

The View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The 2005 General Assembly session has begun, and I look forward to serving your interests in Atlanta.

Considering the dramatic leadership change that the State House is going through, startup was surprisingly smooth. The new leadership was elected by strong, bi-partisan majorities; revised Rules for the House were reviewed, discussed and adopted; committee, office and seat assignments were completed; and all was made ready for the Governor's annual State of the State address.

One of the rules changes designated "Hawks", who could join and vote in any committee. While this rule has attracted some grumping, it is actually very much like a practice that previous Speakers used, in which "ex-officio" committee members could do much the same thing. Thus Speaker Richardson is simply living up to his commitment to make the House a more accessible body, by making the Hawks an official and visible tool.

By now, over 200 bills and resolutions have been introduced, with most already assigned to committees. The first of those bills will make it through committee to the House for general consideration during the week of January 31st. You can see bills on the internet by going to http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005_06/leg/legislation.htm. Please keep in mind these bills may change radically, if they emerge from committee.

First, some of the more interesting and significant bills that have already been introduced. One is the Women's Right to Know act (HB 197), which will ensure that pregnant women desiring an abortion are fully informed of their alternatives to abortion, at least 24 hours before the abortion is performed. Also, if the mother to be is a minor, her parent(s) or guardian(s) must be informed. The bill also requires that certain medical safeguards and reporting requirements be met.

Another significant bill (HB 98), concerns the state's Greenspace program, which be re-titled the Land Conservation program. It will allow land acquisitions statewide, rather than just in metro Atlanta. The bill is a recognition of the fact that metro land prices are escalating so fast that we may miss the chance to obtain environmentally significant parcels, still at very reasonable prices, in other parts of the state - which would have happened under the original Greenspace program's goal of obtaining 20% of land in metro counties first. Obviously, this is disappointing for the metro counties, but we may have to consider the greater good of Georgia on this one.

One other notable bill is HB 45, which would control how certain over the counter drugs (like ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or phenylpropanolamine) which can be used to make methamphetamine, are sold. It would also provide criminal penalties for individuals who use such drugs to make and sell methamphetamine.

If you have interest in a particular bill, please feel free to contact me about it.

In the meantime, I'm working hard to learn how to be an effective representative for you, and to focus on the areas you told me were important during the campaign. I think I'll be able to get up to speed quickly, considering the many incumbent colleagues I already know, who are happy to help with tips and advice.

And without further ado, here are some specifics on my committee assignments and contact information. First, I've been placed on four committees - Transportation, Education, Insurance and Special Rules (Policy) - I'm still learning the role of the last one, and will update you on it later.