



Senate District 15 – Session Update – Week One - 2016

Atlanta was hectic this week as legislators made their way to the Capitol to reconvene for the 154th Georgia General Assembly's 2016 legislative session. Monday, January 11th marked the first day of the forty days we will be in session. This short time period is crucial as we all work together to move Georgia forward.

State of the State

On Wednesday, January 13th Gov. Deal delivered his annual State of the State address which covered highlights of the last year and hopes for the new one. Gov. Deal noted that Georgia's economy is back on track and continuing to grow. As a result of removing the sales tax on energy manufacturing, this industry has produced 22,000 new manufacturing jobs, representing over \$900 million in added wages for Georgia families. Governor Deal also highlighted strides that we have made in technical education, making Georgia more desirable for companies that are searching for a qualified workforce. The governor also announced that our state employees and teachers will receive a much deserved 3% raise! Education reform, healthcare costs, criminal justice reform and a pay raise for state employees are all issues that Governor Deal plans to focus on over the next couple of years.

Education Reform

Education reform has been a hot topic over the last year and the debate of how to best service the educational needs of our students will continue. During the State of the State, Governor Deal announced that recommendations from his appointed Education Reform Commission would not be put in place until 2017. That means, we will have ample opportunity to vet the final report, gain input and address questions and concerns from our education community. I am pleased to report that the state will allocate an additional \$300 million towards K-12 education this year. While the General Assembly has made improvements where education is concerned, there is still much work to be done.

Transportation Projects

Work on our state's infrastructure continues as we make strides to improve Georgia's transportation system. Now that Georgia is the 8th most populated state in the nation, adequate transportation, and maintaining our roadways and bridges, is necessary for citizen safety and Georgia's economic development. The Department of Transportation has projects scheduled across the state in an attempt to relieve our congested and worn highways. Over the next 18 months we will see over 2,500 miles in roadway resurfacing, the replacement of 118 bridges, the widening of 36 roadways, hundreds of safety projects and a 20% increase in local government grants. Citizens can keep track of transportation projects around the state by visiting www.GARoads.org.

Committee Process

In the coming weeks, I will have a number of Committee meetings to attend. Committees serve a vital role in the legislative process of our state government. Once a bill is drafted and officially filed with the Secretary of Senate's office, the bill is formally read in the Senate Chamber and assigned to a committee. The committee will carefully review the bill and determine whether it's a good, clear bill. If it's passed out of committee, it will then go to the Rules Committee, which decides whether the bill will receive a vote from the full Senate.

Every bill that moves through the legislature should be carefully reviewed by all Senate and House members, legislative counsel and most importantly, the people of Georgia that hold a special interest in the respective bill. The road from first draft to becoming law is long and challenging to ensure every bill we pass is in the best interest of all Georgians.

I will continue my work as Chairman of the Senate State Institutions and Property Committee. In addition, I will also serve on the following Committees: Banking and Financial Institutions, Ethics, Insurance and Labor, Interstate Cooperation, Reapportionment and Redistricting, Regulated Industries and Utilities, Veterans, Military and Homeland Security. These committees are very important to our area of the state and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our district citizens through my committee work.

Budget Week

Tuesday, January 19th marks the beginning of what we refer to as "Budget Week". Despite the hundreds of bills that will be discussed over the next 40 days, the only thing that we are constitutionally required to do by law is pass a balanced budget. In the coming days we will anxiously await as the Appropriations committee deliberates and makes suggestions as to where state funds should be allocated. I will keep you informed on funding and projects that will take place in our region as we move through the budget process.

I encourage all of you to become involved in the government process! I welcome your ideas and insight and I look forward to hearing from you on how we can move Georgia forward. Feel free to contact me any time if you have concerns or ideas that you would like to share. Thank you for allowing me the honor and privilege to serve you, our district and our great state.



Ed Harbison
Senator of the 15th