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Legislative Update for Week Ending 2-1-08

The General Assembly reconvened January 28, to begin the second week of the legislative session. The legislature will be in recess Monday allowing legislators to remain in their home districts to vote Tuesday morning. The House and Senate will reconvene at 1:00 on Tuesday, February 5.

On Monday, the Senate voted to override the governor's veto of HB 529, which codifies separate budget offices for the House and Senate. The Senate Natural Resources Committee unanimously passed SB 342, the Water Conservation and Drought Relief Act, that would "fast track" permits for reservoirs and provide state funding. The Senate Judiciary Committee passed SB 355 that narrows the exemptions for "good funds" that can be dispersed at a real estate closing.

The House passed increased penalties for dog fighting, residency restrictions for registered sex offenders that had been stricken by the Georgia Supreme Court, legislation allowing individuals to freeze/unfreeze their credit report with a consumer-friendly amendment that would cap the cost at \$3 per request, and a resolution (HR 1025) that would require the Governor to approve or veto budget items and not redirect those monies. The House also passed, after a lengthy debate, HB 881 that would create the Georgia Charter Schools Commission and set up an alternative method of getting charter schools approved. The House passed the Senate Rules Committee substitute to HB 89 with a floor amendment that would allow persons with gun permits to carry guns into sporting events, restaurants, wildlife management areas, recreation areas, airports, and churches. A resolution was introduced to impeach Lt. Governor Cagle for failing to act on the House-override bills and was assigned to the Special Rules Committee.

Local news stories highlighted the need for legislation requiring seatbelt usage in pick-up trucks, citing public safety concerns and \$20 million in highway funding that the state is currently not receiving because of this pick-up truck exemption. Over 90 percent of Georgians polled favor passage of legislation removing this exemption.

State Department of Transportation board seats for several congressional districts were decided on Friday, February 1. Mr. Emory McClinton was re-elected without opposition for district 5. Former Rep. Mike Evans, in a hotly contested race, retained his seat for district 9. Rep. Johnny Floyd, Cordele Ga., was elected to replace retiring member Billy Langdale, Valdosta Ga., for district 2. Mr. Raybon Anderson had two opponents but retained his seat for district 12. Ms. Dana Lemon was re-elected without opposition for district 13.