



## *Senate Information Office*

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### **WEEKLY COLUMN**

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

### **By Senator Bill Heath**

This past week in the Legislative Session, we have considered essential education items as well as tackled tough issues such as the statewide smoking ban and the economic development bill, House Bill 218. Because we are getting closer and closer to Day 33, it has been a week filled with long committee meetings so that we can get this vital legislation out of committee, onto the Senate Floor and over to the House of Representatives for final passage. A bill is lost if it does not make it to the House by Day 33, and there are still many issues that we must discuss before that deadline.

The debate over the need to protect the ability to conduct sensitive economic negotiations versus the public's right to know is one of the most serious issues facing the legislature this year. I want to assure you that HB 218 does not allow secret deals to change zoning or waive environmental laws. This legislation will simply enable Georgia to compete in the increasingly cut-throat business of economic development. Job recruitment is a process of elimination and one of the reasons a state can be knocked off the list for consideration is its inability to protect information companies deem sensitive. Today, Georgia is at a distinct disadvantage in this area. I want to put your fears to rest about this issue and let you know that I will fight for each neighborhood in this district. You have a right to determine how

land and the environment is developed and protected, and I will fight to protect those rights. At the same time, I work everyday to attract good, high-paying jobs for you and your children.

House Bill 218 addresses this issue and puts Georgia on a level playing field with other states when it comes to recruiting businesses to relocate to our great state. All of Georgia's bordering states protect the ongoing negotiations between public officials and the private sector over whether a new industry will move to their state. We are losing business to Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida. Those bordering states have free reign to look at whatever we are doing to attract businesses and then make a better offer to those same companies. This puts Georgia at a disadvantage in trying to create jobs for our families. Other states are unwilling to open their records up for scrutiny, forcing Georgia to consider closing ours.

This week we also made great strides in improving education for not only the children of Georgia, but also for educators. We passed Senate Bill 34, also known as the *Master Teacher Program*, out of the Senate recently and this week we agreed to the House version which makes minor changes. Part of Gov. Perdue's education package, this legislation will serve to make outstanding teachers "master teachers" who will become mentors to their colleagues and pass on their outstanding teaching skills to their colleagues if it reaches the Governor's desk. Teachers who continued through the program eventually could become academic coaches which would give them additional pay for their duties. The purpose of the legislation is to keep outstanding teachers in the classroom while still being given the opportunity to move up the education ladder without becoming a principal or superintendent. All too often the efforts of our teachers are not recognized and this program will allow many educators to be able to reach their highest potential while continuing to impact their students and colleagues in a positive way.

This week we debated Senate Bill 90, also known as the *Smoke Free Act*. I believe that every Georgian has the right to breathe smoke-free air but not at the expense of the individual freedom for those who wish to smoke. I believe that it's not about smoking; it's about infringing on the rights of individual businesses and business owners. However, after careful consideration, I believe that we are coming to a good bipartisan compromise in Senate Bill 90 and I believe that we can both protect those who choose not to smoke while protecting the right to smoke for citizens who choose to do so.

Until next week.....

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