

General Assembly Report for January 11-12, 2017

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Tuesday was another day of looking through a multitude of introduced bills and sorting them with LIAB into several categories related to our issues: Children, Constitution amendments, Education (school discipline, charter schools), Elections (lots), Environment, Equal Rights, ERA, Health, Justice, Mental health Opioids (I added this because of high interest and several bills), OpenGov, Redistricting, Reproduction, Social Services, Violence (domestic), Weapons, Women.

Info desk personnel change -- new person -- Cathie -- may be more friendly.

Wednesday: Legislative Black Caucus (more women than men, 5 Senators, 13 Delegates) press conference to introduce legislative priorities -- Education K to 12 funding and Criminal Justice reform such as driver's license return. Sen. Locke reflected on the loss of their heroine Sen. Yvonne Miller who said they must always by the "Voice" and conscience of their community. Del. Ward has a bill to add education in DMV Driver ED materials on how to react to a traffic stop to avoid confrontation with police. Other issues: raise minimum wage to \$10 in 2017, succeed in Ban the Box legislation, school discipline reform, oppose "bathroom bill", and oppose proof of citizenship for voter registration.

3rd party registration: Discussion with Del. Fowler's aide and two helpers. She will discuss with him the problem of too much reporting. She found it humorous that his bill HB1430 was introduced before Del. Coles' HB1431 but Del. Coles was quoted in the local news. I will try to get back to see the Delegate. [Del. Coles is hardly ever in his office but I am sending him an email and may see him at the P&E meeting tomorrow].

Also, actually talked to Sen. Chase and her aide. She was amenable to striking parts of the bill but decided she should check with Clara Belle Wheeler first. Oh, dear.

HB1678 and HB1679: FOIA exemption of fracking chemicals. Conferred with Emily Francis, Southern Environmental Law Center, who gave me their talking points. Del. Anderson is on the subcommittee so I talked to his aide, but no commitment to oppose 1678.

Wednesday Noon convening sessions were very brief.

Today: Went to the GAB for a 7:30 AM meeting but discovered, as did others, that it had been canceled last night at 10 PM. So, I met Claire of ACLU in the cafe. That was good because I learned of a letter ACLU sent to the Governor to establish total and complete No excuse AB voting. I read it online -- it has the very complete reasoning -- legal and all. It is on their website along with their press release. Sen. Spruill has the total NEAV bill.

Tried to see Del. Cole who had visitors in his office. Turns out it was GR Larry Haake, Robin Lind, and Mr. Bell of another jurisdiction. So, I added another GR interview to my list though we only discussed 3rd party registration, not AVR, because that was the purpose of their visit to Del. Cole. Larry gave me a report of his "Review of False Voter Registration Applications Received in Chesterfield County during 2016." They, of course, are supporting HB1431. I will forward the report electronically.

Also, the GRs and local EB members (GREB) are meeting next Tuesday afternoon so it might be possible to meet with more of them then.

8:30 and 9:30 the Health Committees met. That included a lengthy report from Sec. Hazel and the Director of the Health Dept Levine and others about the major addiction problems. Everyone seems astounded and wants to take major steps to conquer it. Del. Garrett, a dentist, reminded everyone to distinguish between opiates (plant source) and opioids (synthetics). One bill was to provide naloxone to forensic laboratories because of the possibility of airborne opioids exposure.

11:30 Transparency VA met to plan how to operate. Anne Sterling came because of her keen interest. We decided to continue observations of whether or not votes are recorded, are pleased that Speaker Howell announced that videos of floor session will be archived, will prepare a press release with our accomplishments (no unannounced committee meetings at the Speaker's desk and availability of the budget online), praise the archived videos, will give great support to Del. Cline's bill to record votes, try to determine the plans for videos in future GA building, meet on weekly on Thursdays. Also present were Becky Bowers-Lanier, Megan Rhyne, Scott Price, Andy Goddard, Jay Speer, Dana Wiggins, Steve Rossi, Michael Jackson, Jo Solomon, Mary Crutchfield, and Adam (intern with Becky), Andrea Shaia (intern with Megan). Also, can view live streaming of some committee meetings by EyeOnRichmond.org

1:30 PM Went across the street to City Hall to see if I could get an appointment with GR Showalter for Friday so Mary Crutchfield and I could interview her for AVR. But her office is closed Friday and Monday.

About 2 PM: House General Laws subcommittee to hear HB1678 (Robinson) re FOIA exemption of fracking chemicals. Robinson presented her bill followed by supporters from the oil and gas industry -- General Commerce, VA Manufacturing, VA Petroleum Council, and "ConserveEnergy?" saying that there has never been a problem with fracking for many years and this just codifies the new regulations that were put in place in November 2016. Del. Carr had questions about protecting public health. Del. Minchew repeated his questions about how a property owner would know what might be seeping underground to his water supply from a neighbor's property. If there was subterranean leakage how would he determine if it was different than H2O? The expert said that DMME has a complaint process.

Opposition was from environmental groups including SELC, VCN, and two others, Megan Rhyne and me. I think Del. Yost made the motion to approve and, of course, Del. Robinson voted 'yes' along with Del LeMunyon and Del. Anderson. Nays were from Del. Carr, Del. Aird, and Del. Minchew. So, it will go to the full House General Laws Committee for action.

Afterward, Del. Anderson told me that he is sorry to have "failed" his first test for transparency this year -- sort of an apology.

4:00 PM was the first meeting of the subcommittee of the House Militia, Police & Public Safety. I will report to Ruth Hoffman but to make the story short for now, Del. McQuinn's bill to prohibit carrying guns in public libraries failed. Lingamfelter's bill to eliminate the circuit court clerk fee for concealed carry gun permits passed. Another to allow permits for residents 18 years old with military experience to own a gun passed. These will be on the agenda for the full committee Friday morning -- which is almost here!

Friday AM: 8:00 AM MPPS -- just 3 bills; 9:00 AM: full House P&E but just organization, no bills expected. House convenes at 10 AM and Senate at 10:30 so a short day.