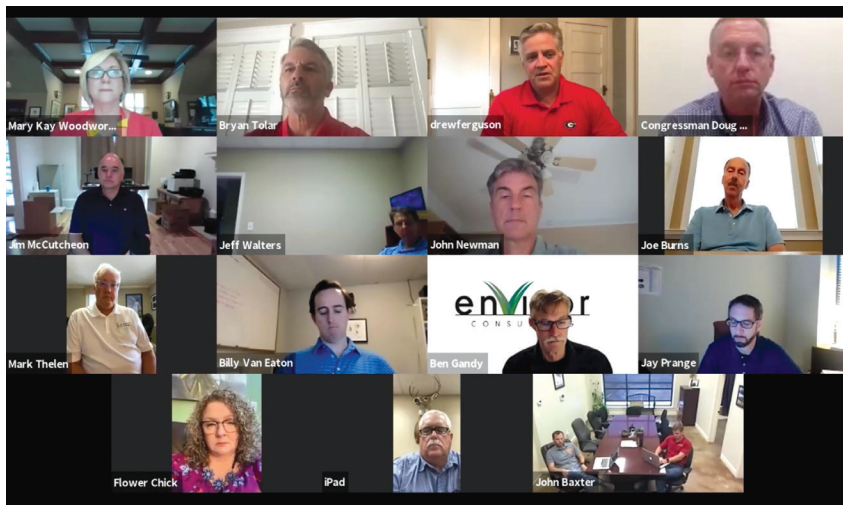


Facing the challenges Fighting for you - our members

by Bryan Tolar, Tolar Capitol Partners



UAC recently held a Zoom call with members to engage with two of Georgia's U.S. Congressmen to discuss COVID-19 legislation and more.

2020 has been one-of-a-kind...and we certainly hope it is not repeated in 2021. As I write this update, hope for an adapted college football season is still on the horizon – and with it, a promising symbol of normalcy.

Regardless of the challenges, through all of the change and awkwardness brought on since March 2020, UAC has never hesitated to advance the industry in all the ways you deserve and expect. Your investment in UAC makes it all possible.

The 2020 legislative session

First, let's reflect on outcomes of the 2020 legislative session. As you know, policy initiatives often build upon one another and react to current events, COVID-19 included.

State budget

By far, the largest big-picture challenge remains the state budget and the many agency and education components that rely on tax revenues. The current budget anticipated a 9% drop in state funds, but the lingering impacts of the pandemic are forcing additional soul searching as the calendar rolls forward. Federal funding, or lack thereof, is also a big determining factor.

Should the economy sputter further or falter, expect lawmakers to take swift corrective action through deeper budget cuts for the current FY2021 budget as well as the FY2022 budget planning process. Time will tell.

Business benefits

The 2020 legislative session also yielded several business benefits for UAC. These included:

- ▶ a resolution to U.S. Congress that we need to improve the federal H-2A and H-2B guest worker visa programs for landscaping, agriculture, forestry, and other related fields;
- ▶ a law that restructures the appointment timing of members to the Georgia Seed Development Commission (GSD) to help ensure continuity for the board over time;
- ▶ a law updating and strengthening Georgia's industrial hemp law for enforcement and production licensing, including greenhouses; and
- ▶ a law regarding COVID-19 that provides facilities with extensive immunity from civil liability for injuries or death alleged to have been sustained because of actions taken by the business.

All are good building blocks for UAC members.

Sales tax exemptions

A faltering budget could resurrect efforts that surfaced at the State Capitol in June. Sadly, these recent actions sought to eliminate several

sales tax exemptions, including one for sod sales direct from the farm. Doing so would put Georgia sod growers at a severe disadvantage to sod farms in adjacent states. This or other similar attacks could reduce the size of current sales tax exemptions and tax credit programs which would have impacted all Georgia Agriculture Tax Exemption (GATE) purchases for ag inputs and energy used for agribusinesses. Desperation for state tax dollars can cause hazy, even delusional thinking, so we are preparing now to fight that battle with lawmakers when they reconvene in January.

UAC efforts

Finally, efforts continue to advance the UAC profile and membership throughout the pandemic.

A well-received series of **UAC Short Take videos** helped share the message of adjustment and experiences from a variety of UAC members and education partners.

It is unfortunate that the usual member engagement events, such as monthly industry suppers and the Turfgrass Field Day in Griffin had to be scrapped, but work goes on.

UAC recently held a **Zoom call with members to engage with two of Georgia's U.S. Congressmen to discuss COVID-19 legislation** and more. Congressman Doug Collins and Congressman Drew Ferguson were pleased to join the discussion and share their insight. This too was provided as video footage for UAC members who could not attend the live event.

Additional COVID-19 activity came when UAC member Scotts Miracle-Gro manufactured over 600,000 plastic face shields at their plant in California. They reached out to UAC to

help place the shields in hospitals for front-line workers in Georgia. UAC connections with Governor Kemp, Members of Congress, and state legislators led to the August **delivery of 36,000 face shields** to hospitals and to Georgia's Emergency Management Agency. We are thankful for the generosity of Scotts Miracle-Gro and to the partnerships that exist in the UAC membership to deliver on education, outreach and opportunities that help our industry and our state.

Looking ahead

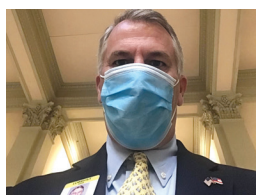
The months ahead are clearly critical as to how our state and communities can move forward. Previous comments touch on many challenges, but changes at the State Capitol will also play an important role.

The retirements of Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman John Wilkinson and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom McCall are huge losses alone, but they will accompany the shuffling of many other lawmakers as well. Their collective leadership will not be easily replaced.

A strong, engaged membership will continue to allow us to weather the storm. We encourage you to reach out and speak up on ways UAC can help your business build a better tomorrow.

No doubt, football will cure some ills...we love sports and it is symbolic of brighter days ahead. Thank you and continue your efforts to stay safe.

When's kickoff??? 



Tolar Capitol Partners provides background and status information on key issues, prompting action from our members when needed and lobbying on behalf of our industry. tolarcapitolpartners.com