

Notes from the Georgia Senate

February 25, 2008

By: *Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen)*



We surged past the halfway point of the session this week, and daily business is now moving very rapidly. Among the many pieces of legislation that passed this week, I am happy to report that the Fiscal Year 2008 amended budget has now passed the Senate. The amended budget is sometimes called the “little” budget, since it is only for the last part of the fiscal year, where we may release surplus funding for needed expenditures. This year’s FY 08 amended budget places an emphasis on the areas of natural resources, trauma care funding and education funding. The bill adds \$300 million overall to the existing \$20.2 million budgeted for fiscal year 2008.

The Senate’s version of the FY 08 budget contains:

- \$40 million dollars in new funding for the construction of new reservoirs and \$500,000 for the maintenance and improvement of existing reservoirs. With Senate Bill 342, new state grants will be available to communities that hope to enlarge existing reservoirs or obtain permits to construct new ones.
- New funds for state mental hospitals, child welfare services and the PeachCare program.
- \$6.3 million dollars added to the hazardous waste trust fund.
- \$53 million in new funding for trauma care.
- A \$72 million down payment to return some of the education funds that have been reduced over the past several years due to austerity cuts.

Senate and House leadership will now meet to hammer out the final details of the Amended budget. I feel we have a fiscally responsible budget for the remainder of FY 08, which emphasizes only the critical and emergency needs in the state.

Other key measures passing the Senate this week included:

- SB 387 allows electors to request and cast absentee ballots without stating a reason for doing so, and allows electronic submission of absentee ballot requests. The bill also sets forth new measures in an effort to secure the absentee balloting process.
- SB 361 allows a consumer to place a security freeze on his or her credit report. The freeze would be free for consumers who are victim of identity theft and those over the age of 65.
- SB 379 prohibits the use of automatic dialing and recorded message equipment or “robo-calls” in many circumstances.
- SR 822 creates the Georgia-North Carolina and Georgia-Tennessee Boundary Line Commission, and declares Georgia’s northern border with Tennessee and North Carolina at the 35th parallel.
- SB 395 establishes the Safety Net Clinic grant program for the care and protection of indigent and elderly patients. It is one of Lt. Gov. Cagle’s key healthcare initiatives in 2008.

Call or come visit when you need me . . .

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