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WEEKLY COLUMN

For Immediate Release:
April 13, 2007

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Notes from the Georgia State Senate

Property tax refund will benefit many hardworking Georgians

By State Sen. Bill Heath



If you weren't tuned in to the business of the General Assembly last week, then you may not have heard the great news coming out of our state capitol. After much deliberation, leadership in the Senate and House has arrived at a compromise on the FY 07 supplemental budget that will be of great benefit to all of Georgia's citizens.

First, let me bring you up to speed on the budget talks that have taken place in the last few weeks. Recently, members of the Senate voted to cut all "pork" out of the FY 07 amended budget and include only those items that are absolutely necessary.

In a bipartisan spirit, members of the Senate rallied behind Lt. Governor Casey Cagle, who is adamant that the amended budget should fund only those items necessary – additional funding for Georgia's school systems, which admitted more students than they anticipated last year, and to fund emergency spending needs such as *PeachCare for Kids*, the counties which were damaged by the March 1 tornadoes and the public defender program.

This is a responsible spending philosophy that keeps the pledge Republicans have made to exercise restraint in the budget process, and put our state on sound financial footing. Lt. Gov. Cagle is doing the right thing, and because he is doing the right thing, he has unanimous support in the Senate. When

it comes to the taxpayers' money, government officials should demonstrate fiscal responsibility and restraint, and I think that we see this in the FY 07 amended budget. I am proud of the principled work we have done in the Senate Appropriations Committee and in Conference Committee in an attempt to truly cut back on government spending.

Last week, a compromise was reached on the amended budget that will allow approximately \$140 million to be returned to Georgia homeowners in the form of a refund or property tax credit. In adopting the FY 07 budget, we are taking our state government in a very positive new direction. Georgia's taxpayers are currently overburdened, and we need to do everything we can to lower the current tax burden. Once we've adequately funded the next year's budget and put money into the state reserves, we need to look into ways that we can either reduce or completely eliminate certain state taxes – such as the state income tax or ad valorem tax. I am pleased to have been involved in the budget process, and I look forward to our work on the upcoming FY 08 budget.

In other news, the Senate passed an important bill (HB 128) last week that will pave the way for Georgia's sixth sales tax holiday. As many of you know, the tax holiday allows consumers an exemption from both state and local taxes on personal purchases, such as school supplies, personal computers and accessories and clothing items with a sales price of \$100 or less per item. This year, parents and teachers will again get a little help from the state with back-to-school preparation, while out-of-state shoppers will invest their dollars in our economy. Once again, the weekend will be a win-win for consumers and retailers alike. This year's back-to-school sales tax holiday begins at midnight on Thursday, August 2, and runs through midnight on Sunday, August 5, 2007. In addition, a sales tax holiday on energy efficient appliances will take place Thursday, October 4 through Sunday, October 7.

Please 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.