

Under the Gold Dome

2009 Session wrap up

The 2009 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly officially adjourned *Sine Die* Friday, April 3rd. We accomplished many important items on the agenda and passed key pieces of legislation during the 2009 session. Over the course of 40 legislative days, we worked together and devised a budget that basically includes only the essential and necessary programs for the state. Also during the 2009 session, with the cooperation and input from both chambers, we passed legislation that meets the needs of the people we represent.

The main issue on our legislative agenda, like every session, is creating a balanced budget. This year was difficult given the current economic situation we are faced with, not only as individuals but also as a state. Families across Georgia are cutting back and we had to do the same with the budget. In the late hours on Friday night, we passed HB 119 which includes an \$18.6 billion budget for fiscal year 2010. It is still awaiting the signature from Governor Perdue. Faced with statewide revenue shortages, we had to make some very difficult decisions about what to fund. The General Assembly here in Georgia did not follow the lead of other states, states around the country which raised taxes to make up for the shortfall. We are proud to tell you that we did not raise taxes on the citizens in Georgia. Families are struggling to make ends meet and to place another burden on them would simply be unfair. During hard economic times, we all suffer: as individuals, as families, and as a state. We have all had to cut back and make sacrifices. One thing can be said; when things are tough we share the responsibilities, come up with solutions to our problems, and pull together as a state.

The Transforming Transportation Investment Act, SB 200, was passed by both chambers. It will provide the Governor and the legislature with more influence on transportation projects in Georgia. Appointed by the Governor and upon approval of the Transportation Committee, this bill will create a new DOT Director of Planning. Also, the Governor and members of the General Assembly will have greater input on the transportation plans within the state.

In an effort to curb metal theft and to strengthen the law in Georgia, both chambers passed SB 82. As legislators, we have heard of many instances within our communities of various pieces of metal parts being stolen, from parts of an air conditioner to unused car parts. This legislation will create additional requirements for those taking items to a metal recycler with the intention of reducing metal theft in the State.

The Department of Human Resources (DHR) will be faced with an immense restructuring with the passage of HB 228, still awaiting the Governor's signature. Under this piece of legislation DHR will be reorganized and separated into three new departments: the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Community Health, and the Department of Human Services. DHR is

extremely large as one entity and our goal was to make it into smaller and workable departments.

One of our goals during this session was to help our businesses in Georgia by providing some form of economic relief. We passed HB 438 which would increase the tax credit for major economic development projects in the state. To encourage business development in less-developed areas of the state, we passed HB 439 which revises the income tax credit to businesses. The JOBS (Jobs, Opportunity, and Business Success) Act of 2009, HB 481 and HB 482, passed both chambers during this legislative session. Our intentions with these pieces of legislation are to promote business in Georgia and to encourage employment. The JOBS Act of 2009 includes many incentives for businesses, such as: phasing out the corporate income tax, reducing the capital gains tax, eliminating the state inventory tax, temporarily suspending filing fees for new businesses, and allowing a \$2,400 tax credit for the hiring of the unemployed. Hopefully these bills will help to stimulate our economy here in Georgia by providing some economic relief to our businesses and also have a positive impact on employment.

Education is always a priority. In an effort to provide parents with school choice for their children we passed HB 251. This bill relates to elementary and secondary education and will allow the parent or guardian to transfer their children under certain conditions to another school within the district as long as the school has room to accommodate a transfer student. Parents should have a choice of where their children attend school. We also passed the Move on When Ready Act, HB 149, which will allow high school junior and seniors to receive high school credit for work completed in post-secondary institutions. Due to the shortage of science and math teachers in Georgia, we passed HB 280 which provides teachers in those areas with the same compensation that fifth-year teachers receive. As legislators we realize the importance and significance of education and will continue to provide the support for our schools, teachers, and children within our districts and all across the state.