

A View from the House

By Representative Doug Holt

The best guesses have it that last week was the second last week of the session. The pace picked up again, both in the committees and on the House floor, where we considered 60 items. We agreed with a number of the Senate bills of note, all of which I voted for.

SB 4 changes how federal transportation funds are distributed. Currently, 85% of such funds are shared equally among congressional districts, with the remainder available for "as needed" projects anywhere in the state. This current system also has exemptions for money directed to MARTA, GRTA and some other authorities to be skimmed off first, before the other distributions are calculated. SB 4 eliminates almost all the exemptions, and lowers the guaranteed percentage per district down to 80%. This new formula actually gives each district roughly \$100 million more in guaranteed funds, and leaves more for the "as needed" category. The previously exempted authorities will be funded out of money for the districts they actually serve.

SB 90, the "Georgia Smokefree Air Act", was excellent for public places, but burdensome for small businesses. I supported several amendments that took some of that burden off of those businesses (defined as 10 employees or less). However, another amendment was passed, which I voted against, that nearly gutted the workplace restrictions. The bill is back with the Senate now, probably going to conference committee.

SB 93 makes it illegal to cover a vehicle license plate (anyone who is law abiding already complies, so I think it's fair to say this would only inconvenience the criminally minded), and makes a number of administrative changes to how DUI reduction efforts are performed. More important, the bill requires that non-driver's license photo ID's be made free to those who are 65 and older, or who claim inability to pay for an ID. This is important because it is a step towards making the tighter polling place ID requirements in HB 244 workable for all law abiding Georgians. I was very pleased to support this effort to make photo ID's more available, because while I supported tighter ID requirements, I also consider it very important that no one be disenfranchised because of the new rules. I will continue to push for changes that make the new, more secure voting system workable.

SB 133, the sparkler bill, voted down before, was brought back up this week. It passed, but I still voted against it.

Congressional re-districting is finished. For Newton, it was not the most desirable result. The county's growing population and proximity to Atlanta caused it to suffer the fate of many metro counties by being divided. My hat is off to Chamber of Commerce President Scott Morris, for his efforts to create an alternative map that would have put all of Newton in John Linder's 7th district. Sadly, there wasn't enough time to sell this option. Nonetheless, the new map has Newton in only 2 districts, instead of the current 3, and should also give some influence in each district: first because John Linder previously represented Newton, and is thus familiar with the county and its leaders. Second, because the other portion of Newton will be the one of the most populous parts of the 8th district, which will command the attention of Congressman Marshall.

As always, I like to recognize those who took the time and trouble to come to the Capitol to see and experience state government in action. Teacher Bart Buff of Newton's Eastside High brought his 9th grade Quest (gifted) Government class on Tuesday. They had a chance to watch both the House and Senate in action, and met with Governor Perdue as well.