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WEEKLY COLUMN

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Notes from the Georgia State Senate

By Senator Bill Heath

We have worked hard in the Senate this week to promote family values and do all we can to protect Georgia's families. We passed Senate Bill 25 in an effort to keep families together and prevent couples from hastily obtaining a divorce that they may regret. The bill requires parents of minor children to participate in education classes focusing on the impact the divorce will have on their children – both born and unborn. The couple does not have to attend the education classes together however, if a protective order has been issued against either parent, if there have been allegations of violence within the marriage or if either parent chooses to attend the classes alone. We believe that children are the innocent victims of legal separation and divorce, and there is a devastating impact on children who have had no voice in the decision to disrupt the family. SB 25 also lengthens the waiting period before obtaining a divorce from 30 to as many as 180 days for couples with children. The exception is that no waiting period will be mandatory if either person has obtained a protective order or where family violence has occurred. If passed by the House of Representatives and signed by the Governor, the law will take effect on July 1, 2005. Divorces already in process prior to that date would not be subject to the new law.

On Friday, we passed House Bill 197, also known as the *Woman's Right to Know Act*. This bill requires that a minor seeking an abortion must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian who must show proper identification. Persons standing *in loco parentis*, acting as a temporary guardian of the child, are no longer authorized. It also states that no abortion may be performed or induced without the voluntary and informed consent of the woman that is seeking the abortion. Informed consent is defined by certain requirements that must be met, and the woman must receive the information 24 hours before the abortion. Additionally, physicians and clinics will be required to report the number of abortions performed and the method used to the State. We believe that a woman should be able to gather all the facts regarding the procedure and have time to think before making such a life-altering decision.

We also passed Senate Bill 69 on Friday, which would create a "Choose Life" Georgia license plate. The sanctity of life is important, and this license plate will give those who wish to purchase it a chance to express their appreciation for life and all its gifts. Life is irreplaceable and I believe we should be able to show our support for choosing life and choosing to put our families first.

We have many more issues ahead of us and as always, your concerns are my concerns. Please feel free to call me with your opinions or suggestions.

Until next week.....

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Sen. Bill Heath represents the 31st Senate district which includes parts of Bartow, Haralson and Paulding Counties. He may be reached at 404.463.1361 or by email at billheath@billheath.net.