

## **Delegate Al Eisenberg's Richmond Report Number 4 March 1, 2006**

The 2006 General Assembly has entered its final weeks. Unfortunately, the House of Delegates approved by a substantial margin one of the worst Biennial Budgets in recent times. The Republican majority, desperate to demonstrate action on transportation needs, raided numerous programs in K-12 and higher education, health care, law enforcement, fire and emergency services, and other critically needed programs and services in order to claim progress on transportation. It's a budget composed of smoke and mirrors.

As a result, core elements of a robust, effective, and vital proposed budget have been ravaged, while Republican legislators have resorted to one-time fixes for transportation needs that rely upon hope and prayer for a state economy based on never-ending surpluses. This patchwork budget may very well undermine our credit ratings and force the State to engage in large-scale borrowing.

The State Senate, a more moderate, deliberative, and responsible body, must now rectify the patchwork program that the House of Delegates has proposed to the citizens of the Commonwealth. It is likely that the House of Delegates' transportation program will run into serious trouble on the Senate side, thus forcing extension of the 2006 General Assembly Session to come up with a compromise that the entire General Assembly can embrace.

As the Session winds down, most of the bills that we focus on in the House of Delegates are those coming over from the Senate for the House to consider.

Below is a list of the bills I introduced that have been acted upon this session:

- **HB 1583** - Requires the sealing of Social Security numbers publicly displayed in court petitions for incapacitated people needing guardians or conservators. The sealing of these numbers will significantly reduce identity theft. It passed both Houses unanimously, and is headed to the Governor for his signature.
- **HB 1161** - Ensures that the State government keeps up to date in its use of telework and telecommuting tools, services, and programs necessary to encourage the standard use of these measures among our State employees. The legislation would help state employees work from home or use telework centers, thus reducing auto use, while improving the efficiency of the Commonwealth's daily work environment. This bill is especially important for Northern Virginia, where we all know traffic is a problem. This bill has passed both Houses and has been sent to the Governor for his signature.
- **HB 1163** - Makes it a Class 1 misdemeanor for any person or entity other than the Department of Motor Vehicles to sell, give, or distribute, or attempt to sell, give, or distribute any document purporting to be a driver's license. The sale of bogus "International "Drivers' Licenses to many unwary people, often immigrants

who do not have other documentation, has caused untold grief. These bogus licenses are sold at inflated prices, often hundreds of dollars, and cause unsuspecting individuals to throw away good money and, to be ticketed for driving without a valid license. Such sales also open a door for people bent on undermining our homeland security. This legislation will shut down that avenue. It passed the House and Senate unanimously.

- **HB 1169** – Requires the use of electronic recording in the custodial interrogation of juveniles suspected of violent felonies. Such recordings would protect the juvenile from abusive practices as well as assure that law enforcement is protected from false allegations. While this legislation did not pass it has been referred to the Virginia State Crime Commission for further study.

The great disappointment of the session for me was the Republican hostility to legislation that would protect victims of domestic violence, particularly in light of recent Attorneys' General support for such legislation. I carried three bills on this issue (**HB 1165, HB 1166 and HB 1167**) two were reported out of committees, but ran into traps set by the majority. Each of these bills would have provided for a confidential address system for victims of domestic violence. **HB 1166** reached the House floor, but was carried over for further consideration. The bill was carried over not because there was anything wrong with it but because the Republicans simply did not want the bill to pass. It would have allowed domestic violence victims to use a post office box as their public address on voter registration lists so that they can exercise their right to vote without fear that their abusers will find them and do harm to them or their children. Several Republican legislators made light of the legislation, caring little for the women and children who live in fear.

**HB 1167**, another domestic violence bill, would have required health insurance plans to use an alternative address so that domestic violence victims could receive insurance papers and related documents without fear of being discovered by abusers who may be listed on the same insurance policy. This bill was carried over because the insurance industry argued that the provision of an alternative address would be costly and burdensome. The insurance lobbyists apparently did not consider that if an insurance company fails to provide cover for an abused policyholder, the company would have to shell out substantial sums in medical claims to victims whose abusers can more easily find their victims and do them serious bodily harm.

In addition to those bills, a bill I introduced last year concerning towing practices was incorporated into an omnibus towing measure (**SB 134**) that a legislative commission had crafted during 2005. This omnibus bill has now passed the Senate and House. My measure would reduce arguments between the public and towing companies by requiring the companies to post signs at their collection offices clearly stating the maximum fees for towing services and the phone number of the appropriate local consumer affairs office or the State Consumer Affairs office if local offices are not available.

As a member of the Agriculture, Chesapeake, and Natural Resources Committee, I was pleased to be the chief co-patron on a major environmental bill to require power plants to make substantial reductions in air pollution. Jack Reid, the chief patron of the bill, and one of the most conservative members of the General Assembly, has carried this bill for two sessions. **HB 1055** passed the House Committee unanimously, but ran into last minute, unnecessary roadblocks. I was pleased to manage a “shuttle diplomacy” effort to get all major interests on the same page. The bill passed the House, demonstrating that on certain must-pass measures, Democrats and Republicans can work together across party lines.

In my next report I will write about the good, the bad and the ugly. Don't forget to keep in touch. My email address is [delaeisenberg@house.state.va.us](mailto:delaeisenberg@house.state.va.us). My phone number until March 11<sup>th</sup> is 804-698-1047, after that we are back in Arlington where my phone number is 702-228-7909.