



Senate District 15 – Legislative Update – Session Preview 2016

As we gather with friends and family over the holiday season, many of us reflect on the last year and begin planning for the new. When heading into a New Year, like most, I begin thinking of my resolutions. What can I do to improve or resolve issues affecting me personally or professionally? What can I do this year that will make a positive impact on those around me? Much like I strive to resolve issues personally, as your Senator, I also strive to resolve any issues affecting our great state and district. The New Year brings hope and excitement! It also brings a new session, new issues and new debate. Here is a forecast of major issues we will discuss during the 2016 legislative session.

Education Reform

Last January, Governor Deal announced the creation of Georgia's Education Reform Commission. The commission, made up of education experts, as well as, a number of legislators held study committee meetings throughout the year. Georgia's funding formula, improved educational standards and increased access to early learning programs are just a few examples of what the reform committee was tasked to review. In November, the commission completed a report of recommendations for Governor Deal's review. Their report will largely determine education legislation during the 2016 session. I look forward to reviewing the full committee report and hearing debate as education issues arise.

Funding / Appropriations

2015 has been a positive year where the state budget is concerned. Going into the 2016 session, we are expecting a surplus of funds. With education reform measures on the table, it is likely that more money will be pumped into K-12 education. We have made large strides in recent years where education funding is concerned and I look forward to seeing what else we can do to further support our education systems.

Gun Control

In light of recent attacks, the topic of Gun Control will once again make an appearance as we gather for the 2016 session. House Bill 709 which would require the completion of firearms safety training by certain persons for the issuance of a weapons carry license, has been pre-filed and is ready for further discussion. In 2014, we passed House Bill 60, which allows Georgians to legally carry firearms in a wide range of new places. We also expect "campus carry" legislation, which would allow firearms on college campuses, to be up for discussion.

Medicaid Expansion

With approximately 300,000 Georgians without healthcare insurance, some members of the General Assembly are pushing for the expansion of Medicaid for people who fall into no coverage gap. With estimated costs of nearly 4 billion dollars over the next 10 years, Governor Deal is not in favor of expansion. Opponents of Medicaid expansion believe it is a temporary fix to a larger problem with our flawed healthcare system. Supporters of expansion believe that this measure is necessary to combat future healthcare costs going up as a result of those that are uninsured. Supporters also insist that this is the only way to save our rural hospital systems. Other states, such as Arkansas have expanded with the condition that the state uses additional funding to provide private insurance for citizens through the public marketplace. Healthcare is always a top priority as we search for solutions to improve Georgia's health rating and 2016 will be no exception as we continue to discuss Georgia's future where Medicaid is concerned.

Tax Reform

Georgia tax reform measures will be up for discussion as we look for ways to improve our current tax code. Last session House Bill 445, a comprehensive tax reform plan was brought forth. In short, HB 445 would lower Georgia's current income tax (both for individuals and corporations) to a flat 4 percent, while raising the state's sales tax to 5 percent from the current 4 percent. Those in support of tax reform believe that allowing citizens to bring home more money will stimulate the economy. Those against the measure believe that taxing staple items, such as groceries, will negatively impact low income families.

As always, there will be no shortage of debate during the 2016 legislative session. The first of forty days begins today, Monday, January 11th. I encourage you to contact me throughout session with questions, concerns or ideas regarding proposed legislation. Please be on the lookout for my legislative columns as I work to keep you informed. I look forward to representing you Under the Gold Dome and it is an honor that you allow me to do so. I promise to work hard for you, represent you and when needed, to protect you. God bless each and every one of you. May the New Year bring you excitement, hope and of course- Health, Wealth and Happiness!



*Ed Harbison
Senator of the 15th*