

## **Sunday Column – Government of the People For publication 5.7.17**

The length of the regular session of the Alabama Legislature is limited to 30 meeting days within a period of 105 calendar days. Each house usually meets two days per week which leaves time for committee meetings on the other three days. As you read this, there are six legislative days remaining in the 2017 session.

Before the session even began there were already 103 bills pre-filed in the House and 60 in the Senate. During any given year our legislators will collectively consider hundreds of bills. It is virtually impossible for any one legislator to become intimately familiar with the language of every bill that comes before him.

This is where citizens and lobbyists come in. Many bills will rise to the surface only when brought to a legislator's attention through our intervention. If we think a bill is important then it has potential to become important to our legislator, even if sometimes for the wrong reason.

Our government is intended to be a government of the people; however, this ideal can only become reality when we make the effort to participate. As constituents we don't need to know every bill intimately but we can go to the Alabama legislative website to see a list of bills. If we see one we like or don't like then it is up to us to let our legislators know.

You can also connect with groups like the League of Women Voters, or the Humane Society of the United States, who promote certain bills and post updates as the session unfolds. This way you will be alerted when it is time to let your legislator know what you want to see happen and why.

To participate, the first thing you need to do is find out who represents you at the Alabama Statehouse. The quickest way to do this is to text your home zip code to 520-200-2223. You will receive the names and contact information of your congressional and state legislators almost immediately.

Social media is a legitimate way to communicate with your representatives. Most of them have a private Facebook account you can like and follow. You can comment on their posts to let them know your position on a specific bill. You can also ask your representative what their position is.

When you communicate with your representative give your name and indicate you are from their district. Be sure to reference the bill number. Reread your message before sending and consider how you would respond to someone who addressed you this way. The U.S. Postal Service is a viable means of sending a message to your representative and it is an attention getter since few people communicate this way anymore.

Never fail to thank your legislator for their consideration even if they don't vote your way. It is important to leave the door open for the next conversation.

As the 2017 Legislative Session comes to a close there is only one companion animal related bill remaining. HB525 would allow a person in good faith to rescue a person or an animal from a vehicle without criminal liability. This bill received a round of applause from the House Judiciary Committee after the first read.

We all have a vote and a direct line to our government representatives. We just have to use it. If you like this bill be sure to let your legislators know.

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