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WEEKLY COLUMN

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Notes from the Georgia State Senate

By: State Senator Bill Heath



This year comes as a landmark period of struggle and angst in our most important areas—education and the economy. I am proud to say that this past week I helped create and pass legislation that will aid Georgians in these issues through measures to help homeowners, construct better standards for our local school boards, and create helpful solutions for employment and the specific strength of Georgia's economy.

The citizens of Georgia will still receive tax relief thanks to the Homeowners Tax Relief Grant signed into law by Governor Sonny Purdue this week. This law guarantees \$428 million in funding which provides tax relief to more than 3 million Georgia homeowners. In these dire economic times, Georgians need to see their government is working to help them, and I'm proud that my fellow legislators in the Senate did just that.

The School Board Governance Act (Senate Bill 84), which creates better standards for school board members, passed in the Education and Youth committee this week. The bill was created to hold school board members accountable for their actions and to ensure their focus in our children. Our state was thrown into the national spotlight with Clayton County schools losing their accreditation. Steps need to be taken to ensure another school district does not have the same predicament.

Under this legislation, the State Board of Education will create a code of ethics and a training program for all school board members. A new Standardized ethics policy by state school boards will be included in the ethics policy adopted by local boards as a minimum, laws relating to board and superintendent roles and responsibilities will be clarified, and qualifications for candidates will be put into force.

If a school board is in danger of losing accreditation, the state will be allowed to take action under this plan. No longer will parents have to wait for a new election cycle to replace appalling members. When this bill becomes law, the Governor or the remaining board members can suspend school board members and replace them.

The Senate also worked to find solutions to unemployment in Georgia. In the spirit of the Ronald Reagan tax cuts in the early 1980's, the *Jobs, Opportunity and Business Success Act of 2009* has been created. This is not the same as the big government Federal stimulus package. This act gives hardworking Georgia families a break in today's economy. My colleagues and I in the Senate wanted to empower individuals and small businesses in the state, not create big government.

We recognize that these are challenging days for most families and businesses, so we offer initiatives in a single legislative package that recognizes the people of our state as the driving economic force. This act gives a \$500 credit towards unemployment insurance taxes, a \$2,400 Income Tax credit for eligible employees, "a new" business holiday, the elimination of State Inventory Tax on all Georgia Businesses, and the elimination of the Sales Tax Deposit.

These are the steps that will pull Georgia out of this economic downturn. This initiative creates an environment that encourages the creation of jobs through the removal of governmental imposed barriers and provides incentives for job creation by independent businesses. What we are proposing is harnessing the greatness of Georgia ...the intellectual capital, the entrepreneurial spirit, and the true grit of everyday Georgians.

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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.