

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Our final week of session saw the normal surge of legislating. We considered 42 bills and resolutions, and also worked to resolve many minor differences between bills, as well as voted on conference committee reports that hashed out major differences between House and Senate versions of bills.

SB 20 is meant to combat sanctuary policies, a practice in which some cities and counties around the state are setting regulations, rules, etc., which prevent officials or employees from reporting illegal aliens. In some instances, this is a direct subversion of legislation passed in 2006 dealing with the presence of illegals. Local governments that violate this rule would risk withholding of state funding or state-administered federal funding. Surprisingly, there was no debate. I supported the bill, and it passed by 124 to 28.

SB 30 deals with a problem in which gasoline suppliers (read “big oil”) won’t allow distributors to mix ethanol with base gasoline stock. They bring in ethanol from their own sources, and thus control the price. Allowing ethanol produced in Georgia to be used would expand the amount of ethanol on the market, and put a downward pressure on prices – so the suppliers have an incentive to shut out in-state ethanol. Helping local ethanol break into the market would also increase availability of higher percentage ethanol blends. This bill would allow both distributors and suppliers to blend fuel stocks, thus leveling the playing field, opening the doors for higher ethanol blends, and allowing savings to be passed on to end consumers. I voted “yes”, and the bill passed by 137 to 30.

SB 55 would expand the range of criteria a local tax assessor must consider when determining fair market value. Of the additional criteria, the most important is consideration of foreclosed properties in reaching a valuation. Previously, foreclosed properties could be excluded in calculating a value. The bill passed unanimously.

SB 56 proposes setting up a “Stop Meth Log” program recording sales of drugs that can be used in production of methamphetamine in an electronic database, for law enforcement purposes. Many of us agreed with citizens contacting us that this was a very heavy-handed measure that endangered personal privacy, no matter how laudable the intentions. Personal data, to include actual prescription information, would be stored in a database that could potentially be hacked and stolen. This is a risky measure, and I could not support it. It passed by 107 to 60, however.

SB 67 would require that written or oral exams for a permanent driver’s license must be administered in English. A license is a privilege that must be won by demonstrating preparedness to handle travel contingencies, which includes reading road signs. This bill would, of course, also be a disincentive for the ongoing presence of illegal aliens. I agree with both propositions, and supported the bill. After a lengthy debate, the bill passed by a largely party line 104 to 58.

SB 85 would consolidate aircraft and support staff belonging to various state agencies in a Georgia Aviation Authority. The reasoning behind this proposal is that none of the various aircraft services is large enough to be very efficient, whereas a consolidated outfit would be. The bill also directs that all aircraft and support personnel be trained and equipped to support all of Georgia’s needs, so that a larger quantity of aircraft would be available to serve a specific need at any given time. This seems like a very sensible reorganization, so I voted “yes”, and the bill passed by 139 to 32.

SB 94 enables Georgia to access a part of the federal stimulus that would help those thrown out of work by the recession to keep their health insurance for up to nine months. Language in the bill specifically ensures that the state, in accepting this aid, does not commit itself to any obligations that are not part of our existing policy. With this measure, Georgia will recoup some of the tax

dollars we send the federal government that make us a net donor state (we send more than we get back). I supported the bill, and it passed by 156 to 11.

SB 117 would direct the state department of Economic Development to enhance the "Made in Georgia" program by creating a website informing the public of Georgia manufacturers and their products. Products would need to be at least 50% made in this state to qualify. I supported the bill, and it passed by 165 to 1.

SB 128 offers owners of boat, utility and non-commercial livestock trailers the option of purchasing a permanent license for such trailers. I agreed with the measure, and it passed by 167 to 3.

SB 151 would allow family members or friends of a murder victim to testify at a sentencing hearing via audio or video recording. There are times that such folks are so worked up that they have trouble calming down to speak to a jury, so this option would let them give their testimony in a more controlled environment. Again, this is only for sentencing, when guilt has already been determined, not during the trial itself. The bill passed unanimously.

SB 168 deals with a problem very much in the news. Much has been made of the fact that there are at least 22 state legislators who have not filed personal income tax returns (this representative is not one of them). The bill would authorize the commissioner of the Department of Revenue to inform the chairs of the House and Senate Ethics committees on an official basis, which would allow those committees to investigate and act on such breaches. I'd like to tell you this passed unanimously, but there was one dissenting vote (not mine).

SB 200 is the transportation re-structuring bill I've discussed previously. The version we voted on leaves the DOT board largely intact, but adds a Director of Planning position that would be directly appointed by the Governor, subject to legislative confirmation. Otherwise it contains the provisions of the previous version that would rationalize our statewide transportation planning process, which I strongly support. The bill saw a lengthy debate, and then obtained the minimum 91 votes needed for passage (including mine). There was an immediate motion to reconsider, but this failed by a seven-vote margin. The Senate later agreed to our version of the bill. I think this is one of the major accomplishments of the session.

SB 240 creates a new binding arbitration process that taxpayers can opt for when they appeal an ad valorem assessment by a local board of assessors. The idea is to give taxpayers an option short of going to court. The process is a streamlined approach, in that it directs the arbitrator to choose either the assessor's valuation or one offered by the taxpayer. In order to avoid frivolous arbitrations, the loser is required to pay the arbitration fee. Having an option other than going to court could be worthwhile, so I voted for the bill, and it passed by 161 to 2.

HR 471 registers Georgia's opposition to federal legislation called the Clean Water Restoration Act. If passed, the legislation would dramatically expand the reach of the federal bureaucracy, giving federal regulators authority even over non-navigable waters wholly within the state, and creating extensive federal permitting authority over local land use decisions. While we agree that keeping our water clean and safe is an important policy goal, it doesn't call for expanding federal authority to the extent that bounds set by the U.S. Constitution may come into question. I supported the resolution, and it passed by 123 to 31.

Now for my customary session wrap-up. Since January 12th, I've read over 440 bills, resolutions, etc., and voted on about 280. I received 6326 contacts (phone calls, visits, mail and email), of which over 15% were from within the district (I continue to make responding to all in-district contacts my first priority). Email made up about 84% of my in-district contacts, and 93% of all contacts. "Spam" email accounted for 26% of the out-of-district contacts. These numbers are a bit lower than last year's, primarily due to reduced quantities of spam.

Contact Info: My office phone is 404-656-0152, and email address is [Doug@DougHolt.org](mailto:Doug@DougHolt.org).