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Column

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Notes from the Senate



By Sen. Bill Heath

ATLANTA (March 13, 2009)—Thursday of this week marked a milestone in the legislative process - Day 30 which is the last day bills can pass out of the Senate to the House. Crossover Day ends at midnight, and any legislation we support or wrote that hasn't been passed this year will have to wait until the 2010 Legislative Session. It is a long day that requires a lot of devotion and consideration, and from this day forward our time will be spent on legislation that passed out of the House.

The Georgia State Senate voted in favor of Georgia property owners with the passage of Senate Bill 240. The legislation enables property owners to go directly into arbitration over property assessments rather than going through the regular lengthy government process. Georgia's property owners deserve realistic property values, especially during uncertain economic times. The Senate acted to put the property owner and government on a level playing field when it comes to assessing property values. SB 240 removes government bureaucratic layers, providing property owners more flexible options for resolving assessment disputes and achieving fair arbitration.

Earlier this week, the Georgia General Assembly passed the amended Fiscal Year 2009 budget, fulfilling its Constitutional requirement to balance the state budget before the end of the fiscal year which ends June 30. The budget meets the essential needs of our state during these challenging times in our economy, cutting nearly \$2 billion from the original 2009 budget. We accomplished this without raising taxes. We prioritized the needs of Georgians and cut wasteful spending. While Washington

D.C. saddles us with over \$1 trillion dollars in debt, the Assembly worked together and passed this budget without a single ‘pork barrel’ project.

We restored the \$428 million Homeowners’ Tax Relief Grant, cut state legislative office budgets by 8 percent, restored the mental health funds, addressed consumer protection by providing for four new food safety inspectors, and achieved \$10.5 million in savings from lower interest rates, taking advantage of the state’s triple-A Bond Rating.

As chairman of the Senate Retirement Committee, I fully support the Truth in Testimony Act (Senate Bill 7) which also passed out of the Senate this week. SB 7 allows committee chairmen the discretion to swear in witnesses by taking an oath before testifying in committee meetings. Committees consider and vote on legislation to determine if it is good enough for full consideration of the Senate. Committees hear testimony in support or opposition of the proposed legislation from government agencies, constituents, subject matter experts and organizations representing specific groups of citizens. This bill allows us to weed through testimonies that could potentially determine the direction of our support. It will ensure the information provided to the committees is genuine and allows us to make better informed decisions on behalf of the constituents we represent.

I am pleased to serve the people of the 31st Senate District. As the Senate now looks to complete this legislative session by taking up House legislation, please contact me with any questions, concerns or feedback. I look forward to hearing from you and continue to work for a better Georgia.

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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 bill.heath@billheath.net.