

Notes from the Georgia Senate

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By: Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen)



We have completed 28 days of the 2008 session, and Senate committees have been working late into the evening, as we try to pass as many Senate bills as possible by the 30th legislative day, which is otherwise known as “Crossover Day.” Crossover Day is the final day a piece of legislation can cross from one Chamber to the next. This is the time when the big issues start to move onto the floor for debate in both chambers, and business moves at a very hectic pace.

This week, I am happy to report that an important bill protecting the rights of Georgia landowners, Senate Bill 449, has passed out of the Senate Economic Development Committee. Known as the Landowners Protection Act of 2008, the bill would provide property owners immunity from liability when they allow a person to hunt on their land, or when the property owner allows a person to enter their property for “agritourism” purposes, provided the property owner’s conduct is not grossly negligent. I sponsored this bill because it is a good piece of legislation to protect Georgia landowners from frivolous lawsuits in the future.

In other news, the Senate has passed a bill that would protect children in Georgia from the scourge of sexual predators, who prey on kids using the Internet. SB 474 seeks to bring law enforcement, parents and educators together to work with Internet service providers (ISPs) in helping curb harmful online activity. Under the bill, registered sex offenders would be required to provide their e-mail addresses and user names to the state, and their Internet usage may be monitored. The legislation strengthens the partnership with Internet service providers and law enforcement by granting the ability to obtain records involving a possible sexual offense against a child. In an effort to put more control in the hands of parents, SB 474 also requires Internet access providers to offer subscribers the ability to block their child’s access to specific Web sites and monitor their child’s use of the Internet. I look forward to seeing some type of Internet protection laws pass in the upcoming weeks, because we are responsible for protecting our kids from this type of threat.

Some of the other key bills that passed recently in the Senate include:

- SB 433 modifies certificate of need requirements to allow certain destination cancer hospitals in Georgia. Passed by a vote of 31 to 23.
- SB 383 allows the Commissioner of Insurance to adopt policies to promote, approve and encourage health savings account eligible high deductible plans in Georgia. Passed by a vote of 36 to 12.
- SB 366 prohibits prisoners from receiving or possessing cell phones. Passed by a vote of 49 to 0.
- SB 300 is known as the Transparency in Government Act. The bill requires all state spending to be available to the public on a searchable Web site. Passed by a vote of 49 to 0.

Call or come visit when you need me . . .

Sen. Bill Heath represents the 31st Senate District which Haralson and Polk counties and portions of Bartow and Paulding counties. He may be reached at 404.651.7738 or by email at bill.health@senate.ga.gov.