

## Notes from the Georgia Senate

March 7, 2008

By: Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen)

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The Senate was preparing for Crossover Day this week, which is the last day we can pass a Senate Bill over to the House. Last year, there were more than 60 bills on the Senate calendar for Day 30, which makes for quite a long day in the Chamber. We have completed 29 days of the 2008 session, and this week we've seen several good bills pass. These bills range from a measure creating an online marketplace for health insurance products to a bill allowing sugar gliders to become affordable pets for Georgia citizens. In addition, Senate and House leaders have approved our schedule through the March calendar up to Sine Die, which tentatively will fall on April 2 or 3. This week, I'd like to discuss a couple of the important bills approved by the Senate.

Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle's Georgia Health Marketplace Act passed the Senate on Thursday. Lt. Gov. Cagle announced this initiative last fall in an effort to reduce the number of citizens in our state with no medical insurance. Senate Bill 404 will provide cost-effective options for Georgia citizens seeking more choices for their health insurance. The bill makes it easier for individuals and businesses to purchase health insurance policies by creating an Internet portal, known as the Georgia Health Marketplace (GHM), which will provide consumers with access to healthcare products and programs. These include the PeachCare for Kids program, health insurance coverage to employees of small businesses, health savings accounts (HSAs) and prepaid healthcare services provided directly by a physician. Georgia consumers need increased access to healthcare products, and this online marketplace will provide more options. SB 404 passed by a vote of 42 to 12, and now moves on to the House.

Also this week, a bill I've sponsored along with Governor Sonny Perdue passed the Senate. Senate Bill 449 will further protect the rights of Georgia landowners who allow others to use their property for hunting or other recreational purposes. 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 someone to enter their property for "agritourism" purposes, provided the landowner's conduct is not grossly negligent. The bill protects those who allow others to use their land for hunting, fishing and those who use their land for agritourism ventures by limiting frivolous lawsuits.

Other key bills that passed recently in the Senate include:

- SB 438 increases penalties for those who cause serious injury due to a right of way violation resulting in a collision with a motorcycle, pedestrian, bicyclist or farmer hauling products. Passed by a vote of 51 to 1.
- SB 512 authorizes the distribution of a \$1,500 grant per academic semester to each eligible North Georgia College student who plans to enter the Army. Passed 51 to 0.
- SB 485 creates a licensing program for home inspectors. Passed by a vote of 45 to 0.
- SB 472 is known as the Anti-cigarette Smuggling Act. This bill directs the Department of Revenue to adopt digital based cigarette stamp processes in order to further guard against tax evasion. Passed by a vote of 50 to 0.
- SR 996 is a Constitutional Amendment that allows school boards to pledge tax funds received from redevelopment programs. Adopted by a vote of 46 to 3.
- SB 458 allows students of schools that lose or fail to attain accreditation to receive a scholarship to attend a private school or permission to attend another public school. Passed by a vote of 32 to 21.

Call or come visit when you need me . . .

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