



Keeping Current @ the Capitol March 8, 2010

Legislators have completed 20 of 40 legislative days and return Monday for the 21st of 40 legislative days. They have been in adjournment for the past two weeks while budget leaders struggled with the task of dealing with a potential shortfall of \$1 billion for FY 2011.

Budget Update

The Amended FY2010 budget has passed the House and Senate but further action has been postponed until revenue figures for February are available. The Amended FY 2010 budget has already been pared down to \$17.4 billion and due to lower than anticipated state revenues in recent months, legislators are expecting to cut an additional \$300 million to \$600 million to cover the shortfall.

Last week the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees continued their work on FY 2011 as they considered various scenarios for enacting deep budget cuts across all state agencies and departments. The Governor's proposed budget for FY 2011 was based on anticipated revenues of just over \$18 billion. The state budget has already been cut by 20 percent during the past two years as the FY 2009 budget as originally passed was slightly over \$21 billion.

Although legislators seem reluctant about finding new revenues in order to balance the budget and avoid further crippling cuts, momentum appears to be building for passage of an increase in the state tobacco tax. There is also talk of increasing various fees for a number of state services, but specific details have not been announced.

HMHB Legislative Agenda Update

Enhance Medicaid services for Georgia women by obtaining a federal waiver for the Planning for Healthy Babies Program.

There appears to be strong legislative support for a Medicaid Family Planning waiver, but the funds must be found for the state match. The Department of Community Health has requested the amount of \$1.5 million in the FY 2011 budget. For this issue to move forward, however, legislators must determine their strategy for dealing with huge budget deficits in FY 2011.

Oppose legislation that threatens health insurance benefits such as mammograms, pap smears, and childhood immunizations.

SB 309 (Sen. Judson Hill, 32nd) and **SB 407** (Sen. Hill) would allow insurance companies licensed and regulated in other states to sell health insurance policies in Georgia. These out-of-state companies would be exempted from state laws requiring benefits and consumer protections such as mammograms, pap smears and childhood immunizations. Both bills are being considered by Senate Insurance and SB 407 is the bill that is expected to move forward.

Support legislation to increase the state's tobacco tax.

Momentum appears to be building for passage of legislation increasing the tobacco tax. . This week the Georgia Alliance for Tobacco Prevention released results of a new poll showing wide support among Georgia voters for a \$1 per pack increase that could produce \$300-\$400 million to help with the budget shortfall. Teen smoking has been shown to decline as the tax increases, so many people support it on that ground alone. Advocates are holding a rally on Monday, March 8th beginning at 9:00 a.m. at Central Presbyterian Church across from the Capitol. They will greet legislators, hold a press conference at 10:30 a.m. in Room 450 at the Capitol, and then resume meetings with legislators from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Press conferences are also scheduled at sites around the state. Additional House members from both parties have signed **HB 39** (Stephens, 164th), the tobacco tax legislation introduced in 2009.

Prepared for HMHB by Mary Frances Williams.