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WEEKLY COLUMN

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Notes from the Georgia State Senate

General Assembly celebrates Family Day 2007

By State Sen. Bill Heath



We are headed toward the halfway point in the 2007 legislative session, and the pace of business will increase dramatically by the time we reach Day 20. We also celebrated Family Day at the State Capitol on February 10, where we invite our families and members of the general public come to the Capitol to experience the legislative process in person.

Family Day 2007

Last week, we celebrated the second installment of Family Day at the Capitol. Family Day is a day we choose to convene for a rare Saturday morning of session. On this day, members of the General Assembly will bring their families to the Capitol to take part in the legislative process. Also, we invite members of the general public to visit either the Senate or the House Chambers to witness a day of session. All of this is done for a few important reasons – to allow Senators and Representatives to show their loved ones what they actually do during the long hours of the legislative session, to educate the public on the legislative process and how a bill becomes a law, and most of all, for everyone to have a fun day at the Capitol. This year, the Senate took up regular business, which is a change from the first Family Day in 2005. Besides learning about how a bill becomes law, Family Day 2007 also featured the Secretary of State's copy of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. There were displays from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, classic cars from the Georgia State Patrol, the "Orange

Crush” Humvee and an OH58 helicopter from the Georgia Department of Defense, snakes, owls and other birds from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, displays from the Atlanta Fire Department, including fire trucks and a blow-up slide, and Georgia Tech’s mascot “Buzz.” This year’s Family Day was a great time for all, and I hope we can celebrate it again in the future.

PeachCare for Kids

If you watch the news, I am sure that by now you’ve seen stories about the PeachCare program. PeachCare for Kids is a comprehensive healthcare program for uninsured children in Georgia. The program provides health benefits that include primary, preventive, specialist, dental care and vision care. Currently, Georgia ranks fourth in the country in the number of enrolled children behind New York, California and Florida. PeachCare is Georgia’s version of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program or “SCHIP.” Because of the formula used to calculate federal allotments to the state coupled with the unexpected success of many SCHIP programs, Georgia is in danger of facing a shortfall in federal funds, and could run out of PeachCare money in April or May 2007. Despite lobbying efforts by Governor Sonny Perdue and others, Georgia is facing a \$57.8 million shortfall in federal funds for FY 07 (which ends June 30). In response to this issue, Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle has formed the PeachCare Task Force. The Task Force will be charged with developing a short list of options for the full Senate to consider in order to save the PeachCare program over the long term. Needless to say, we are doing everything possible to restore federal funding for the PeachCare program, because many children in Georgia depend on this program. Many of those enrolled in PeachCare are Georgia’s neediest kids, and we cannot leave them without the proper healthcare treatment.

Remember to contact me in my office on the issues that are affecting you and your area.

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Sen. Bill Heath represents the 31st Senate District, which includes all of Haralson and Polk Counties and parts of Bartow and Paulding Counties. He may be reached at 404.651.7738, or by email at billheath@billheath.net.