

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The week of the 13<sup>th</sup> saw the pace pick up, with the passage of 24 bills and resolutions. The House was in recess Friday again, for further work by the Appropriations Committee on the 2006/2007 budget.

A number of the bills passed were significant or otherwise of interest. HB 661 requires that public schools notify parents at the beginning of each school year of all the school sponsored clubs and organizations that their children could join. It does not affect athletics (team sports) rules. Parents would then have the right to notify the school if they don't want their child participating in any or all of the activities. The bill was brought because of concerns expressed by parents who either found out that their children were involved in groups that they (the parents) found unacceptable, or that the kids had simply overextended themselves by joining too many groups. I voted for yes, and the bill passed, 143 to 25.

HB 1238 puts a 5% charge on any wire transmissions (think Western Union) of money out of the U.S. by anyone who can't prove that they are a U.S. citizen, or are in the country legally. The proceeds will be set aside for indigent care – meaning that it will help cover costs of people who show up at emergency rooms, but can't pay. This is obviously meant to help deal with our illegal alien problem. The measure isn't drastic, but rather is an incentive for illegals to gain legal status. I also found the use of the money (indigent care compensation) very appropriate, since this expense is growing rapidly, and is frequently generated by those self-same illegal aliens going to emergency rooms. Though I found it reasonable, many representatives clearly didn't, because it sparked a great deal of partisan debate, and passed by a nearly party line vote of 106 to 60.

A major bill was SB 390, the Governor's proposal to press public school systems to ultimately spend at least 65% of their instructional funds in the classroom. This figure was chosen by Governor Perdue because statistics show that the top 10% of states in academic achievement spend an average of over 64% this way; and because the 64 systems in Georgia already doing this average 6 to 14 points higher on the CRCT test, and 73 points higher on the SAT. Capital improvements (new schools) and other non-instruction related expenses are not considered in computing this fund usage figure. I'm not a big fan of state interference in local system operation, and I'm of the opinion that more effort needs to be put on classroom discipline, so that teachers have a better chance of actually engaging student's minds: nonetheless, I do find these statistics compelling. It also is no surprise to me to find out that the Morgan and Newton schools are performing well in many ways, because Morgan is already rated by the state Department of Education as spending 68.69% in our classrooms, and Newton 66.38%. The bill does contain waivers for high performing systems, and for those that have been struck by an "act of God" – for example, hurricane Katrina, or fuel price jumps. It doesn't dictate how that 65% is used among the areas it defines as "in classroom". Despite all this, or perhaps just because it is the Governor's bill, we spent over three hours in debate on it, and it passed (with my thumbs up), by a another nearly party line 102 to 70.

I really enjoyed visiting with Morgan High's FFA and FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) members, who came on Tuesday. Same with the Leadership Newton group that came Thursday, as well as the delegation of Newton County School Food Service folks who came to share concerns with the delegation. It's always a treat to visit with folks from home. Richie Knight and Mya Speaks, both of Newton High, did a great job paging on Monday. Lee Strange, with the Morgan High FFA, also was a terrific page on Tuesday, despite a lengthy session with a lot of "hot air". Thanks!

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).