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This Week in the Senate

January 9-12, 2017



The Senate Convenes in 2017

The Georgia Senate convened on Monday, January 9, for the beginning of the first session of the 154th Georgia General Assembly with four new members—Senators Lee Anderson (R - Grovetown), Tonya Anderson (D - Lithonia), Matt Brass (R - Newnan) and Blake Tillery (R - Vidalia).

We were sworn in by one of our former colleagues, newly appointed Court of Appeals Judge Charlie Bethel. His successor, Chuck Payne, who won a special election run off on Tuesday, visited the Senate Chamber on Wednesday. He will be sworn in next week once the election returns are certified.

Governor Nathan Deal outlined his budget recommendations in Wednesday's "State of the State" address. The Appropriations Committees will hold joint budget hearings starting next Tuesday. Governor Deal has proposed a 2% salary increase to the pay scale for all state teacher positions and a 2% raise for state employees. His budget also reflects a proposal to increase pay by 19% for DFCS caseworkers.

Governor Deal also announced coverage for autism treatment under Medicaid and the State Health Benefits Plan will be extended to age 21. He thanked Senator Renee Unterman (R - Buford), Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, for her hard work on this issue.

The Committee on Assignments completed standing committee assignments. Two members will chair standing committees for the first time in their legislative careers. Senator Ellis Black (R - Valdosta) will chair the Retirement Committee and Senator Ben Watson (R - Savannah) the Redistricting and Reapportionment Committee. Two of our other sophomores, Senators P.K. Martin (R - Lawrenceville) and Larry Walker III (R - Perry), will join the Governor's floor leadership team.

We heard from noted economist Dr. Roger Tutterow at our annual Senate Welcome Breakfast. He predicted continued growth of Georgia's economy. I hope and sense he is right. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the General Assembly as we meet the opportunities and challenges facing Georgia.

Sen. David J. Shafer

President Pro Tempore, Georgia Senate

MONDAY, JANUARY 9

Senators Sworn in for the 2017 Legislative Session

Lt. Governor Casey Cagle welcomed 55 senators to launch the beginning of the 2017 legislative session. All senators were sworn in by Georgia Court of Appeals Judge and former state Senator Charlie Bethel.

Sen. David Shafer Re-Elected as President Pro Tempore

Members of the Senate unanimously approved the re-election of Sen. David Shafer (R - Duluth) as President Pro Tempore for the 154th General Assembly. This will be Sen. Shafer's third term as President Pro Tempore. He will serve as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Administrative Affairs. Sen. Shafer, first elected in 2002, is the 68th person to serve as President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

David Cook Re-Elected as Secretary of the Senate

David Cook was confirmed to serve his fourth term as Secretary of the Senate and was sworn into office by Lt. Governor Casey Cagle. Sec. Cook formerly served as Commissioner of the Department of Community Health under Governor Nathan Deal. He is also a former President of the Medical Association of Georgia.



Senate Passes First Resolutions of the Legislative Session

Sen. David Shafer (R – Duluth) sponsored Senate Resolutions 1 through 4.

SR 1 approves the adoption of the Senate Rules for the 2017-2018 legislative term. SR 2 states that the Senate has convened for the 2017 legislative session and SR 3 notifies the governor that the General Assembly has convened. SR 4, the biennial housekeeping resolution, sets provisions for the 154th General Assembly. – **SR 1, 2, 3 & 4**

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10

Service Providers' Association for Developmental Disabilities Day

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) sponsored Senate Resolution 8 recognizing January 12, 2017, as Service Providers' Association for Developmental Disabilities (SPADD) Day at the Capitol. SPADD is a coalition of public and private providers whose purpose is to improve the quality of education by providers and partners around the community. – **SR 8**



Clayton State University Day

Senate Resolution 9, sponsored by Sen. Gail Davenport (D – Jonesboro), recognizes January 10, 2017, as Clayton State University Day at the Capitol. SR 9 commends the University for its growth in size and prestige. Clayton State University, established in 1969, boasts an enrollment of 6,900 students. – **SR 9**

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11

State of the State Address

On Wednesday, Governor Nathan Deal gave his State of the State Address, and in doing so, gave highlights of his fiscal year 2018 budget proposal and his amended fiscal year 2017 budget. In his address to the Georgia General Assembly, Governor Deal wanted us to “accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, and don’t mess with Mr. In-Between.” He addressed topics like education, in which he proposed a pay increase for teachers and a funding increase for K-12 education. He also proposed a pay increase for service workers and police officers, and announced a new Cyber Innovation and Training Center to be built in Augusta. To improve services for our veterans, he proposed increased funding to remove barriers to mental health service for veterans and introduced a women veterans coordinator position.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12

Tucker County Commissioner Joe E. Burgess Recognized and Commended

Senate Resolution 12, sponsored by Sen. Greg Kirk (R – Americus), recognizes and commends Tucker County Commissioner Joe E. Burgess for his dedication to Georgia and his community. Burgess is the second-longest serving minority county commissioner in the state of Georgia, serving since 1985. – **SR 12**



Budget hearings will be held on **TUESDAY, JANUARY 17 AND WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18** in Room 341 of the Georgia State Capitol.

The Georgia Senate will reconvene at 10:00 a.m. on **MONDAY, JANUARY 23.**