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This Week in the Senate

March 13 - March 16, 2017



Finalizing the FY18 Budget

Last week we convened Monday through Thursday for Days 32 through 35 of the legislative session. The full Senate took up 17 House Bills and committees held hearings on many more.

On Wednesday, the Senate unanimously passed House Bill 44, the Fiscal Year 2018 General Budget. Senate Appropriations Chairman Jack Hill (R – Reidsville) presented the Senate version of HB 44 and outlined key changes the Senate made. The Senate's version of HB 44 includes an allocation of \$485,000 for the Senate Transparency Project, an effort to upgrade technology so that committee meetings can be "live streamed" on

the Internet. Since there are differences between the Senate's version and the one passed by the House, a Conference Committee has been appointed to work out a compromise. I am proud to serve as one of the conferees and look forward to working with my colleagues to pass a fiscally conservative budget that will benefit all Georgians.

The last two weeks of session will be very busy. We reconvened Monday for Day 36 with seven House Bills on the Senate Rules Calendar. We meet again on Wednesday and Friday and two days the week following with Day 40, *Sine Day*, on Thursday, March 30, 2017. If you have any questions, comments or ideas, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sen. David J. Shafer

President Pro Tempore, Georgia Senate

MONDAY, MARCH 13

Architectural Board Exams

House Bill 41, carried by Sen. Michael Williams (R – Cumming), would allow students who have not yet received their degrees and actively participate in an Integrated Path to Architectural Licensure to sit on an architectural board or exam. HB 41 would not grant a student their license until their architectural degree is complete. HB 41 passed by a vote of 47 to 1. – **HB 41**

Utility Linemen License Plates

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonga) carried House Bill 260 which would recognize Georgia electric utility linemen by creating a license plate in their honor. The bottom of the license plate would feature the phrase "Thank a Lineman," and proceeds would go to the Southeastern Firefighters Burn Foundation, which provides assistance to families of burn patients including transportation, lodging and daily meals. HB 260 passed with a vote of 48 to 1. – **HB 260**

Cystic Fibrosis Education and Awareness Day

Senate Resolution 114, sponsored by Sen. Fran Millar (R – Atlanta), recognizes May 1, 2017, as Cystic Fibrosis Education and Awareness Day at the Capitol. The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation’s mission is to help find a cure for the over 30,000 Americans who suffer from the disease. Cystic fibrosis is a life-threatening genetic disease that causes persistent lung infections and limits the ability to breathe over time. – **SR 114**



Recognizing UAW Region 8

Sen. Steve Henson (D – Stone Mountain) sponsored Senate Resolution 139 recognizing the work of United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) Region 8. UAW represents several workplaces ranging from multinational corporations to small nonprofit organizations. UAW Region 8 has 50,000 members and nearly 103 local unions covering the South-eastern United States including Georgia. – **SR 139**

Georgia’s First State Historical Song, “Kumbaya”

Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick) sponsored Senate Resolution 293 recognizing “Kumbaya” as Georgia’s first state historical song and its significance to the Gullah-Geechee culture. The song was first recorded in Georgia by Robert Winslow Gordon, and has since had a great impact on American culture. – **SR 293**

Valdosta State University Day

Senate Resolution 296, sponsored by Sen. Ellis Black (R – Valdosta), recognizes March 13, 2017, as Valdosta State University (VSU) Day at the Capitol and also commends VSU’s student leaders. VSU has approximately 11,300 undergraduate and graduate students, degrees in over 100 different majors and an outstanding athletic program. – **SR 296**

Georgia Southwestern State University Day

Sen. Freddie Powell Sims (D – Dawson) sponsored Senate Resolution 379 recognizing March 13, 2017, as Georgia Southwestern State (GSW) Day at the Capitol. GSW’s enrollment increased by seven percent in the fall of 2016, and has provided higher education for over 111 years. The university was ranked as the most affordable small college by *Great Value Colleges* and *Best Value Schools* and offers more than 40 degree programs. – **SR 379**

Recognizing Linda A. Klein

Senate Resolution 380, sponsored by Sen. Horacena Tate (D – Atlanta), recognizes Linda A. Klein, who is the current president of the American Bar Association (ABA), the world’s largest voluntary professional association. Linda previously served as chair of the ABA’s house of delegates and she was the first woman elected to serve as president of the State Bar of Georgia. – **SR 380**

St. Patrick’s Day Parade Committee

Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah) sponsored Senate Resolution 382 which recognizes the members of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade Committee, including Chairman Brian Counihan and Grand Marshal Dennis Michael Counihan. The parade will mark the 193rd occasion in which the event has been held in the city of Savannah to celebrate early Irish immigrants who settled in Georgia. – **SR 382**



TUESDAY, MARCH 14

Congressman Rick Allen Welcomed to the Senate

Congressman Rick Allen (GA – 12) was welcomed to the Senate Chamber as a special guest on March 14, 2017. Congressman Allen expressed that he is looking forward to the economic possibilities of Georgia's Cyber Innovation and Training Center that will be located in Augusta. Congressman Allen thanked the Senate for their continuous hard work and their part in helping Georgia remain the number one state in which to do business.

Updating Regulations for Motor Vehicles

Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla) carried House Bill 58 which would update federal regulations regarding the safe operation of motor carriers and commercial motor vehicles. Under HB 58, every commercial vehicle must meet the safety requirements and be in a safe condition by federal regulation standards. This bill also updates the law to match new federal regulations that went into effect January 1, 2017. HB 58 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HB 58**

Expanding Definition of Sexual Abuse

House Bill 86, carried by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) would update the definition of “sexual abuse” to include anyone involved in the trafficking of a person for sexual enslavement. HB 86 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HB 86**

Advertising of Medical Specialty Certification

House Bill 157, carried by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) would repeal requirements for advertising or publicizing medical specialty certification of physicians to the public. HB 157 passed with a vote of 48 to 1. – **HB 157**

Insurance Payment of Claims

Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White) carried House Bill 174 which would grant insurers more payment options when paying for insurance claims. Under this bill, insurers can now use a wire transfer, cashier's check, bank check, electronic funds transfer, gift cards with no expiration date, dormancy fees or any method of payment approved by the Georgia Insurance Commissioner. HB 174 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HB 174**

Income Tax Credit for Establishing or Relocating Quality Jobs

House Bill 265, carried by Sen. Butch Miller (R – Gainesville), would provide a tax credit to employers who create quality jobs in the state. This bill creates a seven year window for employers to benefit from the tax credit. In order to qualify for the tax credit, employers would have to create 50 new quality jobs within two years. HB 265 also provides that properties used in the renovation or expansion of certain qualifying theaters owned by a nonprofit organization will be exempt from sales tax. HB 265 passed with a vote of 34 to 18. – **HB 265**



Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity

Senate Resolution 231, sponsored by Sen. Lester Jackson (D – Savannah), recognizing March 14, 2017, as Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Day at the Capitol. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Indiana University on January 5, 1911, by 10 African-American men. There are now over 130,000 fraternity members around the world who work to train African-American youth for leadership, achievement and human development. – **SR 231**

Recognizing Brian K. Burdette

Sen. Burt Jones (R – Jackson) sponsored Senate Resolution 278 which recognizes Brian K. Burdette's public service to Georgia. In 2007, he was appointed as the 10th Congressional District State School Board representative, and in 2011 was chosen to serve as Chairman of the District Flexibility and Charter Schools Committee. Burdette has earned the respect and admiration of his colleagues through his leadership, patience and sensitivity to the needs of Georgia's citizens. – **SR 278**

George Washington Carver High School Girls Basketball Team

Sen. Ed Harbison (D – Columbus) sponsored Senate Resolution 446 recognizing the George Washington Carver High School girls basketball team for an outstanding season. Head coach Anson Hundley led the team to their first Georgia High School Association (GHSA) championship game where they were named the 2017 GHSA State Runner-Ups. The team worked hard throughout their season ending with an impressive record of 26 to 6. – **SR 446**



Columbus High School Girls Basketball Team

Senate Resolution 447, sponsored by Sen. Ed Harbison (D – Columbus), commended the Columbus High School girls basketball team for their accomplishment of playing in their first Georgia High School Association (GHSA) State Championship game. The Columbus High School girls basketball team and was named the 2017 GHSA AAAA State Champions with a final score of 69 to 67 ending the game in overtime. The Columbus High girls basketball team completed their season with a record of 25 to 5 under the leadership of head coach Joe Cherron. – **SR 447**

Georgia Hospital Community

Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge) sponsored Senate Resolution 389, presented by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), commending the Georgia Hospital Community for its response to Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. Georgia's hospitals responded when Hurricane Matthew hit the state's coast by evacuating patients and residents from coastal counties and accepting hospitalized patients in need of care. Georgia's hospitals have worked hard to prove their commitment to preserving life within their communities. – **SR 389**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

Congressman Buddy Carter Welcomed to the Senate

Congressman Buddy Carter (GA – 01) was welcomed to the Senate Chamber as a special guest on March 15, 2017. Congressman Carter thanked the Senate for their hard work to end opioid abuse, and commended them for their dedication to the citizens of this state.

Real Estate Professionals

Sen. Butch Miller (R – Gainesville) carried House Bill 39 which would modify the disciplinary process and notification requirements for the Georgia Real Estate and Appraisers Commission Board against real estate professionals who are convicted of crimes. HB 39 would also authorize the Board to determine what disciplinary action should be taken on the convicted individual. HB 39 passed with a vote of 48 to 1. – **HB 39**

Fiscal Year 2018 Budget

House Bill 44, carried by Sen. Jack Hill (R – Reidsville), proposes the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget. The proposed 2018 budget would include a state fund revenue estimate of \$24.9 billion. Funds will be allocated to a variety of areas including education, criminal justice, public health, cybersecurity and transportation. HB 44 passed with a vote of 55 to 0. – **HB 44**

Firefighters Pension Fund

Sen. Hunter Hill (R – Atlanta) carried House Bill 83 which would authorize up to 10 percent of the Georgia Firefighters' Pension Fund to go toward real estate and up to 10 percent to go toward alternative investments. HB 83 passed with a vote of 51 to 0. – **HB 83**

Supporting and Strengthening Families Act

House Bill 359, carried by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), would grant parents the option to delegate temporary caregiving authority for a child through power of attorney to certain individuals. In addition to eliminating the Care of a Minor Child Act, parents would not have to involve the Department of Family and Children Services or go through probate court. HB 359 passed with a vote of 40 to 11. – **HB 359**

Recognizing Ashley D. Bell

Sen. Lester Jackson (D – Savannah) sponsored Senate Resolution 333 commending Ashley D. Bell on his accomplishments and his recent appointment from President Donald J. Trump to serve as a special assistant to the Secretary of State. Mr. Bell was elected as the youngest person to serve on the Hall County Board of Commissioners and was the first African-American male to serve in elected office within Hall County Government. His intelligence and work ethic helped earn him the position as the highest ranking African-American staff member of the Republican National Committee during the 2016 election. – **SR 333**

Congratulating the Vidalia High School Competitive Cheerleading Team

Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia) sponsored Senate Resolution 357 which congratulates the Vidalia High School Competitive Cheerleading Team for their victory at the Georgia High School Association Division AA State Championship. The team continued its successful competition season by winning four invitationals and setting a school record for points won. – **SR 357**

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

Space Flight Activities

House Bill 1, carried by Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White), would minimize the tort liability for space flight activity operators when a participant is injured during space flight operations and a written waiver was signed, except in the case of gross negligence or intentional misconduct. Under this bill, Georgia law would also govern any lawsuit pertaining to space flight activities. HB 1 passed with a vote of 44 to 6. – **HB 1**

Livestock Dealers and Auctions

Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla) carried House Bill 49 which would update the licenses of livestock dealers and market operators. HB 49 would also update the surety requirements authorizing the Georgia Department of Agriculture to charge triennial fees of no more than \$25 dollars and implement an expiration date. HB 49 would require the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture to publish the names and locations of duly licensed livestock dealers and market operators. HB 49 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HB 49**



Redactions of Child Abuse Records

House Bill 75, carried by Sen. Jesse Stone (R – Waynesboro), would authorize redactions to child abuse, neglect or dependency records when related to the Department of Human Services or a governmental child protective agency in any pending investigations or prosecutions. HB 75 passed with a vote of 49 to 0. – **HB 75**

Financial Institutions

Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon) carried House Bill 143 which would streamline regulations, ease the burden on credit unions and keep the state of Georgia’s banking community competitive. This bill updates regulations in several banking code sections. HB 143 passed with a vote of 44 to 8. – **HB 143**

Certification of Election Officials

House Bill 268, carried by Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge), would update the rules within the election laws to provide training for poll workers, clear up registration issues and provide absentee ballots for senior voters during the primary elections. HB 268 passed with a vote of 32 to 18. – **HB 268**

The Pharmacy Patient Fair Practices Act

House Bill 276, carried by Sen. Jeff Mullis (R – Chickamauga), would grant the Insurance Commissioner authority to regulate and examine certain matters in regards to Pharmacy Benefit Managers. Under this bill, the State Health Benefit Plan, the Department of Community Health, care management organizations and any health maintenance organization with an exclusive medical group contract that operates its own pharmacy does not apply. HB 276 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HB 276**

Commending Zeta Phi Beta Sorority

Sen. Freddie Powell Sims (D – Dawson) sponsored Senate Resolution 208 commending Zeta Phi Beta Sorority for its overall success as an organization and for its “Zetas Helping Other People Excel” (Z-HOPE) community outreach program. Some of Z-HOPE’s primary objectives include: providing culturally appropriate activities, community engagement and facilitating community service and mentorship opportunities for its members. Zeta Beta Phi was founded on January 16, 1920, at Howard University in Washington, D.C. – **SR 208**



Council for Quality Growth Day

Sen. Brandon Beach (R – Alpharetta) sponsored Senate Resolution 359 recognizing March 16, 2017, as Council for Quality Growth Day at the Capitol. The Council for Quality Growth is a nonprofit trade association that seeks to promote balanced and responsible community growth throughout the state. – **SR 359**

Honoring Mr. Leo Mazzone

Senate Resolution 444, sponsored by Sen. Bill Cowsert (R – Athens), honors former Atlanta Braves pitching coach Leo Mazzone. In his 15 years with the Braves, Mr. Mazzone led the team to 14 consecutive postseason appearances, including the 1995 World Series Championship. Mr. Mazzone is currently a sports analyst for “680 The Fan,” and the special pitching advisor for Furman University. – **SR 444**

**The Georgia Senate reconvened for DAY 36 at 10:00 a.m. on
MONDAY, MARCH 20.**