

Riley ...from page 1

quality of water resources, but will also focus on water and wastewater facilities in the state.

Riley was nominated to the council by the Georgia Forestry Commission and said he will be protecting the forests, which act as a natural filter for waterways after rainfall runoff. "It is important we maintain our forest coverage," he said.

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Relay for Life for about 15 years.

Thomason lost her husband to lung cancer in 2005, so she knows how important the annual event is. "It makes me want to help more," said Thomason. "Hopefully we will save somebody else's life with the work we do."

Kendall...from page 1

port, and Mayor Andrea Gibby will present the homestead exemption to the Young Harris City Council during their next meeting.

He said if the bill goes through, Towns County citizens will get to vote on the matter in November. However, even if the vote passes, the homestead exemption will not be covered in the 2009 tax digest because the vote came too late in the year. If the vote is approved, Kendall said the exemption will begin Jan. 1, 2010.

Next on the agenda, county attorney Rob Kiker read the Ordinance Adopting Salary Standards for Elected County Officials. This ordinance was adopted after a county audit recently discovered the previous Sheriff's Office, previous Probate Judge, and current Clerk of Court have been receiving salaries above state recommendations.

The new ordinance will adopt the minimum base salary, cost of living increases, and longevity increases as set forth in the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) State Law for elected constitutional officials in Towns County.

Last on the agenda was the first reading of the Dangerous Dog and Rabies Ordinance. Towns County resident Gale Eaton, who was attacked by a number of pit bull/boxer mix bulldogs on Feb. 13, attended the meeting and spoke to the crowd.

She called her experience "terrifying" and urged the county to include heavy penalties for dog owners whose animals bite. Eaton said she has thousands of dollars' worth of doctor bills without a legal right to stand on because there was no county ordinance in place when she was attacked.

Eaton wanted to thank the people of Towns County, Hiwassee Mayor Barbara Mathis, and Kendall for their support. She said Kendall gave her his word that he would make the dangerous dog ordinance a priority, and he kept his word.

Kiker read the lengthy ordinance, which he said was stricter than Georgia Law. The ordinance defined terms including aggressive dog, potentially dangerous dog, and dangerous dog.

In addition, the ordinance stated the requirements for possession of a dangerous dog, including proper enclosure, a warning sign, a small registration fee, an insurance policy of at least \$25,000, and a surety bond of at least \$25,000.

Eaton said liability insurance is important because the owner of the dogs that attacked her cannot afford her doctor bills.

Allison...from page 1

gram. These funds, along with \$200 million from the federal stimulus package, allowed us to fully fund Medicaid programs. Medicaid provider rates will also remain at the current level for this fiscal year as well.

This budget conservatively applies federal funding to existing programs as the stimulus funds are only a one-time, short-term fix. This is why we have worked so hard over this session to pass economic recovery packages such as the JOBS Act. Legislation like this will speed Georgia's economic recovery

by allowing the private sector to grow and create jobs.

All Georgians are affected in some way by the state's budget. It is important for me to hear about the issues important to you. I would like to thank all of the citizens who attended the town hall meetings on Saturday March 21, 2009 and look forward to seeing you again soon. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at my Capitol office at (404) 656-0177, by email at stephen.allison@house.ga.gov, or visit my website at www.allison08.com.

Town Hall...from page 1

language in the resolution. Ultimately, the resolution did not pass. Allison told the citizens of Towns County, "I could not vote to approve that resolution, as is."

Allison talked about HB 143, which was proposed to guarantee the Homeowner's Tax Relief Grant this year. However, in the future, he said the grant money will only be given in years when the state has a surplus. Allison called the Relief Grant a "fine-tuned program" but added the state is currently in a tremendous recession and sales taxes are down.

Allison said House Bill 233 has passed the House but still has to clear the Senate. HB 233 proposes a two-year freeze on property assessments in the state. Allison said if it passes, property taxes will only go up within the next two years if millage rates are increased.

Allison said House Bill 45 has his support and has passed the House. HB 45 requires any new person voting in Georgia to show proof of U.S. citizenship. Allison said a driver's license will not be considered adequate proof, but a U.S. passport of birth certificate will.

Allison said Senate Bill 83 did not pass. SB 83 proposed raising the homestead exemption across the state from \$2000 to \$4000. However, he added that Commissioner Kendall's proposal for a \$10,000 homestead exemption for Towns County is in the House. He said if the proposal is passed, commercial properties in the county will be affected, carrying more of the tax burden.

Allison said House Bill 160 passed the House even though he voted against it. HB 160 is also called the Governor's Super Speeder Bill, where any driver caught going over 20 mph over the speed limit on a state road or going over 85 mph on the interstate will be fined \$200 from the state in addition to their normal speeding ticket. Reimbursement fees will also go up, said Allison, in some cases from \$35 to \$210.

"We are locking people up because they can't pay their tickets now," said Allison, who added the proposal could create headaches for local governments. Allison said larger cities have departments to take care of speeding violations, but smaller areas rely on probate judges to handle fines. He spoke of a number of potential problems between local and state governments concerning the enforcement of this proposal. Nonetheless, Allison said he believed the bill would become law because it has the Gov. Purdue's support.

Allison said Senate Bill 31 passed the House even though he voted against it. SB 31 (also called the Georgia Power Financing Bill) proposes charging Georgia Power customers more on their monthly bills to help pay for two nuclear power plants to be built in South Carolina. Allison said the logic behind the bill was to charge people upfront for the construction rather than take out loans that will have to be paid back later. However, he said there were still questions

about financing the construction and said concerns had been raised by the AARP about senior citizens paying more for services that will not be available until the future.

Allison called the bill "controversial" and said he has gotten a lot of emails from citizens about the bill. He said many EMCs buy power from Georgia Power and questioned whether the EMCs' rates will go up, too.

Allison said House Bill 23 passed the house, which will make texting on a cell phone while driving illegal.

Allison said House Bill 44 passed the House, which is an application for zero-based budgeting. Allison said most budgets going through the House now simply give the bottom line. HB 44 proposes listing every single expenditure of one quarter of the budget every four years in order for the House to find obsolete programs.

Allison said House Bill 193 passed the House, which proposes to give local school boards more flexibility in planning out the school year. He said right now the state requires the schools to have 180 school days, and it costs the state \$50 million a day to pay for the schooling. He said the HB 193 means a school board could lengthen a school day past 8 hours and reach the required hours of schooling within fewer days, which would save the state money.

Allison said House Bill 261 passed, which proposes a \$3200 tax credit for first time homebuyers. He said it would be a good incentive to get people to buy homes, even though Towns County is mostly a second home market.

Allison said House Bill 480 passed the House. HB 480 removes all ad valorem and sales taxes from automobiles purchased in Georgia starting in 2010. Allison said the 7% sales tax will be replaced with a 7% title fee, which comes to the same amount of money. However, the state will eliminate the ad valorem tax, and drivers will only have to pay a small amount for their tags every year. There were concerns among the citizens about this proposal, but Allison said it should mostly benefit everyone except for rental car companies and people who purchase a lot of used vehicles, what he called "casual sales."

Allison said House Bill 481 and House Bill 482 passed the House, which he called "Jobs Bills." He said first, this would eliminate a sales tax deposit requirement on businesses that are required to give estimates. Second, a business would receive a \$2400 tax credit for each unemployed worker hired who works for the business at least six months. Third, it would abolish the inventory tax, said Allison, so businesses would no longer have to pay taxes for the stuff sitting on their shelves.

During questions and answers, Towns County citizen Darrell Barrett asked about House Bill 618, which would affect weapons carrying permits. Allison said it was in committee, as were many other bills because the House was focusing on other economic bills this year.



Kiker



Eaton



Rogers