

Notes from the Georgia Senate

March 28, 2008

By: Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen)



With only four working days remaining, the 2008 legislative session is down to the wire. This is the time of the year when you'll see Senators and Reps running from the Capitol across the street to the legislative offices, trying to keep their bills moving. This week, the Senate passed its version of the Fiscal Year 2009 Budget. This year's budget places an emphasis on education, healthcare, economic development, transportation and more. The FY 09 budget is a \$21.4 billion package that funds the most critical services our state provides to citizens. Here are some of the highlights of the FY 09 budget:

Education

- \$56 million to repay austerity cuts to education. When coupled with the \$53 million from FY 08, this means over \$100 million in new funding for education this year.
- \$22 million in bonds for low wealth school districts
- \$83 million in general school construction money

Healthcare

- \$98 million in state funds and \$341 million total to fully fund PeachCare
- \$9.2 million to improve access to rural health
- \$3 million for public health clinics across the state
- \$6.2 million in state funds/\$17.3 million in total funds for trauma care providers

Economic Development/Transportation

- \$2 million in additional funds for regional business assistance
- \$7 million in community improvement district grants for a congestion relief fund
- \$50 million for a state transportation infrastructure bank to make loans for transportation projects
- \$9.8 million in airport aid
- \$30 million in bonds for reservoirs
- \$26 million for land conservation

The FY 09 budget (HB 990) will now go to a committee comprised of Senate and House negotiators to come to a final agreement on the spending plan.

The Senate tax reform plan was also approved this week. The plan will reduce income taxes 10 percent across the board for every citizen who pays income tax. The cuts would be phased in over five years in annual installments, beginning this year on July 1. Our plan is broad-based, immediate and fair, and it will help Georgia's economy by putting money back into the pockets of taxpayers. The Senate plan would set forth the biggest tax cut in Georgia history at around \$1 billion when fully phased in.

Finally, we saw overwhelming approval of House Bill 301 this week, which toughens Georgia's dog fighting laws. Last year, the news of former Atlanta Falcon Michael Vick's conviction for his involvement in a cruel dog fighting ring shocked and appalled people across the nation. If anything good comes from this case, it could only be that Vick has brought the issue of animal fighting to the forefront of public consciousness. The final passage of HB 301 sends a strong message that we will not tolerate the practice of dog fighting in Georgia.

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.