

## A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

Last week saw the pace pick up a bit more, and we were in session for four days. The House considered 11 bills and resolutions. The supplementary, or "little" budget, which is the adjustment to the current fiscal year was by far the most important item we worked on. I'll cover that after describing a couple other measures.

HB 1016 redefines the code on identity theft so that businesses can be considered victims. This will eliminate some ambiguity that exists in current law, and allow businesses to be protected in the same manner as individuals. An appropriate, and even overdue change in the information age, and the bill passed unanimously.

HB 908 would give school systems a three-year window of flexibility on some of the mandated expenditure controls that they operate under. We passed a bill granting almost the exact same flexibility last year, covering only the present school year. Since these allowances have been used responsibly by the systems, HB 908 seeks to give them a stable planning window that should cover the currently expected recovery period. This bill did see a hot, interesting debate, with opponents holding that they could support another year, but not the full three years of flexibility. The contention ultimately turned to issues of House procedure, and saw some of the best speakers in each party employing rhetorical devices and flourishes not often seen – and a couple of stumbles, too. In the end, a solid majority agreed that we should give the systems this option, and the bill passed (with my support) by 137 to 34.

HB 947 is the supplemental budget bill mentioned above. Overall, the bill reduces the budget by \$1.2 billion, out of the original \$18.6 billion that had been forecast. This was a difficult adjustment to compose. We have tried to maintain our policy of cutting core responsibilities of state government, like education and public safety, by lesser percentages than other areas. Those two were cut by 1.8% and 3.7%, respectively. Other areas thus had to suffer higher percentage cuts. On the House floor, the bill required a lengthy initial presentation, and then several speakers discussed their perspectives on the provisions. A number expressed discontent over some of the choices made, or the fact that a more aggressive pursuit of sales tax collections could have reduced some of the sacrifices required (an effort that I do think bears some attention). In the end, the budget passed, with my support, by a mildly bi-partisan 122 to 44. The bill moves to the Senate next.

Now for a few recently introduced measures. HB 1047 would set a minimum fine of \$75 on drivers, in the passing lane of a multi-lane highway, who fail to travel at the minimum posted speed while being overtaken by another vehicle. I'm curious as to how the author thinks this could be enforced.

HR 1203 calls for a referendum on allowing local school systems to use education LOST (local option sales tax) proceeds for maintenance and operations, as well as for currently authorized capital projects purposes. The sponsors feel that this would be an important flexibility for school systems, especially during a downturn like the present.

I had the pleasure of quite a few visitors during the week. On Monday, Janet Woodard, Laura Rolader and the Morgan 4-H delegation came as part of 4-H day at the Capitol. I had a chance to visit with the kids in the group: Cain Bentley, Hannah Eaton, April Grantham, Skip Lewan, Robin Motes, Leanna Scoggin and Claire Woodard. They are an enthusiastic bunch, and are doing some terrific work with the horses at the Georgia Equine Impound facility. On Tuesday, Commissioner Sammy Cathey and County Manager Michael Lamar stopped by to cover some legislative concerns. I met with Chairman Kathy Morgan and Commissioner Nancy Shultz, and we had a lengthy discussion of county legislative issues with Senator John Douglas. Wednesday was Equine Youth Day at the Capitol. Kyle Kapp with his dad Bob, and Kaylyn Bryan and her

mom Angela came to take part and show their support. The event really showcased how important the horse industry is to our area. Thursday brought the folks in this year's Leadership Newton program, ably lead by Danny Stone. We had a chance to discuss a number of issues, and they had some very insightful questions. Commissioner Tim Fleming is in this year's class, and so the gang is quite in tune with the latest political topics. My thanks to everyone for taking the time to come and say hello!

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