

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

After appropriations hearings during the week of the 21st, the session got underway in earnest last week. Since this is the second session of a two-year term, there is legislation from last year still in the system. We went to work on some of it last week. Several bills were noteworthy.

HB 301 is a long overdue ban of dog fighting. Media reports on this despicable practice last year finally gave it the backing to sail over the heads of special interests, who have kept such bills from reaching the House or Senate floor for years. I voted yes, and the bill passed by 165 to 6.

HB 130 seeks to provide consumer protection for those concerned about identity theft. The bill would allow you to place a permanent freeze on your credit record with the credit reporting agencies, at a fee of no more than \$3 per agency (there are three firms in this business). Placing a freeze will prohibit such agencies from releasing your credit report or score without your express authorization, except in a number of very carefully defined situations of public interest or existing credit relationships. If the bill gains full passage, you will be able to have a freeze placed on your record starting August 1st. You can have the freeze lifted for limited periods of time if you are applying for credit; to grant access to the firm you are seeking credit from. Of course, existing laws that allow identity theft victims to have a freeze placed for free are still binding. This is a new way to protect yourself proactively. The bill sailed through by 167 to 2, and I didn't vote "no"!

HB 881 would create a Georgia Charter Schools Commission, providing an alternative approval path for new charter schools. I supported the bill because I've learned of far too many school systems that give teachers little if any backing in disciplining students (this is not the case in Morgan or Newton, thankfully; but my oath binds me to consider such issues for the whole state). Poor classroom order is absolutely corrosive to a successful learning environment. Thus I feel it is appropriate to provide more options for parents who want their children to attend a school where teachers have control of their classrooms (and teachers who want to work in such an environment, for that matter). While one might consider this bill to be partisan in nature, it actually has support and opposition in both parties. I'm on the House Education Committee, and when we passed it out of committee earlier in the week, it had 22 "yes's" to four "no's". Later in the week, the bill passed the whole House by 119 to 48, with my support.

An interesting new measure is HB 921, which would enable Georgia's Banking and Finance Department to participate in an online, national licensing and tracking system of mortgage lenders and brokers. This is clearly a reform intended to help address the ongoing sub-prime mortgage crisis. It would give Georgia a greater ability to investigate the practices of out of state lenders and brokers seeking a license here.

I'll continue with more interesting new bills in next week's column. As always, I list them because they are interesting, not because I necessarily support them. Bills always change before they reach the House floor for a vote, so I consider it inappropriate to firmly endorse or oppose them until I can read the final version.

I enjoyed a chance to visit with Camille and Bill Ronay of Buckhead Tuesday. They have done a tremendous job supporting Georgia tourism in many ways, and I want to thank them for putting so much of their own time into efforts that will benefit all of us. On Friday, Representative Bob Smith joined me in commending Morgan's champion 4-H Archery team before the whole House of Representatives. The members of the House were quite impressed with the achievements of Aston Adcock, Katie Wibell and Sarah Wibell, and of Coach Nick Nicholson. They received a standing ovation from the House, and many members told me afterwards that they were proud to know how well Morgan's team represented Georgia. Way to go, girls!

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