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TOP STORY

Legislative Day 8: Senate Receives visit from Distinguished Former Colleague, Second Day in a Row



Mayor of Atlanta, Kasim Reed, speaks to the State Senate.

By Natalie Strong

CHAMBER (Jan. 28, 2010)-Once again, the Senate received a special, distinguished visitor on Thursday as members welcomed Atlanta Mayor, and former Senator, Kasim Reed. The Senate honored Mayor Reed with a Resolution to commend his past achievements and present position as Atlanta City Mayor.

Sen. Donzella James (D-College Park) introduced Mayor Reed and lauded him for his great achievements at such a young age. Reed then took the podium to speak about his fond memories in the Senate and his current job just steps away from the State Capitol.

He thanked his former colleagues for their unending support and pledged to shorten the distance between city and state government. Reed attributed his success to his relationships in both the house and senate and likened his feelings to an old African proverb “if you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go with others.” He challenged his former colleagues to work through the tough issues together, to turn to one another and solve problems side by side

and shoulder by shoulder. He pledged to support members of the Senate and House, as well as Governor Sonny Perdue, and work together to improve the economy, build jobs and emerge successfully from the tough times.

Lastly, Sen. Valencia Seay (D- Riverdale) took the podium and concluded by reminiscing about her time as a suite mate with Mayor Reed- even remarking the Mayor’s good looks.

Thursday also saw the first bill of the 2010 Session reach the Senate floor. Sen. Bill Heath (R- Bremen) presented Senate Bill 306 which makes it legal to use a hands-free communication device, such as a Bluetooth, to communicate while operating a motor vehicle. SB 306 was the product a letter that Sen. Heath received from a constituent in the fall who had been ticketed for using a Bluetooth Device. The constituent was cited with a violation although he was trying to be a safe driver and use a hands free device.

In addition, the Senate celebrated Georgia College and State University day at the State Capitol. Senators welcomed ROTC cadets from GSCU to the podium to speak about their experiences. The cadets thanked the senators for their continued support and funding for programs and scholarship at the University.

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Senate Health and Human Services Committee Passes the Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act

By Jennifer Kitt

450 CAP (Jan. 28, 2010) - The Senate Health and Human Services committee unanimously passed Senate Bill 315 the Emergency Volunteer Practitioners Act. This bill will create a registry for licensed health care practitioners that can voluntarily treat Georgians in the case of an extreme emergency. Once the governor declares a state of emergency, a volunteer health practitioner who is licensed and in good standing in his or her home state may treat individuals in Georgia. Sen. Preston Smith (R-Rome) was inspired to author the bill after seeing the devastation from the Haitian earthquakes and Hurricane Katrina.

“This bill will allow licensed health care workers to assist our state if we are faced with an emergency situation,” Sen. Smith said. “If a disaster does strike Georgia, the registration process can be expedited to

get more health care workers into the state.” Representative for Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA), Buzz Weiss, spoke to the committee about the organizations’ role in coordinating the legislation.

Bill Clark, with the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association, also testified before the committee. He reminded the committee that the emergency volunteers would be considered employees of the state and should examine the fiscal impact that could have on the state. After his testimony the committee passed the legislation with at 10-0 vote.

After voting committee Chairman Sen. Don Thomas (R-Dalton) assigned SB 146, a bill requiring the Department of Community Health to contract with a single administrator for Medicaid dental services, to the technology subcommittee for review. □

Transportation Committee supports efficiencies for Rural and Human Services Transportation

By Raegan Weber

CAP 125 (Jan. 28, 2010) – State Sen. Doug Stoner (D-Smyrna) achieved success in the Transportation Committee today for finding greater efficiencies in providing rural and human services transportation services across the state. Senate Bill 22 will establish the Georgia Coordinating Council for Rural and Human Services Transportation (Council).

Since the previous session, Stoner has worked with President Pro Tempore Tommie Williams (R-Lyons), Senate Transportation Chairman Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga), Senate Economic Development Chairman Chip Pearson (R-Dawsonville), and Sen. Nan Orrock (D-Atlanta) in exploring the need for better and more efficient transportation services for

rural citizens, the elderly and disabled. They worked in a bipartisan effort to establish guidelines for the Council and make adjustments to SB22 since it was proposed at the end of the 2009 Legislative Session.

Funding for rural transportation assistance goes through a tangled web of bureaucratic services, leading to confusion, inefficiencies and ultimately lack of good service. This Coordinating Council will comprise of representatives from the State School Superintendent and the Commissioners of the Department of Transportation, Department of Human Resources, Department of Community Health, and the Department of Labor. The Council will report to the Governor, General Assembly and House and Senate Health and Human Services Committees by December 31

of each year addressing cost implications, impact on client services and recommendations for efficiencies.

Many organizations spoke in favor of the bill because they see this as a significant step forward in finding efficiencies within the bureaucracy and utilizing existing resources without costing more taxpayer money. Each noted that improvements to transportation for the elderly and disabled will help improve their access to jobs and any medical attention they may need. Supporters included the Georgia Council on Aging, Georgia Transit Association, and All About Developmental Disabilities.

The bill passed with unanimous consent. □

Telecomm Reform Takes Center Stage in Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee

By Natalie Strong

CAP 450 (Jan. 28, 2010)-The Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee met to discuss the need for telecomm reform in Georgia. Committee Chairman, Sen. David Shafer (R -Duluth) presented his preliminary bill, which is a viable substitute for House Bill 168. Sen. Shafer noted that the bill was merely up for discussion and welcomed input on proposed changes and additions for all invested parties.

Sen. Shafer assured the committee, as well as the attending audience, that any bill released from the committee would strictly follow four guidelines: levels the playing field between carriers, reduces subsidies, gets rid of unnecessary regulations and does not burden the consumer with new fees or taxes.

The proposed bill will work to bring parity to all access fees charged between carriers. Over the transition, a

company whose fee is being cut will be compensated from companies who will benefit from the new legislation. The primary goal is to level the playing field by assuring that each company will pay the same access fee and repeal unnecessary regulations for companies who choose to be regulated.

There were many parties present to speak both for and against the proposed legislation.

Those for the bill spoke about Georgia's long needed attention to telecomm reform and how the much needed changes would empower Georgians with the choice to pick from fairly competing carriers. They applauded the committee's intention to rid carriers of antiquated regulations and to create a level playing field among businesses. Support reiterated that any bill that passed the committee must be free of any new taxes or fees that would unfairly burden the consumer.

Those who spoke against the bill agreed that Georgia was in dire need of telecomm reform but strongly differed on what the approach and strategy should be. They argued that they would be unable to compete with companies who received the benefit of being subsidized and that increased cost for a smaller retailer would certainly equal an increase in cost for their consumers. Critics also worried that the bill would remove the protection methods which are already in place should a company lease wires from a larger carrier and these wires become damaged. Currently, the smaller carrier would have the opportunity to appeal to the FCC for downed service and lost customers as a result, but the proposed legislation would limit this option.

The meeting was called to order and Sen. Shafer welcomed all interested participants input and offer them the opportunity to review the current draft legislation. □

Georgia Senate Passes Hands-Free Communication Bill



Sen. Bill Heath addresses the Senate on SB306

By Raegan Weber and Meredith Rich

ATLANTA (Jan. 28, 2010) – The Georgia Senate passed the first bill of the 2010 legislative session. Sen. Bill Heath's (R-Bremen) legislation, allowing the use of hands-free communication devices while driving a vehicle (SB 306), passed without opposition. The legislation corrects current law which currently prohibits the use of headphones.

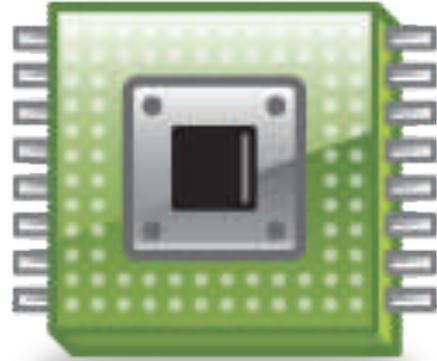
"Drivers who want to be safe on the road and use hands-free devices should not be penalized for using good judgment," said Sen. Heath. "The legislature creates enough laws, so it is about time we start reducing the burden on citizens. With this clarification, citizens can be safer while talking on the phone

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Judiciary Committee votes to Prevent Involuntary Microchip Implantation

By Kallarin Richards

CLOB 307 (Jan. 28, 2010) – The Senate Judiciary Committee held its first meeting of the 2010 Legislative Session on Thursday. Business began with members unanimously voting to hold a series of hearings this legislative session to explore the relationship and interplay between the Georgia State Bar Association and Georgia’s Judiciary and Legislative Branches. Chairman Preston Smith (R-Rome) and Sen. John Wiles (R-Kennesaw) have been working to improve relationships with the State Bar, and this process will help achieve efficiencies and progress in Georgia’s judicial system.



The committee also passed a bill authored by Sen. Chip Pearson (R-Dawsonville) that protects Georgians from being involuntarily implanted with a microchip. Microchips can be used as tracking devices or to store medical information. Sen. Pearson noted that Senate Bill 235 upholds Georgians’ constitutional rights of protection of person and property by prohibiting anyone from having a

microchip involuntarily implanted. The bill also lays out guidelines for voluntary implantation, which can only be performed by a physician and will be regulated by the State Board of Medical Examiners. Sen. Pearson added that the bill sends the message that Georgia will uphold its citizens’ constitutional rights and protection of their personal property. □

Continued from page 3

and operating their vehicles."

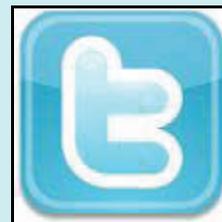
The legislation allows for safe hands-free communication devices. The bill states that it is illegal to operate a motor vehicle while wearing a headset or head-phone that would impair one’s ability to hear.



The current law was enacted before the creation of cell phones, blackberries and Bluetooth devices. Heath wants the law modernized. He proposed this legislation in response to an e-mail from a citizen who was cited under the old

Georgia code for the use of a hands-free device. □

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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]*

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