



The Capitol Report May 3, 2004

Provided by The Georgia Railroad Association

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The General Assembly opened a special session today, but the lawmakers' thoughts will be more about the 2004 elections than the simple budget "fix" they must pass this week. Qualifying for state legislative races ended Friday, so the battle lines are drawn.

Most members of House Transportation will return.

Twelve of the 16 members of the House Transportation Committee are unopposed for re-election, including Chairman Paul Smith of Rome. One member, Rep. Ken Birdsong (D), is not running for re-election.

House Transportation Committee members with contested races are:

- Vice-Chairman Hinson Mosley (D) of Jesup faces Kay Godwin, a dental hygienist from Blackshear, in the General Election.
- Rep. Mickey Channell (D) is opposed in the General Election by Eatonton lawyer Trent Brown. Channell, a self-described "Zell Miller" Democrat and a member of "Democrats for Bush," must overcome his party label in a district that went heavily for George Bush in the last Presidential election. Channell is chairman of the House Industrial Relations Committee and a key lieutenant to Speaker Terry Coleman.
- John Noel of Atlanta has five challengers in the Democratic Primary. There are no Republicans in this race.

The apparent stability of the House Transportation Committee is an exception to the rule in an election year that promises to bring major changes to the General Assembly.

High turnover possible for Senate Transportation.

In contrast to House, none of the ten members of the Senate Transportation Committee is unopposed. Four members of the Senate committee are not running for re-election, and the remaining six face re-election challenges.

Chairman Tommie Williams of Lyons has a General Election race against Glenville lawyer Hugh McCullough. Other contested races include:

- Don Cheeks (R) of Augusta who will face either former Senator Charles Walker or Augusta lawyer Ed Tarver in the General Election.
- Joey Brush of Martinez who is challenged in the Republican Primary by businessman Jim Whitehead of Evans. The winner will go against Martinez lawyer Chuck Pardue in November.
- Ginger Collins of Smyrna faces Engineer Bill Adams in the Republican Primary, with the winner facing current State Representative Doug Stoner and Libertarian Joe Fennell in the General.
- Valencia Seay is unopposed in the Democratic Primary, but must face Fayetteville consultant Edith Marie Mullin in the General Election.

- Steve Thompson of Powder Springs is unopposed in the Democratic Primary, but is opposed by Bill Sanders of Marietta in the General.

Committee members not running for re-election include Democrats Nathan Dean of Rockmart and Liane Levetan of Decatur, along with Republicans Charles Tanksley of Marietta and Mike Crotts of Conyers, who is running for Congress.

Elections certain to bring change.

Barring post election party switching, there is a good chance that Republicans will maintain their majority in the Senate, and Democrats will keep control of the House of Representatives. Twelve Republican Senate candidates have no Democratic opposition, and eight Democratic Senate candidates have no Republican opposition. In the House, the numbers are very close, with Democrats assured of controlling 53 seats and Republicans 50 seats.

While it appears likely that the Democrats will maintain their majority in the House, the margin could be so thin that leadership positions will be affected. Among House members not seeking re-election are Appropriations Chairman Tom Buck -- a veteran of more than 30 years in the House -- and Majority Leader Jimmy Skipper.

Before the first vote is cast, the State Senate is assured of at least a 20 percent turnover in this election cycle. No fewer than six Senate committees will have new chairmen in the 2005 session. Senators who have already announced that they will not seek re-election include:

- Peg Blitch (D) of Homerville, a member of the powerful Appropriations and Rules committees.
- Chuck Clay (R) of Marietta, chairman of the Interstate Cooperation Committee.
- Rooney Bowen (R) of Cordele, chairman of the Public Safety Committee.
- Mike Crotts (R) of Conyers, chairman of the Ethics Committee.
- Nathan Dean (D) of Rockmart, one of the longest serving Senators and a member of the Transportation Committee.
- Hugh Gillis (D) of Soperton, chairman of the Natural Resources Committee and the longest serving legislator in the United States with some 54 years of service.
- Carol Jackson (D) of Cleveland, a member of the Natural Resources Committee.
- Robert Lamutt (R) of Marietta, chairman of the Insurance and Labor Committee.
- Connie Stokes (D) of Decatur, a member of the Insurance and Labor Committee.
- Charles Tanksley (R) of Marietta, chairman of the Judiciary Committee.
- Nadine Thomas (D) of Decatur, a member of the Appropriations Committee.

Clay, Crotts, Lamutt, Stokes, and Thomas are all running for the U.S. Congress.

An "Honor Roll" of legislators.

During each legislative session we are quick to ask lawmakers for help in passing bills that we favor and in defeating bills we oppose. We should be equally as quick in acknowledging those who have supported our positions on key legislation. Below is a list of legislators who not only voted in support of our positions on key issues, but worked to advance those positions.

House of Representatives

- Rep. Mike Barnes of Hampton – Helped build support for GRA's grade crossing liability bill, HB 1254.
- Rep. Mark Butler of Carrollton – His participation in subcommittee debate was instrumental in the defeat of HB 1324, which would have placed stiff penalties on railroads and railroad supervisors over issues relating to workplace injuries.
- Rep. Mickey Channell of Greensboro – Sponsored HB 1254 and was instrumental in the passage of this bill to limit grade crossing liability for railroads.
- Rep. Barry Fleming of Harlem – His explanations during the debate on HB 1254 were critical to the bill's approval in the House Transportation Committee.
- Rep. Johnny Floyd of Cordele – Supported passage of HB 1254 through the Transportation Committee.
- Rep. Gerald Green of Cuthbert – Sponsored HB 1456 which increases penalties for hijacking and theft of cargo.
- Rep. Jimmy Lord of Sandersville – Helped move HB 1254 and HB 1456 through the House Rules Committee.
- Rep. Tom McCall of Elberton – Sponsored legislation to make technical corrections in the rail code, and supported passage of HB 1254 through the House Transportation Committee.
- Rep. David Ralston of Blue Ridge – His participation in subcommittee debate was instrumental in the defeat of HB 1324, which would have placed stiff criminal penalties on railroads and railroad supervisors over handling of workplace injuries.
- Rep. Vance Smith of Pine Mountain – Helped build support for HB 1254 in Transportation Committee.
- Rep. Paul Smith of Rome – As chairman of the Transportation Committee, his support of HB 1254 was vital to the passage of the bill through the Committee and on the House floor.
- Rep. Ron Stephens of Garden City – Helped defeat HB 1324 in an Industrial Relations subcommittee, and helped build support of HB 1254 in House Transportation Committee.

Senate

- Senator Don Balfour of Snellville – As chairman of the Senate Rules Committee, his support was critical in ensuring a Senate floor vote on HB 1254, the grade crossing liability bill.
- Senator Mike Crofts of Conyers – Carried HB 1254 through the Senate, presenting the bill in the Transportation Committee and then on the Senate floor.
- President Pro Tempore Eric Johnson – Supported HB 1254 and SB 585, which would have required local governments to share in the cost of maintaining road surfaces at grade crossings.
- Senator Jeff Mullis of Chickamauga – Sponsored SB 585, the bill to require local governments to share in the cost of maintaining road surfaces at grade crossings.
- Senator Tommie Williams of Lyons – As chairman of Senate Transportation Committee, his support was vital to the passage of HB 1254. He also ensured that SB 585 had a hearing before the full Transportation Committee.

2004 Associate Members

The following companies have joined the Georgia Railroad Association or renewed their associate memberships for 2004.

Adams Warnock, Inc.	Healey Railroad Corporation
A&K Railroad Materials, Inc.	Koppers, Inc
APAC	Lanier Steel Products, Inc.
Atlantic Track & Turnout	L. B. Foster
Atlas Railroad Construction	MBA of Md.
Bankhead Railway Services, Inc.	McCord Tie & Timber, Inc.
Boatright Enterprises	Midway Railroad Construction Co.
Century Group	Neel-Schaffer, Inc.
Crouch Engineering	Omni Products
Dixie Precast	Palmer & Cay of Georgia, Inc.
Envirofuels, LP	Pointer Smith Contracting
Full Service Railroad Consulting, Inc.	Progress Rail
GE Capital Railcar	RMI
Georgia Operation Lifesaver	Rail Training & Consulting
Georgia Ports Authority	Tifton Terminal Railway Museum
Georgia Rail Consultants	Zurich North America

GRA Directory: New Members, Services and Categories!

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