

February 2008

The Virginia General Assembly only meets for 60 very intense days each year. In fact, in odd years, we meet for only 45 days. When you read this column, we will have adjourned. But, here is the view from the midpoint. First, several of my local bills are still alive on their way to the Senate:

(1) Highland Street Traffic: For years and years, going back to before the SCA became part of my district, you have been stymied by VDOT saying that there is nothing that can be done to slow down traffic because Highland is the only access to the industrial park. My bill, HB277, directs that VDOT at least negotiate with community representatives through the traffic calming processes. We may only get another stop sign between Backlick and the industrial park, but at least you'll get that. It is frustrating that it takes state legislation.

(2) Boarding Houses: Several Fairfax delegates and senators have bills to help Fairfax County enforce its zoning laws. My bill, HB466, deals with owners who flip/sell their property in the middle of Fairfax County taking court action against their operating an illegal multi-family residence. Under current law, the County has to start enforcement proceedings all over again against the new owner, which typically involves a delay of six months to a year. My bill not only will allow the County to continue their enforcement case but, equally important, any potential new owner will be on notice that this is *not* a business property. It is a single family home.

(3) Loitering: While merchants can post no loitering signs on their property, they cannot deal with problems on the VDOT right-of-way in front of their buildings. HB470, allows VDOT to post the right-of-way if loitering presents a safety hazard. This was suggested to me by Dana Kauffman.

(4) Home Contractors: Through letters and numerous problems mentioned to me as I've gone door-to-door throughout my district, I became increasingly aware of a major problem for homeowners who are burned by shoddy, unlicensed contractors. There are special protections under Virginia law if you are dealing with a licensed contractor and I *strongly* recommend that you do so.* However, under current law, your only recourse against an unlicensed contractor is to sue for the specific problem you've experienced. My bill, HB575, brings suits against unlicensed contractors under the Consumer Protection Act. This means (a) the unlicensed contractor's actions against others can be brought into evidence, (b) if you prevail you are entitled to reasonable attorney's fees and costs, and (c) you will be awarded triple damages. Furthermore, this means Fairfax County's Consumer Protection Agency can also take action against those who've repeatedly failed to carry out the work promised. (*Go to www.dpor.virginia.gov - License Lookup and Disciplinary Actions)

Hopefully, the Senate will pass these 4 bills and they'll become law as of July 1, 2008.

While I also have broad policy bills that are still alive related to the long involvement I've had with child abuse, nursing homes, and mental health, other bills have fallen victim to Virginia's serious budget shortfall due to the economy. Those bills include (a) not taxing the pay of Guard and Reservists who are deployed more than 90 days overseas which would treat them the same as others in the military, (b) providing tax credits or deductions for uncovered home care nursing expenses and for home care providers as a way to help more people to remain in their homes rather than going into a nursing home, and (c) joining the many other states that have direct care nursing home staffing standards.

Finally, of course, I never give up introducing bills to change the formulas that allocate state money to Fairfax schools and to transportation. These bills never get out of subcommittee, but at least there's some dialogue and each year I get more co-sponsors as understanding goes.

On a personal note: After I've been in the House Courts Committee, on which I sit, until 11pm, it is sometimes challenging to get back to the General Assembly by 7am to present one of my bills before a subcommittee. But, truth be known, it's a challenge I love