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## Local races focus on Warner, taxes; At issue is necessity of increase

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The House of Delegates races next week in Northern Virginia are emerging as a referendum on Gov. Mark Warner and the state's massive 2004 tax increase that he championed.

Several of the races pit Republican incumbents who opposed the increase against Democratic challengers, who are supported by Mr. Warner and who say they would have voted for the \$1.38 billion tax increase - the largest in Virginia history. The package - which funded education, health care and public safety - also cut the food tax and income taxes for poor Virginians.

One of the most watched races is between Delegate Jeffrey M. Frederick, a freshman in the House, and Hilda Barg, a Prince William County supervisor.

"Ever since I voted against the tax increase ...[Mr. Warner] has been targeting me," said Mr. Frederick, Prince William County Republican. "I guess when you don't vote for the governor's tax increase he comes to your district to support someone who will."

Mr. Frederick said he stands by his vote, particularly since the state has a record surplus.

Mrs. Barg and other Democrats said Virginia still needs more money to improve public education and its aging road system.

Such views have won her the praise of Mr. Warner, a Democrat.

"We need more moderate, centrist candidates who aren't running their campaigns based on some ideological or hard-core partisan agenda," Mr. Warner told The Washington Times. "We are still facing tough challenges in Richmond and we're going to need a legislature that is going to ... be focused on solving our transportation crisis and keeping our rural economic development efforts going."

There are five such races in the election Tuesday, in which voters also will select a new governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general.

State law prohibits governors from seeking a second consecutive term.

In Fairfax County, Delegate David B. Albo, a Republican, faces challenger **Greg Werkheiser**, a Democrat.

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Mr. Albo has served 11 years in the House and is poised to become chairman of the Courts of Justice Committee.

Mr. Albo said he opposed the increase because Fairfax County gets little back for the tax money it sends to Richmond. The county, the most populous in the state, gets back 25 cents for schools for every dollar its residents pay in taxes.

"If I had to go back in time and do that vote again, I'd vote the same way every time because it is not fair for Fairfax County to have to pay the entire bill," he said. "I thought it was a rip-off for my constituents."

Mr. Werkheiser is a lawyer in the District and longtime friend of the governor, who has given him roughly \$30,000.

He was also Mr. Warner's speechwriter during his unsuccessful 1996 campaign for U.S. Senate.

"This race is a contrast between two different views of the future of Virginia and what it means to be a responsible public servant," Mr. Werkheiser said. "My opponent is part of the you-can-have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too wing of the Republican Party."

The other three races are: Delegate Michele B. McQuigg, a Republican, versus Earnie Porta, a Democrat, in Prince William County; Delegate Richard H. Black, a Republican, versus David Poisson, a Democrat, in Loudoun County; and Delegate Robert G. Marshall, a Republican, versus Bruce Roemmelt, a Democrat, in Prince William County.

Mr. Black predicted yesterday his race would be "extremely close," and characterized his opponent as a pro-tax candidate.

"He has been very vocal not only in supporting the 2004 tax increase ... but he advocates additional taxes," Mr. Black said.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Brian J. Moran, Alexandria Democrat, said the party hopes to capitalize on President Bush's declining approval rating and on the woes of national Republicans.

He also said the Democratic candidates in Northern Virginia were recruited to challenge "the extremists of the Republican Party" who opposed the "governor's budget."

Mr. Black said Mr. Bush's Supreme Court nomination of Judge Samuel A. Alito Jr. will boost conservative voter turnout.

"It will definitely help energize the base for the election," he said.

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