

Georgia insight

Sue Ella Deadwyler
www.georgiainsight.org
"She hath done what she could."
Mark 14:8a
"...and having done all ... stand."
Ephesians 6:13c

Critical Issues Await 2016 General Assembly

Carryovers from 2015 Session

- *Bills left-over* for 2016 – 438 House bills (H.B.) and 179 Senate bills (S.B.) – total 617.
- *Resolutions left-over* for the 2016 session – 92 H.R. and 77 S.R. – total 169.
- *Left-over totals* – 786 bills and resolutions remain alive for action in 2016.

House and Senate Action in the 2015 Session

- Of the 955 bills introduced in the 2015 General Assembly, 706 H.B. passed and 249 S.B. passed.
- Of those 955 bills introduced, only 12 were defeated or withdrawn.
- Of the 1,610 resolutions introduced in 2015, 960 H.R. and 650 S.R. passed – total 1,439.
- Governor Deal signed 239 House bills and vetoed eight House bills.
- Governor Deal signed 62 Senate bills and vetoed three Senate bills.

The governor's signature on a bill indicates his support, and frequently prompts a signing ceremony and photo-op for supportive citizens and organizations, as well as the bill's author and other legislators. Legislation the governor signs may become law upon his signature, but other bills that passed become law on the up-coming July 1st or as specified in the legislation.

New Representatives by Party and District

Betty Price, R-48	Taylor Bennett, D-80	Shaw Blackmon, R-146
Sheri Gilligan, R-44	Doreen Carter, D-92	Clay Pirkle, R-155
Marie Metze, R-55	Jodi Lott, R-122	Vacant, D-58

House of Representatives by Party: Republican 118, Democrat 60, Independent 1

Governor's Floor Leaders: Representatives Robert Dickey, Terry Rogers, Chad Nimmer

New Senators by Party and District

JaNice VanNess, R-43	Larry Walker, III, R-20
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Senate by Party: Republican 40, Democrat 16

Governor's Floor Leaders: Senators Mike Dugan, John Kennedy, Butch Miller, Bill Jackson

15 Key Carryover Bills

1. H.R. 807 Constitutional Amendment for Casino Gambling introduced by Representative Ron Stephens on March 26, 2015 would amend the State Constitution to authorize casino gambling in Georgia. If it were to pass, the state would be divided into six areas – Regions One, Two, Three, Four, Five, and Six – into which the 159 counties would be divided and listed in the State Constitution by name and region designation. H.B. 807 was assigned to the House Regulated Industries Committee, where it remains for action in the 2016 session.

ACTION – Oppose H.R. 807. Contact Regulated Industries Committee Representatives Maxwell, Howard, Ch. 404 656-5143; Harrell, Brett, Vice Ch., 656-0254; Dickson, Tom, Sec. 463-4427; Bennett, Karen. 656-0202; Chandler, Joyce, 656-0254; Cooke, Kevin, 656-0188; Cooper, Sharon, 656-5069; Deffenbaugh, John, 656-0202; Fludd, Virgil, 656-0116; Golick, Rich, 656-5943; Hawkins, Lee, 656-0213; Jones, Jan, 657-0498; Martin, Chuck, 656-5064; Mitchell, Billy, 656-0126; Powell, Alan, 463-3793; Rakestraw, Paulette, 656-0177; Ramsey, Matt, 656-5024; Rogers, Terry, 651-7737; Rutledge, Dale, 656-0109; Stephens, Mickey, 656-0265; Taylor, Tom, 656-3947; Welch, Andrew J., 656-0213.

January 1, 2016

H.B. 677 Provides for and Regulates Casinos

H.R. 807 would authorize casino gambling, if legislators pass it and voters ratify it in the General Election. If passed H.B. 677 would regulate casinos, if and after H.R. 807 is ratified. **2. H.B. 677**, introduced by Representative Ron Stephens March 26th, has 127 pages of details to establish and regulate six licensed casino resorts in five designated state regions, as outlined in H.R. 807. It would regulate casino gambling, lottery for education, gambling contracts, crimes and offenses, effective January 1, 2017.

Residents in municipalities and counties must pass a public referendum of approval before a casino resort can be established under this bill, which also requires the following:

- The current Lottery Corporation would be renamed *Georgia Lottery & Casino Gaming Commission*, which would be operated with five percent of annual casino proceeds.
- A seven-member appointed unsalaried *Advisory Committee on Problem Gaming* would handle all emerging problems and decide which communities get problem-solving grants.
- A total of six *Casino Gaming Licenses* would be issued as designated for the five regions described in H.R. 807. The *nonrefundable application fee* for each license is \$500,000. *Region 1 will be allowed two licenses.* (a) A Primary License will be \$25,000,000. (b) A Secondary License for \$10,000,000 allows a smaller casino with 2,000 player-seats. *Regions 2, 3, 4, and 5 are allowed one license each* at a cost of \$10,000,000 per license. All license fees would be transferred to the Casino Gaming Education Account.
- *The Casino Gaming Education Account* will receive all license fees, plus 90 percent of all annual casino proceeds, and will be listed as a separate account in the state treasury. The money may be invested, and its earnings will become unencumbered property of the state.
- *A Georgia Licensed Resort Facility Host Community Fund* would get four percent of the annual proceeds.
- *A Georgia Problem Gaming Fund* would be created and supported by two percent of the annual proceeds
- *Bingo Games* will be offered as explained on pages 121-126, which would amend current law as follows:

“Except for recreational bingo and bingo conducted as a legal casino gaming activity in accordance with the requirement of Chapter 39 of Title 50, only nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations which are properly licensed pursuant to this part shall be allowed to operate bingo games.” [Underlined words are the proposed changes.]

Questions:

Could more than six casinos be authorized if American Indian Tribes apply for licenses based on their status as a sovereign nation?

If so, would casinos of American Indian Tribes be licensed and under legislative regulations?

Would alcoholic beverages be sold for consumption on casino premises and/or to-go?

What would be the minimum age of customers allowed to enter casinos or play the games?

What would be the minimum age for a casino employee or performer in a casino floor show?

ACTION – Oppose H.B. 677. Contact Non-Civil Judiciary Committee Senators Stone, Ch., 404 463-1314; Ligon, Jr., V-Ch., 656-0045, Kennedy, Sec., 656-7454; Bethel, 463-1383; Crane, 656-6446; Fort*, 656-5091; H. Hill, 463-2518; H. Jones II*, 463-3042; McKoon, 463-3931; Parent*, 656-5109. (*Democrat)

Horse Racing, Pari-mutuel Betting and Casinos

3. S.R. 135, Horse Racing & Gambling, introduced February 3rd by Senator Brandon Beach (R), legalizes horse-racing, pari-mutuel betting, and associated businesses. Net proceeds go to organizations and educational institutions that promote the equine industry. Such funds may be used for scholarships, grants or loans to college students and voluntary pre-kindergarten.

Since S.R. 135 is a proposed constitutional amendment, a two-thirds majority vote is necessary for passage. If passed, voters would be asked this question on the November 2016 ballot:

“Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to authorize the General Assembly to provide by law for pari-mutuel wagering in Georgia on horse racing under the authority of the Georgia Lottery Corporation?” [Note: S.R. 143 adds casino gambling. (See next paragraph.)]

4. S.R. 143, Horse Racing, Casinos & Gambling, a constitutional amendment introduced by Senator Curt Thompson (D) February 4th, allows the General Assembly to pass laws governing *pari-mutuel wagering on horse racing and casino gambling* in Georgia, and *“any matters relating to such activities.”* Net proceeds and revenues would be a separate budget item.

Left-over funds would be used for tuition scholarships, grants, or loans for Georgians to attend voluntary pre-kindergarten or higher education in this state, as recommended by the Governor.

If passed, voters would be asked the following question on the 2016 General Election ballot:

“Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to authorize the General Assembly to provide by law for pari-mutuel wagering on horse racing and casino gambling in this state and for the use of the net revenues and proceeds only for the purposes of funding higher education tuition scholarships, grants, or loans and voluntary pre-kindergarten programs?”

ACTION – Oppose S.R. 135 and S.R. 143. Contact Regulated Industries & Utilities Committee Senators Jeffares, Ch., 404 463-1376; Ginn, V-Ch., 656-4700; McKoon, Sec., 463-3931; Beach, 463-1378; Cowser, 463-1366; Gooch, 656-9221; Harbison*, 656-0074; Henson*, 656-0085; Hill, Jack, 656-5038; Lucas*, 656-5035; Miller, 656-7454; Mullis, 656-0057; Shafer, 656-0048; and Unterman, 463-1368. (*denotes Democrat)

Sexual Orientation

5. H.B. 40, introduced last session by Representative Keisha Waites (D), would *require public and private schools* to give *sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity* civil rights status in instances of bullying, the definition of which includes expressions of negative opinions.

ACTION – Oppose. Contact Juvenile Justice Committee Ch., Representative Tom Weldon, 404 656-5105.

6. H.B. 142, by Representative Simone Bell (D), requires schools or programs to adopt pro-LGBT policies, or lose their eligibility for student scholarship funds.

ACTION – Oppose. Contact House Education Committee Ch., Representative Brooks Coleman, 404 656-9210.

7. S.B. 47, by Senator Vincent Fort (D), requires more harsh punishment of offenders who commit crimes that are, or are perceived to be, based on the victim’s sexual orientation.

ACTION – Oppose. Contact Judiciary Non Civil Ch., Representative Rich Golick, 656-5943.

8. H.B. 323, by Representative Karla Drenner (D), adds “sexual orientation” to State government employment nondiscrimination policies; defines the term as “a person’s actual or perceived heterosexuality, *bisexuality, homosexuality, or gender related identity or expression.*” Sexual lifestyles get civil rights status, which would prompt affirmative action.

ACTION – Oppose. Contact Judiciary Ch., Representative Wendell Willard, 656-5125.

Religious Liberty, ALAC, No DL for Illegals, Marijuana

9. S.B. 129 Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) by Senator Josh McKoon to preserve religious freedom in the state, passed the Senate 37-15 March 5th, is in the House.

10. H.B. 218 Preventing Government Overreach on Religious Expression (a.k.a. RFRA), introduced February 10, 2015 by Representative Sam Teasley, would preserve religious freedom and authorize legal action for those whose religious expression has been burdened.

11. H.B. 171 American Law for American Courts (ALAC), introduced February 2, 2015 by Representative Dustin Hightower (R), prohibits the enforcement and use of foreign law by any court, arbitration panel, administrative agency, or tribunal; and prohibits re-filing in a foreign court, wherein constitutional rights may be violated. Eight states – Tennessee, Louisiana, Arizona, Kansas, Oklahoma, N.C., Florida, and Alabama – have enacted ALAC to especially protect women and children, who are the primary victims of discrimination under foreign law.
ACTION – Support S.B. 129, H.B. 218 & 171. Call Judiciary Com. Ch. Representative Willard, 404 656-5125.

12. S.B. 6 Georgia Road Safety and Driver's License Integrity Act, introduced by Senator Josh McKoon January 28, 2015, is needed for driver and pedestrian safety. Its provisions are:
(a) Federal immigration law could not be the basis for issuing driver's licenses to illegal aliens.
(b) Eligibility for a driver's license could not be based on approved deferred action status.
(c) Driver's licenses or ID cards obtained by illegal aliens would not be proof of lawful status.
(d) Illegal aliens could not qualify for welfare benefits under the SAVE program.
(e) Drivers caught driving without a valid license could have their vehicle impounded.
(f) The Department of Driver Services would use Homeland Security's E-Verify initiative.
ACTION – Support. (a) Call Public Safety Com. Ch., Tyler Harper 404 463-5263. (b) Ask your senator to sign it.

13. S.R. 6 Constitutional Amendment Allows 21-Year-olds to Buy Marijuana, introduced March 4, 2015 by Senator Curt Thompson, is in the Judiciary Non Civil Committee. If passed, voters in 2016 would decide whether the General Assembly could legalize and regulate the cultivation of marijuana and its retail sale for personal use to individuals age 21 or older.

14. S.B. 7 Marijuana ID Card at Age 18, Treatment, Cultivation, Possession, and Retail Dispensaries, introduced February 11, 2015 by Senator Curt Thompson, requires the Department of Revenue to write regulations for the use and cultivation of medical marijuana (the plant, not the oil) and its derivatives for patients, caregivers (age 21 or older), growers, and licensed dispensaries. Qualified patients and caregivers could possess two ounces of usable marijuana and grow eight marijuana plants in enclosed, locked facilities. Security is not required for plants in transport. Participants under age 18 must have parental consent. One dispensary with a State Board of Pharmacy permit will be required for every ten pharmacies registered under this plan.

15. S.B. 198 Marijuana Cultivation and Sale to Anyone Age 21 and Older, by Senator Curt Thompson is a 26-page bill outlining regulations for various facets of the medical marijuana business, including cultivation, licensure, retail stores, and penalties for violators. Qualifying patients and caregivers may have two ounces of usable marijuana and may grow eight plants in enclosed, locked facilities. The plants may be transported without being enclosed or locked.
ACTION – Oppose S.R. 6, S.B. 7 & S.B. 198. Call Judiciary Non Civil Com. Ch. Senator Jesse Stone 404 463-1314.

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