

The General Assembly Welcomes U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson

By Jennifer Kitt

On Tuesday, the Senate welcomed U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Georgia), who was visiting the Capitol to officially announce his campaign for reelection. In his address to the Senate, Isakson encouraged legislators to use money from the Federal economic stimulus package responsibly.

added that he knew the Senate would spend the



U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson at the Senate Rostrum

Sen. John Bulloch (R-Ochlocknee) commended the Georgia leaders of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) while introducing Senate Resolution 299. The resolution recognizes February 17, 2009 as FFA day at the Capitol, and February 21-29 as FFA week. The Georgia FFA is the third largest FFA organization in the nation, with over 28,000 members. The organization promotes agriculture education, leadership and personal growth to its members.

“My one admonition is this is a one time occurrence. Don’t get used to it and don’t get dependent on it because it’s a big jolt of money, but it’s borrowed money,” he said. Isakson

money wisely and had faith that the country will emerge form the recession stronger than before.

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Other Key Bills and Resolutions Introduced in the Senate

- **Senate Bill 151** relates to oral victim impact statements and grants of pardons, paroles, and other relief to provide courts and the State Board of Pardons and Parole greater input from crime victims, their families, and other witnesses and to provide for victim notification of parole board hearings.

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- **Senate Bill 152** relates to established agricultural commodity commissions and ratifications, contributions, and balloting to provide for an Agricultural Commodity Commission for Ornamental Plants.
- **Senate Bill 153** allows the use of more than one parking place by persons with disabilities when all parking places for persons with disabilities are full.
- **Senate Bill 154** amends legislation that provides a supplemental salary for the judges of the Superior Court of the Coweta Judicial Circuit in order to change the supplemental salaries for the judges.
- **Senate Bill 155** relates to the best management practices for control of soil erosion and sedimentation and minimum requirements for rules, regulations, ordinances, or resolutions in order to change certain provisions relating to 25 foot buffers along state waters.
- **Senate Bill 156** revises the duties of the Georgia Trauma Care Network Commission by revising definitions relating to trauma care, provides duties of the State Office of EMS/Trauma relating to the statewide trauma network, revises funding priorities, abolishes the Georgia Trauma Trust Fund, and establishes the State Office EMS/Trauma.



Upper Chamber Report

FEBRUARY 18, 2009

Raegan Weber, Press Director
Kallarin Richards, Editor in Chief

TOP STORY, cont'd

Sen. Dan Weber's (R-Dunwoody) Senate Bill 58, which relates to newly created municipalities, providing for the offer of sale to these municipalities of county property used as police stations, fire stations, cultural properties, or vacant properties within the geographical boundaries of the new city, passed with a 32 to 16 vote. Weber took well to rally support of the bill that would currently affect DeKalb County and the city of Dunwoody.

Opposing views were heard from Sen. Steve Henson (D-Tucker), who noted that the state should not be involved in local and county matters. He cautioned against getting involved in the DeKalb and Dunwoody issues, and against not allowing local and

county governments to address the situation.

"We have a new government in DeKalb County and a new CEO that is trying to reach an agreement in this situation. We've seen other municipalities such as Sandy Springs and John's Creek come together without this bill," said Sen. Henson.

The Senate also passed Senate Bill 4 from Sen. Gloria Butler (D-Stone Mountain) with a vote of 49 to 0. SB 4 requires Constables/Marshals when issuing protective orders to notify the protected person by electronic or telephonic means within 24 hours. Senate Bill 62 from Sen. Ralph Hudgens (R-Hull) seeks to include plan administrators in prompt pay requirements

that are already on the books in Georgia, which also passed with a vote of 49 to 0.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Brown (D-Macon) took the well to passionately show his distain for the displacement of veterans from their government housing and apologized for focusing on "politics" and not the people. Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford) followed Brown to inform the Chamber how each veteran was properly and carefully cared for. She also mentioned that she, Sens. John Douglas (R-Social Circle) and Johnny Grant (R-Milledgeville) confirmed that all 86 veterans were accounted for and moved to another home.

The Senate was adjourned until Wednesday, Feb. 18 at 10 a.m. □

Other Key Bills and Resolutions, cont'd

- **Senate Bill 157** relates to classification of sexual offenders, sexual offender registration, and restrictions on sexual offenders' residences, workplaces, and activities so as to amend current legislation applicable to appeals from decisions of superior courts reviewing a decision of the Sexual Offender Registration Review Board.
- **Senate Bill 158** provides exceptions to the requirements for fiscal notes regarding legislation.
- **Senate Bill 159** creates the Hemophilia Advisory Board.
- **Senate Bill 160** amends the "Quality Basic Education Act" to revise provisions relating to instructional activity concerning Veterans Day and require public and secondary schools to be closed on November 11 of each year in honor of Veterans Day.
- **Senate Bill 161** requires certain insurance coverage of autism spectrum disorders.
- **Senate Bill 162** authorizes security guards and detectives to obtain individual licensure for employment.
- **Senate Bill 163** relates to the Department of Human Resources to authorize the commissioner of human resources to appoint a diabetes coordinator, provide for the department to serve as the central repository of diabetes treatment and prevention data.
- **Senate Bill 164** provides certain height limitations on signs and signals on the state highway system to allow owners of legally erected and maintained signs to obtain permits to remove vegetation from the viewing zones of their signs if certain specified conditions are met.
- **Senate Bill 165** authorizes the Department of Community Health to obtain income eligibility verification from the Department of Revenue for applicants for Medicaid and the PeachCare for Kids Program.
- **Senate Resolution 291** urges the President and Congress of the United States to support legislative efforts to enact the "National Childhood Brain Tumor Prevention Network Act of 2009."
- **Senate Resolution 294** authorizes conveyance of certain state owned real property located in Baldwin, Bibb, Cherokee and Wilkinson Counties, Georgia; authorizes the conveyance of any state interest in certain real property in Baldwin County, Georgia; and authorizes the conveyance of an easement of certain state owned real property located in Camden County, Georgia.
- **Senate Resolution 295** requests the implementation of a Strategic Deployment-Distribution Corridor Network by the Georgia Ports Authority and the Georgia Departments of Transportation, Economic Development, and Agriculture with assistance from the Georgia Congressional delegation.

Sen. Chip Rogers: Delivering on Promises to Homeowners

ATLANTA (February 17, 2009) – Senate Majority Leader Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) released the following statement regarding Governor Perdue signing H.B. 143 into law. This ensures over three million homeowners that funding for the 2009 Homeowners Tax Relief Grant (HTRG) will be maintained in this year's budget:

“While Washington D.C. places almost a trillion dollars in debt on the American people, we in Georgia are delivering real tax relief to homeowners. The legislature declared that funding the Homeowners Tax Relief Grant was our top legislative priority. Today with the cooperation of the Governor, the Senate, and the House, we have reached an agreement to deliver on this promise to taxpayers. This is good day for homeowners in Georgia.”

HB 143 will honor the \$428 million HTRG the General Assembly placed in the 2009 budget and adjusts the manner and method for appropriating any grants in future years.

For more information on HB 143, go to www.legis.ga.gov.

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Senator Judson Hill Introduces State Medicaid Reform Bill

By Matt Colvin

ATLANTA (February 16, 2009) – Leading Georgia health care reformer State Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta) introduced Senate Bill 92 as his latest initiative to improve our current state health care system and to make health care more accessible for all Georgians. SB 92 would transfer eligible state Medicaid and PeachCare patients' medical coverage to a private health insurance provider with state health care funds still paying the premiums. The measure is intended to help Medicaid and PeachCare recipients obtain health care in the doctor's office rather than be turned away due to low physician reimbursements pushing the recipients to the hospital emergency room for care. The measure also provides eligible recipients the opportunity to stay insured under the same plan once they move off of government assistance. Hill believes SB 92 is an essential measure to accomplish his mission of improving access to quality care and lowering health insurance costs for every Georgian.

“In tough economic times, the easy answer is to increase the taxpayer's burden to raise extra funds before looking at fiscally responsible ways to change health care, to increase

health care quality and decrease the costs to the state,” said Hill. “I am confident Senate Bill 92 will have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the health care industry in our state. It gives Medicaid and PeachCare better access to quality medical care and provides them the protection of continued private coverage once they leave the state plan. It is vital that once we get people insured, they have the ability to stay insured with quality, affordable health care coverage”

When Medicaid and PeachCare eligible recipients move into the private sector, Hill believes that the long-term results will be extremely beneficial to both them and to the state. By working with private insurance companies, the legislation should allow for doctors to receive greater compensation for medical services as well as generate revenue increases for hospitals and medical facilities. Hill points out that having more people insured in the private sector will ultimately lower the health care cost burden for all Georgians.

Hill projects these new policies could potentially save \$80 million a year, in which these savings could be used to help alleviate any future health care funding shortfalls such as the \$110 million projected shortfall Georgia is facing for later this year. Measures

such as this are even more necessary with new federal dollars coming to the state because the short-term fix they may bring also causes an even greater long-term health care funding crisis.



SB 92 is just one of Hill's many health care reform initiatives. In 2008 he authored and successfully passed the nation's first patient-centered prevention-focused free market health care reform legislation, making health care and insurance more affordable for Georgia's working families. Several of his health care bills have been adopted by national associations as model legislation. Hill championed legislation in 2007 that led to the creation of www.GeorgiaHealthInfo.gov giving Georgians access to the latest health-care quality, cost and health education information. Hill was also appointed by Lt. Governor Casey Cagle as chairman of the 2008 Senate Healthcare Transformation Study Committee, responsible for creating and perfecting policy to help make health care and health insurance more accessible and affordable for every Georgian.

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Senator Ed Tarver Hosts Augusta Day at the Capitol, Introduces new Paine College President

By Matt Colvin

ATLANTA (February 16, 2008) – State Sen. Ed Tarver (D-Augusta) joined a group of state officials in hosting the annual Augusta Day at the Capitol last week in Atlanta. During the day’s events, Tarver welcomed notable Augusta leaders and officials to the gold dome, including new Paine College President Dr. Gregory Bradley. Tarver expressed his confidence in Dr. Bradley’s vast education experience and his vision for Paine and is excited to work with its new president to further grow and expand the historically black liberal arts school in the upcoming years.

“It is always a privilege to host Augusta Day at the State Capitol and this year was especially rewarding to introduce Dr. Bradley to state



leaders and education officials,” said Tarver. “Paine College has found itself an outstanding leader with a focused vision, a commitment to academic success, and the experience and knowledge to guide Paine College for many years to come. He is forward-thinking in his goals and ambitions for a school rich in history and importance to our state and I am looking forward to working with Dr. Bradley and to see his contributions to Paine and the Augusta community.”

Dr. Bradley’s first visit to the Capitol during Augusta Day provided him opportunities to speak with several state and educational leaders, including Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, University System of Georgia Chancellor Erroll Davis, and State

Sen. Seth Harp (R-Midland) who chairs the Senate Higher Education Committee.

Tarver noted Dr. Bradley is committed to making Paine College a premier liberal arts school in the region that provides intensive student engagement and a comprehensive learning environment. Several components of Bradley’s strategy are improving the core faculty, growing Paine’s technology infrastructure development, and enhancing the campus facilities.

Paine College is a historically black, higher-educational institution founded in 1882 and currently supported by the United Methodist Church. Paine is a four-year co-ed liberal arts school with academic divisions focusing on business administration, humanities, social sciences, education, natural sciences, and mathematics.

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In Committee News...

Health Care Dependent Reform Passes Senate Insurance & Labor Committee

By Matt Colvin

ATLANTA (February 17, 2009) – A bill allowing all dependent children under the age of 25 to stay on their guardian’s health insurance plan has passed the Senate Insurance & Labor Committee. Senate Bill 94, sponsored by State Sen. Judson Hill (R-Marietta), would allow coverage for dependent children regardless of their enrollment status in college up until they turn 25. Currently the law requires insurance policies to only allow coverage if the dependent child under 25 is a full-time college student. Hill has been a long-time advo-

cate of state health care reform and this measure would allow students who chose to pursue internships or are working on a part-time degree to stay covered until they reach 25.

Senate Bill 105, also sponsored by Hill, passed out of committee and would allow health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) – only plans to be approved for sale in conjunction with individual health insurance plans.

Hill’s state Medicaid reform legislation, Senate Bill 92, was scheduled to be taken up for a vote but Committee Chairman Ralph Hudgens (R-Hull) announced the bill will be presented at a future meeting yet to be determined.

Other bills that were passed out of committee include: House Bill 80, which would allow private companies that have a minimum of two employees to secure life insurance for anyone in their company they deem as needing life insurance; Senate Bill 95, sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford) would protect seniors over the age of 65 from any unfair insurance trade practices; and Senate Bill 123, sponsored by Sen. Lee Hawkins (R-Gainesville) would require pharmacy benefit managers to be licensed by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

All bills will now head to the Senate Rules Committee before going to the Senate floor for consideration.

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In Committee News...

Outdoor Advertising Restrictions Pass Through the Transportation Committee

By Raegan Weber

ATLANTA (Feb. 17, 2009) – Today the Transportation Committee passed the Outdoor Advertising Restrictions bill by a vote of 9-1. Senate Bill 164, authored by Sen. Don Balfour (R-Snellville) provides additional restrictions by prohibiting outdoor signs that exceed 75 feet in height (excluding pre-existing signs). In addition, the bill re-

quires an outdoor advertising permit holder to submit a vegetation fee of \$4,000, minus the costs associated with acquiring, installing, and maintaining replacement landscaping. Replacement landscaping will require the planting of trees from a list approved by DOT in a ratio of 22 trees for each site a vegetation removal permit is granted on the right of way. If DOT determines the applicant's site is not feasible for the tree replanting plan, DOT must consider the acceptance of wildflower planting. All replacement landscaping must be installed



during the next full planting season, and outdoor advertising permit holders will be responsible

for maintaining the landscaping, including erosion control, for two years. For more details on this bill, go to www.legis.ga.gov and do a legislative search for SB 164.

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Public Safety Committee Passes Two Metal Theft Bills

By Raegan Weber

ATLANTA (Feb. 17, 2009) – Sen. Seth Harp (R-Midland) presented his two metal theft prevention bills today to the Public Safety Committee. Senate Bill 53 provides for the seizing of vehicles and tools of the criminals that were used during a metal theft crime and prohibits any kind of advertising for the purchase or sale of stolen metals. Many times the chosen form of advertising is fliers posted to trees and lamp poles in local areas. SB 53 passed unanimously through the Public Safety Committee.

Senate Bill 52 creates a registry for metal thieves so they will be

known throughout their neighborhoods. Main concerns over the bill were for the protection of juvenile offenders and first offenders. Sen. Harp assured members of the committee that the judges will still have the ability to rule accordingly in those cases and juvenile offender laws still apply. The bill passed with a majority vote.



STOP METAL THEFTS

Last month, Public Safety Committee Chairman Jack Murphy (R-Cumming) joined other General Assembly leaders to announce the formation of a Stop Metal Theft Task Force to combat the rising problem of recy-

cles metals being stolen from homes, cars and even graveyards.

Items that are typically at risk include catalytic converters, copper piping in vacant homes, copper coils and wires in air-conditioning units and platinum.

The task force's work will be maximized by the **STOP METAL THEFT (SMT)™** website, which has been dubbed the MySpace of metal theft. To visit the site, go to www.stopmetalthefts.com.

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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]*