

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The early part of last week was spent on committee meetings and budget work. We were in session Thursday through Saturday. We considered ten bills, a couple of which were of minor note.

HB 76 makes it a criminal act to fraudulently use Georgia Emergency Management Agency symbols or titles. Seems silly, but it turns out that some people have posed GEMA officials to con citizens out of money and property in the wake of disasters. Another one of those "I can't believe people would do that" type problems: but it has happened, and a response was clearly called for. No dissent here, it unanimously.

HR 56 calls on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study the cost, feasibility, safety and effectiveness of raising the water level in the reservoirs in our state. Allowing water levels to rise (where safe) would be a very cost effective way of increasing water availability for public use. This bill also passed unanimously.

On Friday, my main annexation bill, the Fair Annexation Act (HB 2), moved a step forward. I had a chance to present it for the first time to the General Government sub-committee of the Governmental Affairs Committee. During the year since I introduced the previous version of the bill, I have had many folks contact me from all around the state. So it was no surprise that the room was packed with supporters (and, of course, a fair number of opponents). I had worked on my presentation for several weeks, and gave it my best. I certainly appreciated having quite a few supporting speakers, most importantly Chairman Varner from Newton. The sub-committee wanted to have a hearing focused on gathering information, so they made sure that both supporters and opponents had equal time. There was no motion made on the bill, since there were a lot of folks who wanted to be heard who could not, due to the limited amount of time (2 hours) we had that committee room. There was certainly a great deal of information presented, and the committee members want to hear more, and then take some time to digest it all. I'll keep you informed about the bill's progress whenever we reach the next significant step.

Something I didn't mention earlier was the addition of a new standing committee, called Code Review. Its purpose is to review the law books for sections that are obsolete or irrelevant. Technology and culture change over the years, making laws obsolete. Since the Georgia Code is huge, this new committee is a commitment to an ongoing search for these old pieces of law, so that they can be repealed. The work of this committee was highlighted on Saturday, when we came in for "family day". We held a short session to pass bills repealing law that the Code Review Committee had found, which also gave our families a chance to see how the House operates. We will probably make this a tradition, one, which I think, is important in both substance and style. "Cleaning up" the law books should be continuous process.

Time for a couple of new bills and resolutions. HB 281 would add childcare centers to the list of facilities considered 'Drug-free School Zones.' The same penalties for manufacture, possession or sale of illegal drugs for existing zones would apply.

HR 158 would freeze primary residence tax appraisal values starting in 2009. The value for existing homes would be set at their level as of that date, and new homes would be set at their assessor's appraisal at time of sale. The assessed value of these homes would only change upon their sale. This change would require a constitutional amendment, which would be on the November 2008 ballot.

The U.S. Congress is clearly playing games with the program that funds Peach Care. We are one 18 states that need to have the funds promised for this program released to us, but the federal legislature has let several opportunities slip by when they could have solved the problem.

There is over \$1 billion dollars available for the program held in reserve for states whose population is not growing as fast as ours, so the money is there. We could fund the shortfall ourselves, but it would require taking a huge chunk out of many major state programs, including the most important, like education and transportation. And you can be sure we would never see that money refunded. It's time our federal legislators got together with their peers from the other 17 states in this fix, and demanded that Congress act ASAP.

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