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## The JLARC Review: It's Never About the Spoon (Part 2)

Filed under: [Commentary](#), [News & Updates](#), [PI Window on Business \(Show\)](#), [Public Sector Procurement](#) — Tags: [Don Corleone](#), [Don Emilio Barzini](#), [eVA](#), [Everybody Loves Raymond](#), [JLARC](#), [Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee](#), [Marie Barone](#), [Resolution Number 119](#), [Tattaglia](#), [The Godfather](#), [Tom Hagen](#), [Virginia Resolution Number 119](#) — procureinsights @ 4:30 am

When the divine inspiration that ultimately leads to the words that appear in this blog strikes me, I am usually walking our two dogs. Not having a pen and paper with me (a practice I have often thought about but never followed through on), I find myself in the unenviable position that is reminiscent of the old Far Side cartoon. Specifically, the one that depicts two parent snakes lamenting the inability of their wooden-barred playpen to contain their numerous offspring. Classic Larson to be sure.

As a result, and in an effort not to lose the flow or sequence of words, I repeat over and over again in Rain Man-type fashion, the sentences that come streaming into my head until I can return home. Upon walking through the front door I immediately take pen in hand and furiously record on paper the thoughts that by this point have captured my mind like the proverbial tune that you cannot get out of your head. Thankfully my wife, who understands my creative process, grants me a wide berth until the ink dries and the papers that now contain the fruit of my stroll are folded and safely tucked away in my pocket. By the way, if paper isn't available I use whatever is at hand, from the inside of a milk carton to a restaurant napkin. My favorite is still the inside of a soap box but, this is a story for another day.

The reason I am sharing this with you is that the inspiration in this particular instance evolved around the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee's (JLARC) review of eVA, the Commonwealth's highly successful purchasing initiative.

In my last post I indicated that I would be providing a weekly update on the progress of the eVA proceedings each Friday until the JLARC report is released on July 13<sup>th</sup>. However, I now find that in this particular instance I can't wait for the self-imposed scheduled release date of the next installment. And yes, there will still be a Friday post.

At this point I would also like to state for the record, that I have not been retained by the Commonwealth as part of the review team and are therefore not restricted by any form of a non-disclosure agreement. Nor I should add, was confidentiality ever requested or implied by the Chief Legislative Analyst when he contacted me.

My involvement is due to nothing more than the belief on the part of some Virginian officials that my expertise in the area of public sector procurement practice, and in particular eVA, can shed some much needed light on an exercise that could easily get out of hand. A result that would be detrimental regardless of which side of the issue one may be on.

### [Keeping Balance on the Political Beam](#)

For me the underlying question regarding the eVA review centers on how a relatively small percentage of stakeholders representing what on the surface appears to be a regionalized interest, could carry enough weight to have this resolution presented let alone passed without any real tangible data to support it.

In this regard, experience has repeatedly born out the fact that it is often the subtlety of a seemingly innocuous comment that can shed the most revealing light on a situation. Especially one as politically charged as Joint Resolution Number 119 appears likely to become.

Now while I want to caution you that this is based solely on a combination of my past experience and journalistic instincts, the reference on more than one occasion to the "previous" Governor's programs, which include the decision to

set aside opportunities of \$50,000 or less for certified small, woman, and minority-owned business is interesting.

This might lead one to believe that the outward facing instigators are likely having their strings willingly pulled (at least in part) by interests which are higher up in the food chain. In essence, it is a classic strategy to let someone else (who themselves have a convenient axe to grind) take the blows on the front line for what would likely be viewed as an unpopular move, re questioning eVA's positive impact on the SME business community.

Or to put a more universal (and entertaining) spin on it, I am reminded of that classic movie the Godfather, and in particular Don Corleone's realization (which he shared with Tom Hagen on the ride home from a meeting of the New York families) that the more powerful Don Emilio Barzini and not the Tattaglia family was behind Sonny's death.

And while we often focus our energies on the outward manifestation of a particular event or action, we rarely if ever look to identify and understand its root cause.

It may turn out that this exercise that has come to be known as Joint Resolution Number 119 actually has little to do with eVA, and more to do with the grayer recesses of back room politics where there are often old scores to settle and/or new vistas to conquer.

Once again, and based on research as well as direct interaction with an increasing number of eVA suppliers from both within and external to the Commonwealth – that's right a healthy percentage of out of state businesses who compete and win contracts through eVA believe that Virginia's system is SME-friendly, I am having a great deal of difficulty reconciling the fact that a long standing program can be so easily challenged by what is at best a paucity of dissenting stakeholders.

[It is Never About the Spoon](#)

At the risk of an over reliance on Hollywood storytelling, I can't help but also recall an episode from the very popular Everybody Loves Raymond sitcom.

The episode to which I am referring is the one where Marie Barone (for the uninitiated, the Mother-In-Law) deliberately attempted to undermine son Raymond's wife Debra's efforts to cook meatballs based on her recipe, by affixing false labels to the front of the spice bottles she had provided during her apparently "well-intentioned" cooking lesson.

With the introduction of the mislabeled spices into the recipe, Debra's meatballs were needless to say awful.

In an attempt to check Marie's original recipe to see if she somehow "missed something," Debra sneaked into her Mother-In-Law's house, which was just across the street, late at night using the excuse of returning a borrowed spoon as the reason for her visit.

When confronted by her Brother-In-Law Robert – who happened to be a policeman, she uses the returned spoon excuse in an effort to explain away her presence.

Referencing his many years of experience on the force, and the countless number of break-ins with which he had dealt, Robert responds by saying that in every situation he has ever handled, it is never "about the spoon."

When it comes to Joint Resolution Number 119, we may never completely know the real reason behind its presentation and passing. However, and in the spirit of "whose watching the watchers," through increased awareness the reasons may ultimately prove to be of less importance than the outcome.

And at the risk of sounding as if I am taking too cavalier of an approach to these proceedings (which of course I am not), whatever the outcome it will be both an interesting and likely intense journey to the July 13<sup>th</sup> "Report Date."