

# Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update - March 2015– Session



## *Session Update- Week 10*

On Friday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, we completed day 33 of 40 legislative days. Day 40, or as we call it, Sine Die is quickly approaching. Sine Die is a Latin term that means “adjournment indefinitely.” Sine Die is the deadline for any legislators trying to pass bills this session. Once the clock strikes midnight on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, the 2015 session is officially over! With a looming deadline, we are in overdrive as we continue to work for the citizens of Georgia. Major issues such as transportation, the budget, and medical cannabis oil are coming to a head as the Sine Die deadline draws near.

### **Senate Presents Alternative Transportation Bill**

As the debate continues over House Bill 170, the Senate has presented alternative legislation, which they unveiled this week. As expected, the Senate version of the House Bill 170 differs quite a bit from the original legislation that we passed. The Senate version of the transportation bill will do the following:

- \$250 million from the General Budget would be allocated to the DOT to pay “debt service” which would then “free up” \$250 million in motor fuel tax revenues to spend on infrastructure
- Current motor fuel taxes would be rolled into a single excise tax of 24 cents per gallon
- \$5 daily fee would be imposed on each rental car that is leased in the state
- Adds annual “impact fee” to tag renewals. Proposed fees are set at \$25 for passenger vehicles and \$50 for trucks and buses

The Senate version of the bill does keep some of the original House language pertaining to tax credits and exemptions.

- Requires annual fee by electric vehicle owners of \$200 for a passenger car and \$300 for a commercial vehicle.
- Eliminates the \$5,000 tax credit for the purchase of electric vehicles.
- Eliminates the sales tax exemption for airlines on the purchase of aviation jet fuel.

While on the Senate floor, an amendment was passed to remove the passenger car / bus impact fee. Other than that change, the bill passed and will now come back to the House where we will vote to “agree” on the changes made to the bill or “disagree.” If we can’t agree on the bill in its current form then a conference committee will be appointed by the Speaker and Lt. Governor in order to reach an agreement between the Senate and House. Conference committees are usually made up of 3 members from each chamber and are appointed to work out a compromise on language differences. Once the committee has completed their meeting they will present every legislator with a Conference Committee Report. If we vote to accept the recommended changes of the conference committee, then the bill passes. If we don’t agree to the Conference Committee Report, then negotiations start again. Until we see the final reports, no one can be sure what compromise, if any, will be reached. We are all working diligently on this issue and hope to have a resolution to our transportation problem by the end of day 40.

**Medical Cannabis Compromise :** A compromise has been made between the House and Senate relating to Georgia's allowance of medical cannabis oil. Portions of House Bill 1 and Senate Bill 185 were consolidated into one bill during this week's Senate Health and Human Services Committee meeting. The committee passed a new version of HB 1. The latest version of the bill removes the threat of criminal prosecution for the possession of up to 20 ounces of cannabis oil with the maximum strength of 5 percent THC. The new bill also removes fibromyalgia from the list of medical conditions that would be allowed to use cannabis oil treatment. The conditions that remain in the bill are cancer, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease), multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, mitochondrial disease, Parkinson's disease and sickle cell anemia. One provision from Senate Bill 185 that was added to HB 1 is the allowance of children with seizure disorders to participate in a clinical trial that is currently underway at Georgia Regents University in Augusta. This bill now moves to the Senate Rules Committee. The Senate Rules Committee will determine if and when the bill will be eligible to receive a vote from the full Senate floor.

**Senate Approves 2016 Fiscal Year Budget:** On Friday, March 20<sup>th</sup> the Senate passed their version of House Bill 76, the 2016 Fiscal Year budget. The budget will guide our state spending from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. The budget designates the majority of state revenue to be directed towards our education system. Other major parts of the budget include health services and public safety initiatives. There are a few changes that were made on the Senate side during the budget process, which changes the original bill that we passed in the House. Because the Senate made changes to the bill, a conference committee will be appointed from both chambers to work out any differences. We expect to see the final version of the budget within the next couple of weeks, when a final floor vote will be taken.

**Federal Funding Needed to Keep Medical Students in Georgia:** Last week the House voted to pass House Resolution 302. Different from a bill, a resolution is put forth with the intention of solving a problem. HR 302 strives to increase the number of doctors in Georgia. Our state, especially rural areas, is currently facing a shortage of doctors. HR 302 urges the United States Congress to fund more residency slots for medical students in our state. In recent years, our state population has outgrown the federal government's allotted number of funded residencies. Since doctors tend to live where they complete their residency, it is important that we are granted more funding to keep these doctors in our state. Georgia has taken great steps to increase the number of medical students; unfortunately, without the assistance of Congress, we cannot afford to keep these students in the state after concluding their studies. Many actions have been taken over the past couple of years to solve our rural healthcare crisis. We are hoping that this recommendation is a step in the right direction for giving Georgians adequate access to healthcare. As a member of the House Health and Human Services Committee, I am passionate that we provide quality care to the citizens of district 149.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, I am here for you. One of my top priorities is to be accessible to our citizens. I have planned two Town Hall Meetings in May to give an overview of the 2015 session. These meetings will be an open forum and I encourage you to attend. The first meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 4<sup>th</sup> at the Eastman- Dodge County Chamber of Commerce. The second meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup> in Telfair County in the McRae-Helena City Council Chamber. I will send out reminders to our local papers and via email. I hope to see you there! I am honored that you have allowed me the opportunity to represent the needs of our district at the Capitol and I will continue to work hard on your behalf. With session coming to a close, I look forward to April when I can come home to the friendly faces that I have missed while in Atlanta. Until then, may God bless each of you and may God continue to bless our district and the great state of Georgia!

