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Weekly Legislative Report #1

Week Ending January 15, 2021

Amid COVID pandemic restrictions and health requirements, the first session of the 2021-22 term of the Georgia General Assembly was convened on January 11. Legislators entered their respective chambers in small groups as summoned to be sworn-in, each member allowed only one person to accompany them. The corridors in front of the House and Senate are blocked off from the public and there will be severe restrictions on public seating in committee rooms. However, all committee meetings (and some subcommittee meetings) are supposed to be live-streamed on the General Assembly's newly refashioned web site, www.legis.ga.gov. The site is a great resource for researching bills, scouting upcoming Capitol meetings, and locating officials' contact information.

State officials, legislators and staff are being tested for the Coronavirus twice each week, on Mondays and Thursdays. We've learned that nine members/staff in the Senate, including the Majority Leader, and four in the House tested positive last week. On Tuesday, Speaker David Ralston told the House in no uncertain terms that he was not pleased to learn that 74 reps had skipped the first test. Based on his tone and the fact that he was checking the list of "testees," we're guessing that many won't miss again. Whether or not lawmakers will have to take an extended recess like last year is a question in the back of everyone's mind.

Most of the work of the legislature during the first week was pro forma. The Senate, with only 56 members, is a little ahead in the organization game, having already made committee assignments and announced chairs. The House, 180 strong, is expected to have committee members and chairs published by Tuesday.

State of the State

Governor Brian Kemp delivered his [state of the state address](#) on Thursday, emphasizing the term "resilient" to describe Georgia's response to the severe challenges presented in 2020. He

promised that there would be no budget cuts in the coming year, and no tax increases. He pointed out that Georgia's unemployment rate of 5.7% is below the national average. In a reference to the contentious politics of the recent election, Kemp discouraged any legislators who might want to "assign blame, settle old scores and relive and relitigate 2020."

One prickly issue sure to generate legislation this session is the integrity of absentee voting. Kemp and many Republicans are on record in support of requiring photo IDs to vote absentee. Opponents of such a change counter that no significant fraud was ever substantiated in the last election. One problem cited with photo IDs is that many elderly don't have a driver's license or a convenient way to make a copy of any other ID for submission with a ballot request. We expect several other tweaks to the way elections are conducted to be introduced in the coming weeks.

The Governor's Budget

In connection to the State of the State address, Gov. Kemp also published his [proposed budgets](#) for the remainder of the fiscal year ending June 30 and for FY 2022. The "big budget," as the July 1 spending plan is known, does not include any across-the-board cuts as were required last year. The figure that Kemp calculates will balance the state's income and expenditures in FY 2022 is \$27.2 billion. That's up from \$25.9 billion this time last year. The proposal seeks 1.2 billion new dollars for K-12 education and \$76 million to fund Medicaid waivers that would increase coverage to another 50,000 Georgians. He has targeted \$10 million to the OneGeorgia Authority to establish a broadband infrastructure grant program for rural communities. When federal funds for programs such as Medicaid, various block grants, etc. are included, total spending will reach \$54 billion.

However, submission of the Governor's proposed numbers is just the starting point in a long process. The official budget bill is introduced in the House where appropriations subcommittees quickly begin to analyze, edit and massage the numbers and programs before passing it over to the Senate, which repeats the process. Given the danger of a COVID surge requiring the legislature to take a mid-session break, we think leadership will try to finish work on the amended budget quickly to ensure state agencies have updated guidelines for their spending during the last three months of the fiscal year.

Chancellor Wrigley to Retire

University System of Georgia Chancellor Steve Wrigley announced Tuesday he will retire July 1, capping a long career in higher education and public service. Wrigley oversees colleges and universities across the state with a total of more than 340,000 students. Speaker David Ralston observed, "Throughout his tenure, both as a university administrator and Chief of Staff to Governor Zell Miller, Chancellor Wrigley has demonstrated his commitment to the future of this state and its people. He was a driving force behind the creation of our HOPE Scholarship Program which has provided more than \$11 billion to help deserving students afford a world-class college education in Georgia."

Next Week

As usual, the General Assembly is in recess during MLK holiday week while it delves into the FYA 2021 budget. Joint House/Senate Appropriations Committee hearings will be held Tuesday through Thursday with most members participating virtually. [Click here for the schedule and live video.](#) The General Assembly won't meet in regular session again until Tuesday, January 26.

Tracking List

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

The 2021 Legislative Session is the first session of the 2021-2022 Term of the Georgia General Assembly. Therefore, bills not passed or defeated during this session will be carried over to the 2022 session. Bills pending in the House or Senate Rules Committees at adjournment sine die of the 2021 session will be recommitted to the committee from whence they came.

Sections:

[Aging](#)

[Business – Tort Reform](#)

[Business](#)

[City & County Governments & Regional Commissions](#)

[Economic Development](#)

[Environmental & Natural Resources](#)

[Government – General](#)

[Health – General](#)

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[Workers' Comp](#)

Aging

Business – Tort Reform

Business

City & County Governments and Regional Commissions

Economic Development

Environmental & Natural Resources

Government -- General

Health – General

Hospitals -- CON (Certificate of Need)

Hospitals

Insurance

[SB 1](#), Georgia All-Payer Claims Database (Sen. Dean Burke-R)

Relating to the Georgia All-Payer Claims Database, so as to provide that entities that receive certain tax credits and that provide self-funded, employer sponsored health insurance plans are submitting entities and provide for related matter. **Status:** [Referred to Finance Cmte](#)

Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities

Military Base Support

Pharmaceuticals

Public Health

Study Committee

Taxes

[SB 6](#), State Tax Exemptions (Sen. John Albers-R)

Relating to fiscal bills to provide for independent economic analyses to be procured by the Office of Planning and Budget for certain tax benefits upon request by the chairpersons of the House Committee on Ways and Means and the Senate Finance Committee. **Status:** Referred to Finance Cmte

Transportation

Workers' Comp

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