

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

This week, while the pace slowed to 21 items, several involved lengthy debate. Also, many more bills and resolutions are arriving in committee for review, and for the "tightening up" that often occurs as committee members apply their expertise to an item via amendments. We've passed the half way mark (25 of 40 legislative days), so the days are getting longer and more involved as we go. I'm starting to understand the comments of incumbents regarding the intensity of a legislative session. At the same time, work is continuing on the budget, with the differences between the House and Senate versions of the supplemental budget being worked out, and appropriations hearings on the 2005-2006 budget already underway. Mix in a lot of constituent calls and concerns to address, and you have a very busy phase the session is entering into.

No new items to the Governor yet, but the House worked on several important pieces of legislation.

The first, HB 22, which I mentioned last week, was passed and sent to the Senate. Rough estimates are that this law, which would send sales tax on vehicles purchased or leased to the counties where they are register/licensed, would bring something in the range of an extra \$1 million to our district. Make sure your senator knows you support this one!

HB 299 addresses the fact some students are taking advantage of the HOPE scholarship for post graduate degrees. It's part of the on-going reality check recognizing that HOPE will start reaching its limits in years to come. I'm told that Zell Miller himself has said that his original intent for HOPE was to assist with four year degrees, and that is what this bill aims to do in tightening the definition of what the scholarship will cover. Basically, HOPE will now provide for 127 quarter hours of study, with an exemption allowing 135 hours for certain situations. Considering that most of the public and private colleges and universities in the state weighed in with endorsements of this bill, there seemed to be a pretty fair case in its favor. There was a good deal of debate, with many folks not pleased with the idea of limiting HOPE in any way. The vote, not entirely on partisan lines, was 93 to 76. I voted yes.

A very historic vote occurred Wednesday, on HB 197, the Woman's Right to Know Act. Having been crushingly rejected in previous years, the bill sailed through with a bi-partisan 139 to 35 majority. In keeping with my campaign promises, I obviously voted yes.

One other interesting, though non-controversial vote was on HR 142. This resolution calls on the Committee on the Implementation of Textile Agreements to act against unfair Chinese trade practices, which include subsidies, intellectual property piracy, tax rebates and currency manipulation. Since quotas on China's share of the U.S. import market for textiles were lifted in 2002, continued violation by that country of World Trade Organization rules have allowed that them to capture dominant shares of several textile markets. It is estimated that they will dominate the entire U.S. textile market in just a few years if nothing is done. This situation is certainly intolerable for Georgia, which has 92,000 citizens employed in textile jobs. Astoundingly, two representatives voted against this resolution - I can assure you I wasn't one of them.

One quick item of note on the horizon. HR 230 would establish a House study committee, intended to examine the addition of education as a need that impact fees could be assessed for.