

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The flow of bills reached the House floor this week. Just a trickle, though: nine mostly housekeeping and other minor measures were considered. Only one was of some interest. HR 16 calls for a statue of Zell Miller to be placed on the Capitol grounds. Everyone who spoke about the bill, from either party, spoke in favor. The vote was 153 to 3 (I voted yes). The former Governor/Senator has certainly surprised many with his evolving political philosophy, but bonds of appreciation and friendship meant that only the three representatives voted no, and about seven abstained.

Before going into new bills, I would like to explain another concern for this session. Over the summer, a House/Senate study committee reviewed the effectiveness of trauma care in Georgia. They found that our trauma treatment efficiency is much lower than in the rest of America, with a death rate 20% above the national average. For a state with over 9 million people, that means about 700 more deaths than would occur if we met the average. Since Newton and Morgan counties have a bit over 1% of Georgia's population, that means seven of us have died due to inefficiency. A sad number to consider. The report obviously concludes that some of the problems contributing to lower efficiency will take money to address. But it also points out that a tremendous amount could be done with public education on causes of traumatic accidents, and about how to react when you are in, or see an accident. We could also do a lot by having a better statewide trauma management policy, and by bridging communication barriers between various emergency services in and among our local governments. I certainly hope we can follow up on most, or all of the committee's recommendations.

Now, back to new bills of interest. HB 114 would undo Speaker Tom Murphy's "third-rail" – that is, the exclusion of pickup trucks from seat belt requirements. A statewide poll showed approval for eliminating that exclusion at a very solid 70+ %, and (quite surprisingly) rural approval was over 80%. Actuarial statistics show that we average over 100 extra traffic deaths a year due to lack of a "click it" law on trucks. If this bill passes, we'd also be eligible for roughly \$20 million in federal transportation grants, to boot.

HB 208 would change the way school councils are composed. The bill would require that a majority of members be parents/guardians, of whom at least two are businesspeople. Another provision would mandate that the council chair be one of the parent members.

Several bills have been introduced to deal with the Certificate of Need (CON) issues I discussed previously. I think HB 210 may be the one to watch. It's long and complex, with some serious research and thought behind it. The most important things it would do are to revise CON issuance requirements, so that they can't be used to suppress competition. The other key provision applies to newer types of medical facilities, which have complained about the CON process. They would be required to provide indigent care, just as existing medical facilities do. I've not studied this bill thoroughly yet, but I am hopeful that it might accomplish the kind of fair and market oriented reform that this very contentious issue requires.

John Sutherland, from the Red Oak area of south Newton, came to visit the Capitol on Thursday. He's a college student, who took a day when he didn't have any classes to come and watch his state government in action. I enjoyed visiting with him, and hope that more young people would show such initiative in learning how government really works.

For reference: bills and live session and committee video are online at www.legis.ga.gov.
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