

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The fast pace continued last week, with consideration of 44 bills and resolutions. I'll cover the most significant items. One failed, but has been of such great interest that I should relate its conclusion.

HB 1226 promotes reservoir construction, assisting local governments by making state level experts available to help with (especially federal) permitting processes. Financial assistance will also be provided. The bill had one key provision that I was very pleased to see. It takes the administrative rules controlling inter- and intra-water basin transfer contained in the state water management plan we approved early in the session, and turns them into law. This is one of the key changes I wanted to see in the water plan. I voted "yes", and the bill passed by 166 to 3.

HB 1209 is a new option for school systems. Many have been asking for flexibility on certain state mandates for years, in order to tailor their approach to their student mix, and create efficiencies. HB 1209 offers them the chance to obtain this flexibility in exchange for a contract that sets improvement goals. There can be consequences if the goals aren't met, proportional to the degree of failure. But this law is optional. Local systems are not required to make a contract with the state. They can remain under the existing system of highly regulated operation. This model is attracting a good deal of national attention, because it is the first attempt to create a two-way partnership between the state and local level. I hope that systems will try this option, because current education law often traps them in inefficient practices. I supported the bill, and it passed by 112 to 58.

HB 979 and SR 796 were a much-improved version of Speaker Richardson's tax relief plan. Over many months, the House leadership worked with the members to reach an acceptable version of the plan that would still be a tremendous benefit to taxpayers. You would have had a chance to vote on it in a referendum in November, if it had passed. There were several major benefits in the package. First, auto ad-valorem taxes would have been phased out completely by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. Tags fees would have been reduced to a flat \$30, with \$10 going to fund a statewide trauma system that we badly need. The state would have been constitutionally required to compensate local governments for the revenues lost. The other major benefit of the plan was property tax assessment growth caps. Using your 2008 assessment as a base, future assessments would have been limited to 2% on residences, and 3% on other properties. Improvements to a property would have been added to the assessment at fair market value. When a property was sold, its assessment would have been updated to fair market value. A county could still have performed mass reappraisal of all properties in a designated area, when it was demonstrated that market conditions have changed dramatically. Another provision was a cap on local government revenue growth. I didn't think this provision was really necessary, because of the assessment caps. But key Senators were ready to pull this provision out, resulting in a very good package. So I supported the legislation. But when the vote was called on SR 796, which provided for the referendum to make the necessary constitutional changes, the resolution couldn't muster the super-majority (120 votes) required for passage. It failed, with 110 votes in favor, and 62 opposed. There was no point in voting on HB 979.

On Tuesday, I enjoyed a chance to have lunch with Morgan High Principal Dr. Mark Wilson and Jimmy Stokes, and discuss several education issues. Thursday, the Morgan Chamber of Commerce delegation came to visit, headed by Sheriff Robert Markley and Georgia Power's Linda Gantt. School Superintendent Stan DeJarnett, Dr. Wilson, and a group of middle and high school students eager to see their state government at work joined them. I appreciate everyone taking the time and putting up with the traffic necessary to come to Atlanta.

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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