

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Crossover week saw the usual rush of legislation. We considered about 70 items.

HB 470 is a major upgrade of the Georgia Lemon Law. Its coverage is expanded beyond private individuals to include businesses with ten or fewer vehicles. The period during which a new vehicle buyer is protected by the law is extended to two years or 24,000 miles. Better compliance deadlines and other protections will speed up action to correct problems by manufacturers. Safety problems are given a high order of precedence. Several other improvements make this bill a timely upgrade. It passed unanimously.

HB 1216 converts the current Regional Development Centers (RDC's) to commissions. Board membership will be basically the same as now, and the commissions would perform most of the same functions (local government planning assistance, economic development, grant preparation and administration, job training, and aging services). There is some expectation of adding additional responsibilities in the future. But RDC's have performed their duties quite well as is, so I felt that giving them independent legal status would simply divert resources away from their mission, and from local governments. I voted "no", but the bill passed by 134 to 30.

HB 1244 extends income tax credits for businesses allowing employees to telecommute. The credit is higher for businesses in parts of the state that are out of compliance with the Clean Air Act. This is the kind of out-of-the-box thinking that we must pursue to help resolve congestion woes and alleviate the pressure of ever higher gas prices, beyond simply building more roads. Since so many "inside the perimeter" jobs are office/service related, telecommuting holds great promise. The bill also passed unanimously.

Improving student discipline in our schools is one of my favorite goals, so I was very pleased to see HB 1321. The bill requires student codes of conduct to address situations where a student falsely accuses teachers or other school personnel of misconduct towards him or her self, or towards other students. If the charge is found to be false, the school system must issue a statement that charges have been cleared to any media outlets that have covered the story, if desired by the accused. If the student who has made the false accusation is ten or older, there can be consequences. A judge may order the student to perform community service, and the school system may suspend or expel the student. This is good legislation, and deserved unanimous passage, which it received.

HB 1318 was intended to protect property rights of sign owners. However, the bill was a too aggressive. It contained a provision requiring local governments to compensate sign owners if the owner of land a sign is on seeks a re-zoning that requires the sign come down. Such situations are a matter of dispute between the landowner and the sign owner. Taxpayers should not be forced to foot the bill for disagreement between third parties. I voted no, and the bill failed by 74 to 91.

Speaker Richardson brought his tax plan back to the floor on Tuesday, contained in SR 1246, and a companion bill HB 1158. This time, he got it right. The legislation contained the auto ad-valorem tax phase out, the property tax assessment growth caps, and funding for a statewide trauma network. The troubling caps on local government revenue growth were gone. The legislation received tremendous bipartisan support, with SR 1246 passing by 166 to 5, and HB 1158 by 164 to 7. If the Senate agrees to these measures, you will have a chance to vote on them in November.

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