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This Week in the Senate

February 14 - February 17, 2017



Working Towards Sine Die

This week marks the halfway point for the 2017 Legislative Session, ending on Friday with Day 20.

The Senate has been hard at work, with back-to-back committee meetings and hearings. A total of 11 general Senate Bills made it to the Senate floor this week. Senate Bill 89, the “Georgia Right Track Act”, creates the Georgia Freight Rail Program within the Department of Transportation and provides a framework to expand and improve the state’s rail system. Backed by both the Department of Transportation and the Georgia Ports Authority, it will relieve freight traffic congestion on the state’s highways and roads and extend the economic benefits of the Savannah harbor expansion to all parts of Georgia.

Other bills dealt with gun carry rights for retired peace officers, bankruptcy exemptions for health savings accounts, the egregious practice of “upskirting,” regulations for durable medical equipment providers and changes to our medical cannabis law. Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia), a freshman who has yet to present his first bill to the full Senate, has nonetheless proven himself a skillful drafter of floor amendments, perfecting the bills of others like a seasoned veteran and raising expectations for his own first bill.

House Bill 43, the Amended Fiscal Year 2017 State Budget, was given final passage by both the House and Senate and then signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal. Now our attention turns to House Bill 44, the Fiscal Year 2018 State Budget, which is still working its way through the House. Passing a balanced budget is our only constitutionally mandated duty, and it takes the bulk of our energy. We are fortunate to have Sen. Jack Hill (R – Reidsville) at the helm of our Senate Appropriations Committee. I have not been privileged to serve with a finer legislator or more capable steward of our tax dollars than Sen. Hill.

We will reconvene next Tuesday for Day 21. The days will grow longer and our calendars fuller as we approach Crossover Day, Day 28. If you have any questions, comments or ideas, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sen. David J. Shafer
President Pro Tempore, Georgia Senate

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Requiring Durable Medical Equipment Suppliers to be Licensed

Senate Bill 41, sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), would require the Georgia State Board of Pharmacy (GSBP) to license durable medical equipment suppliers. Applicants must apply for a license through the GSBP to maintain an office in Georgia, pay a fee and meet all safety requirements set by the Board. Under SB 41, a license is effective for 36 months. SB 41 passed with a vote of 40 to 8. – **SB 41**

A More In-Depth Guideline for Discharging Judgments Against Certain Property

Sen. Jesse Stone (R – Waynesboro) sponsored Senate Bill 87, which would provide procedural guidelines for debtors to cancel judgments against property that is exempt due to either federal or state bankruptcy statutes. SB 87 passed with a vote of 49 to 1. – **SB 87**

School Districts Call for Referendum for the Levy of Taxes

Senate Resolution 95, sponsored by Sen. Ellis Black (R – Valdosta), would allow for public school districts with one or more independent school districts in the same county to call for a referendum to levy a one percent sales and use tax. The proceeds of the tax would be distributed between the county's school districts and the independent school districts based on either the student enrollment in each district or an agreement between the county and independent school systems. SR 95 passed with a vote of 47 to 5. – **SR 95**

Amended Fiscal Year 2017 Budget

Sen. Jack Hill (R – Reidsville) carried House Bill 43, the amended Fiscal Year 2017 Budget. The Senate agreed to the House of Representatives substitute and passed HB 43 with a vote of 53 to 0. HB 43 was then transmitted to the House immediately. – **HB 43**

Recognizing Garrett Geros

Senate Resolution 97, sponsored by Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White), commends Garrett Geros for his continued commitment to athleticism and spirit for life, despite losing a leg after a car accident in the summer of 2016. He has demonstrated a commitment to excellence in his academics at Cartersville High School and is a member of the Cartersville High School football team. He also displayed exemplary team spirit by supporting his team as they completed their second undefeated 2016 season. – **SR 97**



Honoring Olivia Glenn

Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White) sponsored Senate Resolution 98 honoring Olivia Glenn for her constant strength and inspiring hope during her battle with pediatric cancer. Glenn was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare childhood bone cancer, at 11 years old and later developed acute myeloid leukemia as a result of the chemotherapy treatment. She has undergone more than four surgeries and five types of chemotherapy, but despite all of it she celebrated her 13th birthday on Valentine's Day. – **SR 98**

Congratulating Evans "Duck" Moore

Senate Resolution 142, sponsored by Sen. Lee Anderson (R – Grovetown), congratulates Evans "Duck" Moore for celebrating his 100th birthday. Moore served in the United States military during World War II. As a resident of Wilkes County, he leads by example by showing his community how to serve those around them, their state and their country. – **SR 142**

Honoring Senator Judson Hill

Sen. Michael Rhett (D – Marietta) honored Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta) with Senate Resolution 211 following his resignation on Monday, February 13. Sen. Hill served Senate District 32, which encompasses portions of Cobb and Fulton Counties, since 2004 and was most recently the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. He addressed the Senate body with an emotional address, saying, “I am proud, honored and especially blessed to have served with you all and call you friends of a lifetime.” – **SR 211**



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Prohibition of “Upskirting”

Senate Bill 45, sponsored by Sen. Larry Walker III (R – Perry), would forbid the use of a electronic device to observe, film, video record or photograph under or through an individual’s clothing in an attempt to view intimate parts of the body or undergarments where the person has a reasonable expectation of privacy. Such conduct is considered criminal regardless of whether the act occurs in a public place. SB 45 passed with a vote of 49 to 0. – **SB 45**

Space Flight Activities Tort Exemptions

Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick) sponsored Senate Bill 46, which would provide operators of space flight activities immunity from any lawsuits if the spaceflight participants become injured during spaceflight except in cases where operators are negligent or act with intentional misconduct. SB 46 passed with a vote of 49 to 2. – **SB 46**

Georgia Right Track Act

Sen. David Shafer (R – Duluth) sponsored Senate Bill 89, the “Georgia Right Track Act,” which would provide investments for railways, railroad facilities and railroad equipment. This bill would enhance the state’s investment in freight rail projects and help support a safe and balanced transportation system. SB 89 passed with a vote of 49 to 0. – **SB 89**

Georgia Farm Bureau Day

Sen. John Wilkinson (R – Toccoa) sponsored Senate Resolution 82, recognizing February 15, 2017, as Georgia Farm Bureau Federation Day at the state Capitol. The Georgia Farm Bureau Federation was formed in 1937 and has grown into a diverse organization with more than 300,000 members and 158 county chapters. – **SR 82**



Marietta City Schools Honored at the Capitol

Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R – Marietta) introduced Senate Resolution 178, honoring Marietta City Schools for being named the 2016 Georgia Charter System Innovator of the Year. Marietta City Schools have been diligent in removing barriers to success so each and every student can be successful, graduate college and be ready to enter the workforce. – **SR 178**

Calhoun County Charter System of the Year

Sen. Chuck Hufstetler (R – Rome) sponsored Senate Resolution 179, honoring Calhoun City Schools for being named the 2016 Charter System of the Year. Calhoun City Schools have exhibited excellence in leadership, partnerships, governance and achievement. They boast a 97 percent graduation rate and have outperformed their traditional counterparts in every academic milestone, have maintained other charter systems and have played an instrumental role in the charter system community. – **SR 179**



Miss Apple Capital

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega) sponsored Senate Resolution 183 congratulating Taylor Burrell for being named Miss Apple Capital 2017. Miss Apple Capital is a Miss America preliminary pageant, which is the largest provider of scholarships to young women in Georgia. Ms. Burrell is a sophomore at the University of West Georgia (UWG), a member of the school's Honor College, on the Dean's list and was nominated to represent UWG at the Congress of Future Medical Leaders in 2015. – **SR 183**

Miss Teen Apple Capital

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega) sponsored Senate Resolution 198, congratulating Chandler Sherry for being named Miss Apple Capital's Outstanding Teen 2017. She is using her platform titled "It's your future, vote on it" to bring awareness and to educate teens about the importance of voting while also helping register young people to vote. Ms. Sherry is a junior honor roll student at Walton High School, the executive vice president of the Student Government Association and represents the Cobb County Chamber of Commerce Youth Leadership Council. – **SR 198**

Cordele - Crisp County Fish Fry

Sen. Greg Kirk (R – Americus) sponsored Senate Resolution 213, recognizing the annual Cordele-Crisp County Fish Fry at the Capitol. SR 213 also recognizes the Cordele City Commission, the Board of Commissioners of Crisp County, the Cordele-Crisp Chamber of Commerce and the Cordele-Crisp County Fish Fry team. – **SR 213**



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Weapons Carry License for Retired Disabled Law Enforcement Officers

Senate Bill 15, sponsored by Sen. Michael Rhett (D – Marietta), authorizes retired disabled law enforcement officers to obtain a free weapons carry license if they have served for at least 10 years or left their position due to an injury suffered in the line of duty. SB 15 also requires that law enforcement officers comply with other stipulations regarding the weapons carry license. SB15 passed with a vote of 51 to 0. – **SB 15**

Regulation of Low THC Oil

Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah) sponsored Senate Bill 16, which will decrease the tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in Georgia’s medical cannabis oil to three percent. SB 16 amends qualifying conditions to include autism spectrum disorders. When diagnosed with autism, patients 18 years of age or older who suffer from severe autism, or those under 18 with authorization from a physician, will be allowed to receive low THC oil. SB 16 passed with a vote of 41 to 12. – **SB 16**

Georgia Science Teachers Association

Senate Resolution 60, sponsored by Sen. Butch Miller (R – Gainesville), recognizes the Georgia Science Teacher Association (GSTA) for their outstanding work in educating Georgia’s students. GSTA is an organization that allows science teachers to work together to provide students with an advanced science education. – **SR 60**



Harlem High School Softball Team

Sen. Lee Anderson (R – Grovetown) sponsored Senate Resolution 111 congratulating the Harlem High School softball team for winning the 2016 GHSA Class AA State Championship. The Senate recognizes the support from the community and the commitment of Coach Mike Leverett. The softball team obtained five successive Class AA Region Four titles and marked 2016 as their best season in Harlem High history with a record of 35 to 4. – **SR 111**

New Americans Day at the Capitol

Sen. Steve Henson (D – Stone Mountain) sponsored Senate Resolution 137 recognizing March 7, 2017, as New Americans Day at the Capitol. Over 200 new Americans will be welcomed to the Capitol’s third annual United States Citizenship and Immigration Service Naturalization Ceremony. There are nearly one million immigrants who reside in Georgia who contribute to the state’s growing and blended population. – **SR 137**

Family and Consumer Sciences Recognized at the Capitol

Senate Resolution 161, sponsored by Sen. Marty Harbin (R – Tyrone), recognizes the importance of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) education that helps individuals make sensible decisions about their overall well-being. The objective for FCS is to ensure that families and individuals are prepared to successfully face the varied challenges of everyday life. – **SR 161**

Rome High School Football Team

Senate Resolution 215, sponsored by Sen. Chuck Hufstetler (R – Rome), congratulates the Rome High School Football Team on their outstanding season and winning their first GHSA AAAAA State Football Championship. Head Coach John Reid led his team to success finishing their football season with a record of 13 to 2. The Rome Wolves won the State Championship on December 9, 2016, at the Georgia Dome. – **SR 215**

Kennesaw State University Day at the Capitol

Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R – Marietta) sponsored Senate Resolution 216 recognizing February 16, 2017, as Kennesaw State University Day at the Capitol. Kennesaw State University was chartered in 1963 and boasts an enrollment of over 35,000 graduate and undergraduate students, making it Georgia's third largest university. – **SR 216**

The Senate Honors Pinewood Atlanta Studios

Senate Resolution 217, sponsored by Sen. Marty Harbin (R – Tyrone), honors Pinewood Atlanta Studios for their innovative services and providing an economic boost for the state of Georgia. In the 2016 fiscal year, 245 television and film projects impacted Georgia's economy by providing thousands of jobs for Georgians and promoting small businesses throughout the state. Pinewood Atlanta Studios filmed "Captain America: Civil War" which was the highest grossing film in 2016 and actively partners with the Georgia Film Academy to further the education of film. – **SR 217**

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17

The Fairness, Accountability, Simplification and Transparency (FAST) Act

Sen. Mike Dugan (R – Carrollton) presented Senate Bill 2, formally titled "The FAST Act – Fairness, Accountability, Simplification and Transparency – Empowering Our Small Businesses to Succeed." The bill seeks to remove redundant regulations that make it more difficult to conduct business in Georgia. SB 2 requires an emphasis on a fair system that allows for Georgia's agencies to more easily communicate with businesses in their jurisdictions. It also mandates that agencies that do not meet their own license issuing schedules will have to reduce fees paid by the consumer. This bill is one of the six Senate Majority Caucus priorities and passed 52 to 0. – **SB 2**

The CONNECT Act

Senate Bill 3, or the "Creating Opportunities Needed Now to Expand Credentialed Training Act", sponsored by Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R – Marietta), would encourage high schools and industries to participate in credentialing programs that would allow high school students to earn certified industry credentials while still in school. Areas of focus under this bill include industries in the career, technical and agriculture education programs. If SB 3 becomes law, it would give Georgia's high school students another path to take after they graduate. SB 3 is one of the six Senate Majority Caucus priorities and passed 52 to 0. – **SB 3**

Establishing Technology Standards and Policies for State Agencies

Sen. P.K. Martin IV (R – Lawrenceville) sponsored Senate Bill 117, which would require the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) to establish technology standards and policies for Georgia's governmental agencies within the Executive Branch. However, GTA must provide a waiver to agencies if their regulations are inapplicable or do not promote the best interests of Georgia. SB 117 passed 53 to 0. – **SB 117**

Honoring Physicians in the "Scholarship Program"

Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge) sponsored Senate Resolution 117, which honors physicians who have completed the "Scholarship Program," formerly known as the Country Doctor Program, through the Georgia Board of Physician Workforce. The "Scholarship Program" was created in 1952 and provides scholarships to increase the number of physicians and healthcare practitioners. – **SR 117**

Georgia Court Reporting and Captioning Week

Sen. Jesse Stone (R – Waynesboro) presented Senate Resolution 196, establishing February 11-18, 2017, as Georgia Court Reporting and Captioning Week at the Capitol. Court reporters and captioners are responsible for the closed captioning seen scrolling across screens all over the United States, bringing information to millions of deaf and hard-of-hearing Americans every day.— *SR 196*

Recognizing Georgia Federation of Republican Women

Senate Resolution 200, sponsored by Sen. Matt Brass (R – Newnan), commends the Georgia Federation of Republican Women (GFRW) for 60 years of continued service to the Georgia Republican Party. GFRW facilitates cooperation among Republican women’s clubs and promotes an informed electorate through political education and activity. – *SR 200*



The Georgia Senate will reconvene for **DAY 21 at 10:00 a.m. on
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21.**