

House considering 'Arizona-style' immigration crackdown

By Rep. Debbie Buckner

Legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives to crack down on illegal immigrants in Georgia, using a law enacted last year in Arizona as a model.

[HB 87](#) was developed by a special House-Senate committee that held several hearings last fall on the immigration issue. Under the proposal, law enforcement officers would be authorized to determine the immigration status of someone they have stopped or detained for a possible violation if they suspect the person is an illegal immigrant. The person could then be held by police for verification of their immigration status even after the basis for the original probable cause for the stop has expired.

The bill would also require business owners with more than five employees to provide evidence they have used the federal E-verify system to check the citizenship status of their employees. HB 87 would also provide Georgia residents an ability to sue a police force or other government agency in Superior Court if they believe the agency is not enforcing the immigration law.

Supporters of the proposal say it is in response to a breakdown in federal enforcement of immigration laws and is aimed at protecting employment opportunities for legal residents.

Opponents claim enactment of the measure would adversely affect Georgia businesses, with an especially negative impact on the agriculture and tourism industries.

HB 87 was assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee for its consideration.

Poison Precaution: I have co-sponsored legislation that would require engine coolant or antifreeze sold in Georgia and containing more than 10 percent ethylene glycol to include denatonium benzoate as a bitter tasting agent to make it unpalatable. HB 40 is a public safety precaution to prevent incidents of poisoning by consumption of these liquids. The legislation, which has bipartisan support, was referred to the House Judiciary Committee for its consideration.

Ethics Reform: The Georgia Alliance for Ethics Reform, a coalition of groups including Common Cause, the Tea Party and Georgia Watch, has called for stronger standards in the state's ethics laws. The alliance is pushing for a \$100 limit on the amount lobbyists can spend on an elected official in their efforts to influence action on proposed legislation. The groups also want expanded disclosure of lobbyist expenditures, restrictions on the transfers of money from political action committees to individual candidates' campaign accounts and stronger conflict of interest laws.

Water Transfers: The State Board of Natural Resources has voted to approve new regulations governing inter-basin transfers of water in Georgia. Under the new rules, the director of the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) should consider environmental and economic standards in deciding whether to grant a permit to transfer water from one river basin to another. Many rural legislators wanted the rules to be required, rather than suggested. We are working for tighter restrictions on inter-basin transfers out of concern the practice will result in areas outside of the metro Atlanta region being adversely affected.

QBE Study Committee: Gov. Nathan Deal announced his plans to appoint a study committee to review the Quality Basic Education funding formula used by the state to determine how much of the state's budget is distributed among local school systems. The committee may make recommendations for adjusting the formula, which has been in place for more than 25 years. The governor said he will also be appointing advisory commissions on business competitiveness and water supply.

Tax Refund Mistake: On Jan. 20, the Georgia Department of Revenue issued approximately 30,000 electronic tax refunds, totaling about \$12 million. Afterwards, it was discovered that about \$633,000 of the refunds were overpayments caused by what new Revenue Commissioner Doug MacGinnitie called a "computer glitch." The department then reversed the electronic transfers of the overpaid refunds to individual taxpayers' bank accounts, causing some recipients who had not been made aware of the reversal to have their checks bounce and be hit with overdraft fees by their bank. MacGinnitie said the department is working to re-process the refunds and is working with the banks involved so that the overdraft fees charged to the taxpayers are waived.

General Assembly Online: Throughout the session, you can read the details and check the status of legislation and watch live broadcasts of House and Senate proceedings online at www.legis.ga.gov. Lawmakers were scheduled to return to the Capitol on Monday, Jan. 31, for Day 7 of the 40-day session.

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