

# Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update- February 2015– Session



## *Session Update- Week 6*

The 2015 session of the Georgia General Assembly has hit the half way point as Monday, February 23rd marked the 20th day of 40 legislative days. That means we only have 10 more legislative days until Day 30 or as we call it, "Crossover Day". Crossover day is extremely important for legislators trying to pass their bills. It is the last day that House Bills can transfer or "crossover" to the senate chamber with enough time to make their way through the "process" of committee hearings and a floor vote. Looming deadlines like "Crossover Day" means that long nights at the Capitol are ahead. Despite the hurried frenzy, we have managed to get a lot done for the betterment of Georgia citizens and our district!

### **Senate Bill 5- Savannah Deepening Project**

Senate Bill 5 is the first bill this year to make it through both chambers of the General Assembly, doing so unanimously. The bill will allow Georgia Ports Authority to accept federal dollars for the Savannah Harbor deepening project. The Savannah River will be deepened from 42 feet to 47 feet, allowing larger container ships to deliver goods. Although we have already put \$266 million towards the project, President Obama recently requested an additional \$42 million from Congress. We are currently scheduled to finish the project by 2020. The port deepening project is great news for Georgia that will result in continued job growth across the state. Senate Bill 5 now awaits Governor Deal's signature.

### **House Bill 100- Age requirements children enrolling in certain educational programs**

On Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, we passed House Bill 100 which requires a child to be 5 years old by August 1<sup>st</sup> to begin the kindergarten year. Currently, most schools in Georgia begin the first week of August, meaning children 4 years of age can enroll and begin kindergarten. Some educators have expressed concern that younger students are not developmentally prepared or mature enough to begin school. Those against the legislation believe that parents know when their child is ready to begin school. However, school year start dates begin much earlier now than in past years and this bill simply aligns the new start dates with previous age requirements. The new age requirements will not go into effect until the 2017-2018 school year. The legislation also changes overall enrollment deadlines for school from September 1<sup>st</sup> to August 1<sup>st</sup> for the 2017-2018 year. The enrollment deadline following year 2018 will then be pushed up to July 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **House Bill 198- Suicide Education and Prevention**

House Bill 198, known as the Jason Flatt Act, passed unanimously on Thursday and now moves to the senate for review. The bill will require that public school personnel receive annual training in suicide awareness and prevention. The legislation also states that local school systems must adopt a policy on student suicide prevention, providing staff with materials to fulfill necessary training requirements. Implementation of the program will be free for school districts by providing them with information on how to identify resources and useful tools in the community. It is our hope that this program will assist school personnel in recognizing suicidal tendencies among our students before it's too late. Suicide among young people is a growing threat and is recognized as the third leading cause of death for those between the ages of 10-24. No family should ever have to endure the suffering of a preventable child death. I sincerely hope that this legislation will give school officials the tools and training they need to avoid future tragedies.

**House Bill 49- Tax Bills Electronically**

On Friday, February 20<sup>th</sup> in a 164-1 vote, we passed House Bill 49. The bill would allow the Tax Commissioner or Collector the ability to send tax notifications in an electronic version to citizens. Under the legislation, the tax payer could elect to receive tax bills or delinquent notices electronically instead of by traditional mail. This bill now heads to the Senate for further review.

As we make our way through session, I will continue to update you on major developments. If you need anything at all, please feel free to contact my Capitol office anytime. Thank you for your support, allowing me the opportunity to work for you. It is humbling to know that you have entrusted me with the responsibility to protect and serve our district. It is a responsibility that I do not take lightly or for granted. Representation for all is what our great nation and state was founded on and I promise that your voice will be heard. God bless all of you and may God continue to bless District 149 and the great state of Georgia!

