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Notes from the Georgia State Senate *Many important issues are now before us*

By State Sen. Bill Heath



The General Assembly began a two-week recess period last week, but we are still hard at work for the people of Georgia, as we wait for Congress to approve funding for a program that is integral to Georgia's children – PeachCare. As we look to address the PeachCare situation, we are simultaneously preparing the Fiscal Year 2007-08 budget, introducing new bills and moving many bills through committees. Here are some important measures that we will look at before the end of the 2007 legislative session.

All Georgia Serves Amendment

The *All Georgia Serves* constitutional amendment would expand the number of social organizations in Georgia able to use state funds to care for our most vulnerable citizens. The amendment was introduced by Gov. Perdue to remove any uncertainty about the ability of faith-based organizations to accept state funds for providing social services, allowing the best human services providers to serve our neediest families and children. The *All Georgia Serves* amendment will bring the Georgia Constitution in line with the U. S. Constitution. The Senate Health and Human Services Committee recently approved this measure, and I will carry the amendment as it makes its way through the legislative process.

Fighting false IDs and documents

Senate Bill 100 passed the Senate last week by a unanimous vote. The legislation will increase the existing penalties for those who knowingly manufacture, sell or distribute false identification documents. The measure incorporates a certain amount of leniency for underage citizens who may be too young to realize that falsifying an official ID for the purpose of purchasing alcohol is *not* a good idea. However, those who manufacture and sell fake IDs to those who use them to stay in the U.S. illegally need to be punished. Since the early 1990s, Georgia has seen an influx of illegal immigrants moving into our state, and we began to take steps last year to curb this problem by passing SB 529. This year we are taking additional steps to be sure that illegal immigrants do not have easy access to driver's licenses, other identifying documents, license plates and tags, all of which help them to assimilate easily into our communities. It is a crime to be in the U.S. illegally, and we are still at work addressing this issue, because I know it is a major concern of my constituents.

Zero-based budgeting

Forcing the state budget to be rebuilt from scratch every four years is an idea whose time has come. The Senate decided that recently by voting to require that one quarter of the state budget undergo a complete examination each year, so that every four years, all state programs are re-evaluated prior to funding. Each year, Georgia's state agencies request new funding for their programs – and only this “new” money is scrutinized by legislators. The remainder of the budget is considered “continuous spending,” and just rolls over from fiscal year to fiscal year. The idea of zero-based budgeting will change the way the state computes the budget, and that will greatly benefit Georgia's taxpayers.

These measures will help bring our state forward into the 21st century. They are working their way through the legislative process, and I hope to see them pass through both chambers to go to the Governor's desk very soon. I appreciate your support, as I do my best to represent your interests in the state Senate.

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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.