



Keeping Current @ the Capitol April 5, 2010

Legislators have completed 33 of 40 legislative days. They are taking this week off for spring break and will return on Monday, April 12 for the 34th day. The legislative calendar has not been set beyond this date.

Budget Update

There is still no word on when work will resume on the Amended FY 2010 budget, which has passed the House and Senate but must be finalized in conference committee. There has also been little news of the FY 2011 budget.

House Appropriations Subcommittee meetings on FY 2011 that were scheduled early last week were abruptly cancelled when the House and Senate disagreed on **HB 307** (Rep. Jim Cole, 125th) the hospital provider tax bill which would generate approximately \$263 million. The House had passed HB 307 the previous week, but controversy arose when the Senate amended the bill by adding **HB 1023** (Rep. Tom Graves, 12th) which would permanently cut taxes by \$380 million a year when fully implemented. The Senate removed HB 1023 from HB 307 but then had difficulty finding the votes to pass the bill. HB 307 was amended again to exempt health insurers from paying the state portion of insurance premium taxes for a period of three years and then passed the Senate. HB 307 must return to the House for approval of the Senate changes, and House leadership has expressed displeasure with the Senate's actions.

With so much uncertainty about how much money will be available the House has been hesitant to move forward with its version of the FY 2011 budget. As of this writing, House Appropriations Subcommittee meetings are scheduled for Monday, April 12.

HMHB Legislative Agenda Update

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

HB 1184 (Rep. Matt Ramsey, 72nd) and **SB 407** (Sen. Judson Hill, 32nd) are two bills would allow insurance products licensed and sold in other states to be sold in Georgia. Out-of-state insurers are exempted from state laws governing required benefits and consumer protections that apply to health insurers licensed in Georgia. These bills threaten benefits such as well child care and minimum hospital stays following childbirth.

Status: HB 1184 passed the House on 3/26 and SB 407 passed the Senate on the same day.

Support legislation to increase the state's tobacco tax.

In spite of growing concerns about falling state revenues and the need for even more budget cuts, House and Senate leadership have taken no action on HB 39, which would increase the tobacco tax by \$1.00 a pack

Status: HB 39 did not pass the House by crossover day.

Support funding for a statewide trauma care system.

SR 277 (Sen. Greg Goggans, 7th) proposes a vote on a constitutional amendment to add a \$10 car tag fee to provide funds for a trauma trust fund. **Status:** SR 277 passed the Senate in 2009 and was favorably reported by the House Ways & Means Committee on March 17. At the end of this past week, the measure was slowed by an inquiry by Rep. Charlice Byrd (20th district) as to the measure's constitutionality. Rep. Byrd's contention is that SR 277 is a revenue measure and, therefore, should have originated in the House. Others hold that, since SR 277 is a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment and is not a regular tax or appropriations bill, it is not restricted to the protocol.

Other Legislation of Interest to HMHB Members

HB 1407 (Rep. Carl Rogers, 26th) requires a single administrator for Medicaid and PeachCare dental services. **Status:** Passed the House. Assigned to Senate Health & Human Services.

SB 443 (Sen. Preston Smith, 52nd) would give the General Assembly a way of overseeing the CMOs that serve Medicaid and PeachCare patients. **Status:** Passed the Senate. Assigned to House Health & Human Services.

SB 458 (Sen. Don Thomas, 54th) eliminates the exemption of pick-up trucks from the requirement that drivers use seat belts. **Status:** Passed the Senate. Assigned to House Health & Human Services. Other bills that seek to remove the exemption for wearing seat belts in pick up trucks have typically been assigned to House Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, where the bias against such legislation has kept the bills from moving forward. Failure to require seat belts in all autos costs Georgia millions each year in federal highway funds.