



This Week in the Senate

February 20 - February 24

President's Day

The Senate was not in Session on Monday, February 20, in observance of President's Day.

Fiscal Budget Passed Back to House

Sen. Jack Hill (R-Reidsville) presented the amended fiscal budget on Thursday. The Senate passed HB 741, the FY 2012 Amended Budget. The Senate then recommended an amended budget of \$18.5 billion in total state funds, slightly more than the \$18.3 billion originally passed in the FY 2012 General Budget. Since the House version of the bill includes line items different from the bill passed by the Senate in a 51-1 vote, members from both chambers will now determine a mutually agreed-upon bill. —**HB 741**

Online Education Legislation

Majority Leader Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) introduced legislation on the Senate floor that will require high school students, beginning with those who enter the ninth grade in the 2014-2015 school year, to complete at least one online learning course during their high school career. Sen. Rogers said the bill is intended to benefit the taxpayers, the schools, and the students. The bill passed with a vote of 36-15. —**SB289**

Statue of Limitations Extended for Report of Sexual Abuse

Under legislation sponsored by Sen. Charlie Bethel (R-Dalton), individuals who were victimized by a sexual crime as a child are given until their 28th birthday to report the crime. For cases involving childhood rape, the individual is given until their 33rd birthday to report the crime. Under current law, some individuals are not given enough time following their maturation to adulthood to report their crime. The bill passed with a vote of 53-0. —**SB316**

Documentation for Teachers and Administrators Terminated for Financial Reasons

Legislation introduced by Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) would require that written documentation be provided to employees of the education system, such as teachers and administrators, detailing the reason for their termination if the termination was due solely to financial reasons. The bill passed with a vote of 51-0. — **SB153**

Increase in Employees Wages Taxed for Unemployment Insurance

Sen. Fran Millar (R-Atlanta) sponsored a bill that will increase the amount of employee wages that are taxed for unemployment insurance and reduce the maximum number of weeks a claimant may receive benefits from 26 to 20. The bill passed 34-13. —**SB 447**

Increase the Transparency of SPLOST Projects

Sen. Ligon introduced legislation to the Senate on Wednesday which would increase transparency in Special Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) projects. In addition to the current requirement to publicly report expenditures for all projects funded by SPLOST, this bill would

require the disclosure of estimates of the maintenance and operation costs for all projects, including a statement of surplus funds, as well as the estimated date and cost of completing these unfinished projects. The bill passed with a vote of 48-6. —**SB332**

Restructure of Georgia International Commercial Arbitration Code

Legislation sponsored by Sen. Bill Hamrick (R- Carrollton) would restructure procedural rules for international commercial arbitrations in Georgia. This would repeal current Georgia law and replace it with a more modern version. Sen. Hamrick stated that he believes the bill will stimulate job creation and passed with a vote of 51 to 0. —**SB383**

Employees' Retirement System of Georgia Enhanced Investment Authority Act

Legislation introduced by Sen. Tim Golden (R-Valdosta) permits eligible large retirement systems, excluding the Teachers Retirement System, to invest up to 1 percent of their assets into alternative investments. Each year, they may increment this amount by 1 percent until the 5 percent cap is reached. Participating systems would have to annually report to the House and Senate Retirement Committees. The bill passed 50-4. —**SB402**

Dentist to Receive Special License

Under this bill, dentists and dental hygienists who have a license in good standing in any U.S. jurisdiction may receive a special license from the Georgia Board of Dentistry to volunteer their services. The bill passed 55-0 and sponsored by Sen. Greg Goggans (R-Douglas). —**SB 338**

Commissioner of Agriculture Allowed to Use Surety Bonds to Collect Debts

On Tuesday, Sen. John Bulloch (R-Ocklocknee) sponsored a bill that allows the Commissioner of Agriculture to require anyone to obtain a surety bond on the balance of a civil penalty owed. The Commissioner can also suspend a portion of a penalty pursuant to a consent order or final decision when no further review is taken or allowed. The bill passed 49-0. —**SB 367**

Seed Certification Bill

Sen. John Bulloch (R-Ocklocknee) sponsored a bill that would give the Dean of the University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences the authority to designate any certifying agency in good standing with the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies to provide for seed certification. Current law states that the Dean must designate the Georgia Crop Improvement Association, Inc. as a certifying agency. The bill passed 48-4 on Tuesday. —**SB390**

Excluding Horseshoeing from the Practice of Veterinary Medicine

Legislation proposed Wednesday by Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) would exclude the practice of fitting and shoeing equines (horses, mules, donkeys, and etc.) from the definition of "practice of veterinary medicine." The bill passed with a vote of 52-2. —**SB324**

Tilapia Becomes a Domestic Fish under New Bill

Under legislation proposed by Sen. John Wilkinson (R-Toccoa), tilapia would be declared a "domestic fish" in the state of Georgia. This would allow tilapia to legally be released into specified private ponds and sold from commercial fish hatcheries if the tilapias are produced by an aquaculturist licensed by the state Department of Natural Resources. This legislation also restricts the use of tilapia as live bait. The bill passed 51-2. —**SB360**

Changes in Hospital Accreditation References

This bill deletes references in the Georgia Code to the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals or the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, former names of the organization now known as the Joint Commission. In place of these deleted references, these code sections will now refer to “a nationally recognized health care accreditation body.” The bill passed 56-0 and was sponsored by Sen. Butch Miller (R-Gainesville). –**SB 361**

Annual Controlled Substances Update

Sen. Buddy Carter (R-Pooler) presented legislation to update the schedules of controlled substances and list of dangerous drugs. This is the annual drug update bill will add to and revise the different classifications of drugs and adds drugs to the definition of dangerous drugs list. This bill passed 53-1. –**SB 370**

Bill Proposes Name Change for Research Building

Legislation by Sen. Ronnie Chance (R-Tyrone) will rename the Herty Advanced Materials Development Center to the Georgia Southern Herty Advanced Materials Development Center and will transfer control of the center to the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. This bill passed 56-0. –**SB 396**

Confidentiality of Insurance Commissioner’s Office Analysis

Sen. David Shafer (R-Duluth) sponsored legislation that will secure the confidentiality of analysis performed by the Insurance Commissioner's office pertaining to the financial condition or market conduct of an insurer. The bill passed with a vote of 53-0.–**SB385**

Controlled Substances Legislation

At the request of the Attorney General, Sen. Buddy Carter (R-Pooler) presented legislation to allow Georgia pharmacies to fill out of state prescriptions and make Georgia laws in compliance with federal laws regarding samples. The bill passed 49-0. –**SB 378**

Redistricting Legislation

This bill will revise the boundaries of certain state House districts. The bill passed the Senate 36-15 and was transmitted back to the House of Representatives by Reapportionment and Redistricting Chairman, Sen. Charlie Bethel (R-Dalton). -**HB 829**

Disposition of Veterans' Cremated Remains Act

Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford) presented legislation that will require the funeral director in charge of a crematory to make a reasonable effort to determine whether any body submitted for final disposition by cremation is that of a deceased veteran. The bill passed 44-0. –**SB 372**

Adoption of Changes by Board of DNR

Sen. Buddy Carter (R-Pooler) passed a resolution that authorizes the land use changes adopted by the Board of the Department of Natural Resources and granting non-exclusive easements for the construction and operation of certain facilities to the Georgia Transmission Corporation and the Coastal Electric Membership Corporation, and the Department of Transportation. The bill passed 40-0. –**SR 765**

Sen. Leroy R. Johnson Honored

The Honorable Leroy Johnson is the first African-American elected to the General Assembly after the Reconstruction period. Mr. Johnson has owned and managed Leroy R. Johnson and Associates, P.C. for 47 successful years and primarily practices in the areas of probate and estate, criminal, domestic relations, and personal injury. Sen. Donzella James (D-Atlanta) and numerous other senators honored Mr. Johnson in the Senate Chamber on Friday. –**SR 946**

Congressman Sanford Bishop Visits Senate

Sen. George Hooks (D-Americus) welcomed US Representative from the 2nd District, Sanford Bishop, Jr. to the Senate on Tuesday. Rep. Bishop reflected upon his time spent at the Georgia General Assembly and expressed his admiration to the Senators for their hard work, diligence, and commitment in forming a responsible fiscal budget. Additionally, he encouraged Georgians to join several other states in aiding the employment of the spouses of military personnel, especially those who have encountered difficulties of interstate licensing.

Third Annual Turkish American Day

Tuesday members of the Senate recognized the estimated 8,000 Turkish Americans residing in the State of Georgia and the 500 Turkish American businesses. Turkish businessmen, CEO's and government leaders were on hand to receive the recognition and expressed their gratitude for Georgia and the United States' cooperation in working with the economically thriving country of Turkey. –**SR 969**

Future Farmers of America Day

A resolution in honor of members of Future Farmers of America (FFA) was passed Tuesday. The Georgia FFA is the third largest association of its kind in the nation and currently holds 30,256 members. President Ben Bennett and other members of the executive board were honored by Sen. John Bulloch (R-Ochlocknee) and the rest of the Senate for their leadership and dedication. –**SR 656.**

Clayton County Fire and Emergency Workers Honored

Sen. Valencia Seay (D-Riverdale) welcomed members of the Clayton County Fire and Emergency Workers to the Senate on Tuesday to congratulate and honor them for being the 2011 Firefighter Challenge World Champions. In the last six years, the Clayton County Fire and Emergency Services team has won a total of nine world titles and set seven world time records. –**SR 711**

Engineering Week

This week, the Senate honored Georgia's engineers. Since 1951, a week in February has been designated to recognize the contributions and accomplishments of the many and varied projects undertaken by engineers to the benefit of the state. Additionally, special attention was given to encourage the development of future engineers. Two of the Senate's engineers, Sen. Hardie Davis (D-Augusta) and Sen. Frank Ginn (R-Danielsville) addressed the Senate. –**SR967**

Members of the National Guard Welcomed to the Senate

On Wednesday, Adjutant General of the National Guard and former Sen. Jim Butterworth, along with members of the National Guard were honored in the Senate Chamber. Members of the Senate paused and reflected on the sacrifice of the Georgia Guard soldiers and airmen and others who have lost their lives during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. –**SR 958**

Senior Week at the Capitol

February 20th to February 26th was designated as Senior Week at the Capitol. This resolution recognizes Georgia's senior citizens for their accomplishments and contributions to the state. Additionally, this resolution serves to raise awareness of the needs of the growing population of Georgia's senior citizens. –**SR710**

Georgia State University's Legislative Health Policy Certificate Program and Advanced Health Policy Institute

On Thursday, the Senate recognized the Georgia Health Policy Center at Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University for the work they have done in educating members of the healthcare and healthcare policy communities. Several elected General Assembly, including Sen. Charlie Bethel, Sen. Valencia Seay, and Sen. Buddy Carter and certain members of the General Assembly staff were recognized for earning health policy certificates through Georgia State University. –**SR857**

Superbowl Champion Deon Grant Honored

Deon Grant of Augusta, Ga. was honored with a resolution crafted by Sen. Hardie Davis (D-Augusta) on Friday in the Senate Chamber. Grant is a member of the 2012 New York Giants Superbowl Championship team and a graduate of T. W. Josey High School in Augusta. –**SR 855**