

The first half of the 71st General Assembly is one third of the way through. I have been successful on several bills so far. Three of my bills in one day has been the most. The one thing that makes the Senate a little easier is the Consent Calendar. If a bill is unanimous in Committee it can be sent to the Consent Calendar, where all those bills listed voted on as a group. It is certainly a time saver.

In my last report, I talked about a bill changing the appellate process for decisions from the Ground Water Commission. The new language would mirror the process for appealing Surface Water cases. I ran this bill last year in the House and it passed by a 60 to 5 margin. Senate leadership prevented this from reaching the floor. This year, there is a new Senate President and it was passed by a 35 to 0 margin. It is scheduled for House Judiciary. Hopefully it will receive the same positive votes as last year's bill. House Ag committee chair, Jeni Arndt, and House ranking Ag committee member, Jon Becker, are the House sponsors. I am confident that they will do a good job. Testimony has shown that over the last decade, some farmers have spent around \$900,000 on Water Engineers and Attorneys. Litigation designed to break a farmer is the fastest way to force a family to sell out, and current process is an onerous one. It will no longer be a tool of wealthy investors to subject hard working families to spend unnecessary funds on frivolous and unnecessary expenses.

I just brought HB 1078 through committee and on the Consent Calendar changing the Family Support Loan Program through Health and Human Services. Even though HHS inherited this program a couple of years ago, it is in support of this change and testified that this program has been around for nearly twenty-five years and the program has not been adequately operated. HB 1078 will reallocate any leftover funds to community boards that give grants to families with expenses that accommodate special-needs children and relatives. These special needs persons can be provided better services by eliminating this ineffective loan program.

The one bill that has been the most controversial, so far, has been a bill curtailing the forfeiture of property owned by drug dealers, etc. This has been a tool used by police, sheriffs, and district attorneys to help defray the cost of enforcement. Even though this bill was sponsored by a Republican, it was Republicans that killed this bill. It is my opinion, that if your local drug dealer gets caught, perhaps the forfeiture and sale of property such as weapons, automobiles and other tangible assets should be sold to help defray the costs to our communities for prosecution, task forces and other needs rather than the local tax payer shoulder the burden of protecting our communities from illegal activities.

Another bill that is creating lots of conversation is Senate Bill 35, which deals with increasing penalty for destruction of personal property in the oil and gas industry. This legislation is already in statute and is currently treated as a misdemeanor. The proposal is to change it to a class 6 felony. Opposition has called this attack on their 1st Amendment right of free speech and the right to assemble for peaceful protest. I am in full support of the right to peaceful protest, but do not believe that damaging equipment or cutting locks on pipelines is peaceful. By closing valves or adjusting them, what protestors are doing, is changing the pressure on the pipelines. An individual's reckless actions are putting innocent peoples' lives in harms- way. One case is in litigation now.

Senator Don Coram

Senate District 6