



This Week in the Senate

February 13- February 17

Contributions for Public School Employees Retirement System to Change

Sen. Jack Hill (R-Reidsville) authored legislation that would increase public school employees' retirement contributions and monthly retirement payments for Public School Employees Retirement System members. Specifically, this bill would increase the employee contribution for all persons who become a member of the System on or after July 1, 2012, from \$4.00 per month to \$10.00 per month. Also, the retirement benefit for ERS retirees would be raised each month in proportion to the number of years the retired individual served. Previously, the monthly rate was determined by multiplying that individual's years of service by \$15. This bill would raise it to \$16 multiplied by years of service each month. Finally, the bill raises the minimum monthly benefit from \$12.00 to \$14.75. The bill was passed Wednesday, 52-0. —**SB 246**

Bill to Prohibit Future Tax Commissioners' from Joining the ERS

SB 286 would bar any newly hired tax commissioner, tax collector, or tax receiver from joining the Employee Retirement System effective July 1, 2012. It is important to remember these are county employees who collect county revenue, and very rarely participate in the collection of state revenue. SB 286 is a fiscally responsible move that ensures our state's employee retirement system is adequately providing for state employees. This is the third time this legislation has been voted on in the Senate, and SB 286 passed with a 47-5 vote. —**SB 286**

Insurance Bill Passes Senate

Sen. David Shafer (R-Duluth) sponsored legislation which authorizes only insurers who issue title insurance policies and who are also responsible for disbursing settlement funds to issue closing protection letters. A closing protection letter is a document which protects the buyer or lessee against fraud. The bill passed Thursday with a vote of 50-0. —**SB331**

Bill Mandates Local Governments Give Preference to Georgia Contractors

Under legislation authored by Sen. John Bulloch (R-Ocklocknee), local governments in Georgia would be required to reciprocate the preferences granted by out-of-state local governments for vendors in their own states to Georgia's vendors. This bill pertains to local governments' awarding bids for goods and services produced in Georgia. The bill passed Thursday with a vote of 51-0. —**SB358**

Bill to Reduce Violence among Department of Juvenile Justice Inmates

Sen. Johnny Grant (R-Milledgeville) authored a bill which will ban potentially dangerous items from Juvenile Detention Centers (JDC) and Youth Development Centers (YDC) throughout the state. This legislation would help eliminate violence among detainees of Georgia's JDCs and YDCs. Sen. Grant stated before the Senate that the legislation has received approval from defense attorneys, advocates of the youth detainees, and the law enforcement community. It passed 52-0. —**SB366**

Bill to Increase Contempt of Court Fines

The maximum fine for contempt of court in a Georgia Superior Court would be increased from \$500 to \$1000, according to legislation authored by Sen. Jesse Stone (R-Waynesboro). The last time this fine had been updated was approximately 30 years ago. The bill passed Friday by a vote of 45-5. –**SB107**

“Deadhead Logs” Bill Passes Senate

In the 19th and 20th centuries, numerous quantities of lumber were deposited in Georgia’s river systems. Some logs were lost while being transported down the river, and others were intentionally left for storage purposes. Over time, these logs were protected from biodegradation due to the low oxygen content in parts of these rivers. These preserved logs are known as “deadhead logs” and are often valued for their use in furniture. Sen. Tommie Williams (R-Lyons) proposed legislation would authorize the state to auction off sections of Georgia’s rivers to harvest these logs. The bill passed the Senate on Friday with a vote of 37-12. –**SB362**

Bill will extend expiration date of Georgia Geospatial Advisory Council

The Georgia Geospatial Advisory Council is an agency established to provide the general public with reliable geospatial data, including flood map modernization. The maps are especially useful for FEMA and other emergency relief organizations. The Georgia Geospatial Advisory Council is set to expire on June 30, 2012; however, legislation proposed by Sen. Buddy Carter (R-Pooler) would extend the deadline to June 30, 2015. The bill passed the Senate 50-0. –**SB369**

Bill should change SPLOST Revenue Collection

Legislation proposed by Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen) would authorize the collection of SPLOST revenues to be fractionally collected up to a full one percent after January 1, 2013. If enacted, voting referendums may ask to collect just a fraction of the single penny that is typically requested. The bill passed with a 47-1 vote. –**SB395**

Lupus Awareness Day

On Wednesday, SR 753 was adopted to declare February 15, 2012, as Lupus Awareness Day at the Capitol. Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford) welcomed leaders of the Lupus Foundation of America to speak on behalf of the approximately 55,000 Georgians who are currently living with Lupus. Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease that attacks the body's cells and tissues, resulting in inflammation, pain, and tissue damage. –**SR 753**

Healthcare Awareness Day

Sen. Donzella James (D-Atlanta) passed a resolution Wednesday to honor Healthcare Awareness Day on February 15, 2012. –**SR 808**

Georgia Family Connection Visits Capitol

The Georgia Family Connection of Region 10 visited the Capitol on Wednesday and thanked members of the General Assembly for supporting them through legislation last year. Region 10 consists of 14 counties in Southwest Georgia. The Georgia Family Connection of Region 10 serves to combat the region’s economic, education, and health related challenges, especially as they effect children and families.

HOPE Scholarship Debate

The Senate passionately debated potential changes to the HOPE Scholarship on Thursday. Both sides took the well as a point of personal privilege to present their argument. The debate centered on whether or not the HOPE Scholarship should be restructured to only be available to students whose parents combined income was below \$140,000.

North Georgia College and State University Recognized

North Georgia College and State University was recognized by the Senate on Thursday. NGCSU is known for having students with some of the highest high school GPAs in the state, academic excellence, affordability, and the number one Reserve Officer Training Corps programs in the nation. Sen. Gooch described the institution as “another gem from Dahlonga”. –**SR 754**

Rural Health Day

Thursday was Rural Health Day at the Capitol. The Senate invited the Georgia Rural Health Association, a nonprofit organization for healthcare professionals who serve rural Georgia, into the chamber. Rural areas often lack sufficient medical personnel, and those who choose to work in rural areas play an especially important role in their communities. –**SR712**

Walter and Winkie Boomershine Recognized

North Georgia residents Walter and Winkie Boomershine were honored in the Senate on Thursday for their humanitarianism and service to the state. Most recently, they built a 20,000 square foot logistics center for the Georgia Mountain Food Bank. –**SR732**

Recognition of 2011 Rick Perkins Awardee for Excellence in Technical Instruction

Karon Green was recognized by the Senate on Thursday for her excellence in technical education and her status as the recipient of the 2011 Rick Perkins Award for Excellence in Technical Instruction. –**SR 799**

National Alumnae Association of Spelman College-Atlanta Chapter Day

On Friday, the Senate honored the Atlanta Chapter of the National Alumnae Association of Spelman College. Spelman College is a historically black college for women, which has been noted for its excellence in intellectual, creative, ethical, and leadership development of its students. The Alumnae Association was recognized for its continuing support of the student body of Spelman College. –**SR871**

Greater Atlanta McDonald's Operators Association Recognized

The Greater Atlanta McDonald's Operators Association was invited to the Capitol Friday. The Senate presented them with a resolution honoring their contribution to the local economy. Specifically they were recognized for the number of jobs created through their industry, as well as the revenue generated in recent years. –**SR825**

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