

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The fury of crossover week behind us, the House turned to reviewing Senate bills and resolutions in committee. We only considered 13 items on the House floor, though a couple were contentious and one a bit time consuming.

SB 145 would allow imposition of a “life without possibility of parole” sentence for murder convictions. Current law requires a prosecutor pursue the death penalty, with the lesser sentence of life without parole only available if the death penalty is not imposed. The intent is to give prosecutors another option in murder trials. I supported this change, but opposed an amendment that would have allowed a judge to impose the death sentence if a jury vote of 10 or 11 for death were cast. The requirement of a unanimous jury vote for death has been part of American law since colonial times, and part of English common law for centuries before that. I don’t think we should tamper with a system that has served for so long, and was considered a significant cornerstone of liberty by America’s founding fathers. The amendment was successfully attached to SB 145, however, so I voted against the bill. It passed by 112 to 55.

SB 359 directs the state Department of Economic Development to create a “Made in Georgia” program. The intent is to promote goods made here, to help us compete with other states that have similar programs, and help us support and protect jobs in our state. The act passed unanimously.

SB 388 concentrates state identity fraud investigative efforts within the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). Identity fraud is an ever more pervasive problem, and it’s time to consolidate work to combat it in one agency; the GBI being the obvious place. The bill passed unanimously.

SB 430 would allow the GBI to compare DNA profiles lawfully obtained from suspects in an investigation, and compare them to profiles in state and national databases. TV shows would lead you to think that this is common practice already, but the GBI does not have clear-cut authorization at present. Along with other representatives, I was troubled by the fact that the original version of the bill concluded with the grant of this power. No provision for removal of an individual's profile if they were cleared before or during trial was included. We therefore amended the bill to require that those who have been cleared have the right to have their profile removed from the GBI database. I supported the amended bill, and it passed by 130 to 40.

SB 463 relaxes state controls on the use of “gray water”. This is water from residential sources like sinks, bathtubs, showers and clothes washers. Currently, this water must be directed to septic tanks or sewer systems. SB 463 would allow a homeowner to collect this water for hand irrigation of gardens, lawns or landscapes. In light the drought, this seems like sensible regulatory flexibility. This bill passed unanimously.

We also passed the conference committee (House/Senate negotiated compromise) version of the 2008 supplemental budget, and the first draft of the 2009 budget – with my “yes” on each. I was pleased to see overall focus moving back towards making education the state’s first priority. Between the two budgets, we have restored roughly \$120 million in education cuts recommended by the Governor. Whether you agree with the QBE formula or not, it is the law, and I feel we have an obligation to live up to it. Hopefully, the Senate will agree with this approach when considering the 2009 budget next week.

On Tuesday, the Morgan FFA leadership came to the Capitol with their advisor, Tim Savelle. I enjoyed visiting with them, and presented a House resolution honoring their work on a public service project. They raised \$2,400 for the Georgia Equine Impound program, which cares for abused and neglected horses confiscated by the state, and operates solely upon donations. FFA member Will Samuels served as a page in the House that day, and did a great job.

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.