Episode 6: Senator Deeds provides his insight on how citizens and lawmakers can work together to make a difference. He encourages listeners to get informed, makes noise, and be the squeaky wheel for the community. If you want to be part of the conversation about rural health, you can join VRHA at the Rural Health Policy Institute, Feb. 5-7, in Washington D.C.

Interview Highlights:

{4:01} Now that we have Medicaid Expansion, what do you think the next steps will be once it’s implemented?

There are multiple things we need to do. People need to know how to sign up and we need to be aggressive on how to get people signed up. People living in rural areas are used to being independent and most people aren’t looking for handouts but Medicaid Expansion is going to be good for everybody. Healthcare should be a right and we need to recognize it as a right. We are better as a community when we are healthy. I have seen estimates that 400,000 people are eligible in Virginia but it is predicted that less than 185,000 will sign up. We need to do whatever we can to get people signed up throughout the Commonwealth.

{10:41} Do you feel that the average hospital or clinic employee understands that the decisions you make in the General Assembly affect their everyday lives?

I worry that sometimes people do not pay enough attention and some of it is not their fault. A lot of people don’t have the time to think through the basics of a federal system. But all of the decisions made there are important. If we the people take charge, if we use our right to be informed and vote, then we get the kind of government we deserve. I worry that people in rural health just don’t have enough information so I try my best, through the outlets I have, to keep people informed on what I am doing.

{18:43} What suggestions do you have for people who are concerned with rural health issues, what actions can they take?

I believe people concerned with rural health issues have an obligation to be as informed as possible. They also have an obligation to be squeaky wheels, to talk to people who are your decision makers. Legislators want to hear from their constituents. You owe it to yourself to be as knowledgeable as you can and to make sure your voice is heard so that you can get the response you want. Be respectful of their time and decisions but always stay in touch with your legislators.