

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The 2010 legislative session started on an upbeat note. The first task of the House was to elect a new Speaker and Speaker Pro Tem, in the wake of the leadership changes during December. On Monday, we elected David Ralston of Blue Ridge as Speaker, and Jan Jones of Alpharetta as Speaker Pro Tem. I am very pleased with both of these selections, and feel these new leaders will guide the House of Representatives in a very positive direction. If you wish to learn a bit more about them, I have previously written a column that introduces each. (You can read it under New Faces at www.dougholt.org/updates2010.htm).

On Wednesday, Governor Sonny Perdue gave his final state of the state address (his second term ends with this year). Normally, the Governor has delivered a message centered on his specific legislative and budget initiatives. Not so this time. Instead, he issued a ringing appeal that we make the hard decisions necessary to get Georgia through these tough times without resorting to solutions that cloud the future of our children and grandchildren. Governor Perdue noted that, in looking at similar times in American history, "What stands out most is each generation's willingness to pick up the yoke and move our nation forward. It has not always been pretty, but what has never happened in this nation is for one generation to drop the yoke and wait for the next to pick it up. And neither have they weighted them down with undue burdens."

I agree wholeheartedly. I appreciate the Governor devoting so much emphasis to this message, and I hope everyone in Georgia hears it (there is a link on the homepage of my website). It is already clear that the greater number in both House and Senate also feel this way; that we must reject the wanton approach that has caused so much revulsion with events in Washington, D.C. I will do all I can to uphold this ideal.

Now I'll turn to the more customary business of recapping the "most interesting" new bills and resolutions, as I normally do for the first few columns. This includes the qualifier that "interesting" doesn't necessarily mean I support the legislation.

HB 908 seeks a temporary (as of first draft, three year) waiver of certain expenditure controls, class size restrictions and other mandates bearing on local school systems. Most systems have been telling us that they cannot sustain any further budget cuts without relaxation of some of the many controls that they operate under. Considering the ongoing budget constraints we face, more cuts are inevitable, so the discussion of what to relax certainly needs to begin.

HB 911 calls for a constitutional referendum to authorize the State Ethics Commission to investigate failure by public officials to file or pay taxes, upon receipt of a written complaint. This would take that power out of the hands of the legislature, and is clearly meant to address the problems brought to light over a year ago.

HB 920 is another ethics related bill, focused on a variety of areas. It would place limits on transfers between campaign organizations, reduce maximum contributions, place caps on the value of gifts to elected officials, and put appointees of the Governor under the same "revolving door" (the practice of becoming a lobbyist upon leaving government service) limitations as already bear on legislators.

HB 928 through HB 933, all introduced by Rep. Chuck Sims of Ambrose, Georgia, propose removing the exemption from sales and use tax on lottery tickets, and would dedicate the resulting revenues to an 'Education Trust Fund'. The money in this fund would go towards 'educational programs and services for levels kindergarten through grade 12'.

Appropriations hearings will occupy the next week, so we won't be in session again until the following week. I'll continue with more new bills two weeks from now.

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