

Speaker: Immigration law OK

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Highlight: Ralston not going to seek changes. Parts of measure are tied up in legal challenges.

Body

House **Speaker** David Ralston said Thursday he is pleased with Georgia's new **immigration law** and does not plan to seek changes to it in the upcoming legislative session despite several unintended consequences that have emerged in recent months.

One problem is substantial crop losses for farmers who can't hire workers to harvest crops. Another problem is projected months-long delays in issuing professional licenses for tens of thousands of accountants, nurses and many other professionals who must now present a "secure and verifiable" form of identification such as a driver's license or passport.

The Republican **speaker** from Blue Ridge said he did not want to act while parts of House Bill 87 are tied up in federal court amid legal challenges brought by a coalition of civil and immigrant rights groups. The federal 11th Circuit Court of Appeals is expected to hear oral arguments some time between Feb. 28 and March 2.

"We have only had six months for it to work," Ralston said in an interview Thursday. "Let's give it some more time. Let's see what the courts do with what some believe to be constitutional issues and move on."

Asked about other **immigration**-related legislation, Ralston said HB 25 --- which would ban illegal immigrants from attending state colleges and universities --- has "some merit" and will be considered during the legislative session that starts Jan. 9.

He said he would also take a look at HB 296, which would require public schools and hospitals to count the illegal immigrants they serve and report that information to the state. Alabama has a similar **law** in place for counting illegal immigrants in its public schools, but a federal appeals court has put that provision on hold after a court challenge from the Obama administration.

"I'm not sure we are ready to move forward on it because of the constitutional challenge to the other bill" in Alabama, Ralston said.

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He added about Georgia's HB 25 and HB 296: "We will look at both of those two and make sure all of the questions have been answered. I am not saying either of them will be passed, but I think they are both worthy of having some discussion."

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