

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update- October / November 2015



As we make our way into the thanksgiving season, there are number of reasons that I am thankful. From a personal standpoint, I am thankful for the love and support of friends and family. From a political standpoint, as a member of the General Assembly from a rural area, I am thankful that our state has recognized the critical need to reevaluate our rural healthcare system. Unfortunately, in recent years numerous hospitals have closed, leaving those outside of metropolitan areas lacking in options for quality care. With a report that shows 65% of the population will be made up of senior citizens by the year 2030, we have been working tirelessly to address issues plaguing our current healthcare system. Many citizens ask the important question- *How is the state responding to this crisis?*

For starters, Governor Deal set aside approximately \$3 million dollars in the 2016 budget to the State Office of Rural Health to fund the necessary tools for a new “Hub and Spoke” pilot program. This program is designed to relieve cost pressures on emergency departments, ensuring that patients receive the best treatments possible. Geographically, most of Georgia is what the federal government refers to as “medically underserved area”. Lack of primary care doctors, coupled with high poverty rates, force Georgian’s to seek medical attention in emergency rooms of the nearest hospital. The program will create “medical hubs” where patients can seek treatment for ailments that are not necessarily deemed, emergencies. The “hubs” will then be able to communicate and share records with a hospital participating in the program. The hospital then directs the best solution for the patients care. The pilot programs will be located at Union General Hospital in Blairsville, Appling HealthCare System headquartered in Baxley, Emanuel Regional Medical Center in Swainsboro and Crisp Regional Hospital in Cordele.

We are also currently working with the Federal Government to increase the amount of medical residencies in our state. In a bi-partisan effort, during the 2015 session, the House passed 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 by urging the United States Congress to fund more residency slots for medical students in our state. Studies show that doctors tend to live where they complete their residency; therefore, it is important that we are granted more funding to keep our medical students in the state. A recent consensus shows that the State of Georgia will require more trained physicians than will be available by 2020. If this stands, Georgia is projected to rank 50th in healthcare due to the lack of primary care physicians. While we have taken the necessary steps to increase the number of medical students in Georgia, without the assistance of Congress, we cannot afford to keep these students in the state after graduation. We are hopeful that our congressional delegates will help us gain more funding sooner, rather than later.

Although we will not see the effects of the Hub and Spoke pilot program or know the outcome of our federal funding requests until a later date, I am relieved that the state is making an effort to address our healthcare concerns. As a member of the House Health & Human Services Committee, I am well aware of the many issues within our health systems. I specifically requested to serve on this committee so that I could be a voice for our district and other rural areas. Healthcare is always a hot topic during session and I look forward to seeing what ideas are presented for the 2016 year. As developments in healthcare occur, I will continue to keep you updated on how the General Assembly responds to any issues that arise.

As we surround ourselves with family and friends over the next couple of months, I hope that you will reflect on what you are thankful for. I am thankful that we live in a nation where democracy is a founding principal. I am grateful to live in a state where growth and development continues to occur. I am thankful to live in a district that I am proud to serve. I am especially thankful that you allow me to represent your interests under the Gold Dome. If you ever need anything at all, I am here for you, always. God bless you and may God continue to bless the great state of Georgia!

