



Senate District 15 — Session Update — Week Nine - 2017

It is hard to believe that we have already completed nine weeks of the legislative session. Friday, March 10th, brought to a close day 31. With the Crossover deadline behind us, we began to concentrate on hearing and voting on the many House bills under consideration. The final days of any session are always long as we work to ensure we pass sound policy for the benefit of our Georgia citizens.

Fire Fighter Protection Bill

Last week we passed House Bill 146 which would require fire departments to provide and maintain adequate insurance coverage for firefighters serving 12 consecutive months and unable to work due to a disabling cancer diagnosis. Because of their work, studies show that firefighters have higher rates of certain types of cancers than the rest of the population. Listed below are provisions of HB 146 that will assist these brave men and women with the financial strain of rising medical costs:

- Provides for a lump-sum benefit of \$25,000 or \$6,250 based on the severity of the cancer.
- Provides a monthly benefit equal to 60 percent of the firefighter's monthly salary at the time of diagnosis, or a monthly benefit of \$5,000, whichever is less.
- Benefits would begin six months after the firefighter has submitted proof of their diagnosis and would continue for three years.
- Provides coverage for volunteer firefighters who are unable to work due to a cancer diagnosis.
- Provides volunteer firefighters would receive a monthly benefit of \$1,500 for the same three-year period.
- Would allow firefighters to maintain their insurance coverage upon retirement or a career change, but recipient would be responsible for paying insurance premiums in those scenarios.
- Authorizes counties and cities to use tax revenue to purchase insurance for firefighters covered under this bill.

Eligible cancers covered under HB 146 include bladder, blood, brain, breast, cervical, esophageal, intestinal, kidney, lymphatic, lung, prostate, rectal, respiratory tract, skin, testicular, thyroid, leukemia, multiple myeloma or non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

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Agriculture

Protecting our AG industry remains a top priority as we passed House Bill 176. HB 176 is intended to improve the overall functionality of the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Currently, under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) the federal government is responsible for directing inspections of certain farms and packing houses. However, HB 176 gives the Georgia Department of Agriculture the ability and flexibility to conduct inspections, as well as, take other regulatory actions necessary to assist the FDA within the provisions of the FSMA. In short, HB 176 allows the Georgia Department of Agriculture the ability to enforce federal law independently of the federal government, which will only help streamline the inspection process.