

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Now that a PeachCare solution seems to be in hand, the General Assembly “cranked up” again last week. We are leading up to crossover day (the last day when you can get a bill passed in one chamber, and still have time to pass the other). So we only met in session on Monday and Tuesday, and continued with committee meetings through the rest of the week. The House worked its way through 41 bills and resolutions in those two days.

Several significant bills drew most of the press focus, so I'll review other interesting bills that received little or no attention. You can assume a bill or resolution passed unanimously unless I give you a vote count.

HB 16 would extend “whistleblower” protections to some government employees who currently don't have them. Specifically, it targets any state agency that is covered under the State Merit System, and any regional and local government or government entities.

HB 48 would extend the definition of “in the line of duty” for law enforcement and fire personnel to include time spent in training. The reason this is necessary is because presently, if an officer or firefighter is killed during training, their families are not indemnified (their lives are not insured). We all thought it very appropriate to extend this protection to the families of those who protect us.

HB 186 would provide a two-year state sales tax exemption for construction of facilities for producing alternative fuels such as ethanol, biodiesel, and related products. The intent is to provide an opportunity for a valuable new industry to get a head start in Georgia, and to help reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

HB 227 seeks to increase competition in the cable TV market. Currently, cable companies have to negotiate a separate agreement to enter each local government market in the state. This makes it difficult and time consuming to enter more markets, which is certainly a damper on competition. HB 227 would allow cable companies to negotiate a statewide agreement, allowing companies to enter new markets far more easily. Local government “franchise fees” (taxes collected on cable), are still protected. This reform has worked well in every one of a number of states that have enacted it. Even so, there was some opposition. The bill passed by 166 to 2, with my yes.

HB 280 makes it unlawful to sell or distribute marijuana flavored candy or other products to minors. Even possession of such items with demonstrable intent to sell or distribute is prohibited. A \$1000 fine would apply to each offense. Research has shown that children who are exposed to these products are much more likely to use real marijuana, and move on to even more dangerous drugs. This certainly seemed like good sense to me, but there was some dissent. The bill passed by 133 to 26, with my support.

HB 549 seeks to simplify and speed up the Medicaid application and approval process for therapy services for children with disabilities. Currently, parents of such children must file up to ten forms, and do so with excessive frequency. The bill would call for the Department of Community Health to create a single form to replace all the others, and to reduce the frequency with which parents must re-submit the it to keep their children in treatment. It also mandates that children will receive an increased number of therapy sessions per month, paid for in part with the savings generated by simplification of the process.

On Tuesday, Phyllis Martin and Gail Eaton from Morgan High came to the Capitol with a delegation from the 10<sup>th</sup> District School Nutritionists. I appreciate the time they took to come visit and discuss policy issues with me.

For reference: bills and live session and committee video are online at [www.legis.ga.gov](http://www.legis.ga.gov).  
Contact Info: My office phone is 404-656-0152, and email address is [Doug@DougHolt.org](mailto:Doug@DougHolt.org).