

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

During the week of the 6<sup>th</sup>, we passed 11 bills and resolutions. The House was in recess Tuesday, out of respect for the funeral of Coretta Scott King; and again on Friday, to give the Appropriations Committee time to work on the 2006/2007 budget.

Several of the bills passed were notable. HB 728, known as the "Mattie's Call Act", provides for creation of a statewide alert system for missing mentally disabled adults. The system would be much like those created in some other states to find such individuals, who normally need constant supervision, when they accidentally manage to wander away from their home and caregiver. The system would be administered by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, in coordination with the Lottery Commission and law enforcement agencies, in order to create the widest possible net to quickly spot and rescue such folks. I voted yes, and the bill passed by 147 to 3.

HB 1107 is the Governor's proposed tax credit incentive for donation of land or easements for conservation purposes. Under this bill, taxpayers could receive a credit against their state income tax liability of 25% of the fair market value of easements or property. A cap of \$250,000 per individual, and \$500,000 per corporation applies. The bill is intended to help accelerate Georgia's efforts to set aside more conservation land, with the easement feature being a relatively new concept that will allow conserved areas to accumulate more quickly, because they remain in private hands. This bill passed unanimously.

HB 1066 adds a number of illnesses that newborns will be screened for, increasing the number of such required screenings from 13 to 29. The logic behind the bill is that a problem identified and treated early will create a savings for the family and for society, since the illnesses to be screened for are always much more costly to deal with if undetected until a child is much older. Parents can opt out of the screenings if they have a religious objection. I voted yes for this as well, and it passed by 163 to 7.

On Wednesday, the Governor announced his initiative to correct the eminent domain problems created by the U.S. Supreme Court last year. The strategy will involve two pieces of legislation, the first of which is entitled the "Private Property Protection Act". This bill would restrict the use of eminent domain to elected officials, who are accountable to the public. The use of eminent domain for redevelopment purposes would be almost completely prohibited – the exception being situations where a blighted property presents concrete harm to the community. The bill would also prohibit use of eminent domain for economic development or to increase tax revenues. Any use of condemnation power would have its burden of proof placed on the governmental body wishing to exercise it. Finally, the bill would provide private property owners with stronger due process rights in any action involving eminent domain. Being only a legislative act, however, the bill would be subject to challenge in court.

The second piece is a proposed constitutional amendment, for this year's November ballot. It primarily enshrines what the Protection Act bill proposes to do, by placing its provisions in the state constitution. Then the changes could not be challenged in court. Basically, the bill is a short-term measure to slow any attempts to use broad eminent domain powers until the amendment can make the restraints permanent.

On Thursday, Cassie Chupp, who attends Morgan County Middle School, was able to come to the Capitol and page in the House for the day. She did a very conscientious job, and I really appreciate her service on a very busy and intense day of the session!

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).