



## Senate District 15 — Session Update — Week Six - 2016

Friday, February 19<sup>th</sup> concluded the sixth week of the 2016 legislative session. With 24 legislative days complete, we are nearing the very important “Crossover Day” deadline. Crossover day is the last day that Senate Bills can transfer or “crossover” to the House chamber with enough time to make their way through required committee hearings and a floor vote. As this deadline rapidly approaches, all legislators are working tirelessly to ensure bills pass out of their respective chamber.

The scope of practice for Licensed Professional Counselors would be expanded through Senate Bill 319, which passed the senate unanimously. The bill would update the definition of “professional counseling” for Licensed Professional Counselors and expands the scope of practice by giving LPCs the ability to diagnose emotional and mental conditions, along with evaluating and recommending treatment.

Various religious measures remain in heated debate. Last week, Senate Bill 309 which allows student athletes to express personal religious beliefs during sporting events passed. SB 309 also enables high schools, who receive state funding, to participate in athletic competitions with schools outside of their designated conference.

Senate Bill 329, which expands the Quality Basic Education Act passed unanimously. The expansion will award students a high school diploma if they have completed college dual credit coursework and have earned certification to work in what the Technical College System of Georgia deems an “in-need” industry. Additionally, SB 329 will expand HOPE scholarship eligibility to students meeting these requirements.

We had a number of visitors to the Senate chamber last week including Congressman Sanford Bishop. Congressman Bishop previously served in the Georgia House from 1977 until 1990 and in the Georgia Senate from 1991 to 1992. Rep. Bishop was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1993.

As we make our way towards the end of the 2016 legislative session, Governor Deal has signed the amended 2016 budget. Our focus has now shifted to the General Fiscal Year 2017 Budget, which passed out of the House last week. With the 2017 budget being the largest in state history, we expect additional funding towards education, transportation and much needed rural healthcare expansion.

In the meantime, I will continue to report on all that is happening under the Gold Dome! As citizens, it is important for you to be knowledgeable about what is going on with your state government. As your Senator, I welcome your suggestions, ideas and I encourage you to contact me anytime. Thank you for allowing me to lead and represent you. It is an honor to serve the folks of our great district!