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Legislative Update for Week Ending 1-18-08

The General Assembly convened Monday, January 14, to begin its 40-day legislative session. The first week is normally filled with ceremonial events and organizational committee meetings, however, this session began with the House, led by Speaker Glenn Richardson, overriding 12 of Governor Perdue's vetoes from the '07 session. The veto overrides were immediately transmitted to the Senate where they were assigned to the Rules Committee.

The first order of business for the Senate Rules Committee was consideration of HB 89 that would prohibit private businesses from disallowing firearms on their property. The committee passed the bill after severely limiting its scope to allow only Georgians with state-issued concealed weapons permits, under limited circumstances, to have a firearm in cars on company parking lots and to carry guns into state parks. The revised bill was not opposed by the NRA or the Georgia Chamber and passed the Senate on Thursday. The Senate also passed SB 76, which returns powers to the Lt. Governor from a "Committee on Assignments" that took control when the Senate became a Republican majority and Democrat Mark Taylor was Lt. Governor.

The House and Senate each debated at length, then passed, identical resolutions (HR 1022 and SR 701) ratifying the statewide water plan that was developed by EPD and adopted by the Water Council.

Also this week, the Jekyll Island Oversight Committee received an update from Linger Longer Communities and reviewed the development plan for Jekyll Island. Critics have said there may be legislation introduced that would try to restrict development on certain parts of the island.

Governor Perdue delivered his "State of the State" address on January 16, highlighting items from his \$21.4 billion budget that includes a \$142 million tax cut from income tax exemptions for affluent senior citizens, and a \$94 million tax cut from the elimination of the state's portion of ad valorem taxes for autos and homes. Expenditures in the budget include: \$17 million to help small businesses with employee health insurance coverage, \$53 million to upgrade the state's trauma care facilities; \$50 million for low-interest loans to help local governments with road projects, and \$120 million for water reservoirs and infrastructure. The Governor also indicated he was willing to sign off on a sales tax exemption for energy use in manufacturing.

Chief Justice Leah Sears' annual "State of the Judiciary" speech is scheduled for Wednesday, February 13.

The legislature will be in recess next week, and the capitol will be closed on Monday for the Martin Luther King holiday. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees will meet for all-day hearings on the supplemental budget Tuesday through Friday. The House and Senate will reconvene on Monday, January 28, at 1:00.