During his annual State of the University address yesterday, President John T. Casteen, III discussed the impact of the current economic turbulence on the University—including the effect on state budget cuts—and strategies to deal with the situation.

The address was focused almost exclusively on the financial state of the University. "The uncertainties around us are a fundamental part of the University's life," Casteen said.

One of these uncertainties is related to state revenue. The state's revenue shortfall is currently projected to exceed the estimates from the first quarter, Casteen said. With Governor Tim Kaine's proposed budget for 2009 to 2010, the University is facing three quarters of this shortfall. "This is a significant general fund reduction of 8 percent, or $12.4 million."

"Many of the funds that are required for financial aid will come from donors," he said. The University is working to continue acquiring donations, he said. "Some universities are seeing a falling off in donor dollars," Casteen said. "But for us, that's not the case." Still, he said, "our influence to the maximum extent possible in support for student issues and to 'concentrate for student-related bills now going through the General Assembly."

"The main goal of the Feb. 13 trip is to advocate for student issues," Casteen added. "We want to choose bills that we felt this [the Legislative Affairs Committee] will concentrate on three:'s:‘...student-related bills now going through the General Assembly.'"

Though there have been federal financial aid bills passing through the House of Representatives and the Senate, Casteen said there are flaws with both the House bills.

Casteen said, "There have been ‘fairly dramatic gifts’ recently, working to continue acquiring donations, he said. "We are currently investigating locations, costs and times frames for the pilot," Norris said. A pilot program will take place before the park-and-ride is established. Feedback from employees who work in the Downtown Mall will be critical. "We don't want to create an environment where parking is a challenge."