

From: Representative Don Parsons

March 24, 2016

On Thursday, March 24, the 2016 legislative session came to an end when the House and Senate completed the 40th and final legislative day, also known as "Sine Die." Sine die is a Latin term meaning "without assigning a day for further meeting." When we convened for the final two days of session this week, we gave final passage to a number of bills, and we worked late into the night both days to ensure that important legislation for our state had every opportunity to be considered this year.

Of all of the legislation passed by the General Assembly this session, one of the most important was House Bill 751, which establishes the state budget for Fiscal Year 2017 and received final, overwhelming approval in the House by a vote of 171-1 during the last week of session. The final version of HB 751 resulted from the work of a House and Senate conference committee where conference committee appointees from both chambers met to work out the differences between each body's versions of the budget. As the only piece of legislation that we are constitutionally required to pass each session, the Fiscal Year 2017 budget will guide all state spending from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017, and HB 751 set the largest budget in our state's history at \$23.7 billion, an increase of \$673.9 million, or 2.9%, over the amended FY2016 budget. As a result, the House was able to fund a number of its priorities, including: rate increases for health and

human service providers; salary adjustments for K-12 teachers, Pre-K teachers, bus drivers, nutrition workers and school nurses; and salary increases for public health nurses, sworn law enforcement officers and other critical positions to address retention issues. HB 751 appropriates more than half of the annual budget for education spending, where local school boards will not only be able to give salary increases, but will also have the ability to eliminate furlough days or increase classroom instruction days for education. The final version of HB 751 also adds important funding for public safety, healthcare, and transportation initiatives throughout Georgia, all while keeping our state's total debt low, our "rainy day funds" high, and maintaining our AAA bond rating.

While we prioritized education funding in our state's budget, we also focused on passing key education policy initiatives this week, giving final passage to three education-related measures to work towards this goal. One bill that received unanimous passage was Senate Bill 18, which would establish new policies within the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) to allow active duty military or veteran students to obtain academic credit for previous college-level learning attained prior to their enrollment. SB 18 would require any institution within TCSG to grant academic credit for college-level learning accomplished before enrollment and would only apply to training and experience obtained through military service that was substantially related to the coursework credit given by the TCSG. Many of our veterans join the military at a young age, and therefore, must defer their post-secondary education for several

years to defend our great nation, and with this legislation, we will be able to give them a head start through this earned academic credit upon their enrollment.

Another education measure that saw final passage this week was Senate Bill 329, which would expand the Quality Basic Education Act to award high school diplomas to students who complete dual credit coursework. SB 329 would award a high school diploma to students who complete college dual-credit coursework and have earned certification to work in an "in-need" industry as determined by the State Board of the Technical College System of Georgia. The State Board would work with Georgia industry associations, the Georgia Department of Labor, and other state recognized strategic work force industries and initiatives. Together these organizations would determine the technical college certificate of credit programs that meet the requirements for industry and job related skills where there are work force needs to ensure that the programs are instructionally rigorous, operate in accordance with industry standards, and provide quality training. Furthermore, students who meet these requirements to receive a high school diploma would also be eligible to receive the HOPE Scholarship or participate in the Move On When Ready dual-enrollment assistance program. This legislation would allow for increased access to post-secondary education in addition to helping address and identify areas where we are experiencing a shortage of trained personnel in Georgia. In conjunction with Gov. Deal, the General Assembly has implemented several initiatives to generate interest and provide training for specific work force needs in Georgia, and I was proud to see

the continued efforts by our legislature to emphasize the importance of work force development to the future of our state.

Expanding access to educational opportunities is important to the members of our body, which is why my colleagues and I also gave final passage to Senate Bill 348 this week. SB 348 would provide increased opportunities for Georgia's students by simplifying the process to create a college and career academy. A college and career academy operates as a partnership and collaboration between businesses, high schools and postsecondary institutions to advance work force development and work based learning programs for its students to prepare them for college and the workplace. SB 384 would allow local school systems to create a college and career academy as part of a contract to act as a strategic waivers school system, which operates under the direction of a partnership between the state Department of Education and the local school system, or a as charter school system. Any established charter or strategic waiver district would have the power to create a college and career academy, as opposed to current law which only allows standalone charter schools to create college and career academies. Finally, SB 348 provides training requirements for the governing boards of college and career academies, including best practices, constitutional and statutory requirements, applicable statues, and rules and regulations. By giving our local school systems more local control and the ability to set up college and career academies, we would prepare Georgia's students for college and the workforce at a young age. Providing opportunities for development and success within our

education system will help shape our state and nation for the future, and I am proud to support the future through these proactive initiatives today.

Senate Bill 230, the "Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act," also received final passage this week to provide Georgians with increased access to healthcare resources and medical personnel during states of emergency in Georgia and other cooperating states. SB 230 would waive licensing requirements for volunteer health practitioners from participating states to allow those volunteers to assist with medical needs in the event of a natural disaster or during a state of emergency even if those volunteers are not residents of Georgia. Volunteer health practitioners would be eligible to provide health and veterinary services provided that they are registered with a volunteer health practitioner registration system, have a license to practice medicine in their home state, and are in good standing in the state where they are licensed. To qualify volunteers must be registered with the Department of Public Health and meet one of the following requirements: be an emergency system for advance registration of volunteer health care practitioners established by a state and funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; be a local unit consisting of trained and equipped emergency response, public health, and medical personnel; be a member of an approved medical reserve corps; or be operated by a disaster relief organization, licensing board, national or regional association of licensing boards or health practitioners, health facility that provides comprehensive inpatient and outpatient health care services, government entity, or be designated by the

Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) as a registration system. During a state of emergency, the governor would define the length of time, locations, and types of medical practice which volunteer practitioners would perform, while representatives of GEMA or any host entity would have the authority to accept or deny volunteer applications. Emergency preparedness is a priority for our state and SB 230 would offer access to necessary resources and provide more immediate care for our citizens by ensuring that in the event of a natural disaster, we can call on qualified medical professionals from other states to lend their assistance.

Finally, with broad bipartisan House support, the General Assembly gave final passage to a measure to ensure the rapid transfer of forensic medical examinations to law enforcement. Senate Bill 304, the "Pursuing Justice for Rape Victims Act," unanimously passed the House to outline proper protocol and requirements for recording and reporting evidence collected during a forensic medical evaluation for investigations of rape. Forensic medical examiners would be required to notify law enforcement officials of this evidence, and law enforcement officers would then have 96 hours to collect the kit once the exam is completed. After collecting the kit, law enforcement officials would then have 30 days to submit the evidence to the proper division, where records of all evidence and kits collected would be kept. An annual report would be compiled each December and given to the Governor, Speaker of the House, Lieutenant Governor, members of the House and Senate Judiciary and Non-Civil Committees, and posted online at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's website detailing the number of

kits tested as well as those that were not tested. This legislation was written in response to the backlog of rape kit evidence in hospitals, clinic, and law enforcement agencies throughout Georgia and other states due to the lack of defined procedure. With a pronounced plan in place, we will be able to better provide for the victims of these heinous acts of violence and seek justice for them in a timely fashion.

Now that these bills passed both the House and Senate, and the General Assembly's 2016 legislative session has adjourned sine die, the future of these bills are currently in the hands of the Governor Deal. As stipulated in our state constitution, the governor has 40 days to sign or veto the legislation. This means that any bill or resolution that the governor has not vetoed by Tuesday, May 3, 2016, will become state law in the coming months.

Although session is over, I hope that you will continue to contact me with any questions or concerns that you might have regarding your state government. If you have any questions about these potential changes to state code or if you have any suggestions for future legislation, I hope that you will contact me. You can reach me at my capitol office at 404-656-9198 or by email at repdon@gmail.com. Additionally, I will be spending a lot more time in the district now, so feel free to contact me locally at 770-977-4426.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your representative.