

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The House passed the supplemental budget last week. This bill is the device for adjusting the present budget (fiscal 2009, which ends on June 30th) based on tax receipt trends. Overall revenue is down enough to require roughly 8% cuts in most of the major components of the budget. The only significant exception is education, which will be cut by about 5%. This budget does include the Homeowner's Tax Relief Grant, in order to keep local governments from having to cut more services. The bill moves on to the Senate now, and we will get to work on the 2010 budget.

We handled 17 bills and resolutions overall, with many of them involving a lot of debate. HB 100 offers some revisions and clarifications to the state's tax credit program for private school scholarships. The most important provision corrects an error excluding pre-kindergarten programs. The bill also provides some clarifications, adds protections for donors, and adds penalties for intentional misuse of the program. The \$50 million cap on the program remains in place. The bill saw a fair amount of debate, with some calling the program "neo-vouchers". I voted yes, and it passed by a near party line 98 to 69.

HB 149 is one of the "interesting new bills" from a previous column that has made it to the House floor. The bill proposes a "Move On When Ready" program in which 11th and 12th grade high school students may move full time to college or technical school. There they may complete graduation requirements while earning college credit. A student who does this will have the state portion of their public school funding transferred to the new institution, and this will be accepted as payment in full (only during what would have been high school years). I voted yes, and HB 149 passed by 154 to 6.

HB 343 seeks to create a "weight inspector" position for enforcement of commercial carrier standards. Uniformed officers presently handle most enforcement because some provisions of the code involve criminal violations, yet most of the work deals with non-criminal weight limits. Thus this bill is a cost saving measure that will allow use of the civilian inspectors to free up highly trained officers. The bill passed by 168 to 1, with my support.

SB 31 is a proposal to allow Georgia Power to recover financing fees for expansion of the Vogtle nuclear generating plant during construction. I was initially skeptical about the idea, but when the bill passed the Senate, I knew I would need to become well versed in the subject. So I've spent a lot of time during the past couple of weeks investigating. I'm now convinced it actually is a good proposal for the state (for additional information, [click here](#)). In any case, we saw a lengthy, fairly hot debate before the vote was taken. And this was also one of the rare occasions when the party structures fell apart. The bill passed by 107 to 66, and I voted in favor.

To close, I must include a note of explanation. I have always tried to respond to every contact from within the district, be it by phone, mail or email. In recent months, however, it has become popular for people around the state to email every state legislator about issues that concern them. Inevitably, our in-boxes get overloaded and email service shuts down. The only way to handle this problem has been to install filter programs that automatically delete any message dealing with the topic – which unfortunately includes messages from within the district. Thus I have undoubtedly not responded to some of your messages, for which I do apologize.

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