



The Capitol Report: January 17th, 2003

Provided by The Georgia Railroad Association

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Historic Session Underway

The 2003 Georgia General Assembly convened on Monday, January 13, and nothing is as it used to be except the hard marble floors of the Capitol. A new Speaker presides over the House of Representatives for the first time more than two decades. There is a Republican in the Governor's office and a Republican majority in the Senate for the first time in 130 years.

Rep. Terry Coleman of Eastman was elected Speaker of the House after fellow Democrat Larry Walker withdrew from the race Monday morning. Others elected to leadership posts include DuBose Porter of Dublin, speaker pro tempore; Jimmy Skipper of Americus, majority leader; and Nan Orrock of Atlanta, majority whip. Rep. Lynn Westmoreland remains minority leader, and Glenn Richardson is the Administration floor leader.

Although Speaker Coleman had not officially announced his committee appointments as Capitol Report went to press, it is clear that several committees will have new chairmen. Credible reports indicate that Rep. Ralph Twiggs will remain as chairman of the House Transportation Committee. Other anticipated appointments include:

- ▶ **Tom Buck** of Columbus, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, succeeding Coleman.
- ▶ **Richard Royal** of Camilla, chairman of House Ways & Means, succeeding Buck.
- ▶ **David Lucas** of Macon as chairman of the new Utilities Committee, which was created by splitting the old House Industry Committee.
- ▶ **Butch Parrish** of Swainsboro, chairman of the new Economic Development and Tourism Committee, also created from the breakup of the former Industry Committee.
- ▶ **Bob Hanner** of Parrott, expected to remain in his former post, chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee.

Full committee rosters for House committees are not yet available.

In the Senate, the new Republican majority changed the rules on Monday to strip the Lt. Governor of much of his power to appoint committees and chairmen. Appointments will now be made by a three-man committee consisting of Lt. Governor Mark Taylor, President Pro Tempore Eric Johnson, and Majority Leader Tom Price. The Lt. Governor will still preside over the Senate as provided by the Constitution, but the Republican majority will, under the new rules, be able to change the assignment of bills to committee if they choose.

New Senate Committees Named

All but one of the Senate committees now have new chairmen. The lone holdover is Senator Hugh Gillis, who will continue to lead the Senate Natural Resources Committee. The Republican leadership gave chairmanships to three other Democrats in addition to Gillis. Rene Kemp was named chairman of the Special Judiciary Committee, Regina Thomas now heads State Institutions and Property, and Ed Harbison is chairman of Interstate Cooperation.

Tommie Williams of Lyons is the new chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee. Other members of the committee include Vice-Chairman Mike Crotts, Secretary Don Cheeks of Augusta, Joey Brush of Appling, Ginger Collins of Marietta, Nathan Dean of Rockmart, Liane Levetan of Decatur, Valencia Seay of College Park, Charlie Tanksley of Marietta, and Steve Thompson of Mableton.

Other key Senate committee chairmen include:

- ▶ **Jack Hill** of Reidsville, Appropriations.
- ▶ **Jeff Mullis** of Chickamauga, Economic Development & Tourism.
- ▶ **Casey Cagle** of Gainesville, Finance.
- ▶ **Robert Lamutt** of Marietta, Insurance & Labor.
- ▶ **Charles Tanksley** of Marietta, Judiciary.
- ▶ **Mitch Seabaugh** of Sharpsburg, Regulated Industries & Utilities.

The Finance and Regulated Industries and Utilities committees were created by splitting the former Finance and Public Utilities Committee, which had been combined by former Lt. Governor Pierre Howard.

New Motor Fuel Tax Proposed

Georgians for Better Transportation and the Georgia Municipal Association are urging members of the General Assembly to support a proposed Transportation Infrastructure Fee (TIF) to be collected on motor fuels used for any transportation purpose. The proposed "fee" would be 6% of the retail price of motor fuel, in addition to state fuel taxes and local option sales taxes.

Revenue generated by the TIF would be allocated to state and local governments for use on any transportation infrastructure. The proposal calls for an income tax rebate to residential households, but not to shippers or carriers. Even if the income tax rebate were available to shippers and carriers, it would have little or no practical value during periods when profits are low or non-existent.

Although no bill has been introduced as yet, it is not too early to begin contacting your elected officials if you are concerned about this proposal. Legislators are already hearing from GBT and local elected officials in support of the new tax.

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