

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

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Wednesday, June 17, 2009 |

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## Auditor critical of work on state public safety radio system



Bob Brown/Times-Dispatch

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Del. R. Steven Landes asked the head of the Virginia State Police, Col. W. Steven Flaherty, "What the heck are you all doing and how can we trust you?"

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By [TYLER WHITLEY](#)

Published: June 16, 2009

Virginia's new Statewide Agencies Radio System is over budget and behind schedule, in part because of poor planning, the House Appropriations Committee was told today.

The system is to bring new computers and radios to State Police cars and allow them to communicate easily with other public safety agencies.

Exasperated members of the budget committee sharply questioned Col. W. Steven Flaherty, the superintendent of State Police, about the report by a state auditor.

"What the heck are you all doing and how can we trust you?" asked Del. R. Steven Landes, R-Augusta.

The project is expected to cost about \$350 million. It was originally scheduled to be finished at the end of this year, but will need another year of work beyond that deadline, officials said.

Among the problems found by the auditor was that the project management team could not determine whether the work was on budget. It also found insufficient review of a consultant's invoices before payment.

Flaherty said the deficiencies have been corrected and that some were exaggerated.

In other action, the committee received further details of the state's budget shortfall. All forms of revenue, including withholding taxes, sales taxes and corporate income taxes, are behind estimates, Secretary of Finance Richard Brown said. But he also said there is reason to believe the recession is bottoming out and the revenue picture is brightening.

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## Reader Reactions

Posted by ( 10-4 ) on June 17, 2009 at 6:06 pm

drfligo: good post. You certainly sound like you know the business. I get most my intel from other Trooper's who have been around and one of my field tech's. I've been told that M/a Com is the cat's meow. I will say that the new system sounds great when it works. Crystal clear! However it's frustrating dealing with the same problems over and over again! Report.. Report.. No changes.

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Posted by ( woodford ) on June 17, 2009 at 3:32 pm

A message to Mr. Creigh Deeds:

Dear Sir,

I hope you have been paying attention to the headlines regarding VITA and now STARS. I know you are a good man and would be a good governor, but you must face the music. Your predecessors Warner and Kaine have done a pathetic job of managing the resources of this Commonwealth and have not held large, expensive contractors accountable.

While you and your party chastised James Gilmore for cutting the car tax, this poor fiscal management by Warner and Kaine has far out priced ANY fiscal policies of the Gilmore administration in its totality.

Virginians will not stand for poor fiscal management. Unless you step up to the plate and admit that your party has not held these contractors responsible and that poor fiscal policies of Democratic governors have cost billions of dollars, then you, sir, will lose the election.

I feel that this is only the tip of the iceberg regarding these issues, and hope you have a plan in place that shows how you will change the failed policies of the Warner and Kaine administrations.

Good day sir, and I look forward to hearing your opinion on these matters.

- A concerned non-partisan citizen

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Posted by ( drfligo ) on June 17, 2009 at 12:52 pm

Running off to MACOM (now Harris & no longer Virginia-based?) isn't the solution, either. Witness similar contention over statewide systems in New York—and the fact that Hanover County has never been happy with them and has run to Motorola.

Statewide systems can be problematic, and no end user anywhere wants to buy enough tower sites to make it work. Witness again Hanover, and Henrico's UHF "portable-only" experiment with GE (now MACOM) over 20 years ago.

This is not to say that Moto is any better, but we need to solve problems—not run to a different inadequate outside problem-solver.

On the old VSP system: The trooper in the rest area WAS heard calling for help, but it was scratchy, and the Super. at that time carried with him a tape of the scratchy transmission while stumping for STARS. What was scratchy sounding under the old system would today be completely garbled, just like your digital TV is snow-free, but the picture just disappears.

A lot of money has been spent including a lot of unrecoverable install time and motel/classroom costs for radio users. It may be time to add some towers out there.

It also seems pretty ambitious to have a single, seamless system providing this kind of coverage. Even places like Orange Co. and San Bernardino Co., CA are split into manageable units. Do we need to look at this, too?

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Posted by ( robotics ) on June 16, 2009 at 9:25 pm

State Police Comms could have built a better system for half the money. Yet they were never given a chance. The "Stars" project management at State Police got in bed with Motorola while the whole thing was in the planning stages. The RFP was written slanted toward Motorola and Motorola was the only company that bid on the system.

Some of the staff at State Police and the Communications Division are the only reason any progress has been made in getting a working system.

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Posted by ( SouthernRock ) on June 16, 2009 at 9:11 pm

This is just another example of taxpayers in the Commonwealth being fleeced by a major corporation while those in leadership idly stand by. Vita & Northrop Grumman; State Police & Motorola, VDOT & the numerous contractors taking over highway maintenace - they are all costing way too much. And as far as the Times-Dispatch serving to keep an eye on government - the newspaper has failed miserably in serving as a watchdog for the public.

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Posted by ( robotics ) on June 16, 2009 at 8:43 pm

Having worked with the old system and now with this one. I can assure you - this whole thing is a waste of money. The radio system is completely unreliable, the laptops are junk. Troopers buy their own cell phones to be able to talk to the dispatchers and their own data cards to have data access. The contract was written by Motorola for Motorola. The state of VA doesn't have a leg to stand on. Warner gave us VITA and

STARS. It will cost the taxpayers millions of dollars to undo this damage. Let's hope it doesn't cost a police officer more than that.

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( 10-4 ) on June 16, 2009 at 8:12 pm

I don't see where the problem of being over budget and behind schedule of the STARS can be attributed entirely to Virginia State Police. Of course the project is behind schedule, but is the auditor aware of all the technical difficulties that Motorola has had with this new system?

I can state that I have witnessed a radio system installed by Motorola that doesn't always work! (thousands of reported problems by Troopers—not an exaggeration!) Yes, a PR stunt with the former governor (Warner) years ago was done to demonstrate the effectiveness of the new radio system, and yes it worked—from that particular location—a rest stop where years ago a Trooper took shots and was unable to communicate with dispatch. However, Motorola has been STRUGGLING to get this new system working in all areas of 2 divisions. (There are 7 divisions within the state). VSP management put a STOP to all mobile (vehicle) installations until Motorola could fix the problem. Obviously if you are going to spend mega bucks on new radios, you don't want to pay them AND allow them to continue installing questionable equipment. I can't go into all the technical details, but let's just say Motorola just wants the money—the heck with Trooper safety.

Consider: 9/11—Motorola radios in NY—fire fighters couldn't communicate—people died, Florida state had BIG problems with their Motorola system.

The fact is VSP wants a system that WORKS!

What would the politicians consider? Maybe give the STARS system over to VITA/Northrup Grumman? Will they be able to do the installations on schedule? Will we be able to talk? The truth is they won't care... they'll have themselves a nice 6GHz microwave system throughout the state. They will in turn lease it out! \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

The answer may be to fire Motorola and give the contract to a reputable local radio company... like M/A Com of Lynchburg, VA They are known to make some good stuff!

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( Jer1234 ) on June 16, 2009 at 8:04 pm

A call to the Times Dispatch would be in order to alert citizens that their tax money is being wasted. Several e-mails and calls were made to the Times Dispatch and the Attorney Generals office. No one wanted to take on Motorola. They, like NG, appear to big to take on. Get the facts before give the Colonel and state employees the blame. They have tried to alleviate the problem but could get no support anywhere. Everyone denied that there was a problem. Just like the NG/VITA contract. Blame the agency.

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( Jer1234 ) on June 16, 2009 at 8:00 pm

Motorola is trying to take over the STARS system permanently. They are upset because they didn't get a maintenance contract for the system. This system has come close to causing the death of several troopers. Inadequate coverage, radio system not available when needed, robotic voice, computer system that waits till everybody is done talking before it sends and receives information. The state having to pay for cell phones and additional network cards for the cars in order for the troopers to talk to someone. Guess what

it is never going to work will Motorola is involved. They were thrown out of Florida for the same reason that Va system doesn't work. Everybody is afraid of them and their lawyers because any litigation would be tied up for weeks. Throw them out and start over, it will save money in the long run.

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( dogtown ) on June 16, 2009 at 7:53 pm

Col. W. Steven Flaherty is a law enforcement officer whose expertise lies in that field: it is illogical for us, and was illogical for the state administration, to rely on him to manage a large scale technology project.

It appears the state administration failed to assign responsibility to a competent technology project manager and Col Flaherty has been left by our part-time governor and full-time DNC chairman holding the bag.

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## Reader Reactions

Posted by ( ripsomelips ) on June 16, 2009 at 7:39 pm

Is Motorola different than any other government contractor? Doubt it. They all try to make to most of an open door. They build a reputation of trust. Then they realize that they have not been taking full advantage of their opportunity. They poke and prod to find increased profit. Once they offer salaries high enough to attract talent, they can take full advantage. Puposely manipulte things to their advantage(free enterprise). They outsmart their "employer". Maybe, the government should only do business with contractors that use the same background check. Level the playing field. But why eliminate(discriminate)so many contractors from the process? Not going to because of the "kickback" clause. Solution: outsource to a foreign country. It's the American way.

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Posted by ( woodford ) on June 16, 2009 at 6:58 pm

STARS was implemented with the intention of replacing the 1970's era state police radio system which had proven to be a safety issue. What has happened since its implementation - on Warner and Kaine's watches - is that troopers are in more danger under STARS. The system is JUNK and every band-aid Motorola has placed on it HAS NOT WORKED. This has been another absolute failure of BOTH administrations just like VITA.

The Dems blame Gilmore for cutting the car tax and creating great budget shortfalls, yet these two programs have outpriced the car tax cut by far and STILL COUNTING.

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Posted by ( ripsomelips ) on June 16, 2009 at 6:06 pm

I wonder how much flack Del. Landes is going to catch. Example "you we're telling them to clean up their act with all that scruff on the back of your neck"! Response "I've got more hair on the back of

my neck than you do on your head, you're just jealous"! "As a matter of fact, you have more hair coming out of your ears than you do on your head"!

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( Jer1234 ) on June 16, 2009 at 6:05 pm

This is so one sided it is ridiculous. Motorola has complained to the GA so much that now they are attacking the Agency instead of finding the real story. Motorola is providing an inadequate system and want paid for it. At one time it was shut down for a year because of Motorola's performance and lack of quality components. Someone needs to look into this a lot more and talk to someone else other than just Motorola. This system isw as bad as the IT system provided by Northrup Grumann. It has been bad since the day Motorola started work. The people who have to clean up after Motorola are so frustrated it is ridiculous because they are told just to go along and they can fix it after Motorola leaves.

Look deeper RTD for the true story

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( ripsomelips ) on June 16, 2009 at 5:49 pm

With that "pure" background check, I am wondering why there any issues at all. They passed the money problem part. And they passed the education part. And they passed the ethics part. I don't understand. Maybe the localities did their homework, when they developed their systems, to isolate themselves. A "turf war" of sorts. And perhaps the economy got the localities to look at their turf in a new way. If true, the localities spent a whole bunch of money isolating themselves. Got "in a pinch", so the state is going to waste a bunch of money figuring out how to link it all up. Who pays for it? The unworthy "citizens" who can't pass the background check. Ya gotta love it.

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( Jack ) on June 16, 2009 at 3:46 pm

Posted by ( Welshwoman ) on June 16, 2009 at 2:59 pm

Having worked in the business I have to tell all of you that the bureaucratic red tape Flaherty has to endure is far worse than you are giving credit for. I agree millions of dollars are being wasted but I can assure you Flaherty has little to do with it. Dishonest contractors looking to drag out work through the tough times, red tape, etc. play the bigger part in it. I assure you, the Colonel has little control over most of it. It takes a team effort and lots of oversight which is hard to find with the manpower shortages in law enforcement these days.

It is Flahertys duty as a public servant to keep the public informed. After all it's the citizens money that is being wasted. Lack of manpower is not a viable excuse. A call to the Times Dispatch would be in order to alert citizens that their tax money is being wasted.

How many of you can pass a background - no credit problems, no drugs, no criminal history, and so on. Darn few of you - I know - I've done the backgrounds!

I am 65 years old and I COULD PASS your background check but what does that have to do with the

issue of Flaherty being head of a state agency that is wasting millions of tax money? He must be held accountable along with Governor Kaine if we could keep him in the state long enough to do it.

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( irma ) on June 16, 2009 at 2:59 pm

Exaggerated?

So the Col. is saying it will be finished by December and vendors will return the excess over budget?

Report Inappropriate Comment

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Posted by ( qhgirl ) on June 16, 2009 at 2:39 pm

Another prime example of why we need smaller government.. not larger. We need less intrusion by government into our private lives. It seems that every project they undertake is poorly managed, over budget, poor quality and/or filled with rampant abuses. This is why we do NOT want the government involved in our health care. This is going to do nothing but cost the hard-working taxpayers for years to come and stands a very good chance of seriously compromising our ability to get competent care.

Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( Jack ) on June 16, 2009 at 2:31 pm

Col. W. Steven Flaherty, the superintendent of State Police you have to remember is a political appointee by the governor. It's been obvious that Falherty has few managerial skills preferring to waste his manpower on "click it or ticket" and Checkpoints. Because of his mismanagement the State Police are a shadow of the department as far as excellence and quality of service to the people.

Every day it seems we read or hear about more cost overruns, delays and waste in state programs that Governor Kaine is supposed to oversee. I guess he's too busy with his national DNC duties to pay attention to what's happening in Virginia.

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