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**Process**

If you are finding the daily news accounts of the General Assembly somewhat confusing, that is understandable. Each day it seems that some bill seemingly cruising to passage somehow abruptly runs aground. In the latter part of every session, this often happens. It may be puzzling but there are explanations.

Once a bill crosses over from the house of origin to the other body, the patrons must deal with a new cast of characters, if you will. Legislators present their bills before committees filled with members with whom they have less of a working relationship. You can imagine how that makes more difficult the "sales job." For bills that pass the committee and go on to the floor, the patrons are not present for floor debate. They must depend on surrogates to plead their case, who, at times, may be less effective.

Sometimes new information becomes available after crossover. Sometimes interested parties just discover the implications of a bill. New proponents and opponents spring up attempting to persuade the legislators.

Then there is the simple political arithmetic. I think it is fair to describe the Republican majority in the House of Delegates as a center-right coalition and the Democratic majority in the Senate, a center-left coalition. They often pass legislation with a decided ideological slant. What may pass in the House by a lopsided margin may be doomed in the Senate and vice-versa.

Finally, there is our sometimes complicated process. Our founding fathers employed nothing less than genius in devising our democratic republic with checks and balances and separation of powers. It is not designed to pass new laws easily. That may be frustrating from time to time, but is in our best long-term interest.

The process is complicated enough without anyone needlessly tampering with it as was

done in the Senate this week. You may have read of a new sub-committee of the Senate Courts of Justice Committee that will consider gun legislation. I use the word "consider" loosely. It is stacked with four Democrats and one Republican. Only one of the Democrats is a lawyer. While that is not a prerequisite to possessing sound judgment, when changing the criminal code it certainly helps.

Fully 25 bills have been dumped into this sub-committee in the next to last week of the session. Sub-committees play a valuable role when used properly. With a balance of members, they can go into detail on bills, hear extensive testimony by citizens, and make recommendations to the full committee that bear weight. I fear this may not be the product of this last minute committee.

Balancing fundamental rights and responsibilities regarding firearms is serious business. All sides deserve a fair hearing and all the implications of every bill should be fully vetted. Anything less is a disservice to our citizens.

So the closing 10 days of this 2010 Session will be full of activity. We can only hope it will be filled with progress as well. I will continue to report to you my views and comments and trust you will find them helpful in sorting out the sometimes conflicting reports.

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