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WEEKLY COLUMN

For Immediate Release:
January 30, 2009

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Notes from the Georgia State Senate

By: State Senator Bill Heath



This week saw the Legislature productively proposing and passing on vital pieces of legislation including Senate Bill 39, Senate Resolution 49, and House Resolution 1 while actively working together to balance the state budget.

The Senate Transportation Committee, of which I am an ex-officio, convened this Wednesday and began this year's legislation strongly by passing Senate Bill 39, the transportation special-purpose local-option sales tax (TSPLOST) bill. TSPLOST provides for a one percent tax to be used to fund transportation projects in special transportation districts within the state. The TSPLOST bill would generate up to \$850 million in funding each year for the metro area and up to \$1.2 billion for the entire state. It provides greater choice and flexibility at the county level so that local areas can decide what transportation projects need funding the most. Should the bill pass in the legislature, a Constitutional Amendment question will be on the November 2010 ballot for Georgians to voice their opinion via a vote.

As a sponsor of Senate Resolution 49, we are proposing legislation defending Georgia workers' ability to vote by secret ballot in union organizing elections. The resolution proposes a state constitutional amendment to protect Georgians from a national attempt to end the use of the secret ballot called The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). It secures the right to a secret ballot for nearly all elections, including those for union representation.

If EFCA becomes federal law it would forego secret ballot union votes and implement a practice commonly known as “card check.” Card check is where workers are encouraged to sign a membership card which then serves as a favorable vote for unionizing. Once a union organizer has enough cards signed by the majority of workers, an employer is required to recognize all employees as a union.

On the House side, they have proposed House Resolution 1, an amendment to the Constitution so as to freeze the valuation of residential and nonresidential real property. It also provides for ratification of certain exemptions and assessment freezes which were previously enacted, applicability, and for the submission of this amendment for ratification or rejection. The resolution looks as though it will pass out of the House, and as a supporter, I hope it will soon make its way over to the Senate.

Balancing our state budget is an intricate and thought out procedure. As we discuss the budget process, we are actively attempting to find money to cover the cost of school nurses and the Homestead Tax Relief Grants (HTRG), which grants a subsidy from the state to the counties and cities to pay a portion of citizens’ property tax. As a legislator, our job is to control state spending while commissioners have to control county spending. We will work together to eliminate wasteful legislation in order to save funds while protecting and adding helpful legislation to support Georgians’ most critical needs.

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Sen. Bill Heath Sen. Bill Heath serves as Chairman of the Retirement Committee and Governor Sonny Perdue’s Floor Leader in the Senate. He represents the 31st Senate District which consists of Haralson and Polk counties and portions of Bartow and Paulding counties. He may be reached at 404.651.7738 or by email at billheath@billheath.net.