

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

During last week, we were in session for three days again, and the pace picked up considerably. A total of 36 bills and resolutions were handled.

As is often the case, most of the items were of minor import; but we did handle several quite interesting, and indeed very significant bills.

HB 276 is a very intriguing act, which will help implement a new method of handling repeat DUI offenders via recent technological innovations. It is now possible to install a breath-testing device in a vehicle, which must register a passing breath alcohol level (and it can tell if the air passed through is human breath) before it will allow the vehicle to be started. The device is called an "ignition interlock". Courts will soon have the option of requiring installation of interlocks as part of their sentencing of repeat DUI offenders. HB 276 provides rules for businesses that want to sell, install and service the interlocks. Business owners who wish to get into this market must pass a criminal background check, and obtain a substantial, continuous surety bond. They also cannot have been convicted of a DUI, or of a felony or a crime of moral turpitude (unethical or offensive acts). Licenses can be revoked if it's determined that the applicant lied about or withheld anything required by the application process. Certain types of government employees, and employees of private probation companies are flatly prohibited from owning or working for an interlock company. The bill passed unanimously.

HB 935 allows advanced practice nurses, under the supervision of a physician, to issue prescriptions in certain situations, and to order certain medical devices, treatments, diagnostic tests or x-rays. These new privileges are very tightly regulated. The bill was long overdue in Georgia: all of the 49 other states have already enacted similar legislation. The expectation is that this law will be a small step in helping reign in rapidly rising health care costs: more importantly, it will provide for better access to medical care. More than half of Georgia counties are rated as "medically underserved", including both counties in this district. There were concerns about possible abuse of these new privileges, but I felt that if 49 other states were doing this, it was time to do so in Georgia too. The bill passed by a large majority of 146 to 6.

HB 1358 is the long awaited return to the goal of reducing class sizes. It is part of the Governor's education agenda. During the recession, he made the difficult choice of waiving class size reduction for the simple fact that the state didn't have the money to do it, and that school systems would have had to adopt immense increases in property taxes to accomplish it. Now that Georgia's economy is growing again, with revenue surpluses coming in, the Governor felt that this was a key issue to address. Of over \$1 billion in surplus revenue, 72% is going to education. The first version of the bill prompted a fair number of constituent calls, because the bill was unclear about how Kindergarten reduction would work. Many Kindergarten teachers and para-professionals were concerned that the bill would reduce the class size by two students, but remove the para-pro from the class. Fortunately, as a member of the Education Committee, I was able to pass these concerns on to the Governor's education policy staff, and the bill was revised. Funding specifically for para-pros will continue, regardless of the reduced class size. I was pleased to vote yes for this bill, which passed by a nearly unanimous 160 to 4.

SB 468 is another part of the Governor's education package. This bill directs the State Board of Education to develop a list of "High Performance Principals": that is, principals who have demonstrated the ability to lead a school to significant academic improvement. Principals who receive this rating by the Board are eligible for a State Board funded salary supplement of up to \$15,000, if they chose to go to a school on the Needs Improvement list. The supplement can be extended up to two additional years, if the school system finds that academic improvement has indeed occurred. Clearly, this concept that strong, motivating leaders can make a valuable difference is very widely held. The bill passed unanimously.

On Tuesday (February 28<sup>th</sup>), Jessica Phillips of Eastside High came to page, and did a very good job. The next day, Stephen Hinton, also from Eastside, paged for a fairly long and intense session. My thanks to both of you for your dedication!

On Wednesday, the Morgan County Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee came to visit the Capitol. Chamber President Ralph Vaughn and Committee Chair Sheriff Robert Markley led the group, which also included many other distinguished citizens. I appreciate their time and trouble making the trip, and enjoyed visiting with them.

For reference: bills and live session and committee video are online at [www.legis.state.ga.us](http://www.legis.state.ga.us).  
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