

## Breaking down the new election regulations

The 2021 legislative session is over, and the most-discussed legislation concerned election reform. While dozens of these bills were introduced, only Senate Bill 202 cleared both chambers. Gov. Brian Kemp signed it into law on March 25.

Much of what's been said about this bill has been inaccurate. Rather than opining about it, I'm simply going to summarize the most important changes.

**Early voting:** For primary and general elections, early voting will continue to begin about three weeks before Election Day. After proposals to reduce early voting on weekends, the bill actually requires two Saturday early-voting days (up from one) and allows up to two Sunday early-voting days. In most counties, this will represent an increase in early voting.

**Voting hours:** There has been some confusion that the bill ends in-person voting at 5 p.m. That's incorrect. Previously, early voting was required "during normal business hours"; this bill clarifies that means 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. But the bill allows counties to conduct voting as early as 7 a.m. and as late as 7 p.m., including on weekends. The bill does not change Election Day hours.

**Runoff elections:** One significant change is to limit runoff elections to four weeks, down from nine. The nine-week requirement was for federal elections, mandated by a court to ensure overseas voters, particularly military personnel, had time to receive and return their ballots. Georgia will shorten its runoffs by adopting ranked-choice voting for overseas voters, as some other states have. These voters will receive special ballots that allow them to indicate their order of preference for all candidates in each race. If their first choice is eliminated in the first round of voting, their ballot indicates which runoff candidate should receive their vote.

Consequently, early voting in runoffs will be reduced. It must begin "as soon as possible" and at least eight days before the runoff.

**Absentee ballots:** Absentee ballots historically represented a small percentage of all ballots cast and weren't subject to ID requirements, only signature matching. The number of absentee voters rose by more than one million in 2020, largely due to the pandemic, and thus a sizable portion of the electorate was treated differently regarding verification. It was impractical to require photo ID for absentee ballots, so the bill instead requires these voters to submit their driver's license number or state ID card number – or, failing those, the last four digits of their Social Security number.

**Absentee ballot applications/requests:** Previously, voters could request an absentee ballot up to 180 days before an election. This bill reduces that to 78 days. Further, the bill requires voters to submit a request at least 11 days before an election, since waiting longer runs the risk that a voter won't have time to receive and return a ballot.

The bill also places new restrictions on private organizations that send unsolicited absentee-ballot applications to voters. The idea is to cut down on confusion after many voters received numerous applications last year.

**Drop boxes:** Prior Georgia law did not include absentee-ballot drop boxes; the State Elections Board adopted them last year during the pandemic on an emergency basis. This bill establishes drop boxes in Georgia law and regulates them. Some people don't like how few drop boxes are allowed (one per early-voting location or one per 100,000 residents, whichever is fewer) or that they must be placed inside polling places and accessible only during business hours. Others believe this increases security while still expanding options for absentee voters.

**Food and water:** The bill bars private parties from giving free food and water to voters waiting in line within 150 feet of a polling place, treating it as an inducement to vote. Election officials may provide water. Importantly, the bill also takes steps to prevent long lines in the first place.

There's more to this bill, but these are among the most controversial ones. Decide for yourself if they boost election integrity or limit voter access.

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**Public Policy**  
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## Discussing Georgia's new voting law with the Ryo Coffee Club

Just as I was about to pick up my flugelhorn, the phone rang. It was Skeeter Skates, owner of Skeeter Skates Tree Stump Removal and Plow Repair in Ryo, Georgia. He sounded concerned. That's not like Skeeter. Of course, he would never admit it. I have found that those in the tree stump removal and plow repair profession emanate a high degree of self-assurance.

"Hoss," Skeeter said, "the boys in the Ryo Coffee Club asked me to talk a little politics with you. I told them I'd be happy to since you know as little about politics as anybody I've ever run across." I hear that line every time he calls me but I don't say anything because Skeeter gets such a kick out of it. Tree stump removal and plow repair professionals love their own jokes.

"First off," he asked, "we was wondering what them politicians down in Atlanta was doing by changing how we vote. That's why I'm calling you." I told him Republicans say they are making elections more secure. Democrats say it's because Donald Trump lost the election. The truth, as usual, is somewhere in the middle.

"Surely, they ain't saying we can't vote no more," Skeeter growled. "Anybody what tries to stop me from voting is liable to get an 11-inch Power King Stump Grinder with Precision Control Brake deposited where the sun don't shine."

I assured Skeeter that nobody was try-

ing to stop him from voting. Admittedly, I don't have all the details about Senate Bill 202 which was passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Brian Kemp behind closed doors, so I don't know what it says about bringing stump grinders to polling places. I suspect Democrats would say banning stump grinders is racist while Republicans would point out that Pres. Biden's home state of Delaware does not allow stump grinders and that they take care of their own house first.

Skeeter said, "Walleye who runs the bait shop in Red Bud says he believes the Q-Anons are responsible for what has happened as well as that Antifa bunch. He says they plan to take over the country, arrest the police and harvest their organs." I think Walleye spends too much time on social media.

"Let me ask you about absentee voting," Skeeter said. "This has got Uncle Coot real worried. He has got no choice but to vote absentee. As you know, Uncle Coot spent a number of years heavily involved in the portable toilet transportation industry and nobody wants to stand in line if he is around, unless they can be upwind. He can shorten a voting line in a hurry."

I told Skeeter to tell Uncle Coot not to worry. He will just have to provide some ID. No different than the portable toilet transportation industry. I am pretty sure you can't simply go in and haul off a potty without having some identification.



Dick Yarbrough

## Stay in school as long as you can

I now have a daughter who is a Senior in college, and a son who is a Freshman.

If that isn't scary enough, financially and otherwise, the Senior seems to think she's ready for the "real world."

"I can't wait until I graduate and am done with school," she said recently.

I quickly tried to talk some sense into her.

"Being an adult stinks," I said. "Stay in school as long as you can. Or as long as your parents will pay for most of it."

When you're still in the arms of education and not fully on your own, all you see is the glory of independence, and not the distasteful responsibilities that accompany adulthood. There are so many things "they" don't tell us when we dive blindly out of adolescence on our own.

"What do you mean?"

Now being "they," I told her what I meant. Here's the condensed version.

- Insurance. Many times during my education, it was mentioned that I would have to pay for insurance, but no one ever



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really stressed how much I would have to pay for insurance. They also failed to sufficiently convey how many types of insurance I would have to pay, or that the percentage of my income that insurance devours would increase every minute of every day for the rest of my life.

- You understand politics. Let me rephrase that: You may understand politics. When you're young, politics is naively seen as a synonym for public service. You see someone running

for national political office, and say, "Gee, he or she seems like a nice person. I'm glad they want to serve the people. I hope they win."

But as you wise up with age, you realize that it's not about public service – it's about politics. And politics is about money, special interests, and separating people by party alliances. These people who think they are in different political parties really aren't that much different, but politics wants them to believe that. And has been incredibly successful in doing so.

We just need to get rid our country of these political parties that separate us. But that's unlikely to happen any time soon – which is great for the business of politics, and horrible for public service.

- Health. Before the metabolism halt of adulthood, I could eat four pounds of Rolos at breakfast, lunch and dinner, and not gain an ounce. If I did that now, I would myself become a Rolo (which is, by the way, a round candy that doesn't breathe).

For most adults, your

health becomes a major concern as you get older. And you also have to be concerned with your kids' health, your pets' health, and then, your parents' health and well-being. And perhaps others.

- Money.

When you're young, you think having lots of money will solve any problem and make you happy. Unfortunately, most of us never get to find out if that is true.

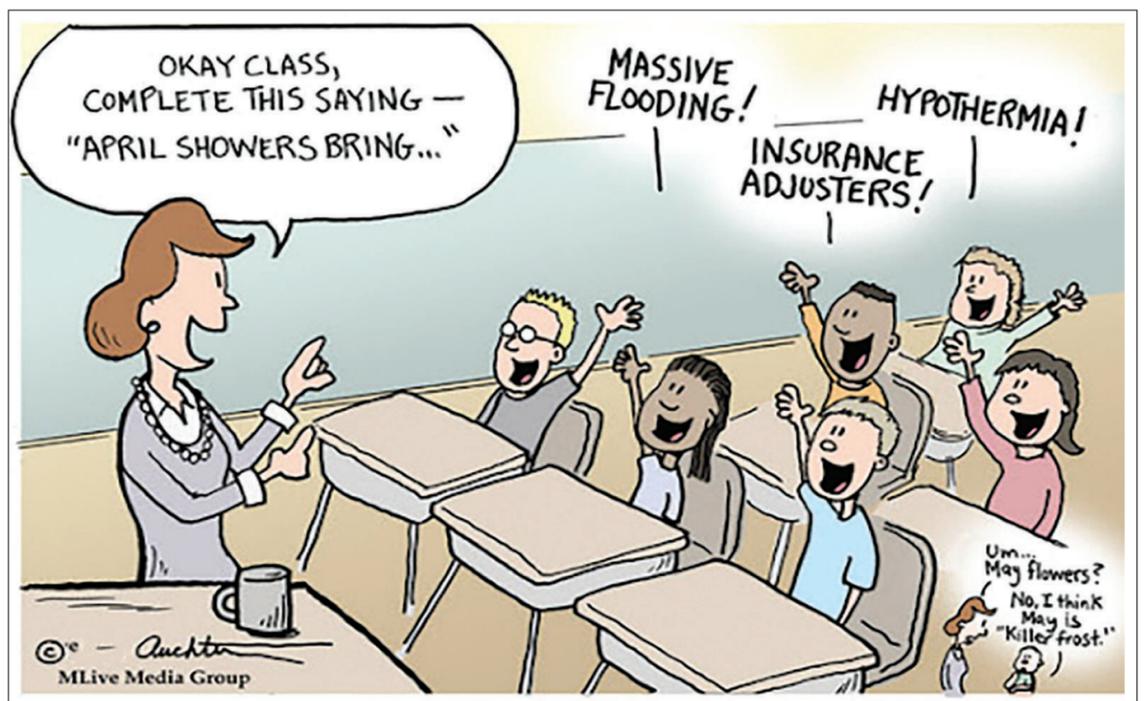
It seems like everything costs a lot more than you can afford, no matter how much money you accumulate. Don't get me wrong – I'm very, very thankful for everything we have. I have all the money I'll ever need – if I died eight years ago.

Even when you have money, your financial welfare is a concern that doesn't seem to go away.

"What doesn't stink about being an adult?"

"Well, lots of things," I said. "First, you're not a dog. For every year you age as an adult, a dog ages seven years. So, you have that going for you."

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Writers must include addresses and telephone numbers. These are for identification purposes only, and will not be published.

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