



Senate District 15 – Session Update – Week Four - 2017

On Monday, January 30th, we reconvened for a productive fourth week of the 2017 legislative session. Committee and subcommittee hearings were in full swing as we considered a number of bills. We also took Senate floor votes on issues regarding alcohol regulations in regards to craft breweries, as well as, healthcare initiatives.

Alcohol Measures

On Thursday, February 2nd, we overwhelmingly passed [Senate Bill 85](#) which would allow Georgia craft breweries to sell up to 3,000 barrels of beer each year directly to consumers. The bill is now under consideration in the House, but will face tough opposition before it becomes law. Opponents of the bill believe this measure will further compromise the make-up of Georgia's three-tier system. The three-tier system was put in place following prohibition and requires all manufacturers of alcohol go through a "distributor" before hitting retail shelves. This system was put in place as a checks and balances system to account for tax revenue. Until recently, breweries could only allow consumption on site and visitors weren't able to purchase product for home consumption. As it stands now, customers are able to take home a limited amount; however, Georgia is the last state to limit direct sales in craft breweries. If passed by the House and signed into law by Governor Deal, the limitations of sale amounts will be lifted beginning September 1st.

Healthcare

[Senate Bill 70](#), also known as the hospital "bed tax," passed the Senate in a 50-3 vote. Although the bill has been deemed a "bed tax," it should really be called the rural hospital "protection act." Under the legislation, Georgia hospitals would continue to pay a tax that helps draw \$600 million in federal support for the Medicaid budget. Georgia has been reluctant to expand Medicaid, leaving hospitals to pay for the care of lower income patients, unable to cover rising medical costs. This tax ensures that Hospitals seeing a high number of low-income patients, receive money back through a higher payment rate from Medicaid at the federal level. Essentially this bill helps close the loophole between low-income patients and care received, which is crucial for our rural areas. This measure also helps prevent the closing of rural healthcare facilities, which is a major concern for state leadership. The bill is now under consideration in the House and is expected to pass. I have spoken to many local leaders about the lack of quality healthcare in our rural areas. Therefore, I will continue to fight for regulation that will protect and enhance rural healthcare initiatives.

Last week we also voted on the adjournment resolution for the remaining days of session. The last day of session, Sine Die, will take place on Thursday, March 30th. In the meantime, I will continue to update you on the latest news in regards to your Government at work. If you are in Atlanta, or plan on making a trip to the Capitol, please come by and say hello. Thank you for allowing me to represent your voice as your confidence in me means a great deal! If you need anything at all, please don't hesitate to contact me anytime.