



News From

Rep. Lee Thompson

House District 104

May 2010

Lawmakers develop bipartisan solutions to difficult issues

The 2010 session of the Georgia General Assembly, lasting from January 11 through April 29, went down in history as the longest session in more than 120 years. Lawmakers addressed a broad range of issues, including the following:

Public Education: SB 250 requires the state Department of Education to develop an anti-bullying policy that can serve as a model for local school systems, along with age-appropriate consequences for bullying in grades K-12. SB 299 gives school systems more flexibility in handling violations of “zero tolerance” discipline policies. HB 936, which I co-sponsored, allows local school boards to use state funding to refurbish school buses.

Transportation: Under HB 277, Georgia will be divided into 12 regions, each of which will hold a referendum in 2012 for a special 1 percent sales tax to be used for transportation improvements within that region. Individual counties cannot opt out of the funding plan, but a “roundtable” of local elected officials from all counties in the region can decide not to hold a tax referendum in their region, the boundaries of which mirror those of Georgia’s regional commissions.

Trauma Care

Funding: Georgia voters will have a chance to approve a reliable funding mechanism that would help enhance the state’s trauma care network following passage of SR 277. The proposed constitutional amendment would implement a \$10 fee on auto license tags to bring in \$80 million each year for a trauma care trust fund. The proposal still requires majority approval by voters in November.

Water Management: SB 370 implements a number of water



Rep. Lee Thompson (left) discusses issues with Education Committee Chairman Brooks Coleman on the floor of the House of Representatives.

conservation measures, including requirements for low-flow plumbing devices in newly constructed homes and buildings and an outdoor watering restriction. This bill was revised extensively in the House Natural Resources & Environment Committee, on which I serve, and includes language from a bill I co-sponsored, restricting daytime

watering.

Traffic Safety: SB 360 bans motorists in Georgia from texting while driving, and HB 23 bans teenagers from talking on cell phones while driving. SB 458 removes the exemption in Georgia’s seat belt law for drivers and passengers in pickup trucks.



Dear Neighbors in House District 104,

I am sending you this newsletter to report on the major legislation and issues that were addressed during this year’s session, my second as your State Representative.

I am seeking re-election this year in House District 104 and look forward to meeting with you in the weeks and months ahead and discussing the issues important to our community and state.

If you would like to stay informed on a more regular basis, please subscribe to my e-newsletter by sending an e-mail to lee.thompson@house.ga.gov. Please contact my office at 404-656-6372 whenever I can be of service. For more information, please visit my official web site at www.citizensforleethompson.org.

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Rep. Thompson criticizes priorities, opposes budget

The new \$17.9 billion budget for fiscal year 2011 reflects an overall revenue reduction of more than \$3 billion from two years ago. This budget will cause more layoffs and furloughs for teachers and other state employees and shift the tax burden to local property owners. Public school funding through the Quality Basic Education formula is slashed by another \$527 million. Nearly \$800,000 in funding for the Georgia Council for the Arts, which had been eliminated in the previous House budget, was restored by the Senate. HB 948 went to the governor for his signature. He may also veto line-item appropriations.



I voted against the budget and spoke in opposition to it on the House floor for a number of reasons. Earlier in the session, the House majority passed HB 212, which extends the partial sales tax exemption on certain sales of jet fuel. Designed to help Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines, this measure will cost Georgia taxpayers \$24 million in state revenues each year. In 2008, Delta lost \$8.9 billion but in the same year paid its two chief executive officers a combined \$28.2 million including stock options.

Meanwhile, the budget for 2011 contained no money to restore funding for supplements for National Board Certified Teachers, which was cut from the budget last year. In Gwinnett County alone, there are 233 teachers among the more than 2,000 statewide who have worked hard to earn that certification and the pay supplement that was promised to them. One-half of the tax exemption we gave Delta for jet fuel would have fully funded these supplements.

A budget that grants a tax break to a corporation that pays its top executives more than \$14 million each yet denies a modest pay supplement to our best and brightest teachers clearly sends the wrong message and reflects the wrong priorities.

The budget was balanced with the help of HB 1055, which increases user fees on more than 80 services provided by the state, bringing in approximately \$96 million. The increased costs affect a broad range of fees, including civil court

filings, business registrations and specialty car tags. The bill also includes a 1.45 percent tax increase on hospital bills, which will generate approximately \$200 million, while promising two minor tax cuts. One cut eliminates the 0.25-mill state property tax (about \$20 per year on a \$200,000 home), and the other eliminates the income tax on unearned income for senior citizens making more than \$35,000 annually for individuals or \$70,000 per couple. Neither cut will take effect until 2012 and are phased in over five years. The fee increases and hospital tax take effect this year.

The majority leadership in the House and Senate refused to consider other common-sense measures to generate the revenue needed to balance the budget. Proposals that were kept bottled up in committee would have raised the cigarette tax by \$1, cut special sales tax exemptions (including Delta's) by 15 percent for a two-year period and increased collections of sales tax dollars already paid by consumers, but never paid to the state.

I believe our budget priorities should be different, which is why I voted against HB 1055 and against this budget. We can do better.



Rep. Thompson (left) and House Speaker David Ralston (right) welcome Lawrenceville Mayor Rex Millsaps to the State Capitol during the 2010 legislative session. Local government officials often consult Rep. Thompson on legislation affecting cities, counties and school systems because of his experience as a city attorney and school board attorney.