



MARCH 11, 2010 - DAY 24

# Upper Chamber Report

Natalie Strong, Deputy Press Director  
Kallarin Richards, Editor in Chief

TOP STORY

## Legislative Day 24: Rogers' Landmark Property Tax Reform Clears Senate

By Matt Colvin

CHAMBER (March 11, 2010) Reform, transparency and efficiency were the themes for Legislative Day 24 as senators passed several landmark bills.



The Senate sent a strong bipartisan message to Georgia property owners that it's time to change the current property tax system. By an overwhelming 54 to 0 vote, senators passed Majority Leader Chip Rogers' (R-Woodstock) Property Tax Assessment and Appeals reform bill (Senate Bill 346), which many legislators are touting as the most sweeping property tax reform in Georgia history. Rogers has been a longtime champion of tax reform, and believes his bill will finally give all Georgia property owners a system they deserve and expect; a system that is fair, straightforward, and actually works. Sens. Steve Thompson (D-Marietta) and Ronald Ramsey (D-Lithonia) joined Rogers in support of the bill and praised the bipartisan and inclusive effort to ensure all parties' voices were heard during the process. For more information, see Page 3.

Sen. Jim Butterworth (R-Cornelia) led the charge to pass two bills aimed at promoting greater efficiency and overall cost savings in state government. His Transparency in Government Act (Senate Bill 389) and Paper Reduction Act (Senate Bill 388) overwhelmingly passed the Senate, legislation he hopes will help facilitate significant changes in how government agencies utilize their resources and provide information to the public.

The Transparency in Government Act will expand the public information website [open.georgia.gov](http://open.georgia.gov) to include all three branches of government, any regional education service agency, all local boards of education, federal pass through dollars and contracts and expenditures made by the General Assembly. Butterworth's Paper Reduction Act will mandate electronic distribution and publication in state government, unless printing is necessary by a legal standard. For more information on these measures, see Page 5.

The Senate closed out the week by approving key legislation aimed at protecting children, the state's most vulnerable citizens. These included a measure that allows children who are found mentally incompetent to stand trial to be placed in a secure, residential facility, rather than a state psychiatric hospital. The Senate also voted in favor of allowing juveniles to use their time spent in

*Continued on Page 2*

*\* Follow the State Senate on Twitter at GASenatePress*



Sen. Greg Goggans and members of the Senate participate in a telemedicine broadcast

secure detention prior to being sent to a Youth Development Center to count toward their overall sentence.

Sen. Greg Goggans (R-Douglas) captivated the Senate with a glimpse of the state's innovative telemedicine technology. Telemedicine allows doctors in cities and urban areas to electronically see and treat patients in rural areas of the state. Dr. Debra B. Lister from Douglas joined the Senate from her office 200 miles away, and gave insight into the progress of telemedicine. □

## Committee Grants Clean Bill of Health to Diabetes and Health Improvement Act

By Katie Wright

CAP 450 (Mar. 12, 2010) – A bill targeted at developing, implementing and promoting a statewide effort to combat the spread of Type 2 and pre-diabetes in Georgia was unanimously passed by the Health and Human Services Committee on Thursday. Sen. Don Thomas (R-Dalton) authored Senate Bill 435 because diabetes is a leading cause of death in the U.S. and its prevalence is particularly high in Georgia. Without aggressive action, the number of Georgians with diabetes will more than double in the next 20 years to more than 1.6 million people, resulting in an economic burden of approximately \$11.9 billion.

This legislation establishes the Georgia Diabetes Control Office, which will operate under the Department of Community Health's public health division. The office will be under the direction of a five-member board of trustees, appointed by the governor. Subject to appropriations, the office will have the authority to administer grant programs to promote diabetes education and prevention.

Sen. Judson Hill (R-Marietta) presented a resolution that establishes a Senate Health Care Transformation Study Committee. Senate Resolution 1134 charges the



study committee with analyzing issues surrounding the availability and affordability of health insurance and access to health care services. While the committee passed the resolution, Sen. Nan Orrock (D-Atlanta) offered a change that was incorporated into the resolution stating that the members of the committee will not receive any compensation. She noted that in light of Georgia's financial crisis, committee members should be willing to give up their per diems. □

# Georgia Property Owners Score Victory



*Sen. Chip Rogers presents Property Tax Assessment to the Senate*

By Raegan Weber

ATLANTA (March 12, 2010) – The most sweeping overhaul of the Georgia property tax system in decades has won unanimous (54-0) approval in the Georgia Senate. Senate Majority Leader Chip Rogers’ (R-Woodstock) Property Tax Assessment and Appeals reform bill is aimed at ensuring all Georgia properties are properly assessed at Fair Market Value and that property owners have guaranteed rights to appeal.

Recent real-estate sales data show widespread disparities between actual sales prices and current assessed values. A study of five metro-Atlanta counties shows an estimated overpay-

ment of property taxes in excess of \$200 Million during 2009.

“This is a real victory for Georgia property owners. We are one step closer to protecting taxpayers from assessments that greatly exceed true fair market value. Georgia property owners have the right to expect a fair property tax system. While this bill does not cure all the ills, it surely moves us closer to a system that actually works,” said Rogers. “The unanimous Senate vote is a sign that we are on the right track and that regardless of political persuasion most everyone agrees the property tax system needs major reform.”

The overall reform includes more than 50 changes to current state law. Significant taxpayer friendly provisions include:

- Requirement that every property owner receive annual Notice of Assessment, which guarantees right to appeal
- Every Notice of Assessment must contain estimated property tax
- Expansion of appeal time-period from 30 to 45 days
- Alternative streamlined appeal option for commercial property valued in excess of \$1,000,000
- Automatic taxpayer victory on appeals when government fails to respond within 45 days
- Requirement that all relevant sales, including distress sales, be included when determining Fair Market Value
- Requirement that only “current use of property” be used in determining Fair Market Value
- Taxpayer must be given access to all data used in determining Fair Market Value
- Sales price establishes Fair Market Value for next tax year

The Property Tax Assessment and Appeals reform bill was a result of a 2009 study committee on property taxes. A report of the study committee hearings can be found at [http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10/senate/committeereports.htm](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10/senate/committeereports.htm).

□

## Sen. Ronnie Chance Named 2010 Legislator of the Year

By Adam Sweat and Raegan Weber

ATLANTA (Mar 11, 2010) - State Sen. Ronnie Chance (R-Tyrone) was recently presented with the Charles H. Barco Award by the Southeastern Legal Foundation as the 2010 Legislator of the Year.

“Throughout my time as a state legislator, I have always admired the Southeastern Legal Foundation and the ideals they fight to protect,” said Chance. “I am honored that they have recognized my commitment to the citizens of this great state and the Georgia General Assembly.”

Founded in 1976, Southeastern Legal Foundation is celebrating its 34<sup>th</sup> year as a national constitutional public interest law firm and policy center that advocates limited government, individual economic freedom, and the free enterprise system in the courts of law and public opinion. Their mission is to engage in litigation and public policy advocacy in support of these princi-

ples. The foundation looks for cases in which their involvement can make a difference, not just to the parties involved, but also on the policies or issues that are in dispute.

Chance was first elected to the State Senate from Georgia’s 16<sup>th</sup> District in 2004. He represents Lamar, Pike and portions of Fayette, Monroe and Spalding counties. He serves as Chairman of the Finance Committee, Vice Chairman of the Government Oversight Committee and Vice Chairman of the Retirement Committee. He is also a member of the Higher Education, Reapportionment and Redistricting and Economic Development Committees. He formerly served as Senate Floor Leader for Governor Sonny Perdue. □



---

## Proposed Law to Fight Illegal Massage Parlors Passes Key Senate Committee

By Matt Colvin

ATLANTA (March 11, 2010) – Legislation aimed to help law enforcement officials stop suspected illegal activities at massage parlors and spas was unanimously approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee Thursday at the State Capitol. State Sen. Cecil Staton (R-Macon) authored Senate Bill 364 to give local police and prosecutors additional resources and provide for more severe penalties by clearing up several loopholes in Georgia law. SB 364 would also allow more local control and regulation for enforcing the increased penalties.

“I am thankful the Judiciary Committee has joined me in support of this important piece of legislation,” said Staton. “Local law enforcement and prosecutors desperately need some teeth added to the law to properly prosecute illegal massage parlors and spas in their area and to ensure they are licensed and engaged in ethical business operations. By increasing penalties for illegal activity taking place under the guise of massage parlors or spas, it gives our local communities the ability to effectively prosecute any criminal behavior and rid their neighborhoods of people abusing the law.”

If passed, SB 364 would amend Georgia law by increasing the penalties for convictions including misdemeanor charges for the first offense, an aggravated misdemeanor for a second offense; and a third or subsequent offense will be a felony with imprisonment for one to 5 years and/or a \$25,000 fine per offense. In addition, property owners and operators can also be held accountable if they are proven to be involved in illegal activities at massage parlors and spas.

*Continued on Page 5*

## Sen. Butterworth Champions Transparency and Efficiency in State Government

By Katie Wright

ATLANTA (Mar. 11, 2010) – Today the State Senate voted in favor of more transparency and increased efficiency to find cost savings throughout state government. Sen. Jim Butterworth (R-Clarkesville) led efforts through the Senate to pass the Transparency in Government Act and the Paper Reduction Act.

“This is the people’s government and we are spending the people’s money. The people have a right to know what is happening. I commend the Senate for ensuring accountability and transparency to the people we represent,” said Butterworth. “The Senate’s actions also create a culture of efficiency and cost savings within state government which is necessitated by this economic recession.”

“I applaud Senator Butterworth for his work and leadership to bring savings and enhance transparency in state government. In this budget climate, we need to identify every avenue possible to save money. Businesses have long practiced the move from paper to paperless and have seen real cost savings and state government should do the same,” said Lt. Governor Casey Cagle.

These bills come from recommendations in the final report from the Budget Task Force, which is comprised of experienced business leaders and accounting professionals who will provide recommendations to the Senate regarding both short and long-term budget solutions. These solutions include consolidation of services, greater efficiency and cutting unnecessary spending. The group was tasked with identifying new ways to balance the budget without drastic cuts to essential services or raising taxes in this economy. Lt. Gov. Cagle and Senate leadership an-



*Sen. Jim Butterworth presents the Transparency in Government Act in the Senate*

nounced the task force in early January.

The Transparency in Government Act will expand the public information website [open.georgia.gov](http://open.georgia.gov) to include all three branches of government, any regional education service agency, all local boards of education, federal pass through dollars and contracts and expenditures made by the General Assembly. With this legislation, the General Assembly, will be included in the auditing and tracking functions of [open.georgia.gov](http://open.georgia.gov), run by the Department of Audits and Accounts. This bill ensures all fiscal actions of state government are available for the general public to find.

The Paper Reduction Act is a prescription to save time and money, and increase efficiency. It will mandate electronic distribution and publication in state government, unless printing is necessary by a legal standard. This will provide easier, more instantaneous access to government information as well as cut costs of printing, paper, and mailing. □

---

*Continued from Massage on Page 4*

By improving current Georgia law on this issue, local governments could become more involved with the regulation of massage therapy services in their area. Staton has been working with local government and law enforcement officials in his district and in other parts of the state on this legislation, and many have expressed to him SB 364 will be a valuable tool to help them crack down on these types of violations in their communities.

The Senate Judiciary Committee passed Staton’s bill by a unanimous vote. SB 364 now moves to the Senate Rules Committee before a full vote in the Senate is taken. If passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Sonny Perdue, SB 364 would go into effect either July 1 or immediately following the governor’s signature. □

## Senator James Recognizes HBCU Bus Tours.com with Senate Resolution

By Jennifer Kitt

ATLANTA (March 11, 2010) – Sen. Donzella James (D-College Park) will present HBCU Bus Tours.com with a Senate Resolution (SR 1197) honoring the organization for its 28 years of service. The company connects inner-city students with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) around the country, allowing them to tour the campuses and prepares students for the collegiate experience. Atlanta will serve as a departure city for students participating in the spring tour March 8 through April 8.



“I am so excited that the HBCU Bus Tours.com will be working with Atlanta’s students,” said James. “This organization does more than provide tours; it gives students confidence that they can obtain a college education.”

The annual bus tour will take students to six HBCUs: Hampton University, Norfolk State University, Delaware State University, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, Lincoln University and Cheney University. In addition to Atlanta, tours will depart from New Haven, CT.; New York, N.Y.; Newark, N.J.; and Washington, D.C.

“We are so much more than a bus tour company. Our mission is to provide the education and information that students and families need to realize that a college education is within reach,” said Alvin Hartley, president of HBCU Bus Tours.com. “The bus tour not only encourages students to attend an HBCU, but it also provides information on preparation and financial assistance.” □

---

## Sen. Hooks welcomes the Georgia Peach Queens to the State Capitol

By Kallarin Richards

ATLANTA (March 11, 2010) – Sen. George Hooks (D-Americus) today welcomed the 2009 Georgia Peach Queens to the State Capitol in Atlanta in honor of Georgia’s peach industry. “These beautiful Peach Queens represent one of Georgia’s most important industries. As official ambassadors to the Georgia Peach Festival, they play an important role in promoting our peach industry,” said Hooks. “Georgia ranks second in the nation in the annual production of peaches, which has significantly impacted the economic growth and prosperity of our state. I’m proud to represent the citizens of Peach County, which is the heart of Georgia’s peach industry.”

The 2009 Peach Queens include Tiny Miss Georgia Peach, Alyssa Bernard; Little Miss Georgia Peach, Sylandi Simone Brown; Junior Miss Georgia Peach, Jamie Walloch; Teen Miss Georgia Peach, Cori Beth Sutton; and Miss Georgia Peach, McKenzie Beach, who were formally recognized by Hooks in front of the entire Senate Chamber.

The peach industry is celebrated every year during the Georgia Peach Festival, which has been an annual event in Peach County for over 20 years. Conceived by Har-



*Teen Miss Georgia Peach Cori Beth Sutton and Little Miss Georgia Peach Sylandi Simone Brown pose with Sen. George Hooks and their families in the Senate Chamber.*

old Peavy, the festival was created to promote the peach industry and celebrate the county’s status as one of the largest producers of peaches in the state. The festival alone generates significant economic opportunities for the local area, attracting between 7,000 and 15,000 visitors during festival week each year. The event has grown so popular that it was expanded from one weekend to an entire week, with vendors and visitors frequenting local businesses across the county. □

# Legislative Process Dates

## Important Dates in the Legislative Process

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

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

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

**39<sup>th</sup> 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.

**28<sup>th</sup> day** - General Senate bills and resolutions.

**38<sup>th</sup> day** - Local Senate bills and resolutions.

**38<sup>th</sup> day** - General House bills and resolutions.

**40<sup>th</sup> 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

**26<sup>th</sup> day** - File with Secretary of the Senate. [Rule 3-1.2 (a)]

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

**28<sup>th</sup> day** - Committee report read upon convening. (A recommitted bill already 2nd read - report day 29.)

**29<sup>th</sup> day** - 2nd Reading. [Rule 4-2.6]

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

### Local Senate Bills and Resolutions

**35<sup>th</sup> day** - File with Secretary of the Senate. [3-1.2 (a)]

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

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

**39<sup>th</sup> day** - 2nd Reading in House.

**40<sup>th</sup> day** - Favorable report and passage in House.

### General House Bills and Resolutions

**30<sup>th</sup> day** - Transmitted from House and received by Secretary.

**31<sup>st</sup> day** - 1st Reading and referral to committee. [Rule 3-1.2 (b)]

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

**39<sup>th</sup> day** - Passage. [Rule 4-2.10 (a)]

**40<sup>th</sup> 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

**39<sup>th</sup> day** - 1<sup>st</sup> Reading and referral to committee.

**40<sup>th</sup> 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]*

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