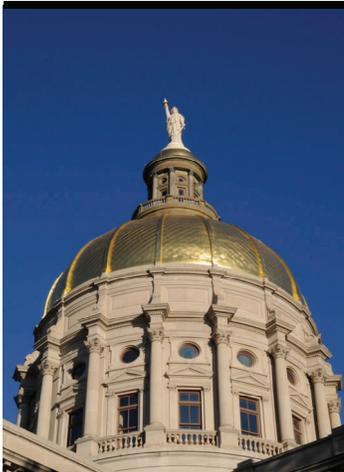


Upper Chamber Report

Raegan Weber, Press Director
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TOP STORY

Peanuts, HBCUs, and Child Prostitution Hot Topics on Senate Floor

By Hayley Howell

The ninth day of legislative session began with strong and ardently professed Points of Personal Privileges from Senators Vincent Fort (D- Atlanta), John Bulloch (R-Ochlocknee), Renee Unterman (D- Buford) and Nan Orrock (D- Atlanta).

Senator Fort proclaimed his concerns with Senate Resolution 84 to combine historically black colleges. Senator Seth Harp’s (R-Midland) Resolution urges the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia to merge Savannah State University with Armstrong Atlantic State University and Albany State University with Darton College in order to save money this budget season. Sen. Fort believes that the resolution lacks documentation proving its resourcefulness and that additional research and information is needed. For Fort, historically black colleges provide a certain atmosphere and a system of mentoring that could be taken away by integrating them with technical schools.

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“The numbers show that the college mergers could be cost saving, but nothing has detail,” states Sen. Fort. “We need to better educate ourselves on this issue before it moves any farther.”

The salmonella outbreak at a local South Georgia plant then took center stage with Senator Bulloch clarifying misleading media reports. Bulloch reminded the Senate that only processed products sent to other manufacturers for the creation of their products has been affected. By displaying a Peter Pan jar of peanut butter and a bag of Georgia peanuts, Bulloch urged everyone that these products were safe for consumption.

“We are the number one peanut producer in the nation, and it is our second most important Georgia product,” Bulloch informed. “I assure you that our peanuts are safe for consumption.”

The salmonella outbreak is a serious problem, and the list of affected products is on the FDA’s website at

<http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/salmonellatyph.html#update>.

Senator Unterman stepped up to passionately educate the Senate about her study committee researching Georgia’s statistics on the sexual exploitation of minors.

Three potential pieces of legislation that have emerged from the study committee are to imple-

ment a surcharge on the entrance into an adult entertainment business, changing the age of erotic dancers from a minimum age of 18 to 21 and to require proof of age, and tie enforcement to licensing regulations.

“We have all worked extremely hard to collect as much data and expert advice as possible over the course of the last year, and based on our committee findings it is vital that we do everything we can to address this problem now, as it is only getting more and more dangerous for our young children,” said Unterman. “Our mission with these pieces of proposed legislation is to ensure Georgia is a safer, better educated state on these matters and a no tolerance zone for the prostitution of children.”



Sen. Bulloch emphasizes the safety of Georgia’s peanut products.

The legislators also proposed to amend Georgia Code 19-7-5, the mandatory reporting of child abuse, to also report a child who they suspect is being prostituted by someone other than a "parent or caretaker."

With the Legislature having to cut 2.2 billion out of this year’s budget, Sen. Orrock took the well to protect senior citizen services from budget cuts.

“If we cut back spending, we will cut senior services by millions,” she reminded us. “We cannot slash and burn programs many have worked so hard to get.” Without senior services, such as Meals on Wheels, many senior citizens will not be able to stay in

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Highlights of Day 9, cont'd

their own homes and with their families. Many will be forced to live in expensive institutions which, unfortunately, have higher death rates.

David Shafer also proposed Senate Bill 1, the "Waste Reduction Act," which will

implement a system of zero-based budgeting for state government. Georgia currently prepares its budget on a "continuation" basis, which assumes that all current spending will be carried forward, and legislators only examine proposed increases. Shafer's legislation would require that one-fourth of the budget be zero based each year, so that over a four year term, the entire budget is scrutinized by the General Assembly.

Senator David Adelman spoke on behalf of the bill. "This bill has been in process since Jimmy Carter was governor," said Sen. Adelman. "I hope you all will support this very important piece of legislation." The bill passed with 100% of the Senate's votes and is now on to the House of Representatives. □

Sen. Johnson Introduces Measure to Secure Secret Ballots

By Kallarin Richards

ATLANTA (January 29, 2009) – State Senator Eric Johnson (R-Savannah) has introduced legislation defending Georgia workers' ability to vote by secret ballot in union organizing elections. Johnson proposed a state constitutional amendment to protect Georgians from a national attempt to end the use of the secret ballot called The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). Sen. Johnson filed his constitutional amendment today, which secures the right to a secret ballot for nearly all elections, including those for union representation.

"A voter's right to a secret ballot is an essential and fundamental principle in our society. Without the ability to vote secretly, individual political freedom will decline and be subject to threats and intimidation by those who want

voters to pursue a specific course of action or ideology."

If EFCA becomes federal law it would forego secret ballot union votes and implement a practice commonly known as "card check." Card check is where workers are encouraged to sign a membership card which then serves as a favorable vote for unionizing. Once a union organizer has enough cards signed by the majority of workers, an employer is required to recognize all employees as a union

"Replacing a worker's private vote with a piece of paper that is potentially signed under harassment is a travesty. Card check is nothing more than a power grab by union bosses that will come at the expense of hardworking Georgians," said Johnson.

Sen. Johnson is responsible for introducing the Senate's version of this measure, while a similar House Resolution is making its way through the Industrial Relations Committee. Both measures have received bipartisan support.

This initiative is just one of a number that are being introduced in several other states across the nation. The proposed amendment states, "The right of individuals to vote by secret ballot is fundamental. Where local, state, or federal law requires elections for public office or public votes on initiatives or referenda, or requires designations or authorizations of employee representation, the right of individuals to vote by secret ballot shall be guaranteed."

If passed by the General Assembly, the measure will appear on the 2010 ballot for consideration. □

Sen. Kasim Reed Files Legislation to Fund More Police Officers and Firefighters in Atlanta

By Raegan Weber

ATLANTA (January 29, 2009) – State Sen. Kasim Reed (D-Atlanta) is proposing an initiative to fund public safety and help fight crime in the City of Atlanta. A referendum, giving the citizens of Atlanta a choice to levy a 1 mill property tax dedicated solely to funding police and fire officer salaries was announced today.

"It is time for us to come together around a common goal – reducing crime and keeping our citizens safe," said Reed. "By conservative estimates,

this legislation will fund 150-200 police and fire officers and eliminate current furloughs."

A special fund will be dedicated only to paying salaries for police and fire officers would be established and would not be co-mingled with the city's general fund. This mill increase would be subject to sunset, unless continued by the voters of the City of Atlanta in subsequent referendum, similar to the Water and Sewer legislation previously co-authored by Sen. Reed. For the owner of a \$250,000 home, this would mean an impact of approximately \$6.00 per month. Conservative projections indicate that a 1 mill increase will generate between \$20-\$24 million.

"The referendum will resolve the current impasse between the Mayor and the Council by providing the funds which are needed to push back against the tide of rising crime in our city," Sen. Reed continued. "Our investments today will pay us back for years to come with safer families, safer neighborhoods and safer communities across our city."

Senator Reed introduced the bill in the Georgia General Assembly on January 29, during the 2009 Legislative Session. For additional information on the referendum, contact Senator Reed or go to www.legis.ga.gov. □

Joint Commission on Sexual Exploitation of Minors Announces Legislative Recommendations for 2009

By Matt Colvin

ATLANTA (January 29, 2009) — The joint Senate and House Commission on Sexual Exploitation of Minors announced their legislative recommendations for the 2009 General Assembly today during a press conference at the Capitol. Three potential pieces of legislation that have emerged from the study committee are to implement a surcharge on the entrance into an adult entertainment business, changing the age of erotic dancers from a minimum age of 18 to 21 and to require proof of age, and tie enforcement to licensing regulations.



State Senator Renee Unterman (R-Buford), in conjunction with Representative Calvin Hill (R-Canton) co-

chaired the committee's five meetings during the interim session and has identified these areas as crucial to help create a coordinated, statewide campaign to raise awareness and stop the prostitution of children in Georgia.

"We have all worked extremely hard to collect as much data and expert advice as possible over the course of the last year, and based on our committee findings it is vital that we do everything we can to address this problem now, as it is only getting more and more dangerous for our young children," said Unterman. "Our mission with these pieces of

proposed legislation is to ensure Georgia is a safer, better educated state on these matters and a no tolerance zone for the prostitution of children."

The legislators also proposed to amend Georgia Code 19-7-5, the mandatory reporting of child abuse, to also report a child who they suspect is being prostituted by someone other than a "parent or caretaker."

Rep. Hill and Senator Jack Murphy (R-Cumming) will sponsor the adult entertainment surcharge bill in the House and Senate respectively that looks to impose a \$3 to \$5 entry fee for patrons at adult entertainment businesses and venues. The revenues generated from the surcharge will be spent to fund services for children who have been prostituted, including abuse centers and prevention strategies.

Sen. Unterman and Representative Amy Carter (D-Valdosta) will champion the issue of raising the minimum age of erotic dancers from 18 to 21 in their respective chambers. Sen. Unterman and Rep. Carter will also introduce Senate and House bills to amend the child abuse reporting law to require mandatory reporting of all commercial sexual exploited minors as child sexual abuse. The current law only mandates a report of sexual abuse by a parent or caretaker, but the study committee findings noted that many adolescent girls are solicited by non-family members.

The committee hopes to utilize these legislative items in conjunction with the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act reauthorization which passed both the US Senate and House December 10th, 2008 and was recently signed by President George W.

Bush. The bill authorizes tens of millions to prosecute pimps and assist victims of the domestic minor sex trade. Sen. Unterman believes that in taking a comprehensive statewide approach means when those funds are appropriated, Georgia will be well positioned to apply for and receive TVPRA federal dollars.

Minor Sexual Exploitation is an imperative and prevalent issue to Georgians because Atlanta is one of 14 cities in the U.S with the highest incidents of child exploitation. Two hundred to three hundred young girls are sexually exploited in Georgia every month with as many as 129 girls being prostituted on a typical weekend night, and 12 to 14 is the average age of entry into pornography and prostitution in the U.S.

Legislators and advocates that were scheduled to speak and appear at today's press conference include Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford), Rep. Calvin Hill (R-Canton), Sen. Kasim Reed (D-Atlanta), Sen. Jack Murphy (R-Cumming), Rep. Amy Carter (D-Valdosta), Rep. David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge), Kaffie McCullough of the Juvenile Justice Fund, Cheryl Deluca-Johnson of StreetGRACE, Rev. Scott Weimer of North Avenue Presbyterian Church, Sharon Saffold-Harris of A Future. Not A Past, Wendell Phillips of the Presbytery Public Policy Committee, and Ray Newman of the Georgia Baptist Convention

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Public Defender Council Bill Passed by Judiciary Committee

By Kallarin Richards

ATLANTA (January 30, 2009) – The Senate Judiciary Committee passed a measure to restructure the Georgia Public Defender Standards Council during its recent meeting at the Capitol. Authored by Judiciary Chairman Preston Smith (R-Rome), Senate Bill 42 changes the council’s board to an advisory body under the director, who will be responsible for setting policy and accountable for the council’s actions.

“The council has a history of driving a separate agenda from the director,” said Sen. Smith. “Greater accountability is needed in order for the system to operate efficiently and effectively, and by restructuring the agency we can eradicate conflicting policy directives.”

The legislation revises the Georgia Public Standards Act of 2003, renaming the council as the Georgia Public Standards Agency and charging the director with control and management of the agency. Currently, the council makes policy and financial decisions, but will relinquish all control to the director under the provisions of the bill.

In his introduction of the bill, Sen. Smith noted that the legislature has not been provided adequate information from the council when requested, and because the council and director do not work in concert, it is unclear who ultimately speaks for the agency. This has only served to exacerbate differences in opinion on funding between the council and the legislature, which Sen. Smith said serves as an example of why this system needs restructuring.

Council Chairman Wilson DuBose agreed that funding issues are at the center of the council and the legislature’s disagreements, but is concerned

that this bill would not solve those issues. When asked for his solutions to the problem, DuBose recommended that the council retain its authority and also be restored power to hire and fire the director. Former council Chairman Emmet Bondurant argued that this legislation puts the council in conflict with its Constitutional obligations by mandating the director serve at the will of the Governor, chief prosecuting officer of the state.

Before moving for a vote, Sen. Smith noted that the final version of the bill outlines the process for removal of a circuit public defender from office, providing additional protection in consideration of a director with significantly more power. The bill passed out of the committee with a 5 to 4 vote, and will be considered by the Rules Committee before it is slated for a vote on the Senate floor.

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Senator Rogers Authors the Taxpayer Protection Amendment

By Raegan Weber

ATLANTA (January 30, 2009) – Senate Majority Leader Chip Rogers today introduced Senate Resolution 1, The Taxpayer Protection Amendment, which would limit the spending of any future budget surpluses. The measure requires any budget surplus first go to fund increases in student enrollment and then be placed into the state reserve fund. If the state reserve fund were to reach 10% of the previous year budget, surplus funds would then go to pay off state debt or be returned to the taxpayers.

“Georgians deserve a budget process that rebuilds our state reserves and prevents the unwise spending of excess tax revenue. When taxpayers are forced to pay more than what is necessary to fund the state budget it is only right that the money is set-aside

for a rainy day so that taxes aren’t raised or essential government services aren’t cut during difficult economic times,” Sen. Rogers said today. “At a time when the politicians in Washington, D. C. show no signs of any fiscal discipline, we in Georgia must provide for the future of our children and grandchildren by properly managing taxpayer money.”

Georgia is one of 29 states in the nation that is required by law to balance its budget each year, unlike the Federal government that can run on deficit spending. The legislature’s current Rainy Day Fund is a \$1.2 billion reserve account to assist the state in difficult financial times. Governor Perdue has applied these funds to his 2010 budget proposal. Rogers’ proposed legislation would ensure greater spending accountability and provide for the most essential government services first.

Rogers has been a champion steward

of taxpayer dollars. In 2008, he sponsored legislation that created the “Transparency in Government Web Site” which gives Internet users access to information on billions of dollars in state spending. The “Transparency in Government Act” requires state spending information be placed on a searchable website allowing Georgia taxpayers easy access to where their tax dollars are being spent. The web site was launched on January 1, 2009 and can be found at www.Open.Ga.gov. Rogers’ supports property tax reform that provides property tax relief and finding greater efficiency in collecting local sales tax so taxpayers don’t have to foot the bill for government inefficiencies.

If Rogers’ Taxpayer Protection Amendment is approved by two-thirds of the Senate and House, SR 1 will appear on the ballot in 2010 as a “yes/no” question for the voters. For more information on the resolution, go to www.legis.ga.gov.

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Legislative Process Dates

Important Dates in the Legislative Process

Introduction - Last day to file and/or 1st Read in Senate.

30th day - last day to introduce General Senate bills and resolutions (even year). [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

30th day - last day to accept General House bills and resolutions. [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

39th day - last day to introduce General Senate bills and resolutions (odd year). [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

**Note: Senate bills and resolutions must be filed with the Secretary before 4:00 p.m. to be 1st read on the next legislative day.*

Deadlines for passage in current year

Committee Report Deadlines - Last day to read report. Report submitted to Secretary by convening.

28th day - General Senate bills and resolutions.

38th day - Local Senate bills and resolutions.

38th day - General House bills and resolutions.

40th day - Local House bills and resolutions.

Calendar Management

Calendar in numerical order after 2nd reading of legislation; days 1-5. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]

Rules Committee sets the calendar for days 6 - 40. [Rule 4-2.10 (b)]

General Senate Bills and Resolutions

26th day - File with Secretary of the Senate. [Rule 3-1.2 (a)]

27th day - 1st Reading and referral to committee. [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

28th day - Committee report read upon convening. (A recommitted bill already 2nd read - report day 29.)

29th day - 2nd Reading. [Rule 4-2.6]

30th day - Passage [Rule 4-2.10 (a)] and immediate transmittal to House. [Rule 4-2.14]

Local Senate Bills and Resolutions

35th day - File with Secretary of the Senate. [3-1.2 (a)]

36th day - 1st Reading and referral to committee. (Cannot pass for 2 days.) [Rule 4-2.4 (c)]

38th day - Favorable report by committee, passage and immediate transmittal to the House. [Rule 4-2.14]

39th day - 2nd Reading in House.

40th day - Favorable report and passage in House.

General House Bills and Resolutions

30th day - Transmitted from House and received by Secretary.

31st day - 1st Reading and referral to committee. [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

38th day - Favorable report upon convening and 2nd reading. (Applies to days 36 - 38) [Rule 4-2.6]

39th day - Passage. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]

40th day - Passage of bills or resolutions tabled day 39; removed from the table on day 40. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]

Local House Bills and Resolutions

39th day - 1st Reading and referral to committee.

40th day - Favorable report by committee and passage.

** Note: On the 30th day and on the last three days of session, bills and resolutions needing action from the House are automatically immediately transmitted. [Rule 4-2.14]*