

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update - April 2015– Sine Die



As the clock struck midnight, Thursday, April 2nd the 2015 legislative session came to a close. The Capitol was hectic last week as legislators, interests groups and citizens worked tirelessly to ensure their legislation passed before the Sine Die deadline. Although this year's session has ended, it is important to remember that bills introduced this year are still eligible to be voted on during the 2016 session. There for, if a piece of legislation has moved through the committee process already, the movement of that bill stays intact for 2016. This is possible because Georgia has two year session cycles. If the bills that remain from 2015 are not given a vote in 2016, then they will have to be reintroduced and go through the entire committee process again during the 2017 session. Major issues were put to rest last week as we finalized the budget and the highly debated, Transportation Funding Act of 2015.

Transportation Funding Act of 2015

Prior to session beginning, the issue on everyone's mind was how to fix our transportation system. With Georgia's road and bridges in dire need of repair, transportation funding took center stage for a majority of the session. Now that Georgia is the 8th most populated state in the nation, adequate transportation, and maintaining our roadways and bridges, is necessary for our citizens' safety and Georgia's economic development.

On Tuesday, March 31st, the House and Senate finally reached an agreement on House Bill 170. House Bill 170, known as the Transportation Funding Act of 2015 was put to rest as the appointed conference committee from members of both chambers, incorporated parts of the Senate and House versions of the bill. Both chambers voted to accept the conference committee report as presented late Tuesday evening. The legislation is expected to generate an estimated \$900 million a year to fix and maintain our highways and bridges. Here is what the final passage of the bill looks like:

- Consolidates various taxes on motor fuel into a single excise tax of 26 cents per gallon/29 cents on diesel fuel
- Imposes a \$5 per day hotel/motel tax statewide
- Removes the airline fuel tax credit
- Imposes a \$200 annual fee for electric vehicle owners and \$300 annual fee for corporate electric vehicle owners
- Removes \$5000 state income tax credit for purchase of an electric vehicle
- Imposes annual highway impact fee of \$50-\$100 for heavy trucks
- Removes state sales tax on gasoline but leaves- Local Option Sales Taxes, Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes, and education SPLOSTs

Georgia's gas tax has been at the same rate since the 1970's. Unfortunately, our state's continued population growth and the usage of our roadways were no longer supported by the 70's tax rate. The additional funding put towards transportation projects will ensure our state's continued growth and development, while keeping Georgia citizens safe.

2016 Budget

The only thing that we are constitutionally required to do during our 40 day session is pass a balanced budget. On Tuesday, March 31st, the House and Senate reached a compromise on the 2016 fiscal year budget. The final budget shows that 55% of state revenues will be designated for education. With Georgia's education rates lagging behind other states, this is great news for our local school systems. Another issue that has plagued our state is lack of health care, especially in rural areas. The 2016 budget allocates 22.2 % of available funding towards health and human services agencies.

We are hoping that with additional resources, these agencies can keep up with our population growth and health demands Georgianø, young and old. Another priority for us is the safety and well being of our citizens. This budget gives our public safety agencies 8.7% of available funding. The farming community and AG industry were also included in the final budget, receiving approximately \$39 million for various projects around the state. Although House Bill 76 is over 1000 pages long, the final budget is available through the Senate Budget office if you are interested in reading it in its entirety. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I am very pleased to see a well rounded budget passed for the 2016 year. I will continue to fight for funding in District 149 so that we can continue to grow and thrive.

Although the 2015 session has come to a close, I will continue to update you monthly on important issues within our state and district. The last three months has been a whirlwind, but I enjoyed every minute! Thank you so much for allowing me to serve as your representative. Your support and encouragement have meant so much to me. If you ever need anything at all, please let me know. I work for you and let me just say, it is a great honor to do so. God bless each and every one of you and may God continue to bless the great state of Georgia!

