

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The House completed the legislative session last week. In two all-day-long floor sessions, we considered 56 bills and resolutions, and also worked through many reviews of amendments and compromise positions between House and Senate versions of bills. Here are some of the most important and interesting items.

SB 148 is a significant effort to rein in the seemingly unstoppable, kudzu like growth of government. The bill seeks to create two oversight committees, one for state regulatory agencies, and the other for the many independent authorities in the state. The committees will review whether these various arms of the state are still performing a statutorily valid and worthwhile mission, and then report to the General Assembly on their findings. In some cases, if the reports recommend closure of an agency or authority, that entity will be automatically disbanded unless the legislature acts to renew the mission. In other, more complex cases, legislative action will be required to carry out the recommendations. The bill sparked a heated, mostly partisan debate. I agreed with those who felt that arms of government should be held up to regular scrutiny, and not given a guaranteed, perpetual existence. I voted in favor, and the bill passed by 92 to 68.

SB 287 revises the process for replacement of lost, stolen or forged driver's licenses. The most important change is a requirement that the driver be offered the option of having a new license number issued, so that the old one is rendered completely invalid. The bill also contains a provision requiring that anyone convicted of a felony will have the words "Convicted Felon" marked on their license for the full length of their sentence. I agreed with this measure, and it passed by 119 to 28.

SB 308 is a significant revision of Georgia firearms law. Existing law is a hodge-podge accumulated from narrow topic bills passed over the years, and is very difficult to work through and understand. This bill rationalizes a great deal of the code so that it is easier to comprehend. The licensing process for concealed carry is made part of an overall Georgia weapons carry permit that covers both handguns and knives. Concealed carry privileges are controlled based on a list of prohibitions (which includes churches, something many folks have asked about), and then defaults to control based on property rights. All in all, the bill is not only a cleanup of firearms law, but a solid advance in the protection of 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights. I voted in support, and it passed by a mildly bi-partisan 118 to 48.

SB 345 would allow counties and cities to sanction road races within their territory. The racecourse would have to be closed to other traffic, and medical personnel would be required to be on site. While many in the House were interested in this option, the experience of fighting the proposed drag strip in Social Circle has opened my eyes to the many possible downsides of such events, so I voted "no". The bill nonetheless passed by 149 to 11.

SB 360 is another measure focused on use of cell phones by drivers. The bill is similar to HB 938, which we passed a few weeks ago. It restricts drivers under 18 from any use of cell phones, and restricts texting by drivers of all ages. The authors of the various bills on this topic are trying to make sure that at least one texting bill gets through the legislative process. This is a common practice with important issues. I again voted in support, and the bill passed by 131 to 19.

SB 368 is targeted at a deceptive practice in which some out-of-state businesses obtain a local phone number in order to appear to be a member of the community. The bill would require clear-cut disclosure of the true location of firms listed in a local phone directory. I voted in favor, and the measure passed by 157 to 3.

SB 411 is a two-part health care bill. The first part grants health plans the ability to use wellness incentives to get policy members to improve their health habits. Incentives like premium discounts, merchandise or debit cards have worked in other states, and it is time we let Georgia health insurers try this approach. The second part of the bill is aimed at what many consider the most objectionable parts of the federal health care law. It states that no Georgian may be compelled to participate in any health care plan, nor may they be penalized or fined for paying directly for health care. You may remember that the House was unable to pass HR 1086, which sought to offer the same protections as a potential constitutional amendment. This approach would put the protections in normal statute, which will offer somewhat less resistance to federal law, but has the advantage of requiring only a simple majority to pass (as opposed to a 2/3rds majority required for HR 1086). Since we had debated this issue before, we went almost straight to the vote. I supported the bill, and it passed by a nearly party line 102 to 53.

SB 458 is long sought language to extend seat belt requirements to pickup trucks without intruding on farmers. Pickups were given blanket exclusion when seat belt laws were first passed in Georgia, because then Speaker Tom Murphy felt farm work would be harmed. As the years have gone by, however, it has become clear that holders of car insurance policies are paying significant extra premiums to cover the costs of this exclusion. In Georgia, statistics have shown that accidents involving non-farm pickups cause nearly a thousand extra injuries and deaths each year, costing upwards of 100 million dollars. The bill tightens the exclusion down specifically to farmers actually engaged in their business, which will be a big help in reducing those costs. I supported the bill, and it passed by 132 to 29.

SB 519 gives local governments flexibility in allowing the use of golf carts on the road. Carts would need to be equipped with proper lighting and a windshield to qualify. Many people have been interested in using these vehicles for errands around town, due to the convenience and cost savings, among other reasons. I joined in supporting this proposition, and it passed by 157 to 4.

SR 277 seeks to address a problem Georgia has had with getting a proper trauma care network set up in our state. The General Assembly has never been able to maintain the political focus to appropriate consistent funding to the program. This has left Georgia as one of the most risky states in the nation for those who have been seriously injured in a traffic accident, because we simply don't have a rational system for getting the most critically injured to one of our few first class trauma centers. This legislation would put a referendum on the ballot in November, asking Georgians if they are willing to fund the trauma network by placing a \$10.00 surcharge on auto tags. Making this fee a constitutional mandate would take the funds out of the legislative appropriations process, and thus dedicate them to this purpose. Since a trauma network is not something the private sector can provide for us, I felt it appropriate to put this question before the voters. Thus I voted in support, and the measure passed by 149 to 14.

On Tuesday, Dave Belton brought another group to the Capitol to press for final passage of the two texting bills in play, HB 23 and SB 360. With him were Mandi Sorohan, her mom Karen Williams, Larry and Sallie Sorohan, and also Zachary Shepherd, Reggan Collins, Caitlin Belton and Jake Pendergraft. The group made their presence felt in the House and the Senate, and were rewarded with passage of both bills. They have had a significant role in this campaign, and we should all be proud of them. That same day, Linda Park from Almon came by to discuss legislation, and I enjoyed the chance to say hello.

Now for my customary session wrap-up. Since January 11th, I've read over 500 bills, resolutions, etc., and voted on about 250. I received 5099 contacts (phone calls, visits, mail and email), of which over 27% were from within the district. Email made up about 84% of my in-district contacts, and 90% of all contacts. "Spam" email accounted for 4% of the out-of-district contacts. These numbers are lower than last year's, mainly 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).