

Richmond Report Number 3 (February 16, 2006)

The General Assembly has reached “Crossover,” the point at which the House of Delegates and the State Senate send their bills to one another for consideration. Senate bills are trickling in.

The bills I have promoted in the Assembly tend toward the plight of people meanly treated. That’s why last year I secured successful a measure to prevent insurance companies from canceling homeowners’ policies simply because someone asked their insurance companies a question about their policies. I also successfully ensured that newly hired, severely ill or injured school employees would not lose their jobs because of their short time on the job. And I secured law to provide monetary restitution, without the need for lawsuits, for people who have suffered damage by unlicensed contractors.

This year, I launched the effort to raise the minimum wage in Virginia. The current level of \$5.15 an hour has remained unchanged since 1997. In collaboration with Appropriations Chairman Vince Callahan, and others we fought hard, but lost that fight by one vote. I am hopeful in the next session that we can turn that vote around. I also sought over the last three years to secure a pilot program of specially-tailored services for frail, elderly people in four apartment projects across the state. By extending the independence of these persons according to the Department on Aging, the State could save a net of \$2 million in avoided Medicaid costs. The underlying bill authorizing the program has passed through committees three times, but we’re still waiting for the funding.

In the 2006 session of the House of Delegates, I’ve secured House and Senate passage of three bills, with two others carried over to the next session. These bills provide for the following:

- **HB116 shuts down a new type of fraud, perpetrated largely upon immigrants.** Fly-by night operations set up storefronts to sell fake “international drivers’ licenses,” which unwary buyers obtain at costs reaching hundreds of dollars. The customers are led to believe these “licenses” are valid DMV documents, allowing them to drive. As a result, they lose their money and they get arrested for driving without a valid license. Even worse, availability of high-quality, professionally manufactured, fake licenses purporting to be real can result in serious national security problems. The House passed the bill today by a vote of 100-0.

- **HB1153** disrupts the opportunity for identity theft from incapacitated people. Court petitions for the appointment of guardians or conservators to look after the affairs, civil rights, and finances of incapacitated people contain amounts of personal information available to public view. The presence of a person's Social Security Number on these petitions creates the opportunity for identity theft. So, sealing the Social Security Numbers, the potential for identity theft is reduced. The bill has passed the House and was approved by a Senate Committee this morning.
- **HB11 provides for an update of annual State reports that gauge and monitor the usefulness of telework/telecommuting tools by state employees.** The reports seek to ensure that the State is deploying the most current, efficient and useful instruments for telework and telecommuting, thus enhancing the Commonwealth's ability to reduce auto commutes. The bill cleared a Senate Committee yesterday.
- **While not an enacted law, my legislation HB1169 requires the use of audio/visual electronic recordings in every interrogation of a juvenile accused of a violent felony.** Recording interrogations protects juveniles from abusive practices, while also protecting detectives who in most places rely upon scribbled notes to offer to prosecutors. The recordings are an "instant replay," accurately depicting what happened in the interrogation room. This legislation was referred to the State Crime Commission—a big boost in the fortunes of this measure.

In the next Richmond Report, I'll take up the issue of Domestic Violence, which has been a top priority of Democratic legislators, but which Republicans have ridiculed or sought to block.