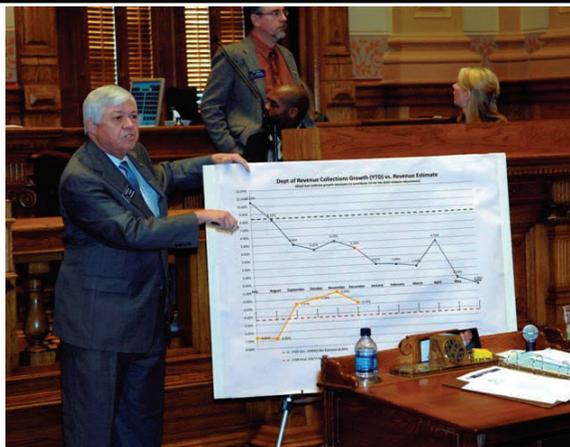


Sen. Hill Presents Budget Reality to Senate

By Matt Colvin

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Jack Hill spoke on the Senate floor this morning regarding Georgia's recent revenue numbers and the budget challenges facing the legislature this year. Despite hearing the reality of the budget shortfall and the gap between last year's and this year's revenue numbers, State Senate leaders expressed an understanding of the daunting challenge they are facing and vow to implement solutions for Georgia's long-term benefit. With the 2009 budget shortfall at \$2.2 billion, Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle is convinced that any fixes the General Assembly tries to implement must be fiscally responsible and sustaining.

"We are facing a very challenging budget season and should prepare for the worst while we hope for the best. It is my priority this year to



Sen. Hill presents revenue collections for the year

balance this budget, not by seeking the aid of creative revenue enhancements, but by making the tough decisions to fund essential government services and cutting those that are not," said Cagle. "I am confident in the Senate leadership as we work toward implementing strong, fiscally responsible policies that will steer our great state for many years to come."

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Jack Hill spoke to the Senate floor this morning on Georgia's recent revenue numbers. Senator Hill showed Georgia's income tax was down almost 2.7% compared to last year at this time, and that the state is showing a serious decline in December 2008 revenues as compared to December 2007. Senator Hill noted that it is difficult to say whether revenues will continue to slip through 2009, and he urged his Senate colleagues to enter this

General Assembly with a conservative mindset.

"There's no doubt we are facing difficult times now and with the uncertainty of knowing where the bottom will be, there has never been a more pressing need for all legislators to be as informed and open-minded as possible in working together on the State's budget," said Hill. "Working with the governor and our colleagues in the House I believe Georgia will be fine in the long-run, as long as we look at sustainable solutions. That's why things like the Rainy Day Savings fund were created - to help with unpredictable times and it's that type of mentality that will allow us to prosper long into the future."

Senator Hill noted during his presentation that while it is difficult to be positive in Georgia's current economic state, he reminded state leaders that recent drops in oil and food prices, a stable manufacturing industry with new automobile plants entering the state, a growing Savannah port and the historically resilient U.S. economy as a whole are ways to look at Georgia with an optimistic future.

□



Upper Chamber Report

JANUARY 16, 2009 — DAY 5

Raegan Weber, Press Director
Kallarín Richards, Editor in Chief

Inside this issue:

Sen. Hill Presents Budget Reality to Senate	1
Reactions to State of the State	2
Digital TV Switch	2
Senate and House Economic Development	3
Education and Youth Committee	3
Daily News Clips	4-9

General Assembly Prepares for Digital TV Switch

By Laura Hale

Georgia lawmakers got a first-hand look at the upcoming nationwide transition to digital television at Wednesday's joint House and Senate Science and Technology Committee at the Coverdell Legislative Office Building in Atlanta. Georgia State Senator Cecil Staton co-chaired the meeting and is committed to help prepare the public for next month's scheduled transition.

"It is important to ensure every Georgian is aware of the upcoming digital transition as many receive important announcements like the weather and emergency alerts from their televi-

sion," said Staton. "Our committee will do everything we can to properly inform and prepare those who will need the converter box what the simple process is to continue using their current TV sets."

The Georgia Broadcast Association (GBA) believes fewer than three percent of Americans will be unprepared for the switch. They noted that the city of Atlanta ranks 56th in the nation as the most prepared city and rural Georgians will be affected most by the transition. The new high digital television will make more channels available to people who live in rural Georgia.

Presenters also took time to demonstrate the process of connecting the new converter box to old television sets. GBA representatives emphasized that high

digital television provides clearer pictures and more channels.

On February 17 the traditional analog television signal will become obsolete. Digital converter boxes will be needed to receive over-the-air broadcast channels on televisions that use antennas. Converter boxes cost about \$40 dollars each, and the U.S. Congress has allocated two coupons for every household. So far, 43 million coupons have been mailed out.

Senator Staton notes that anyone looking for further information on the digital television transition can either call the Federal Communications Commission at 1-888-CALL-FCC or visit their digital TV information website at DTV.gov. □

Reactions to State of the State

President Pro Tempore Tommie Williams and Majority Leader Chip Rogers offer their reactions to the Governor's State of the State address this week:

"The Governor's address reiterates the importance of building a stronger Georgia by creating a leaner, more efficient government. Like many Georgia families and small businesses, we must make tough decisions in order to balance our checkbook. I am committed to

working with both the Governor and the House to do what is best for Georgians in these tough economic times."

Sen. Tommie Williams

Senate President Pro Tempore



"Governor Perdue's speech is a reminder that in light of tough

economic times, we should be thankful that we resisted the temptation in recent years to spend excess revenue. The decision to build up our rainy day fund to more than \$1 billion will prevent us from having to make even more serious cuts to essential government services."

Sen. Chip Rogers

Senate Majority Leader

□

Senate and House Economic Development Committees to Introduce Housing Tax Incentive

By Kallarin Richards

Co-chairmen State Sen. Chip Pearson (R-Dawsonville) and Rep. Ron Stephens (R-Savannah) convened the first Joint Economic Development Committee meeting of the 2009 session at the Coverdell Legislative Office Building in Atlanta. The committee focused on the housing industry and announced their plans to introduce a housing tax incentive plan.

“The overall agenda of the Senate and House Economic Development Committees this year will focus on doing everything we can at the state level to recover the housing industry, and to recover Georgia first,” said

Sen. Pearson. “After our meeting in December with housing industry representatives, it became clear that we need a stimulus plan to jumpstart the housing market and the economy as a whole. We will aggressively pursue this measure to ensure it moves quickly through the legislative process so that we can provide immediate relief to homebuyers.”

Chairmen Pearson and Stephens then assigned respective members to three subcommittees that will focus on the housing tax credit legislation, property tax reduction, and regulatory reform. These subcommittees will begin holding joint hearings later

this month.

Representatives of the building and housing industry delivered a recap of the initial meeting on the housing market in December, and the committee also heard from the Georgia Economic Development Association on their legislative agenda for 2009 that includes programs within the OneGeorgia Authority, Quick Start workforce training and local development authorities. □

Education and Youth Committee Convenes for Session Overview

By Hayley Howell

The Education and Youth Committee held a joint session today to outline this year’s goals to improve Georgia’s school systems. Georgia State Senator Dan Weber (R-Dunwoody) co-chaired the meeting and is prepared to support the committee in this session’s production of constructive legislation.

“Georgia’s education system, while more than likely expecting to receive about a 3% budget decrease, will take on ‘ambitious plans,’ as Gov. Perdue explained in his address,” said Sen. Weber. “Education is vital to the success of our children, our community,

our country and our economy. Improvements in education cascade into improvements in other areas.”

The committee listened as State Superintendent of Schools, Kathy Cox, led them through detailed goals made in accordance with the pressing needs of Georgia’s students. The six goals covered were increasing high school graduation rates, strengthening teacher quality, improving students’ workforce readiness skills, developing strong educational leaders, improving test scores, and creating policies that ensure the maximum academic and financial accountability.

To accomplish these goals, Cox plans to provide a positive career ladder to incentivize teachers with financial rewards and increased responsibilities. More students will have access to agricultural and technical classes to improve their workforce readiness for industries contributing to Georgia’s economy. Cox also wants to implement a risk ratio system which would better track student progress from an earlier age to prevent student failure before it’s too late. □

Please note that the 2009 Legislative Process Dates will be included in future reports upon finalization.

Friday, January 16
DAILY NEWS CLIPS

Economy/Budget

*GA. unemployment claims surge 174 per-
cent*

Associated Press

The Georgia Department of Labor says un-employment insurance claims shot up 174 percent last month compared to December

2007.

Labor Commissioner Michael Thurmond describes the increase as “stunning and sobering.”

http://www.ajc.com/business/content/business/stories/2009/01/15/jobless_claims.html?cxntnid=eml_Business011509

Homeowners may pay if homestead tax relief grants eliminated

The Daily Citizen

In the budget documents released yesterday by the Office of Planning and Budget, Gov. Sonny Perdue has recommended not to reimburse local governments for the Homestead Tax Relief Grants (HTRG) that provided a nearly \$429 million tax break for homeowners on their 2008 property tax bill. For most homeowners, this credit amounts to a \$200-\$300 savings. This credit was applied to their 2008 property tax bills, so homeowners are likely to receive a bill for the amount of their credit if this recommendation is approved by the Georgia General Assembly.

“We certainly understand that the state must balance its budget, but we are greatly troubled by the decision to eliminate the funding for a credit on property taxes that homeowners have already received,” said Jan Tankersley, a Bulloch County commissioner and president of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG). “Local governments also are facing budget challenges, and this leaves us with a gaping hole that can only be filled by sending bills in the amount of the credit to our homeowners or further reducing county services.”

http://www.northwestgeorgia.com/opinion/local_story_015131756.html

Slice off \$2 billion; create 20,000 jobs

By [James Salzer](#)

Atlanta Journal-Constitution

So, first the good news --- at least for the construction industry:

Gov. Sonny Perdue presented a state budget to lawmakers Wednesday that would borrow \$1.2 billion to build schools, libraries and other facilities. He estimates the spending would create 20,000 jobs. Lawmakers will likely want to borrow even more.

The bad news?

<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/printedition/2009/01/15/legbudget.html>

Legislature considers ways to jump-start home building

By [KEVIN DUFFY](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Georgia lawmakers are considering tax breaks for home builders, developers and home buyers in an effort to help the housing market recover.

One idea is to not tax, or tax at a reduced rate, vacant houses and lots.

Under another proposal, a home buyer’s taxable income might be reduced. The amount has not been determined, but lawmakers are looking at a range of \$2,500 to \$5,000.

http://www.ajc.com/services/content/metro/stories/2009/01/15/georgia_legislature_housing.html?cxtype=rss&cxsv c=7&cxcat=13

What's In Perdue Stimulus Package? Here Are Lists

Insider Advantage

The governor released some charts Thursday showing where a good deal of the money is going under his stimulus program:

* \$573 million in bonds for construction projects for the Technical System of Georgia and other state facilities.

* \$325 million in bonds for construction projects for the University System of Georgia.

http://www.insideradvantagegeorgia.com/restricted/2009/January%2009/1-16-09/Perdue_Stimulus_Lists11619652.php

Try selling a helicopter or two

Valdosta Daily Times

Opening salvos of the legislative session this week are not promising for the state's under and un-employed, as those who can least afford decreased services are the ones most directly affected.

In his state of the state address, Gov. Sonny Perdue outlined proposals to the legislators on ways he would like the state's budget amended to reflect a projected ten percent reduction in revenues.

http://www.valdostadailytimes.com/opinion/local_story_015211500.html

Casino support may be better gamble in economic slump

By [David Markiewicz](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Casino advocate Rob Pitts is OK with video gaming at Underground.

"A half a loaf is better than no loaf to start with," the Fulton County Commissioner states, adding he still wants full casino gambling. The latest proposal calls for video lottery terminals run by the Georgia Lottery.

Next, says Pitts, the broader business community needs to come out for gaming. Convention and tourism types are on board.

"The missing ingredient has been [their] strong, out-front support," says Pitts, who senses "quiet" backing.

<http://www.ajc.com/business/content/printedition/2009/01/16/mark0116.html>

Session '09

It is Day Four Under the Gold Dome

By Nelson Mullins

The Gold Dome Report

The "Pigeons" on the third floor were not the only birds under the Gold Dome today. Rest assured there were no Penguins blown in with the arctic weather that Georgia experienced today; it was just Sportsmen and Wildlife Day at the Capitol. With a Bald Eagle watching over them, Legislators attended to the business of the day. Both Chambers adjourned early today to attend respective meetings. The new Committees were named in the House. One noteworthy change was the demotion of Rep. David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge) who challenged Speaker Glenn Richardson for the job as "Speaker." As a result, Rep. Ralston, who previously served as Chairman of the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee, was demoted to Vice Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Replacing Rep. Ralston as Chairman of the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee is Rep. Rich Golick (R-Smyrna). Other changes included the naming of Rep. Penny Houston (R-Nashville) as the new Chair for the House Budget and Fiscal Affairs Oversight Committee, replacing the now retired Rep. Richard Royal. Additionally, Rep. Don Parsons (R-Marietta) was named Chair for the Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Committee after Rep. Jeff Lewis was defeated. Otherwise, Committees met briefly

today in order to attend to "housekeeping" and organizational business.

http://www.nelsonmullins.com/news/nelson-mullins-newsletter_detail.cfm?id=DD5AEA6E-EFAD-B952-0073AD6DBF69DFF4&CFID=132190&CFTOKEN=b11d9f88fa33c529-5EEC5DC1-FFCB-10A1-1812949036497A34

Health

Lawmakers promise fight on hospital fee, property tax grants

By [James Salzer](#)

Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Lawmakers say the state spending plan Gov. Sonny Perdue gave them this week leaves them two rocky paths to fiscal salvation.

They can go along with his proposals to charge fees to hospitals and insurers and eliminate grants that save homeowners on their property taxes.

http://www.ajc.com/services/content/metro/stories/2009/01/16/georgia_budget_perdue.html

Perdue pledges to fix psychiatric hospitals

By [ALAN JUDD](#), [ANDY MILLER](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Georgia promised the federal government Thursday it will make dramatic improvements in its state psychiatric hospitals — and that it will spend what's necessary to protect patients from harm.

The pledge, signed late in the day by Gov. Sonny Perdue, commits the state to a five-year plan of correcting deficiencies that caused hundreds of patient injuries and illnesses and dozens of deaths.

http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/stories/2009/01/15/mental_hospitals_georgia.html

Hughes: Governor Perdue, meet Harold

By Amy Haywood Hughes

Savannah Morning News

There are more questions than answers about proposed changes in Georgia's mental health system.

Near the Piggly Wiggly at Sandfly, it's no big deal to see a linebacker-sized man hitchhiking in a tuxedo jacket with tails, a Stetson hat with a turkey feather, chunky turquoise jewelry and Birkenstocks.

That's just Harold. He's lived here all his life.

<http://savannahnow.com/node/654142>

Let's smarten up sex ed

Macon Telegraph

Several days ago, front page stories in newspapers across the country reported the teenage birth rate, after years of dwindling declines, has experienced a sharp upturn. Births among 15-to-19-year-olds, for example, went up 3.5 percent in 2006, the most recent data available. This was the largest increase since 1989 and 1990.

This didn't come as a surprise. After a decrease in teen births over the last 14 years, the trend had been moving toward a reversal. According to McClatchy Newspapers, the South and Southwest have cornered the lead in teenage births. Northeastern states had the lowest rate of increase, but recorded an increase, nonetheless. The U.S., incidentally, has the highest teenage birth rate of any industrialized nation in the world.

<http://www.macon.com/207/story/587037.html>

Many lawmakers unaware of hospital closings, Keown says

By Patti Dozier

Thomasville Times

A Thomas County lawmaker said the proposed closings of state mental hospitals are not generally known among state legislators or the public.

“Most folks didn’t know this was happening,” said District 173 state Rep. Mike Keown, R-Coolidge, on the fourth day of the 2009 session of the Georgia General Assembly.

http://www.timesenterprise.com/local/local_story_015232726.html

Crime/ Judicial

Bill would ban racial profiling

Associated Press

House Democrats are lining up behind a bill that would ban police officers from racial profiling.

The proposal, introduced Wednesday, would require state and local police departments to begin an annual training program on racial profiling that instructs officers not to use race or ethnicity as a pretext to stop a vehicle.

http://www.onlineathens.com/stories/011509/gen_377428081.shtml

Transportation

Perdue to propose sweeping re-org of state transportation agencies

By Jim Galloway

The Atlanta Journal Constitution

More details on the biggest deal now cooking in the state Capitol:

Gov. Sonny Perdue is preparing a vast reorganization of the state’s transportation agencies that would centralize decision-making and could give him more control over the state Department of Transportation.

You know that, in his state-of-the-state address on Wednesday, Perdue [named his price](#) for supporting a statewide sales tax for transportation:

http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/shared-blogs/ajc/politicalinsider/entries/2009/01/15/perdue_to_propose_sweeping_reo.html

Sex, Lies And Now The Videotape

By Gary Reese

Insider Advantage

As you’ll recall from my previous stories, a Department of Transportation subcommittee last July heard a proposal on Highway 400 widening from the business consortium Crossroads 400 Group. As you can see and heard on the video clips (click [here](#)), the proposal included good news that extra lanes could be added to 400 with little or no cost to state taxpayers.

In August, the full DOT board liked what they’d heard enough to “recommend” – essentially to instruct – the evaluation subcommittee to approve and proceed with the Crossroads project.

But when the vote came back before the evaluation committee, they voted it down 4-1.

http://www.insideradvantagegeorgia.com/restricted/2009/January%2009/1-16-09/Reese_Curtains11619651.php

Funding sought for projects

By Donnie Fetter

Augusta Chronicle

State and area officials are looking for new ways to pay for transportation projects

The Georgia Department of Transportation is scheduled to start just one new area project this year.

Though DOT officials did not provide a confirmed start date, the project is an intersection improvement at Washington and Halali Farm roads in Evans.

http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/2009/01/16/met_507873.shtml

Education

Ga. schools to lose millions under state cuts

Associated Press

Georgia schools are bracing for \$185 million in funding cuts this fiscal year and even more reductions in next fiscal year's budget as the state tries to cope with its sagging economy.

Gov. Sonny Perdue announced the cuts Wednesday, including a proposal to slash \$197 million from the state funding school districts would receive for the fiscal year that begins July 1. Those cuts would include the \$30 million the state pays for school nurses annually.

<http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/251/story/580762.html>

Student Fees Increase to Offset Ailing Economy

By Nicole Head

The West Georgian

During December's final exams, representatives for the University System for the state of Georgia shocked students with the chill of an additional tuition fee for spring semester. After facing a severe budget cut in August 2008, Georgia's research and comprehensive institutions were forced to charge students an additional \$100 as a University System-wide deficit mitigation effort for 2009.

In a letter addressed to students of the University System of Georgia, Chancellor Erroll B. Davis Jr. explained that demanding economic conditions have forced the Board of Regents to consider a further decrease in the state budget for the 2009 Fiscal Year. According to Davis, universities should expect to experience a budget cut between eight and ten percent, a distinct difference from the six percent introduced last fall.

<http://media.www.thewestgeorgian.com/media/storage/paper523/news/2009/01/14/News/Student.Fees.Increase.To.Offset.Ailing.Economy-3585885.shtml>

Perdue proposal limits board size

By Greg Gelpi

Augusta Chronicle

A detail in Gov. Sonny Perdue's legislative agenda could prove costly, controversial and downright confusing for voters in Richmond County and 12 other Georgia school systems.

The governor wants all 180 school boards in the state to operate under similar rules while giving his office greater con-

trol to replace boards that jeopardize their school system's accreditation. Among the recommendations, which have yet to be filed as legislation, is a call for all school boards to have seven or fewer members.

http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/2009/01/16/met_507885.shtml

Energy

Ga. Power bill introduced Friday

by [Tom Crawford](#)

The Georgia Report

Sen. Don Balfour (R-Snellville) confirmed that he will introduce on Friday a bill that would allow Georgia Power Co. to start charging ratepayers six years in advance for the construction of two nuclear generation units at Plant Vogtle.

The Balfour bill is expected to be one of the most controversial measures debated this session, with environmentalists and consumer groups dead set against the "construction work in progress" (CWIP) proposal put forth by Georgia Power executives.

http://www.ciclt.net/garpt/main.asp?Client=garpt&PT=n_detail&N_ID=402718

Water

Never was a drought

Rome News Tribune

THE DROUGHT is over. It never really happened in the first place. Well, at least not in the traditional sense of average rainfall amounts.

Indeed, reading between the lines of a recent state meteorological discussion, what Georgia has really had is more a flood of people than a severe lack of rain.

<http://news.mywebpal.com/partners/680/public/news944330.html>

Other

Will lawmakers act like adults?

By Tom Crawford

The Covington News

One of the advantages of being more than two billion dollars in the hole is that it forces you to prioritize and focus on the things that really matter.

So it is with our state legislators as they gather in Atlanta this week to begin the latest chapter of the General Assembly.

In recent sessions we have seen lawmakers fighting openly, to the point where the House speaker yelled at the lieutenant governor to "be a man" and allow a vote on a tax break measure. Not to mention the time the speaker accused the governor of "baring his backside" on another tax issue.

<http://www.covnews.com/news/article/5426/>

Georgia NAACP renews call for slavery apology

By [AARON GOULD SHEININ](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Rep. Al Williams (D-Midway) believes the timing could finally be right.

The chairman of Georgia's Legislative Black Caucus said Thursday that he will reintroduce a resolution offering the state's official apology for slavery.

Williams last introduced the legislation in 2007, but it failed to gain consensus, despite the support of a high-profile Senate Republican. Williams didn't try last year, but thinks 2009 could be the year.

http://www.ajc.com/news/content/metro/stories/2009/01/15/slavery_apology_georgia.html