



# This Week in the Senate

*January 21-25, 2013*

*Review your week in pictures with the Georgia State Senate's Facebook photo essays!*



## **A Message From Senate President Pro Tempore David Shafer**

“The leadership of the Georgia State Senate may have changed in 2013, but our most important legislative responsibility remains the same, and that is to be good stewards of Georgia’s tax dollars. The Georgia General Assembly recessed this week to allow the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to begin a careful review of Georgia’s financial health and spending priorities. Although spending cuts are sometimes painful, it is important for us to figure out how to do more with less. The people of Georgia are counting on us to safeguard their hard earned dollars, keep the budget balanced and pursue policies that will help our economy grow again.”

*-Sen. David Shafer (R – Duluth)*

## **Governor Opens Budget Discussions**

Gov. Nathan Deal opened this week’s joint House and Senate Appropriations meeting by highlighting measures of success in education, workforce development, and job creation. Gov. Deal challenged lawmakers to join him in moving forward with a focus on progress in issues like public safety, education, healthcare, and economic development.



## **Dr. Kenneth Heaghney Briefs Legislators on State, National Economic Outlook**

Georgia State University professor and state economist Dr. Kenneth Heaghney’s presentation focused on economic trends both nationally and in the state, with emphasis on positive state revenue growth. While Georgia’s consumer spending is projected to be slow in early 2013, an increase is anticipated during the second half of the year. It is expected that 63,000 new jobs will be created at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2013. In addition, Georgia’s inflation forecast remains low and positive trends in the housing market indicate Georgia’s economy is recovering.

## **State Agencies Present Budgets**

The Georgia General Assembly will work together over the next few weeks to ensure all state operations are properly funded without overspending. In addition to setting the framework for the FY 2014 budget, the FY 2013 budget must be revised to account for unexpected expenses and growth.

## **Presenting Agencies**

*This is an incomplete list of state agencies, but all agency budget presentations can be viewed online at [gpb.org](http://gpb.org).*

### ***Department of Education (GDOE)***

State Superintendent Dr. John Barge reported Georgia's K-12 school enrollment has grown tremendously, including its virtual student body population. Overall, enrollment has increased exponentially since July 1, 2012. Gov. Deal recommended \$147 million to fully fund the K-12 student increase, and for the first time since 2008, Georgia's Quality Basic Education Equalization program will be funded completely to better assist low-income school systems. In addition, the FY 2014 budget allocated funds to restore the full 180-day school calendar for pre-K and a 3 percent increase in HOPE scholarships and grants.

### ***Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)***

Commissioner Avery Niles stated the DJJ faces key challenges of providing housing for its population. The proposed budget addresses this issue with \$4.7 million to open the new Rockdale Regional Youth Detention Center and a new 30-bed Youth Development Campus (YDC). The DJJ proposed using technology to offer more online classes as a way of enhancing the education of its students in YDCs which could save nearly \$1 million over the next two years.

### ***Department of Transportation (GDOT)***

Commissioner Keith Golden recommended spending \$245 million of the FY 2013 amended state motor fuel funds to reduce debt. The GDOT proposed to use \$9.1 million from their amended FY 2013 budget for a Department of Public Safety trooper school agreement, which will assist in traffic management. Comm'r Golden also requested \$1.7 million for capital construction projects and \$3.17 million for Local Maintenance and Improvement Grants, which are distributed back to local governments to repair public roads.

### ***Georgia Ports Authority (GPA)***

Georgia ports comprised 7.8 percent of the state's gross domestic product, totaling \$32.4 billion, as reported by Executive Director Curtis Foltz. Georgia's deep-water ports and inland barge terminals support more than 352,000 jobs throughout the state annually and contribute \$18.5 billion in income, \$66.9 billion in revenue and \$2.5 billion in state and local taxes. The port of Savannah was the second busiest U.S. container port for the export of American goods by tonnage in FY 2011, but it is the shallowest major port river in the world. Gov. Deal recommended \$50 million in bonds for the Savannah Harbor Expansion Program (SHEP) for FY 2014, increasing total state funding for the deepening project to \$231.1 million. SHEP's total cost projected to be \$652 million.

### ***Department of Economic Development (GDECD)***

Commissioner Chris Cummiskey focused on business recruitment and retention in four core areas: international trade, tourism, arts development and the film, music and digital entertainment industry. The GDECD served 11,000 Georgia companies last year striking 311 deals with total revenue of \$40 million. Tax revenue from tourism increased by 10 percent in 2012, which sustained 400,000 tourism jobs while Georgia's film, music and digital entertainment industry revenue increased by \$190 million last year.

### ***Department of Revenue (GDOR)***

GDOR Commissioner Doug MacGinnitie reported great improvement in the agency over the past year. GDOR's fight against fraud increased to 160,000 cases, blocking \$117 million in FY 2012 from going to the wrong people. The compliance efforts reached a high in FY 2012 with 304,000 cases, totaling \$270 million. The agency is now requesting \$16-\$20 million in bonds over a two year period and \$10 million for FY 2014.

### ***Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)***

Commissioner Frank Berry stated the DBHDD is currently operating under two settlement agreements with the U.S. Department of Justice - the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA settlement is set to expire on June 2015. DOBHDD proposed a one-time use of Federal funds to offset the \$9.7 million deficit in order to ensure citizens continue to receive the best care possible.

### **Nurses Hold Legislative Day at the Gold Dome**

More than 1,000 nurses gathered at the State Capitol on Thursday to ask lawmakers to support bills to make their jobs more effective and less restricted by government regulations. According to the Georgia Nurses Association (GNA), a record number of nurses registered to attend.

"Nurses have long been advocates for quality healthcare and patient safety, and they are vital to the future of care delivery," said GNA President Sheila Warren in a prepared statement. "The Legislative Day gives nurses from all areas of practice the opportunity to speak with one strong voice on Georgia's health care system."



# # # #

*The Senate Press Office is located at 201 Paul D. Coverdell Legislative Office Building, 18 Capitol Square, Atlanta, Georgia 30334. We can be reached at 404.656.0028 or outside the Atlanta area 800.282.5803*