



## Senate District 15 – Rural Legislation Update – 2017

As we make reflect on the spirit of giving this holiday season, there are number of reasons that I am thankful. From a personal standpoint, I am thankful for the love and support of friends and family. From a political standpoint and as a member of the General Assembly that represents rural areas, I am thankful that our state has recognized the critical need to revitalize and assist our rural areas. While we have seen an increase in legislation dealing with rural revitalization efforts over the last few years, our state leadership wisely appointed members to the House and Senate Rural Development Study Committees. These Committees will continue to meet across Georgia through the end of the year in hopes of identifying policies that will help our rural communities thrive. As expected, healthcare, career and technical education, economic development and broadband access remain at the forefront of conversation.

Currently, 16% of Georgians do not have high-speed internet access, and the vast majority of those broadband deserts are in rural counties. This poses a problem for many reasons, the largest being education. While all public schools in Georgia have broadband internet, many students do not. Further, lack of access causes issues for communities striving for economic development and growth. Multiple presentations and policy ideas have been offered including a broadband grant program which other states have successfully implemented. Other suggestions include incentive programs for providers to service rural areas. Final committee reports, which are due to state leadership in December, will determine how the general assembly moves forward where access is concerned during the 2018 legislation session.

Presentations have also been given on behalf of our small business communities. Our state's 983,000 small businesses employ 1.5 million citizens, approximately 44% of the population. As a major component of our economy, we are dedicated to ensuring these businesses succeed. Decreasing regulation, offering small business incentives, as well as, streamlining application processes have been presented before the committee.

Rural healthcare continues to be a major concern. In recent years numerous hospitals have closed, leaving those outside of metropolitan areas lacking in options for quality care. As a recent report that shows 65% of the population will be made up of senior citizens by the year 2030, we have been working tirelessly to address issues plaguing our current healthcare system. The last few sessions, we have made progress, implementing a hub and spoke pilot program, as well as, offering incentives to medical students to practice in rural Georgia communities. Of the many proposals offered, telemedicine and the possibility of expanded practice scopes for Physicians Assistants and Nurse Practitioners remain hot topics of discussion.

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Education and job ready workforce incentives have also been discussed at length. Did you know that 60% of jobs require some sort of training beyond high school, however, only 33% of jobs require a four-year degree? I am pleased to report that our career ready education initiatives have begun paying off! Career & Technology education is thriving as a recent report from the Department of Education shows a 95% graduation rate for those participating in career and technology job ready programs. This is a huge step in closing the workforce gap in our state's economy. Expect to see more legislation aimed at continuing this trend in 2018!

Listed above are just a few examples of what these study committees are addressing. If you are interested in learning more, I encourage you to visit the Georgia General Assembly Study Committee webpage. There you will find videos and presentations of every House meeting, along with in depth presentations.

As we surround ourselves with family and friends over the next month, I hope that you will reflect on the many things for which you are grateful. I am thankful that we live in a nation where democracy is a founding principal. I am grateful to live in a state where growth and development continues to occur. I am thankful to live in a district that I am proud to serve. I am especially thankful that you allow me to represent your interests under the Gold Dome. If you ever need anything at all, I am here for you, always. God bless you and may God continue to bless the great state of Georgia!