



This Week in the Senate

March 5-March 9

Balanced Budget Amendment

Wednesday, the Georgia State Senate passed Senate Resolution 673 authored by Sen. Bill Cowsert (R-Athens) with a vote of 30 to 20. SR 673 petitions the United States Congress to call a convention for the purpose of proposing a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. The resolution recommends that the total of all federal appropriations made by the Congress for any fiscal year may not exceed that total of all estimated federal revenue for that fiscal year. An exception would be made during the state of a national emergency. — **SR 673**

Purple Heart License Tag

Sen. Ed Harbison (D-Columbus) proposed SB473 to allow active duty or reserve service members to be eligible for the Purple Heart license tag. Currently, the Purple Heart license tag is only available to discharged veterans who received a Purple Heart citation. The bill passed with a vote of 54-0. —**SB473**

Social Responsibility and Accountability Act

The Georgia Senate passed SB 292, also known as the Social Responsibility and Accountability Act, on Wednesday by a vote of 35 to 18. Sponsored by Sen. John Albers (R-Roswell), this legislation requires recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to undergo drug screening to determine welfare eligibility. If passed, this legislation would set a precedent for the operation of state-run welfare programs. —**SB292**

Professional Development Activities for Recipients of Food Stamps

SB 312 passed the Senate on Wednesday by a vote of 40 to 14. Sponsored by Sen. William Ligon (R-Brunswick), this bill would require recipients of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to work toward a general educational development diploma (GED), pursue technical education, attend self-development classes, enroll in an adult literacy classes, or pursue other similar professional growth activities. The ultimate goal of this legislation is aimed at lessening the public's dependency on government entitlement programs while also encouraging a greater measure of self-sufficiency and personal accountability. —**SB312**

Postsecondary Education and Immigration

Senate Bill 458, which would require the verified citizen status of all applicants for public benefits, passed the Georgia Senate Monday. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Barry Loudermilk (R-Cassville) and passed with a 34-19 vote. —**SB458**

State Health Benefit Plan and Abortion Coverage

Senate Bill 438, which seeks to prohibit the State Health Benefit Plan from providing abortion coverage, passed the Senate Wednesday in a 33- 18 vote. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Mike Crane (R-Newnan).—**SB438**

Disposition of Firearms

Wednesday, Sen. Don Balfour (R-Snellville) authored SB350, which would require that firearms used in the commission of a crime be returned to their innocent owners when it is no longer needed for evidentiary purposes. Additionally, the legislation provides options for the disposal of forfeited and abandoned firearms by law enforcement agencies and the state. The bill passed 49-4. **—SB350**

Authorization for Individuals 18 to 21 to Carry Firearms

Senate Bill 493, which authorizes properly trained 18 to 21 year olds to be issued a weapons carry license, passed the Georgia Senate Wednesday. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Barry Loudermilk (R-Cassville) and passed by a 41-13 vote. **—SB493**

Local Government Prohibited from Further Constraining Knife Use

Legislation sponsored by Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen) passed the Senate 41-12 on Wednesday. SB 432 would prohibit any county, municipality, or consolidated government from constraining the possession, manufacture, sale, or transfer of a knife more restrictively than is otherwise provided in the Code part regarding the carrying and possession of firearms. This restriction does not apply to the local government's regulation of knives in courthouses or government buildings. **—SB 432**

Restrictions on Picketing and Organized Labor

Sen. Don Balfour (R-Snellville) sponsored SB 469 which will place restrictions on mass picketing, require right to work notices, require annual authorization of union dues and establish "conspiracy to commit criminal trespass" as a high and aggravated misdemeanor. The bill passed Wednesday, 34-18. **—SB 469**

Assessments of Schools and School Systems Using Numerical and Letter Grades

Monday, President Pro Tempore Tommie Williams (R-Lyons) passed SB 410 which adopts indicators such as quality of learning by students, financial efficiency and school climate for individual schools and school systems. The legislation requires a numerical score rating for individual schools and school systems based on student achievement, achievement gap closure and student progress. The bill passed with a vote of 38-13. **—SB410**

Broadened Child-Abuse Reporting Rules

The Georgia Senate passed SB 355 on Monday by a vote of 49 to 2. Sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford), this legislation would provide a greater level of accountability in cases of suspected child abuse by extending the reporting requirement beyond those directly responsible for the child's care. Under this legislation, an individual must provide a detailed, oral report to law enforcement no later than 72 hours after the alleged incident. Communications between an attorney and their clients are exempt from this reporting requirement. Members of the clergy are also exempt from this mandatory reporting requirement when the information reported is considered confidential. **—SB355**

Urge Congress to Pass Balanced Budget Amendment

Sen. Judson Hill (R-Marietta) sponsored SR 766 on Wednesday. SR 766 will seek to urge the United States Congress to adopt and to submit to the states a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution. The resolution passed, 34-16. **—SR 766**

Religious Exemption for Contraception Coverage

SB460, introduced by Sen. Josh McKoon (R-Columbus), would exempt religious employers from the health insurance mandate requiring contraceptive coverage. A "Religious employer" must meet three requirements. First, it must have a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit designation from the IRS, as well as be organized and operated for religious purposes. Second, it must have as one of its primary purposes the inculcation of religious values. Last, it must employ primarily persons who share its religious tenets. The bill passed Wednesday 38-15.—**SB460**

Nurses and Pharmacists Allowance of Administering Vaccines

Sen. Charlie Bethel (R-Dalton) sponsored SB 288 that would allow pharmacists and nurses to administer all other vaccines, exempting human papillomavirus, to patients over the age of nineteen. Additionally, it restricts pharmacists and nurses from administering any vaccine, including the influenza vaccine, to a person under the age of 19 without an individual prescription. Under current law, pharmacists and nurses are only permitted to administer influenza vaccines. The bill passed with a vote of 43-7. —**SB288**

Medical Identity Fraud Considered Felony

Senate Bill 431 passed the Senate on Monday, which creates and classifies the crime of medical identity fraud as a felony offense in Georgia. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Judson Hill (R-Marietta) and passed in a 51-0 vote. The bill will prosecute any person who willfully and fraudulently uses another person's identifying information for the purpose of obtaining medical care, prescription drugs, or financial gain, without that person's authorization or consent will be prosecuted. This statute includes deceased persons, fictitious persons, and children under 18 over whom the accused has custodial authority. -**SB 431**

Handicap Accessible Taxicabs

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) proposed legislation allowing handicap accessible taxicabs that already have a certificate of public necessity and convenience (CPNC) from at least one Georgian county or city to operate in other counties. The local government that issues the CPNC may also issue a distinctive decal for display on these vehicles. The bill passed 50-0 on Monday. —**SB373**

Authorization for Nurses to Use Radiographic Imaging Tests

Legislation allowing advanced practice registered nurses to order radiographic imaging tests in accordance with a nurse protocol agreement passed the Senate on Monday. Under this legislation, nurses would be granted access to order radiographic tests, regardless of whether a situation is life-threatening or not. This bill, sponsored by Sen. Johnny Grant (R-Milledgeville), passed with a vote of 32-19. —**SB386**

Electric Utility Smart Readers

The Senate passed SB 459 on Wednesday by a vote of 37-13. Sen. David Shafer (R-Duluth) sponsored SB 459 which would authorize the Public Service Commission (PSC) to allow consumers to not use electric smart meters. The PSC may levy a surcharge for such election by consumers. —**SB 459**

Land Bank Act

The Land Bank Act, sponsored by Sen. Tim Golden (R-Valdosta), passed the Senate on Monday. It governs the creation and operation of land banks after July 1, 2012. Under this legislation, counties, municipal corporations and consolidated governments can combat abandoned, dilapidated, and tax delinquent property by establishing land banks to purchase such property. After purchasing such property, the land bank may transfer or sell them to parties who will use the land for publicly beneficial uses. The bill passed with a vote of 49-0. —**SB 284**

Music Therapist Legislation

The Georgia Senate passed SB 414 on Monday by a vote of 33 to 17. Sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford), this legislation would require music therapists practicing in Georgia to be licensed by the Secretary of State. - **SB414**

Redefinition of “Rural Area”

Under legislation proposed by Sen. Greg Goggans (R-Douglas), the term “rural area” for purposes of the Patient Self-referral Act of 1993 means an area that is not defined under federal regulations as an urban area. The Senate passed the bill 50-0 on Monday. —**SB470**

Repealing of Specified Healthcare Organizations

The Senate passed SB 407 unanimously on Monday. Sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford), this legislation would repeal the section of Georgia Code responsible for the creation of the Health Strategies Council and the Clinical Laboratory, Blood Bank and Tissue Bank Committee. —**SB407**

“Development Authority” Legislation

Monday, the Senate passed SB 257 by a 50-0 vote. The legislation sponsored by Sen. Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) would change the definition of “development authority” to include the purpose of promoting the redevelopment of trade, commerce, industry, and employment opportunities. This legislation changes the training requirements associated with development and redevelopment programs. —**SB257**

Public Service Commission Chairperson Appointment

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) proposed legislation which would specify the term of the Public Service Commission (PSC) Chairperson, as well as how the chairperson is selected. The chairperson will be chosen by a majority of the PSC members to serve a two year term. Any three members may call for a chairperson election at any time, as long as there are no more than two elections per calendar year. Furthermore, a member can only serve as chairperson for two consecutive terms. The bill passed Monday, 34-18.—**SB483**

Crabbing Licensure

The Georgia Senate passed SB 464 unanimously on Monday. Sponsored by Sen. William Ligon (R-Brunswick), this legislation would limit the availability of new commercial crabbing licenses while also responsibly managing Georgia’s natural resources. -**SB464**

Administrative Procedures Act: Annual Reports

A bill authored by Sen. Ross Tolleson (R-Perry) requires that each agency must provide annual reports detailing applicable federal mandates that require administrative action for rules and regulations. Further, the reports must detail federal and state regulatory duplicity. On Monday, the bill passed 48-1. —**SB 428**

Electronic Prior Authorization of Drug Requests

Sen. Buddy Carter (R-Pooler) sponsored legislation that would require the Insurance Commissioner to adopt standards for e-prior authorization requests between pharmacy benefits managers and health care providers. These standards are to be consistent with those adopted by the National Council of Prescription Drug Programs. The bill passed Monday, 43-2. —**SB 416**

Creation of Georgia Sheriffs' Cooperative Authority

Sen. Johnny Grant (R-Milledgeville) sponsored legislation that will seek to create the Georgia Sheriffs' Cooperative Authority. The Cooperative Authority will establish a representative group able to act on behalf of sheriffs who work for the state. The bill passed Wednesday, 51-0. —**SB 411**

Number of Judges Increased in Certain Judicial Circuits

SB 356, sponsored by Sen. Jack Murphy (R-Cumming), would increase the number of superior court judges in both the Bell-Forsyth Circuit and Middle Circuit from two to three. The bill passed 52-2 on Wednesday. — **SB 356**

Continuing Competency Requirements for Nurses

Sen. Buddy Carter (R-Pooler) sponsored legislation that requires nurses to meet continuing education requirements as a condition of licensure renewal. The bill passed on Wednesday, 51-1. — **SB 368**

Prescriptions Drug Orders/ Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency

Sen. Buddy Carter (R-Pooler) sponsored SB 380 which will revise requirements for security paper for prescription drug orders. The bill will also authorize the Board of Pharmacy to register an out-of-state pharmacy that mail drugs to Georgia residents, authorize the Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency to accept donations or grants of funds or property and clarify that pharmacists in Georgia may fill prescriptions written by out-of-state health care professionals. The bill passed Wednesday, 50-0. —**SB 380**

Georgia Trauma Care Network Commission

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R- Chickamauga) sponsored legislation that would require the Georgia Trauma Network Commission to make annual reports to the House and Senate Health and Human Services Committees on funds distributed to providers. Wednesday, the bill passed, 52-0. —**SB 489**

Contracts for Public Works Construction and Heavy Equipment Purchases

SB 492, sponsored by Sen. Jeff Mullis (R- Chickamauga) will prohibit a governmental entity from requiring or prohibiting bidders for public works construction contracts from entering into certain labor agreements. The bill will also authorize the award of contracts for state purchases of heavy equipment to one or more qualified bidders. The bill passed on Wednesday, 42-10. -**SB 492**

Extension of Immunity to Graduate Medical Education Providers

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) sponsored SB 506 which will extend the state sovereign immunity granted to state officers or employees to certain health care providers. The General Assembly recognizes there is a shortage of quality health care providers in this state, and even more acutely so in rural areas of the state. In an effort to address this shortage, this bill intends to provide protection to those health care providers enrolled in certain graduate medical education programs or affiliated with certain Georgia hospitals. The bill passed Wednesday, 49-3. -**SB 506**

Bridge Renamed in Honor of Bert Ward

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) sponsored a resolution to dedicate a bridge in Catoosa County as the Bert Ward Memorial Bridge. The resolution passed 54-0. -**SR 843**

Multistate Health Insurance Market

The Georgia Insurance Commissioner would be allowed to set coverage standards for the regional reciprocal sales of health insurance across state lines under SB 471, which passed the Senate today. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Judson Hill (R-Marietta) and will now transfer to the House of Representatives after a 36 to 16 vote. -**SB 471**

Granting of Restrictive Easements

SR873 by Sen. Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) is a resolution authorizing the granting of restrictive easements to Central Georgia Joint Development Authority, Georgia Department of Transportation, Greystone Power Corporation, Flint EMC, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Power Company, Jackson EMC, John S. Braddy and L & M Farms, Inc., to operate and maintain facilities, utilities, and egress and ingress on property in the counties listed above. Wednesday, the bill passed 55-0. -**SR873**

Local Governments Taxing Pawnbrokers

Sen. Ronnie Chance (R-Tyrone) authored SB379, which prohibits local governments from collecting fees or taxes on pawn transactions. However, this preclusion does not affect local occupation taxes or business licenses. Existing local ordinances levying these fees are grandfathered. The bill passed 29-24 on Wednesday. -**SB379**

Standards-Based Grading for Schools

SB 364 did not pass the Senate Wednesday. Sponsored by Sen. William Ligon (R-Brunswick), this legislation would have prohibited local school boards from implementing standards-based grading beyond the third grade. -**SB 364**

11th Annual Clergy Day

On Monday, the Senate celebrated the 11th Annual Clergy Day. Sen. Donzella James (D-Atlanta) honored numerous members of clergy community and presented them with a resolution. Clergy Day is dedicated to thanking every member of the clergy for their devotion to serving Georgians. -**SR 968**

Child Fatality Review Panel of the Year

Child Fatality Review Committees work to reduce the instances of child abuse and fatality in the state. This year, the Gwinnett County division was chosen as Child Fatality Review Panel of the Year. Members of the Gwinnett County Chapter were recognized in the Senate Chamber by Sen. Gloria Butler (D-Stone Mountain). –**SR786**

March for Dimes

Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford) sponsored a resolution in honor of the March for Dimes. The organization is currently leading a nationwide effort to prevent preterm births through funding research, supporting local programs that offer hope, helping families with an infant in intensive care, and advocating for public policies that will ultimately improve birth outcomes. Members of March for Dimes were present at the Capitol on Monday to receive the resolution. –**SR 1086**

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