

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Moving into the second half of the legislative session, action really picked up last week. The House considered 46 bills and resolutions.

HB 978 deals with the growing number of traffic violations and accidents caused by illegal immigrants. Because these folks have no valid ID or insurance, we can't identify those who are repeat offenders. Georgians who are victims can end up bearing the cost of the accident by having to pay their deductible, and through car insurance rate hikes. HB 978 would allow seizure of the illegal immigrant's vehicle, with the government being allowed to sell the vehicle if the driver can't prove legal presence. A court can order that proceeds be distributed to accident victims. The bill has protections for lien holders, and for situations where owners are not aware of a driver's illegal status. We saw some hot debate centered on due process, and loss of mobility. But the forfeiture provisions are drawn from existing laws that provide well-established due process. And it is important to remember that driver's licenses are a privilege, not a right. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that federal law already sets a precedent. The U.S. government can seize vehicles used to transport illegals. Given these considerations, I supported the bill. It passed by 104 to 51.

HB 1091 tightens up the definition of "in-state" status in determining eligibility for lower Georgia college/university tuition rates, and for the HOPE scholarship. Studies have shown that roughly \$4 million per year in lower tuition rates and HOPE funding is going to out of state students. Since the whole point of in-state tuition rates and the HOPE scholarship is to benefit Georgians, this finding is unacceptable. I voted yes, and the bill passed by 155 to 3.

HB 1113 provides much tighter standards for purchasing cards (credit or debit) used by state employees. The bill covers issuance, use and penalties for abuse of these cards. After the news documenting such abuse last year, it was clear that reform was in order. The bill passed unanimously.

HB 1019 would create a Georgia Infrastructure Bank. This is one of the creative ideas recommended by the Transportation Funding study committee that met last year. The bank could provide lower interest loans for state and local government projects, because it would be backed by Georgia's first class credit rating. It will be funded from state, federal and private sources. The money the bank accumulates will be revolving – meaning that repaid loans remain in the bank to fund new loans. A number of other states have used such banks with great success. South Carolina has been the most aggressive in using this tool, having several billion dollars in its bank. The bill passed, with my "yes", by 162 to 1.

HR 413 would have offered a referendum in November to make English the official language of Georgia. If passed, the referendum would have amended the state constitution to require that all official actions of the state be in English, including laws, ordinances, decrees, and driver's license examinations, for example. Necessary exemptions were included for education, public health, law enforcement, diplomacy and trade. History holds repeated examples of nations that fell apart when they ceased to speak a single tongue, so I voted for the resolution. Amazingly, the two thirds (120 votes) necessary to pass were not to be had. The resolution failed by 103 to 61.

On Tuesday, Newton Commission Chairman Aaron Varner was at the Capitol to work on county issues, and I enjoyed a chance to discuss those with him. On Thursday, Morgan Board of Education member Dave Belton came by, and we had some time to discuss several education issues.

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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