

Representative Kathy B. Ashe

House District 56 ... The Heart of Atlanta

2010 KEY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

LEGISLATION THAT PASSED

2011 Budget: The new \$17.9 billion budget reflects an overall revenue reduction of more than \$3 billion from two years ago. This budget will cause more layoffs and furloughs for teachers and other state employees and shift the tax burden to local property owners. Public school funding through the Quality Basic Education formula is slashed by another \$527 million. Nearly \$800,000 in funding for the Georgia Council for the Arts, which had been eliminated in the previous House budget, was restored by the Senate. HB 948 now goes to the governor for his signature. He may also veto line-item appropriations.

Transportation Funding: Under HB 277, Georgia will be divided into 12 regions, each of which will hold a referendum in 2012 for a special 1 percent sales tax to be used for transportation improvements within that region. Individual counties cannot opt out of the funding plan, but a "roundtable" of local elected officials can decide not to hold a tax referendum in their regions, whose boundaries mirror those of Georgia's regional commissions, including the 10-county Atlanta Regional Commission. The bill also gives MARTA more flexibility to spend its sales tax revenues on new projects.

Taxes and Fees: HB 1055 increases user fees on more than 80 services provided by the state, bringing in approximately \$96 million. The increased costs affect a broad range of fees, including civil court filings, business registrations and specialty car tags. The bill also includes a 1.45 percent tax increase on hospitals and their patients, which will generate approximately \$169 million, and two minor tax cuts, one of which phases out the state's 0.25-mill property tax, and the other of which eliminates the retirement income for seniors. HB 903 extends Atlanta's hotel-motel tax to generate funding for a new domed stadium or renovation of the Georgia Dome to keep the Atlanta Falcons in downtown Atlanta.

Ethics Legislation: SB 17 doubles the fines for late reporting and other violations of campaign disclosure rules, demands timely reporting of expenditures by lobbyists and makes sexual harassment by legislators a punishable offense. SB 17 also requires a citizen filing a complaint to pay the official's attorney fees if the Ethics Commission determines the complaint is frivolous.

Trauma Care Funding: Georgia voters will have a chance to approve a reliable funding mechanism that would help enhance the state's trauma care network following passage of SR 277. The proposed constitutional amendment would implement a \$10 fee on auto license tags to bring in \$80 million each year for a trauma care trust fund. The proposal still requires majority approval by voters in November.

Water Management: SB 370 implements a number of water conservation measures, including requirements for low-flow plumbing devices in newly constructed homes and buildings and an outdoor watering restriction. HB 406 allows the development of new reservoirs in south Fulton County.

Property Tax Assessments: SB 346 requires that every property owner receive an annual Notice of Assessment that includes the estimated property tax and expands the appeal time from 30 to 45 days. All relevant sales, including distress sales, must be included when determining Fair Market Value.

Gun Carrying Expansion: SB 308 expands the number of public areas where persons with firearms licenses can carry guns, including parks and historic sites, parking lots of universities courthouses, jails, and in bars with the owners consent. It would eliminate the ban on guns within 1,000 feet of schools and colleges. SB 291 authorizes the carrying of firearms in some areas of airports.

Traffic Safety: SB 360 bans motorists in Georgia from texting while driving, and HB 23 bans teenagers from talking on cell phones while driving. A violation of either law, if signed by the Governor, would

result in a fine of up to \$150 and one point on the driver's license of the offender. SB 458 removes the exemption in Georgia's seat belt law for drivers and passengers in pickup trucks.

Public Education: HB 908 allows local school systems to increase class sizes over the next three years. SB 250 requires the state Department of Education to develop an anti-bullying policy that can serve as a model for local school systems, along with age-appropriate consequences for bullying in grades K-12. SB 299 gives school systems more flexibility in handling violations of "zero tolerance" discipline policies.

GEFA Loan Sell-Off: HB 244 includes the governor's proposal to sell a portion of the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) loans on Wall Street in order to raise some \$290 million to help balance the budget. These loans are valued at \$676 million. GEFA loans are made by the state to local governments at low interest rates to finance infrastructure projects across the state.

Sex Offender Laws: HB 571 allows low-risk inmates to petition the courts to be removed from the sex offender registry after completing their sentences, including those who are disabled, confined to hospice care or who were convicted in "Romeo and Juliet" cases of consensual teen sex.

LEGISLATION THAT DID NOT PASS

Teacher Merit Pay: Gov. Perdue proposed to change how teachers are rewarded and punished. He had bills to pay them based on student performance and to strip them of their pensions if they tampered with the standardized tests that would be part of the evaluations.

Appointment of State Officers: The Governor wanted the Commissioners of Agriculture, Insurance and Labor as well as the Superintendent of Schools to be appointed, rather than elected, in the future. The proposal never had enough support to get out of committee.

Private School Vouchers: There was legislation to expand the state's voucher program that provides taxpayer funds for private-school tuition to handicapped students. The plan would have made vouchers also available to foster children and military dependents.

Mortgage Reform: After two years of committee discussion and intense lobbying by consumer groups, the legislature still failed to pass a bill designed to address some of the consequences of the rash of foreclosures.

Right to Choose: Legislation making it a felony for doctors to perform an abortion if the patient disclosed she was having the procedure because of objections to the race or gender of the fetus, or because she was coerced, never came to a vote in the House.

Milton County: The proposed constitutional amendment to carve out a portion of north Fulton County as a new "Milton County" failed to get enough support for passage.

Tobacco Tax Increase: Despite polls showing 73 percent public support among Georgians, a \$1-per-pack cigarette tax increase failed to get out of committee.

Representative Kathy B. Ashe

House District 56... The Heart of Atlanta

82 Westminster Drive NE

Atlanta, Georgia 30309

404-875-9467

Email: kathyashe@me.com / Website: www.kathyashe.com