

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Last Monday was “cross-over day”, which is the last day a bill can pass in one chamber of the General Assembly, and still have time to pass in the other. During a marathon session that started at 9 AM, and ended at 1:30 AM on Tuesday, we voted on 82 separate bills and resolutions. This wasn't a record, though: some long-term incumbents told me that they've gone much later on some occasions in the past. During the remaining three days of session during the week, we only considered 7 items. This is for the simple reason that we are now working in committee on many bills passed to us by the Senate, and those bills have to start filtering up before we see more extensive House floor action. Not surprisingly, all but one of the really significant/interesting measures were passed on Monday.

So, on to what did pass. First, SB 472, a Governor's agenda bill, seeks to create a program of incentive awards for state government employees, much like many businesses have. It has very strict provisions for how much benefit must be achieved by a new idea to qualify for a reward, and for how much such reward pay can be granted. I voted yes, and the bill passed by 140 to 1.

HB 547 would place a cap in impact fees, at \$10,000 or 2% of the sale price of a house, whichever is less. I felt that doing this would be unreasonable interference of the state with the concept of impact fees, which were intended as a local government tool. Thus I voted no, but the measure passed, by 133 to 32.

HB 848 would provide for an exemption for the state portion of property taxes for seniors age 65 and over. The reduction would not be all that large, since the state portion is not an extensive part of property taxes, but I felt I would still be of some help to folks on a fixed income. I voted yes, and the bill passed by 143 to 18.

HB 1302, named the “Georgia Street Gang Terrorism and Protection Act”, is meant to deal with the noticeable increase of gang activity in our state. It targets organizers who recruit youth to join and commit gang type crimes, as well as those who actually commit such crimes, and has penalties for conviction consisting of jail terms from 3 to 15 years, and/or fines of 10 to 15 thousand dollars. It also makes it a misdemeanor for someone with gang building intent not to sign in at a school and/or not leave at the request of a school official. This legislation was introduced by a teacher, Representative David Casas, who has witnessed gang activity firsthand. While there was some debate on the bill, it passed (with my support), by 124 to 45.

HB 338 would allow hunters using historic or primitive weapons (primarily flintlock muskets) to use a telescopic sight on the rifle. My understanding of this sport is that people want to have the experience of what hunting was like on the frontier, 200 years ago. My opinion of this change is that it is quite out of keeping with having an “historical experience”, and that allowing it might damage the sport by giving it a bad image in the mind of the public. That opinion was shared by virtually all of the contacts from folks in the district on the bill. Since I consider it appropriate to vote in keeping with constituent majorities on straightforward issues like this, I voted no. Nonetheless, the measure passed, by 154 to 6.

On Wednesday, I had a chance to visit with Morgan County Commissioner Walter Butler. He shared some county concerns with me, and I thank him for taking the time and trouble to come to Atlanta.

For reference: bills and live session and committee video are online at www.legis.state.ga.us. Contact Info: My office phone is 404-656-0152, and email address is Doug@DougHolt.org.