

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Last week, there was a fair amount of legislative action, because there are many bills already “in the pipeline” from last year. On Monday, we voted on seven bills involving retirement provisions and policies for state and local government employees. They didn’t involve any new costs, but were all focused on either consolidating plans, or bringing them up to date with new standards or changes in federal law. You could really call them “housekeeping” bills. All passed unanimously.

Later in the week, we passed one of the new bills I mentioned in my previous column, namely HB 973, the “speed trap” bill. It passed by 160 to 1 (and mine wasn’t the dissenting vote!). Also, we passed HB 713, which designated February 6<sup>th</sup> of every year as Ronald Reagan Day in Georgia. While there was some heated debate by several members who opposed the bill, it nonetheless passed by a significant 138 to 19. Finally, we passed HB 999, which modernized many standards for Veterinary assistants. It passed unanimously.

Now to some newly introduced bills and resolutions. HB 1059 intends to place tougher controls on the most vicious convicted sexual offenders. It seeks to ensure that such individuals are not given early release into their communities due to inadequate jail space; requires that they be registered with more information being collected and released to the public; mandates that they wear electronic location monitors for the rest of their lives; and prohibits them from working with children either in a paid or voluntary role.

HB 1061 would enhance rights of self-defense by providing that there is no duty to retreat when using force to defend yourself or others, or in defense of your home.

HB 1086 would create a Georgia Arts Trust, intended to promote the artistic heritage of Georgia; enhance education in the arts and the learning benefits such education has been shown to provide children; and to promote art related tourism, as well as other benefits that the arts have clearly been shown to provide.

HB 1108 would require the Public Service Commission to regulate the natural gas industry in cases of emergency, such as happened last year.

HR 1111 calls for a referendum this November to allow school systems to impose a 1% sales tax for up to five years -- the proceeds of which could only be used to reduce the school property tax millage rate. A local referendum would be required for approval for each five year levy.

Finally, HB 1097 proposes placing a number of restrictions on billboards, the most significant of which would be prohibiting advertisement of products or services that appeal to prurient interests.

Finally, I need to mention that there has been much interest generated in last year’s HB 127, which would greatly increase teacher retirement benefits. It has been claimed that the Teacher’s Retirement System (TRS) has billions of excess dollars that could be used to fund the increase. I have investigated this claim thoroughly, and found that it is a hoax. The money in TRS is all committed to the payment of benefits to our 100,000+ active teachers, and the nearly 70,000 current retirees. To pay for such an increase would require the largest tax increase Georgia has ever seen. I am married to a teacher, and know many others, so I would certainly like to support this bill if it were workable. Instead, I have had the unhappy responsibility of replying to hundreds of emails with an answer that the senders didn’t want to hear. Nonetheless, I consider it my responsibility to research and reveal the truth about such issues, even though the truth hurts.

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