

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

This week, the wheels started turning. We passed ten bills and resolutions, several being significant. They are, of course, not law until the Senate concurs, and the Governor signs them. I voted yes on all ten.

First was this year's supplemental appropriations bill, HB 84. Each legislative session, Georgia reviews and adjusts the budget, in order to account for differences in revenue from what was originally forecast. This was accomplished fairly early in the session, which was one of our goals of being more businesslike.

Another passed was a change in how corporate income is taxed, in order to eliminate some disincentives to businesses locating in Georgia. The bill also closed a loophole that allowed companies to avoid Georgia income tax if they are incorporated in states that have no corporate tax. In short, if they want to do business here, they need to pay their fair share.

HB 218 allows for governments and authorities in Georgia negotiating to bring new business here to keep some aspects of their negotiations private until a deal is inked and announced. The intent is to keep other states from being able to see what kind of deals Georgia is offering, and try to undercut them with better offers. There was some concern expressed about development authorities being able to use this to bring in landfills or other undesirable installations without the public knowing, but an amendment ensures required environmental impact studies for such projects can't be held secret.

Probably the most important bill passed (this week, perhaps for the whole session), was tort reform. This bill is meant to ease a growing crisis in which medical malpractice costs are going up so fast that doctors are dropping high risk procedures, or simply ceasing practice altogether. Some parts of Georgia have no specialists in certain critical areas. This is an incredibly complex topic, dealing with many aspects of malpractice law. Many people have concerns about it, so we will need to monitor its impact closely to make sure we're getting the results we want.

Now, for a couple of bills yet to be considered by the House. HB 42 would allow local governments to consider impact of proposed zoning changes on school systems. Current law doesn't allow this.

HB 312 is a product of the Governor's Commission for a New Georgia task force. The task force is charged with restructuring the functions of state government that can/should be run like a business, so that they are more efficient. This particular bill does several things: 1) it consolidates purchasing power statewide to the Department of Administrative Services (DOAS), so Georgia can benefit from its combined buying power, and so that a single set of procurement and bidding standards are applied; 2) it charges DOAS with maintaining an inventory of all state property and leases, so that we can get the "big picture" of just what Georgia owns and leases, and can then re-deploy or dispose of any surplus; and 3) it gives the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) management over all state owned vehicles (approximately 21,000), to include eliminating exemption of some state agencies from centralized vehicle control. These changes are estimated to save Georgia a minimum of \$130 million dollars over the next four years.

Also last week, members of the East Metro Drug Enforcement Task Force (EMDET) were at the Capitol to visit with Governor Perdue, who has presented the Task Force with a grant recognizing their effectiveness. I visited with Newton's Sheriff Joe Nichols and Covington's Police Chief Stacey Cotton. We are very fortunate to have such capable law enforcement in our area.