



## *Senate Information Office*

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### **WEEKLY COLUMN**

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## **Notes from the Georgia State Senate**

### **By Senator Bill Heath**

This week Governor Sonny Perdue signed the first piece of 2005 legislation to reach his desk on Wednesday. Senate Bill 3, known as Civil Justice Reform, was signed just days after we voted to approve the House of Representatives' amendments to the bill. On Monday, we voted overwhelmingly – 38-15 – to control rising insurance rates and limit non-economic damages in medical malpractice suits in Georgia. The legislation, which became effective upon the Governor's signature, has been a priority of the medical and business community for several years, and will serve to put a \$350,000 cap per provider for pain and suffering awards. We hope this measure will be a step towards improvement in healthcare for all of us.

We passed a measure Tuesday that will create a statewide tourism marketing initiative and establishes a Georgia Tourism Foundation to solicit and accept donations for the marketing plan. If it passes the House, it also will put the state's Golf, Aviation, Music and Sports halls of fame under the Economic Development Department. The tourism industry greatly enhances Georgia's economic growth for current and future citizens and this bill will bring them all under one umbrella for marketing so we can get the biggest bang for our buck.

Also big news this week was passing the Senate version of the Supplemental Budget. In a move to partially restore \$5 million in cuts made to the Georgia Department of Human Resources FY '05 budget and to provide additional education funding, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted to approve \$191 million worth of additions – for a total FY 05 budget, including the amendments, of \$16.6 billion in state funds. We believe it's a simple concept of “nos”—no new taxes, no new debt and no new programs. We are investing in our children and rebuilding our savings account as the economy improves.

With limited resources, we have to focus on what is best for all of Georgia – not just the select few. That is why we are concentrating on those projects and programs that will most benefit our state's young people. The Senate restored \$3.75 million of the \$5 million in reductions the House of Representatives made to the Georgia Department of Human Resources budget – including \$150,000 for video equipment for the State's 38 Child Advocacy Centers to be used in abuse and neglect cases, so that children are not forced to testify repeatedly on the subject of their individual ordeals.

The Senate Appropriations Committee also identified \$1.2 million for maintenance, repairs and renovations to the State's 34 technical colleges and \$9.4 million for instruction in the Board of Regents' budget. Other education funding includes \$105 million for K-12 student growth – money the Governor appropriated in his initial recommendations.

The Senate and House also reallocated \$7.6 million to the budget to provide public school systems with an additional \$5 for each student enrolled in Georgia's more than 2,000 schools. The two chambers are recommending the new funding for the state's 180 school systems be used at their discretion – provided it is used for instructional purposes such as a reading program or test score improvements.

We made a commitment to you that we will spend your money wisely. I am confident the Senate budget recommendations do just that, and by working with the members of the House of Representatives we will develop a budget that will benefit all Georgians.

Until next week.....

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Sen. Bill Heath represents the 31<sup>st</sup> Senate district which includes parts of Bartow, Haralson and Paulding Counties. He may be reached at 404.463.1361 or by email at [billheath@billheath.net](mailto:billheath@billheath.net).