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Legislative Update for Week Ending 3-21-08

The General Assembly was in session three days this week and will now be in recess until Thursday, March 27. This one-week break will give the Senate Appropriations Committee time to work on the FY '09 budget that the House passed yesterday. Also this week, the House and Senate passed the conference committee compromise on the FY '08 supplemental budget. We have completed 34 legislative days.

The House passed the FY '09 budget, the "Made in Georgia" program to promote Georgia goods and products, tougher penalties for driving without a license, incorporation for the City of Dunwoody, legislation permitting the GBI to investigate certain identity fraud cases, and a bill allowing the GBI to compare DNA samples in evidence to the national DNA database. The House also passed legislation allowing prosecutors to seek life-without-parole sentences in cases of aggravated murder, after amending it to provide that judges could impose the death penalty if the jury voted for death 10-2 in the sentencing phase; the Senate has disagreed with these House changes. The House Judiciary Committee favorably reported revisions to the corporate code (SB 436) and the probate court (SB 508), and the House Motor Vehicles Committee favorably reported SB 181 dealing with fees on car rentals.

The Senate passed the Ga. Transportation Infrastructure Bank Act, the Ga. Higher Education Savings Plan, on-line defensive driving courses, and an indigent defense bill dealing with judges for and funding of capital cases. Senator Don Thomas attempted to amend a red light camera bill on the Senate floor to include elimination of the pick-up truck exemption for seatbelt use, but the amendment was later withdrawn and the Senate passed the bill. The Senate agreed to the House version of the Dunwoody incorporation bill, which now goes to the Governor. The Senate Finance Committee amended HR 1246, the Speaker's tax reform legislation, by deleting the elimination of ad valorem taxes on vehicles but retaining the following provisions: prohibiting a state increase in spending, freezing property assessments at the 2008 level, and limiting annual increases in assessments on residential and commercial properties. The Senate Finance Committee also amended HB1244, providing an income tax credit for teleworking, to include a 10 percent cut in state income tax rates proposed by Lt. Governor Cagle. The Senate Banking Committee is meeting Monday, 3/24, on the Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act (HB 972). The charter school reform bill (HB 881) is on the Senate Rules Committee general calendar. The Senate Special Judiciary Committee favorably reported the lemon law legislation (HB 470) and Uniform Environmental Covenants Act (HB 1132). An income tax credit for qualified low-income buildings (HB 405) and a sales tax exemption on energy used in manufacturing (HB 272) are both in the Senate Finance Committee.