



The Capitol Report January 17th, 2005

Provided by The Georgia Railroad Association

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The Georgia General Assembly is in recess for budget hearings this week after an historic opening three days. The new Republican leadership in the House, the enhanced Republican majority in the Senate, and Republican Governor Sonny Perdue open the 2005 session with a unified theme. They will focus on passing very few bills –perhaps little more than ethics reform and the budget – and adjourning before the end of March.

New leadership lays groundwork for the session.

The opening days of the 2005 Georgia General Assembly, though historic, were largely devoted to organization. Every House committee now has a new chairman, practically every House office now has a new occupant, and there are far-reaching new rules on how business will be conducted in both chambers. Highlights from the opening week include:

- Eighteen Democrats were among the 117 Representatives who elected Republican Glenn Richardson Speaker of the House. Most of the Democrats voting for Richardson are members of the new "Rural Caucus" which could become an important "wild card" in any future power struggles.
- House rules were changed to require Rules Committee approval before amendments can be added to a bill on the House floor. This rule puts greater emphasis on the committee system, and should help prevent poorly thought-out amendments from becoming law.
- Another new House rule allows the Speaker to send three designated "hawks" to vote on legislation in any committee. The "hawks" are Reps. John Lunsford of McDonough, Tom Graves of Fairmount, and Stacey Reece of Gainesville. Democrats complained that this rule gives the Speaker "unprecedented" power to control legislation.
- Civil justice reform was notably absent from Governor Sonny Perdue's State-of-the-State address on Wednesday.

There were fewer changes in the Senate, where Republican leaders have been in place for two years. However, the Senate did tighten attendance requirements for committee meetings, and gave the Senate Rules Committee authority to send a bill back to its committee of reference or to another committee.

Committee assignments complete in both chambers.

Rep. Vance Smith of Pine Mountain has been appointed chairman of the House Transportation Committee. Smith, who operates a construction and earth moving business, has a solid pro-business record in the House. New chairmen of other key House committees include:

Appropriations: Ben Harbin of Augusta

Economic Development & Tourism: Ron Stephens of Garden City

Industrial Relations: Mike Coan of Lawrenceville
Judiciary-Civil: Wendell Willard of Atlanta
Natural Resources & Environment: Lynn Smith of Newnan
Rules: Earl Ehrhart of Powder Springs
Ways & Means: Larry O'Neal of Warner Robins

In the Senate, Tommie Williams of Lyons was reappointed as chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee. Other new Senate chairmen include:

Insurance & Labor: Ralph Hudgens of Comer
Judiciary: Preston Smith of Rome
Natural Resources and the Environment: Ross Tolleson of Perry

All of these new chairmen are veteran legislators with excellent records in support of private enterprise.

Key Bill Introductions:

SB 3: Smith of the 52nd – would amend titles 9, 24, and 51 relating to civil justice, so as to change provisions relating to evidentiary matters and liability in tort actions; to change provisions relating to venue in actions with joint defendants; to change provisions relating to affidavits; to provide for defendants' access to plaintiff's health information in medical cases; to provide for offers for judgment, and other purposes. Referred to Judiciary Committee

SB 5: Moody of the 56th – to provide for comprehensive regulation of public-private infrastructure projects; to provide for property dedication, eminent domain, and the exercise of police powers. Referred to Economic Development Committee.

SB 10: Meyer von Bremen of the 12th – would amend Titles 21, 42, and 45 to provide for the comprehensive revision of provisions regarding ethics and conflicts of interest. Referred to Ethics Committee.

HB 8: Oliver of the 83rd -- relating to fraud, waste and abuse in state programs and operations, so as to provide for "whistle blower" protection. Referred to Judiciary Committee.

HB 16: Davis of the 109th – relating to the allocation of funds for public roads, so as to change the provisions regarding the balancing of federal and state funds.

HB 24: Royal of the 171st – would provide for gradual reduction and eventual repeal of the corporate income tax. The income tax on corporations would be abolished after January 1, 2011. Referred to Ways & Means Committee.

HB 52: Teilhet of the 40th – relating to labor and industrial relations, to provide that an employer shall allow an employee who is a victim of a crime to take unpaid leave to attend judicial proceedings related to the crime. Referred to Industrial Relations Committee.

HR 1: Royal of the 171st – A RESOLUTION proposing an amendment to the Constitution so as to authorize the General Assembly to provide by general law for limitations upon the rate of increase of the ad valorem tax millage rate and value of property. Referred to Ways & Means Committee.

2005 Associate Members

The following companies have renewed their associate memberships with the Georgia Railroad Association for 2005.

Atlas Railroad Construction
Boatright Enterprises
GE Capital Railcar
Georgia Rail Consultants
L. B. Foster
MBA of Maryland
Midway Railroad Construction Co.
Neel-Schaffer, Inc.

Palmer & Cay of Georgia, Inc.
Performance Railway Services
Progress Rail Service
Rail Training & Consulting
R. J. Corman Derailment
Southern Rail Leasing
Walden's Railroad Repair
Zurich North America

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