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An issue that has always been and will always be a priority of the legislature is safety. Whether it's the safety of our nation's military members, the safety of our children at school or even the safety of the foods we eat, we are constantly updating and implementing new guidelines to keep in line with the changing world around us. This month's edition of *At Issue* takes a deeper look into these safety concerns as we continue to work to maintain and build upon a safer Georgia.

One step we have made as a senate body in relation to safety concerns is the creation of our Senate Study Committee on School Safety. This study committee was created shortly after the conclusion of the 2018 Legislative Session and has already made great progress. The committee has been meeting with parents, teachers, students, law enforcement and other stakeholders to receive as much information and insight on the issue as possible. Members of the committee have been traveling across the state meeting at different schools each time to see what safety plans, if any, are being implemented in these schools and how we can use current resources as well as create new plans and implementation of these plans so students will continue to see their schools as a safe space.

This committee has been working tirelessly to hear from all citizens of Georgia in a timely manner. This is a pressing issue that involves safety and education of our children, so we will guarantee that this issue will not be overlooked or incomplete. One idea that has come from this committee that I find to be interesting is utilizing our veterans who are looking for work to serve as resource officers in our schools. As you will also read in this edition of *At Issue*, funding of our military members is very important in the state of Georgia. We are working hard at a state and federal level to ensure that we are doing what we can to support our military members, especially with Georgia being a powerhouse to many of our nation's military operations and manufacturing. We strive to take as best care of our military members and veterans as possible and I look forward to seeing if we can expand the window of opportunities for our veterans to continue utilizing their knowledge and abilities in our schools.

We have come a long way in addressing these concerns of our citizens in the legislature but as always, there will continue to be room for improvement. I look forward to seeing the recommendations our study committees will make for legislation to be introduced in the 2019 Legislative Session. I am confident that we are headed in the right direction. I hope you find these articles to be helpful and if you have any questions, comments or suggestions for future topics, please feel free to reach out to my office.

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State Policy Trends

Legislative Plans for School Safety: A Survey of States

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On February 14, 2018, 17 students were killed by a lone attacker at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. This massacre became the second-deadliest incident at an American K-12 school in the past 90 years, surpassed only by the Sandy Hook tragedy of 2012. In the wake of the attack, calls for change echoed across the nation. Politicians, government officials, parents, teachers, and students were once again reminded of the gravity of the need to protect our schools. As in every crisis, many of the loudest voices rising from the aftermath have been the most controversial, but least helpful. However, many states have quietly been doing real work to defend against threats to American children in places of learning. Georgia is one of those states.

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In the weeks following the attack at Parkland, the Georgia Senate passed Senate Resolution 935 establishing a study committee to study school safety within the state, chaired by Senator John Albers (R – Roswell), chairman of the Senate Public Safety Committee. Likewise, the House of Representatives passed a similar resolution creating its own school safety study committee. The Senate study committee has met at various locations around the state and has received testimony from school administrators, representatives of state agencies, state and local law enforcement, state and local fire and emergency personnel, students, and teachers, on how Georgia can make its schools safe.

While the committee continues to meet, and will publish a report with its final findings and recommendations by the end of 2018, topics discussed at the meetings of the committee have focused predominantly upon three key fronts.

The first of these pertains to the physical security of school buildings and facilities themselves. In today's world, where athletic facilities, most government buildings, concert venues, airports, and even movie theaters are often heavily secured, schools are facing the difficult and often expensive challenge of constructing new facilities and updating current ones that will thwart safety risks while still maintaining efficient learning environments for students and teachers.

The second topic being examined by the committee is the social atmosphere of Georgia's Schools. Research consistently shows that while there is no single profile for students who decide to attempt a massacre, those students who do, almost always show warning signs before actually performing an attack. These signs include acting out, exhibiting signs of violence, or even telling family members or other students about their plans beforehand. Unfortunately these threats often go unreported or unrecognized until it is too late. The committee has reviewed extensive testimony relating to the need to foster a more open discourse between students and faculty in order for teachers to identify at-risk students who may be struggling with mental and emotional issues that could potentially contribute to violent behavior and to provide the counseling or even mentoring that may be needed.

The third category being examined by the committee is the need for an effective response in the case of an emergency at a school. Much of the testimony reviewed by the committee has revolved around the need to have a workable response plan in place before an event occurs. During an attack, seconds mean lives, and having an effective plan in place that allows law enforcement, emergency services, and school staff to communicate clearly and work together to neutralize threats while assisting victims is of utmost importance.

Georgia is joined by some other states that are taking similar steps to confront the school safety issue:

Florida

Almost immediately following the Parkland Massacre, Governor Rick Scott signed Senate Bill 7026, establishing the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission to investigate system failures in the Parkland school shooting and other mass-violence incidents and to develop recommendations for system improvements.

This bill also required the Florida Department of Education to establish an evidence-based youth mental health awareness and assistance training program to help school personnel identify and understand the signs of emotional disturbance, mental illness, and substance use disorders in students and to provide school personnel with the skills to help children who are experiencing or developing such problems. The bill also commissioned the creation of an anonymous phone application that will allow students or teachers to report suspicious behavior to authorities.

Additionally, Florida created the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program that will allow school districts to place armed school guardians on campuses. These guardians must complete 32 hours of comprehensive firearm safety and proficiency training, 12 hours of diversity training, pass a psychological evaluation and submit to initial and subsequent random drug tests.

Utah

Utah's Safe Schools Commission recently released a report containing several recommendations. One of these recommendations would create Threat Assessment Teams in every school. These teams would be led by the school principal or an assistant principal and would include a school psychologist, a school counselor, and a resource officer. These teams would identify and analyze potential threats to the student body and seek to prevent the threat from becoming a reality by either notifying proper authorities or providing needed support for at-risk students. Another unique measure recently adopted by the Utah School Board requires schools to conduct a parent and student reunification drill in the event of a school evacuation, in which teachers guide students to pre-determined, off-site venues with color-coded zones.

Texas

In Texas, the Governor's Office released a list of school safety recommendations. These recommendations included one which would revise the state's firearm storage law to include 17-year-olds. Doing so would open parents to civil liability for gun-related crimes committed by their child if the child used a loaded firearm belonging to the parent that was not properly locked up in the home. The Governor's Office also recommended that more "fusion centers" be developed in order to monitor social media for potential threats to schools and students. Texas currently has seven such centers already in action.

Arkansas

Arkansas is considering establishing a system to evaluate threats to students, specifically noting that many threats start or spread on social media. Another measure that more Arkansas districts are adopting allows teachers and staff to carry concealed weapons, which is permissible under an Arkansas law allowing licensed, armed security guards on campus. Districts implementing these policies must require that those volunteering to carry concealed weapons undergo 53 hours of training to be considered guards. These guards are also given a one-time stipend to purchase a handgun and a holster. The district will post signs at each school about the armed guards, but the identities of faculty and staff carrying weapons will be kept secret.

New Hampshire

The governor of New Hampshire commissioned a School Safety Preparedness Taskforce, which released a list of 59 recommendations pertaining to school safety in July of this year. Most notable among these were recommendations for strengthening support for students suffering from mental health issues, the creation of an anonymous tip line for students, parents, and teachers to report suspicious behavior, and for the development of “Best Practices” to be adopted by school districts to adequately prepare against incidents on campuses.

No one wants to believe that an attack like the one that occurred in Parkland, Florida will ever happen in their state, city, or community. Such tragedies are so horrifying that it is often difficult to even think of something like that happening to children close to home. The easiest response to violence in America’s schools would be to skirt the issue, refuse to confront it, and hope that nothing ultimately happens. Thankfully though, Georgians may be assured that their leaders are in fact confronting the issue, thinking about the next incident, and working tirelessly to prevent it from happening. - *TB & AE*

Federal Funding

The National Defense Authorization Act – What’s In It for Georgia?

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For nearly 60 years, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) has been the primary way Congress funds current and future operations of the nation’s military. Adopted by Congress on August 1, 2018 and signed by President Trump on August 13th, the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act marks the first NDAA to be enacted prior to the start of a fiscal year since the FY 1997 version was adopted in 1996.

The \$717 billion bipartisan measure authorizes \$708.1 billion in discretionary spending for national defense-related activities. Of this amount, \$639.1 billion is appropriated for base budget activities—that is, activities the Pentagon would pursue even if U.S. forces were not engaged in conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The Act also authorizes additional Department of Defense (DOD) appropriations totaling \$69 billion to fund designated Overseas Contingency Operations which covers the incremental cost of U.S. overseas operations. Another \$8.9 billion represents mandatory spending, including statutory requirements for military retired pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation, referred to as Concurrent Receipt.

It’s important to point out that Defense Department funding occurs in two phases: the annual NDAA sets policy changes, expenditures for the military, and how the money will be spent, while a defense appropriations bill is what actually moves money over to the Pentagon to support the plan. Simply stated, the NDAA itself does not allocate federal money; it authorizes funding that must be approved later this year in a government spending bill.

Defense Spending in Georgia

By its very nature, the NDAA benefits states with a significant presence of military installations and defense contractors such as in Georgia. According to the DOD’s Office of Economic Adjustment, Georgia ranks ninth in total in-state federal defense spending with \$11.9 billion in federal spending for FY 2016, the latest available figures. This \$11.9 billion figure accounts for \$6.2 billion in defense contracts and \$5.7 billion in military and civilian personnel payroll.

Although Lockheed Martin is by far Georgia’s largest defense contractor with over \$2.5 billion in contracts, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, S&K Aerospace, and even Georgia Tech’s Applied Research Corporation all have contracts in excess of \$100 million with the Pentagon. These defense contractors directly impact the economies of Cobb, Houston, Fulton, Richmond, Chattahoochee, Chatham, Gwinnett, Liberty, Camden, and Dougherty Counties, and their surrounding areas. Additionally, Georgia’s eight military installations collectively contribute an estimated \$18 billion to the state’s economy each year.

These figures not only entail the salaries of uniformed and civilian personnel stationed at and around these bases, but also include the economic contributions of their families, military retirees who choose to settle in Georgia, and continued base operations that rely on the local economy.

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How the FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act Directly Impacts Georgia

Supporting Servicemembers and their Families

Servicemembers and their families will see a number of changes with the 2019 NDAA that could impact their finances in positive ways. Among the most significant changes, servicemembers are slated to get a 2.6 percent pay raise starting in January 2019. This represents the largest pay increase in nearly a decade and will pump approximately an additional \$150 million into Georgia's economy.

In an effort to support recruitment and retention, the Act also extends special pay and bonuses for high demand and specialty military occupations. The NDAA amends the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act, which governs the appointment, promotion, and separation of military officers. Changes include allowing civilians with operationally relevant training or experience to enter the military up to the rank of O-6 (an O-6 is referred to as a Colonel in most branches, except for the Navy and Coast Guard, where they are referred to as Captains) and creating an "alternative promotion" process for officers in specialized fields. These steps should help the military compete with the private sector in recruiting and retaining individuals with skills that are in high demand.

Modernizing the Military and Maintaining Readiness

A number of weapons systems, either operated in Georgia or manufactured in Georgia, are receiving significant support in the 2019 NDAA:

The Act authorizes \$7.6 billion to procure 77 Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighters. These aircraft are partially assembled in Marietta adjacent to Dobbins Air Reserve Base. Currently the largest procurement program in the Pentagon, the F-35 is a multi-roll strike fighter which is constructed in three different versions for the Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy, respectively. Current DOD plans call for acquiring a total of 2,456 F-35s, while U.S. allies are expected to purchase hundreds of additional F-35s.



An A-10C Warthog departs and rolls after receiving aerial refueling over Syria.

Source: U.S. Air Force

\$342 million is authorized to develop a network of sensors called Advanced Battle Management System (ABMS) at middle Georgia's Robins Air Force Base to eventually replace E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) surveillance planes. The existing 16 JSTARS aircraft are flown exclusively out of Robins and perform intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance work in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. The Act directs the Air Force to develop a plan to sustain the legacy E-8C JSTARS aircraft through the late 2020s, until the ABMS concept reaches a level of acceptable maturity and capability.

Building on last year's NDAA, the current Act continues to stress the importance of modernizing the A-10 ground attack aircraft fleet and includes an increase of \$65 million for the jet's wing replacement. This is significant to Georgia because the A-10 is flown out of Moody Air Force Base near Valdosta, and the additional money will help extend the plane's lifetime. There has long been talk of retiring the A-10 and replacing it with the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter or with a cheaper light attack aircraft. Although it's doubtful that the pricey F-35 can perform ground attack duties at the A-10's level, this year's NDAA does authorize \$300 million to purchase an unspecified number of new OA-X light attack aircraft for evaluation.

\$225.3 million is authorized to continue modernizing Army Armored Brigade Combat Team vehicles, including 135 M1 Abrams tanks, 60 Bradley fighting vehicles, 197 Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicles, 38 Improved Recovery Vehicles, and 3,390 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles. This measure will benefit Fort Stewart in Liberty County which is home to two Armored Brigade Combat Teams.

Georgia's only naval base, Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in Camden County, is home to eight nuclear-powered Ohio-class Missile Submarines. These submarines are quickly approaching forty years' of service and are slated to be retired by 2030. Because of this, the NDAA continues funding for the Columbia-class ballistic Missile Submarine, which will eventually be based at Kings Bay as they slowly replace the Ohio-class boats throughout the next decade.

Although past NDAA legislation has included provisions on DOD's cybersecurity role, this year's Act specifies that the Secretary of Defense has the authority to conduct military cyber activities—including clandestine activities—to defend the U.S. and her allies. Cybersecurity is important to Georgia because Fort Gordon in Augusta is the current headquarters of the U.S. Army's Cyber Command and home to many functions of the National Security Agency.

Defending Europe

The current NDAA funds the President's request for \$6.3 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative to further increase the number of U.S. troops in Europe, reassure U.S. partners and allies, and deter Russian aggression. This increased funding could see Georgia National Guard units rotate in and out of Eastern Europe to gain invaluable experience with NATO partners. In July, 1,000 soldiers with the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment of Tennessee's National Guard deployed for a year-long mission to Poland under the European Deterrence Initiative.

Directly Benefitting Georgia's Military Installations

What is absent from this year's NDAA is just as important as what is in it. The Pentagon did not request a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) effort this year and the NDAA does not authorize one. However, the Act does recognize that there are installations around the country that have outlasted their purpose and their continued operation places an undue burden on taxpayers and local communities. The measure, therefore, allows DOD to identify for closure, with the consent of relevant state and local officials, installations where the Pentagon can do so affordably.

The Act also directly funds the following new projects on three of Georgia's military installations:

- Up to \$99 million in new construction at Fort Gordon for the Cyber Instructional Facility and Network Center;
- Nearly \$40 million for Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany to construct a new Welding and Body Repair Shop Facility; and
- \$13.6 million for Fort Benning's new Reserve Training Center.

A Billion Here, a Billion There; Pretty Soon, You're Talking Real Money

Although the \$717 billion in spending authorized by the bipartisan FY 2019 NDAA is approximately \$16 billion more than what Congress approved for FY 2018, in real terms, this 2.25 percent increase actually amounts to a reduction in defense spending, given the 2.46 percent rise in inflation over the past year. Although some critics may dismiss the NDAA in particular, and defense spending in general, as a pork barrel spending, for better or for worse, the Pentagon's budget not only directly benefits Georgia's economy, it also contributes to the continued security and defense of the U.S. and her allies. - AA

Emerging Federal Policy Initiatives

Blockchain: The Answer to Food Safety Concerns or the Latest Technology Fad?

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When was the last time you turned on the news and heard that there had been a food poisoning epidemic? It seems that every other week there is a new foodborne illness outbreak of E. coli, salmonella, or worse, wreaking havoc on a restaurant, grocery store, or other food supplier. These outbreaks leave consumers concerned for their health and safety and cautious to return to these institutions. The FDA estimates that there are 48 million cases of foodborne illnesses annually, which results in an estimated 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Food suppliers are not only tasked with providing food quickly to a multitude of persons, but also making sure that the food is safe for consumption.

Chipotle Mexican Grill, a fast casual restaurant specializing in tacos and burritos, is no stranger to the controversy. Between 2015 and 2016, there were 55 reports of people being infected with E. coli from the restaurant across 11 states. Although Chipotle has tried time and time again to lure customers back with free meals and new menu items, their efforts have been overshadowed by successive outbreaks in 2017 and 2018.

In April 2018, the CDC recommended that Americans avoid any form of romaine lettuce after an E. coli breakout stemmed from contaminated water in Arizona. From the time the first incident was recorded, to when the CDC reported the outbreak "appears to be over" in June 2018, 210 persons reported being infected in 36 states.

So, what can be done to ease the mind of consumers while providing efficient and effective food tracking to reduce foodborne disease outbreaks? Blockchain.

According to Forbes, blockchain is a public register that stores transactions between two users belonging to the same network in a secure, verifiable and permanent way. The data relating to the exchanges are saved inside cryptographic blocks, connected in a hierarchical manner. This creates an endless chain of data blocks that allows for traceability and verifiability of all the transactions made. The best-known example of blockchain is for securing and recording of Bitcoin transactions. Cryptocurrency and other financial services are not the only industries that have taken advantage of blockchain. Blockchain technology has the ability to assist many industries including food safety and healthcare.

One of the main reasons blockchain could help provide consumers peace of mind is the traceability aspect of the technology. IBM, a leading business that has revolutionized the way this technology is used across all industries, implemented IBM Food Trust, a "collaborative network of growers, processors, wholesalers, distributors, manufacturers, retailers and other entities to enhance visibility and accountability in each step of the food supply." IBM Food Trust, powered by blockchain, directly connects persons through a shared record of food origin details, processing data, shipping details, and more. Walmart and Nestlé have both bought into this technology in hopes of improving recalls and to rapidly find issues. According to IBM, food traceback tests, that typically take seven days, are able to be completed in 2.2 seconds.

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Federal Government Implementation

As with any new technology, the federal government typically has approached blockchain cautiously and methodically. However, since the benefits to using blockchain are endless, this technology has drawn a lot of support from all types of industries. With the ability to automatically record and verify large amounts of digital transactions, the technology could essentially be used for any transaction-based service. Another major reason blockchain has become an emerging idea is due to the strong security aspects. Blockchains are decentralized and distributed across peer-to-peer networks. Therefore, if a record in a block is altered in any way, the peer network will know immediately and can reject that block from being added to the chain, keeping the integrity of the chain intact.

While the federal government has yet to promulgate any rules or regulations relating to blockchain, federal agencies are actively engaging in opportunities to implement programs that use blockchain. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) procures funds from the federal government to provide products, services, and facilities to federal agencies that serve the public. According to GSA, one of the federal government's IT goals is to "help evaluate, test, and implement IT modernization initiatives with emerging technologies through the Emerging Citizen Technology Office (ECTO)."

The ECTO launched the U.S. Federal Blockchain program for federal agencies and businesses interested in exploring this technology and its implementation within government to have a space to do so. Further, the ECTO launched the U.S. Federal Blockchain Forum, an inter-agency forum hosted by GSA, to learn about and advance the technology. Agencies such as USDA Food Safety and Inspection and USDA Food and Nutrition Service discussed implementation and limitations regarding blockchain technology. Also, the ECTO hosted the Emerging Tech and Open Data for More Open and Accountable Government Collaborative Workshop where ninety participants from government, industry, and academia came together to present their goals including a way to provide consumers a trustworthy, traceable blockchain ledger "where food is grown, picked, distributed, and sold."



Source: Frank Yiannas and Walmart

Georgia Connections

Albany State was recently granted approval by the Board of Regents to offer the first nexus degree in blockchain technology. Nexus degrees are college credentials that emphasize the connections between industry, skilled knowledge, and hands-on experience in high-demand career fields. To obtain a nexus degree, the University System of Georgia requires 18 specialized hours of coursework, with at least six of those hours in experiential learning, such as internships or in-the-field experiences. At least twelve hours of coursework must be at the upper-division level. Albany State offered its first blockchain technology course in the fall of 2017.

In February 2018, over one hundred people attended the Technology Link: Blockchain Conference 2018 at Albany State, hosted by IBM. This was the first time IBM has held an event like this at a historically black college. Since partnering with IBM in 2016, twelve Albany State students have been hired to work with the company. Georgia State University is also jumping on the blockchain bandwagon and offering a four-day Blockchain Strategy Boot Camp that is "designed for professionals who want to embrace blockchain technology and the radical business transformation it has caused."

Blockchain remains a mystery to many, but it's potential to change the food safety world as we know it is vast. As always, only time will tell whether this technology will become commonplace or if it is another fad that will quickly fade into the next big thing. - LV

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