



Governmental Affairs

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Weekly Legislative Report #1

Week Ending January 18, 2019

The second Monday in January, as dictated by the state's constitution, played host to the convening of the Georgia General Assembly last week. Following raise-your-right-hand ceremonies in the House and Senate, the two bodies reconvened in joint session at Georgia Tech's basketball arena for similar formalities to swear in Governor Brian Kemp, Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan and other recently-elected constitutional officers.

On his fourth day on the job, Kemp delivered his first state of the state address at the Capitol. In it he announced that his budget proposal includes a 2% raise for state employees and a \$3,000 raise for public school teachers. He called the teacher raise a substantial down payment on his campaign promise to raise teacher salaries by \$5,000. The Governor also wants to budget \$1 million for the development of a waiver application to the federal government that would give Georgia greater flexibility to serve more people with Medicaid, without adopting complete expansion based solely on income.

The budget also calls for borrowing \$100 million for bridge projects and \$150 million for a new voting system for Georgia. Additionally, Kemp is requesting \$8.4 million for mental health programs in high schools and one-time funding for of \$69 million for school security -- \$30,000 for each of Georgia's 2,294 public schools.

Kemp's plan attacks the waiting list for senior services by including \$1.9 million to fund 1,000 additional slots for non-Medicaid home and community based services, nearly \$1 million to reduce the waiting list for home-delivered meals, \$957,000 to increase funds for 12 adult protection service caseworkers, \$366,752 to increase funds for five additional public guardianship caseworkers and \$338,802 to increase funds to sustain the Aging and Disabilities Resource Connection network.

[Link to the FY 2020 budget request.](#)

Robin Crittenden Appointed Commissioner of DHS

This week Governor Kemp appointed Robin Crittenden Commissioner of the Department of Human Services. She had served as DHS Commissioner from July 2015 until November 2018, when then-Governor Nathan Deal appointed her as Georgia's 28th Secretary of State to complete Kemp's unexpired term as Secretary of State.

Senate Committee Chair Changes

Very little has more impact on the fate of legislation than who chairs the committee to which it is assigned. Thus, changes in committee chairmanships are always big news at the Capitol. This session, the biggest "chair change" story is that longtime Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee Chair Renee Unterman (R-Buford) lost that position to Sen. Ben Watson (R-Savannah). Assumptions are that the move was related to the expected battle over Certificate of Need (CON) issues this year. Appointments are made by a five-person committee controlled by the Lt. Governor. In other shifts, Frank Ginn (R-Danielsville) was named chair of Economic Development and Tourism, replacing Mike Dugan (R-Carrollton), who was elected by his peers to be Majority Leader. Former Majority Leader Bill Cowsert becomes Chair of Regulated Industries, and Kay Kirkpatrick (R-Marietta) takes over at Ethics replacing Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge). Lindsey Tippins (R-Marietta) will replace Fran Millar (R-Atlanta), who was defeated in the General Election, as chair of Higher Education. P.K. Martin (R-Lawrenceville) takes over at Education and Youth. [Link to list of Senate committees, chairs and members.](#)

House Committee Chair Changes

On the House side a few important changes include Rep. Jay Powell (R-Camilla) replacing John Meadows (deceased) as Chair of Rules. That freed up Ways & Means to be chaired by Brett Harrell (R-Snellville). Jesse Petrea (R-Savannah) will chair Human Relations & Aging, replacing Eddie Lumsden (R-Armuchee) who moved to Reapportionment. Barry Fleming (R-Augusta) is the new Chair of Judiciary replacing Wendell Willard (retired). Alan Powell (R-Hartwell) takes over from Howard Maxwell (retired) as head of Regulated Industries. Chuck Efstrotation (R-Dacula) takes over from Rick Golick (retired) as head of Judiciary Non-Civil. [Link to list of House committees, chairs and members.](#)

Women in the Senate

Sen. Unterman's demotion from chair of HHS, a committee that handled 121 bills last year, to Science and Technology that handled only four, provided impetus for a series of speakers concerned with the treatment of women senators. During a period for personal privilege remarks Sen. Elena Parent (D-Atlanta) pointed out that women hold 28% of the seats in the Senate, but are under-represented on eight of the nine committees that handled the most pieces of legislation last session. She said they are over-represented on five of the six committees assigned the fewest number of bills. One committee, known as Special Judiciary, is composed of seven women, including the chair, and one man, but all are Democrats. Based on experience, they don't expect to have any bills assigned for their consideration this session.

Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan pointed out that four women were appointed as committee chairs as opposed to only two last year. He did not address how few bills these committees consider. Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) replied to the female speakers with what may be at the root of the situation -- that 13 of the 15 women are Democrats. He said that when he was first elected, Republicans were in the minority, and that he, too, served on Special Judiciary. Back then, he recalled, it was the Republicans who got lousy committee assignments from the Democrats in control.

Poll Regarding Policy Issues

On Sunday the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* released a poll conducted for the paper by the UGA School of Public and International Affairs that provides a perspective on the public's view of some of this session's top issues. The poll, conducted Jan.7 through Jan. 17 was of 702 registered voters and has a 3.7% margin of error. Here are some highlights:

Prefer a paper ballot filled in by voter 54.9%
Prefer a paper ballot filled in by computer 34.8%

Remove registrants who don't vote for several years?
Yes 40.5% No 57.1%

How likely is it that obstacles to voting or problems with machines affected the outcome of Georgia's 2018 election for governor?
Likely or Very likely 52.3%
Not very likely or Not likely at all 43.7%

Should GA expand eligibility for Medicaid?
Yes 71% No 22%

Require adults without disabilities to be working or looking for work in order to be eligible for Medicaid benefits?
Yes 65.8% No 27.5%

Raise taxes on cigarettes and e-cigarettes to help pay for public healthcare funding?
Yes 73.2% No 22.3%

Tax phone lines, TV subscriptions and internet streaming services (like Netflix) to build internet lines in rural Georgia?
Approve 27.9% Disapprove 65.5%

Allow gun owners to carry a concealed weapon without a permit?
Yes 15.1% No 82.9%

Increase age to buy an assault weapon from 18 to 21?
Yes 78.2% No 19.1%

Yes, We're Talking the 2020 Election

Sen. Brandon Beach (R-Alpharetta) has announced his intentions to run for Congress in north suburban Atlanta's highly competitive 6th District. Currently chair of the Senate Transportation Cmte., Beach aims to challenge newly-elected Democratic Congresswoman Lucy McBath in November 2020. McBath is the Democrat who just defeated the one-term Republican Karen Handel in a close election. It's unknown whether Beach will first have to face Handel or others in the 2020 Republican primary.

Our Friends

In more personal news, our good friend Tom McCall (R-Elberton) was sworn into the House from a hospital room in Athens only a few days after successful heart bypass surgery. Reports are that everything went according to plan, and he was photographed standing up to take the oath. Best wishes for his speedy recovery and return to the gold dome.

And sadly, on the first day of the session, House icon Butch Parrish (R-Swainsboro) lost his lovely wife following a courageous battle with cancer. Charlotte had retired recently but was well-known and respected around the Capitol in her own right during many years as a House budget analyst and most recently as an analyst/lobbyist for the Prosecuting Attorneys Council. She remained one of the "Capitol crowd," and we valued her friendship and always enjoyed her company during the numerous off-site legislative events held each year. We extend to Butch and family our most heart-felt condolences.

Next Week

Monday is the MLK holiday and technically the General Assembly will be in recess all week. But the Capitol will still be abuzz as 118 legislators (half the total) will be participating in Appropriations Committee hearings. State agency heads will parade before the joint House/Senate hearings Tuesday and Wednesday to present (justify) the details contained in their respective portions of the Governor's budget request. State Fiscal Economist Kenneth Heaghey will testify on Tuesday and Gov. Kemp will address his budget priorities in much greater detail at noon on Wednesday. Thursday afternoon is reserved for testimony regarding federal block grants.

Tracking List

Here are the bills we are tracking. **New activity is noted in red.** Click on the [Bill Number](#) to access the current version of the bill.

The 2019 Legislative Session is the first session of the 2019-2020 Term of the Georgia General Assembly. Therefore, bills not passed or defeated during this session will be carried over to the 2020 session. Bills pending in the House or Senate Rules Committees at adjournment sine die of the 2019 session will be recommitted to the committee from whence they came.

City & County Governments and Regional Commissions

[HB 22 Public Utilities and Public Transportation; telephone cooperatives and their affiliates to provide broadband services](#) (Rep. Penny Houston-R)

Relating to public utilities and public transportation, so as to specifically authorize telephone cooperatives and their broadband affiliates to provide broadband services; to authorize certain financing and partnerships for the provision of broadband services. **Status:** Referred Economic Development & Tourism Cmte

[HB 23 Public utilities and public transportation; electric membership corporations and their affiliates to provide broadband services](#) (Rep. Penny Houston-R)

Relating to public utilities and public transportation, so as to specifically authorize electric membership corporations and their affiliates to provide broadband services; to authorize certain financing and partnerships for the provision of broadband services; to prohibit cross-subsidization between the provision of broadband services and an electric membership corporation's natural gas activities or electricity services activities. **Status:** Referred Economic Development & Tourism Cmte

[SB 2, Public Utilities and Public Transportation; electric membership corporations and their affiliates; authorize; broadband services](#) (Sen. Steve Gooch-R)

Relating to public utilities and public transportation, so as to specifically authorize electric membership corporations and their affiliates to provide broadband services; to authorize certain financing and partnerships for the provision of broadband services; to prohibit cross-subsidization between the provision of broadband services and an electric membership corporation's natural gas activities or electricity services activities. **Status:** Referred Regulated Industries and Utilities Cmte

[SB 17, Public Utilities and Public Transportation; authorize telephone cooperatives and their broadband affiliates; provide broadband services](#) (Sen. Steve Gooch-R)

Relating to public utilities and public transportation, so as to specifically authorize telephone cooperatives and their broadband affiliates to provide broadband services; to authorize certain financing and partnerships for the provision of broadband services **Status:** Referred Regulated Industries and Utilities Cmte

Hospitals

[SB 16, "Interstate Medical Licensure Compact Act"](#) (Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick-R)

Relating to physicians, assistants, and others, so as to enter into an interstate compact known as the "Interstate Medical Licensure Compact Act"; to authorize the Georgia Composite Medical Board to administer the compact in this state; to require fingerprint records checks; to provide for application of an expedited license; to provide for a coordinated information system; to provide for joint investigations and discipline; to provide for a commission to administer the compact among the member states. **Status:** Referred to Health and Human Services Cmte

Insurance

[SB 18 "Direct Primary Care Act"](#) (Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick-R)

Relating to kinds of insurance, limits of risks, and reinsurance, so as to provide definitions; to provide that direct primary care agreements are not insurance; to exempt such agreements from regulation as insurance; to provide for discontinuance of services under certain circumstances. **Status:** Referred to Health and Human Services Cmte

Study Committees

[SR 19 Create Georgia Commission on Freight and Logistics](#) (Sen. Brandon Beach-R)

A resolution creating the Georgia Commission on Freight and Logistics **Status:** Referred to Transportation Cmte

