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Crossover

The latter part of this week at the General Assembly might be compared to the lull before the storm as the Senate and House money committees will reveal their versions of the budget this Sunday. This comes on the heels of the lengthy “Crossover Day,” the deadline for bills originating in each house to pass or fail. Those bills that pass then “crossover” to the other body for consideration.

Two of my bills that passed are related insofar as both deal with technology, better delivery of government services and improvement in our fiscal house. [SB241](#) would enable Virginia educators to contribute their latest findings and expertise to curriculum materials in cooperation with textbook publishers. This online collaboration can make the latest and best materials available to our students and teachers in an increasingly cost efficient manner.

Somewhat similarly, [SB242](#) would enable the research and intellectual property developed by our bright and talented state employees to be shared with other governments and entities. The financial rewards would then accrue to the benefit of both the workers and the Commonwealth.

The economic challenges we face discourage us more than ever from business as usual. We must be open to new ways of delivering government services more efficiently and effectively. While technology is no silver bullet, it can be a very useful tool.

Often citizens understandably question why we need so many bills and whether legislators have the time to give adequate attention to each one. Those of us who are engaged in the process see first hand how it works better than you might expect.

Close, sometimes tedious, scrutiny is given to each bill at either the sub-committee or committee level initially. With tens of thousands of eyes following legislation via the Internet, plenty of outside attention and examination is paid to each bill as well. As legislation moves through the system, increasingly we rely on the judgment of colleagues who have already looked closely at the measures, a practice that serves us well.

As to the number of bills, identical bills are often introduced in both the Senate and House. Another source is the departments and agencies of government which detect often relatively minor flaws in the code that deters them from doing their job properly. Correcting them may require, yes, a new law.

More significantly, improving whole sectors of our society may require a number of individual steps. The effort by Governor McDonnell to improve employment prospects this year, for instance, includes 20 measures, some introduced in both the Senate and House. All but two passed either the Senate or House, including all those I introduced.

A number of issues of particular interest to citizens either advanced or failed. One bill would require all occupants, passengers included, to be harnessed. Another would allow law enforcement offices to issue a ticket regardless of whether there is another infraction observed.

A driving related bill that passed the Senate would require drivers to use hands free devices for any phone calls while driving. Also, out-of-state DUI convictions would factor into penalties assessed for a DUI in Virginia.

The Senate also passed measures making it easier for active duty military personnel to vote in local and state elections, allow uniformed military personnel to use HOV lanes in Hampton Roads regardless of the number of passengers, and put to the ballot a constitutional amendment permitting localities to provide property tax relief for veterans with a 100 percent disability.

Not every good idea ought, or needs, to be made into a new law. It is our task to discern between the two. With your help, I will continue to strive to do just that.

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