

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Last week the pace picked up a bit. The House considered 19 bills and resolutions. Several were interesting or significant.

HB 961 sets standards for making handicap-parking permits more legible, for clearly indicating the difference between a temporary and a permanent permit, and requires that temporary permits be laminated, to make it more difficult to alter the expiration date. The bill restricts permit issue privileges to true medical professionals. Finally, it provides for more severe penalties for those who use handicap parking spaces illegally – including a year's suspension of the violator's driver's license after several convictions. I often see people who display no obvious impairment getting out of cars parked in handicap spaces. At the same time, I've been hearing ever more frequently of situations where someone truly handicapped is unable to find a handicap space because there are none available. Thus it has clearly become too easy to get these permits, and reform is needed. I must not be the only legislator seeing and hearing about these concerns, since the bill passed unanimously.

HB 969 would allow home-schooled students who are taught using the state approved driver-training curriculum to meet the Department of Driver Services (DDS) training requirements. This would put these students on the same footing as others when getting their driver's licenses. This bill also passed unanimously.

HB 919 seeks greater legislature oversight of the Georgia Lottery Corporation. It would require that three seats on the Corporation's Board of Directors be appointed each by the Speaker and the Lieutenant Governor. In addition, the bill creates a Legislative Lottery Oversight Committee that will be composed of 14 senators and representatives. The Lottery Corporation will also be required to report salaries and incentive packages to the legislature. Obviously, this bill is a response to the excessive bonuses the Corporation's executives gave themselves last year. The bill passed, with my support, by 119 to 32.

HB 1027 authorizes the DDS to approve on-line defensive driving courses for what is called pretrial diversion (a process you can go through to avoid having points placed on your license for traffic violations). The goal of the bill is to standardize a process that some judges are already allowing. There was a good deal of debate about whether people choosing this option could have someone else take the on-line course in their place. While the bill's goal is laudable, my background in computers left me convinced that fraud is quite likely. Thus I voted no, but the bill passed by 103 to 56.

HB 1041 mandates that the state Board of Nursing require background checks for new applicants. Sadly, there have been some incidences where criminals were unknowingly hired as nurses. These individuals stole from patients, and abused and mistreated others. It's disappointing to place such a requirement on a highly respected profession whose membership is almost universally quite ethical; but there have been enough convictions of "bad apples" that the change is necessary. I voted yes, and the bill passed by 155 to 1.

Quite a few folks came to visit at the Capitol last week. I had a chance to talk with Ben Cobb, James Killman and Sheri Knarr of the Alcovy CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) about children's issues on Tuesday. Allison Jordan, the Career Technical and Agricultural Education Coordinator at Alcovy High, came to discuss education concerns on Wednesday. On Thursday, Newton County Library Director Greg Heid was there for Library Day, and fought through some large crowds to say hello. Mike and Jeanea Windham of Madison brought their daughters Katie Marie and Keeli to see the legislature in action, and take part in home school day. And Danny Stone brought this year's Leadership Newton class, as he faithfully does every year. All four members of Newton's legislative delegation had a chance to meet with them and answer questions. Bright bunch of folks!

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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