

Notes from the Georgia Senate

March 21, 2008

By: Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen)



As the Senate moves closer to the final gavel of the 2008 session, the news at the Capitol this week was the final passage of the Fiscal Year 08 Amended Budget. This year's FY 08 amended budget places an emphasis on the areas of natural resources, trauma care funding and education. We've added over \$300 million to the existing \$20.2 billion budgeted for fiscal year 2008.

The final version of the FY 08 budget that was agreed upon contains:

- \$40 million dollars in new funding for the construction of new reservoirs and \$500,000 for the maintenance and improvement of existing reservoirs
- New funding 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, some of which goes to Grady Hospital
- \$20 million in equalization funding for education to compensate for new student enrollment

Given the recent prediction of slowing state revenues, I feel we have a fiscally responsible budget for the remainder of FY 08, which strikes a responsible balance between the critical and emergency needs in the state and the desire to keep state spending under control.

In other news, Lieutenant Governor Cagle rolled out a new tax reform plan that if passed could provide more than \$1 billion in tax relief to Georgia taxpayers over the next five years. The Senate tax reform plan offers the hardworking, taxpaying citizens of this state a broad-based tax reduction that will allow them to keep more of their earned income. If passed, the plan will reduce income taxes 10 percent across the board for every citizen who pays income tax, not just those at the top rate of 6 percent. The cuts would be phased in over five years in annual installments, beginning this year on July 1. If passed, it would be the largest tax cut ever in Georgia .

I appreciate that the House of Representatives also chose to address the fact that Georgia needs tax reform this year. Their measure calls for the elimination of all ad valorem taxes in Georgia on cars. Both plans have their benefits, and now it is our job to work together in developing a final plan that combines the best of both for the benefit of our state. This is when the legislative process is at its finest – when two competing ideas, both with merit, must be deliberated upon and a strong end result is reached. Some other bills passing the Senate this week include:

- HB 1019 creates the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank within the State Road and Tollway Authority. The measure will assist in funding new transportation and road projects in the state.
- HB 945 authorizes certain persons to access vehicle tag and title information in order to provide notice to the owners of towed or impounded vehicles.
- HB 1014 expands the Georgia Higher Education Savings Plan to include qualified tuition programs.
- HB 983 authorizes law enforcement agencies from neighboring states that are in fresh pursuit of a suspect who crosses into Georgia to arrest and hold such person in custody.
- HB 1245 reforms and streamlines the current indigent defense system in Georgia with the goal of maintaining solvency.

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.