

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

This week was "crossover day", the last day a bill or resolution passed by one chamber of the General Assembly has time to be passed by the other side. The pace became quite intense, since many members were obviously intent on getting their bills passed. We considered a total of 94 bills and resolutions, and had a couple of marathon sessions - one of them being over 13 hours long.

Out of such a large number of items, there were obviously more of significance than I have the space to cover here. I'll focus on the most important of them. While I did cast some "no" votes this week, none were on the measures outlined below.

First is HB 320, which will create a High Risk Insurance Pool for Georgia, which is a health insurance option for people who can't get insurance due to pre-existing conditions. Ours is one of only five states that don't have such a program.

HB 221 changes the way child support will be determined to what's called an "income-shares" model, taking into account the income of both separated parents. I received many comments about this bill, and it's original version deserved some valid criticisms. However, the bill was extensively re-worked in the preceding two weeks, and has provisions for a study committee to review its provisions during 2005, so that further fine-tuning can be done in the next session. Considering all the changes, the comments of one of our trusted local judges, and the fact that the "income-shares" model seems to be working in about 37 other states, I concluded that this bill was worth voting for.

HB 499 was a re-drawing of Georgia's congressional districts. I was not pleased with the fact that Newton was still split between two districts, and that the greater part of the county is part of a district stretching almost to Florida. However, knowing that the Senate was going to pass a different map, thus requiring a conference committee to find a compromise, I voted yes - which will give me some leverage with the GOP leadership in getting our concerns addressed - whereas had I voted no, I wouldn't have any leverage.

HB 210 helps protect people who sell property to a government body due to use (or threat of use) of condemnation or eminent domain, by exempting them from Georgia capital gains tax.

Perhaps the most hotly debated bill was HB 244. The main point of contention was the change concerning ID requirements to vote. The bill would make it necessary to produce one of several types of photo ID's at your polling place. Having served on Newton's Board of Elections and Registration for 6 years, I felt that stiffer requirements for voting were necessary; I did, however, check to see that plans are in existence to make more locations available for obtaining photo ID's. I will consider it a duty of mine to pursue this cause, since availability of photo ID's to everyone who has the right to vote is absolutely critical.

Finally, HB 577 will put an end to the requirement that you give your fingerprint when getting a driver's license. It won't take effect until July 1st, 2007, to allow time to make the changes - but I think this is a great step back from invasive government.

It's always a pleasure to take a break to visit with folks from home, and this week I had quite a few such opportunities. I especially enjoyed getting some advice on pending legislation from the Covington Fire Department's Chief Fire Officer Don Floyd and Captain Rob Christopher. My thanks to all who took the time to come to Atlanta and visit.