

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

On Tuesday last week, Governor Perdue announced that the revenue estimate for the state budget must be lowered by another \$465 million. This makes the job of cutting an even more significant challenge. Considering this bad news, the House majority caucus has concluded that we must do more than merely react to the crisis by cutting the budget. Since any sustained revival will be driven by private enterprise, especially small business, the most valuable thing we can do is create incentives to get the dominoes of daily business decisions falling forward, instead of backward. We are launching the Jobs, Opportunity and Business Success Act, which is a package of primarily small business friendly hiring credits and new business incentives. We will begin moving the package legislatively this week. The state government has a responsibility to pitch in too, and this is where we start.

In regular business, the pace picked up, and we voted on 15 bills and resolutions. HB 217 would allow physicians to create vaccine protocol agreements with up to 10 pharmacists or nurses. Under such an agreement, the physician would define a treatment regimen for administering flu vaccines to groups of patients. The goal of the bill is to create a rigorous but lower cost network for delivering flu vaccines. The bill passed by 160 to 3, with my "yes".

HB 237 seeks to make Georgia a more adoption-friendly state by making adoptions of hard-to-place children done by private agencies eligible for financial assistance. Such assistance is already available for adoptions done through the state, under very stringent criteria. The program has worked well, and should be extended to make sure that more of these children get to grow up in a family. The bill passed unanimously.

HB 294 would require that legislative approval be required for creation, consolidation, suspension or discontinuation of a technical college or other unit of the State Board of Technical and Adult Education. A couple of years ago, the Governor launched a study committee to review possible efficiencies to be gained by consolidating some of the technical colleges. The committee has made no official recommendations yet, and has pretty much moved to the back burner. Nonetheless, rumors have begun to fly, and many legislators have received anxious questions about the future of some institutions. HB 294 would ensure that no significant changes could be made to the technical college system without being vetted by a public process. I supported the bill, and it passed by 158 to 1.

HB 326 offers changes to hunting, fishing and game licenses that the Game, Fish and Parks Committee has been reviewing for some time. First, it increases non-resident license fees so they are in line with neighboring states. It also allows Georgia residents to obtain multi-year licenses for the first time. It eliminates the primitive weapons (primarily archery) license requirement. Finally, it authorizes the sale and renewal of licenses by telephone and the internet, in addition to the traditional route of purchasing at a store. There were a fair number of questions about these provisions, but little real debate. I voted for the bill, and it passed by 164 to 2.

Now a couple of new bills. HB 198 is aimed at creating flexibility for local school systems when defining their annual calendar. It would change the statutory definition of a school year from a minimum number of days to a minimum number of hours. When the price of gas was so high last year, many systems wanted to look at four-day weeks, and this bill is intended to make such experiments possible.

HB 225 sounds like a reaction to a specific event. The bill would require that only registered Georgia voters be allowed to distribute voter registration applications, or conduct voter registration drives. Should make for some interesting debate.

On Thursday, we had a chance to recognize Dr. Mark Wilson, principle of Morgan County High School. He has been named the 2009 National Principle of the Year, a very significant achievement. Dr. Wilson, along with his wife Lisa, daughters Anna and Ellen, and Superintendent Dr. Stan DeJarnett were invited to the Speaker's rostrum. Dr. Wilson spoke to the assembled House of Representatives, and Georgia is clearly very proud of him. That same day, I had a number of great kids come to page in the House.

Dillon Moore of Morgan County High, along with Taylor Ihringer and Rebecca Webb from Morgan County Middle all helped keep the House in order for a day. Thanks for your service!

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