

GUCA Legislative Update Week #1

1/12/07

The 2007 Legislative Session began on an interesting note with the Democrats creating a fuss by filing an ethics complaint on the Speaker of the House Glenn Richardson. The ethics complaint alleges an inappropriate relationship with a former lobbyist. The complaint did nothing to prevent Representative Glenn Richardson from being re-elected as Speaker of the House. In the Senate, the lieutenant governor's powers stripped from Democrat Mark Taylor when Republicans gained control of the Senate four years ago - were restored to the new lieutenant governor, Republican Casey Cagle. The lieutenant governor will now have the power to appoint committees and to decide where legislation goes.

A few blocks away at the Philips Arena, Governor Sonny Perdue was sworn in for his second term, promising to hand off a well-run state to whoever succeeds him in four years. Casey Cagle, becoming the state's first Republican Lieutenant Governor, continued setting a tone of bipartisanship. He said he sees himself "not as just the first lieutenant governor for the Republican Party but the next lieutenant governor for all of Georgia." In keeping his word, the new Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle has set a palpable change of tone in the Senate, where he started wielding the gavel on the second day for the first time. He promised fairness and bipartisanship, a pledge welcomed by his Democratic opposition.

On the third day of the session Governor Sonny Perdue claimed "This state is poised for greatness" to lawmakers in the annual State of the State address, in which he also proposed a \$20.2 billion budget for next year. He promised \$100 million to begin the process of meeting new accounting rules to provide for the health care of retired teachers and state workers and called on Congress to shore up federal funding for PeachCare. In addition Perdue's "Go Fish Georgia" program, a \$19 million investment to create world-class resources for fishing and boating enthusiasts, is designed to draw more tourists to Georgia, along with premier tournaments. Also in his speech, Perdue came down firmly on the side of House leaders who have vowed to take a hard look at reforming the tax code. "I think we all agree that we need to take a long, hard, comprehensive look at tax policy and to come up with a fair approach that meets our needs and spurs economic development in Georgia." But having said that, he went on to propose granting a new tax exemption for material and equipment used to build biofuel facilities.

Among the bills introduced this week was House Bill 21 to prevent state, county or municipal agencies from printing official documents in any language other than English. Then there is the "Merry Christmas" bill, which would prohibit governmental entities from restricting verbal expressions relating to the celebration of any public or legal holiday. A bill in the hopper would do away with what is known as the corporate net worth tax. This little-known tax levies a graduated tax on the net worth of certain businesses while exempting others but is capped at \$5,000. For many, Representative Chuck Martin said, it is a nuisance tax that requires them to spend far more than \$5,000 to prepare the return. It was worth \$35 million to the state in 2005. That lead foot may start costing you under an administration proposal due to be introduced soon. Basically, it will involve add-on fines for those caught going 75 mph or more on two-lane highways or 85 mph or more on the Interstates (or anywhere else.)

In other appointment news, Representative Jim Cole, R-Forsyth, a former professional baseball player, has been named an assistant administration floor leader for Perdue in the House. He replaces Representative Jay Walker, R-Ocilla, who has been elected chairman of the House GOP Caucus.

Below you will find a list of bills and resolutions that are most important to you. Since this is the beginning of a biennial session all legislation listed below is new for this year 2007. If you would like to retrieve a complete copy of a bill or resolution you can access the information at www.legis.ga.gov .

We continuously monitor all legislation closely and keep you informed of any activity. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions, concerns, or special requests.

Bills of Concern:

Currently, there is no new legislation pertaining to GUCA's realm of business.

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