

“We are the trustees of the peoples’ will. We owe them our best...that is the sacred trust of democracy. The covenant of service which you and I have with Georgians must always be foremost in our minds – to do what is right by them, not what is best for ourselves or our party...”

Those are the words of Governor Sonny Perdue as he addressed the General Assembly in his final State of the State speech Wednesday. The governor’s speech set the tone for the 2010 session of the Georgia legislature: to do the hard things now for a better tomorrow. The State Senate and House of Representatives face some difficult challenges this year, namely finding solutions to the state’s budget, water and transportation problems.



The first week of this year’s session saw a new Speaker of the House come to power. Committee assignments were also announced this week, which means that many members will be shuffled around as well as new chairmen taking over. A large number of bills aimed at ethics reform were also introduced in both chambers.

The General Assembly will stand in recess next week to accommodate the budget hearings for all state agencies. Four legislative days have been completed thus far, and 36 remain...

Ralston, Jones elected by full House



Rep. Calvin Smyre (left) and Speaker David Ralston

In December, the Republican caucus of the Georgia House of Representatives met to cast their votes for the next Speaker of the House. Rep. **David Ralston**, an attorney from Blue Ridge, was chosen by the caucus, and on Monday was elected by the full House of Representatives. Ralston topped Democratic nominee Rep. **Calvin Smyre** (D-Columbus) by a vote of 116 to 58, and replaces outgoing Speaker Glenn Richardson. Ralston had unsuccessfully challenged Richardson for the Speaker position in the 2009 session.

Also elected by the full House was Rep. **Jan Jones** (R-Alpharetta) as Speaker Pro Tempore, the second highest ranking position in the 180 member House. She is the first woman to hold such a high position in the General Assembly. Jones, a former marketing executive, was chosen by the caucus in December as well and won over Rep. **Kathy Ashe** (D-Atlanta) by a vote of 113 to 61.

Jones, the former Majority Whip, will be replaced by Rep. **Ed Lindsey** (R-Atlanta). As we reported last week, Rep. **Jerry Keen** (R-St. Simons) will remain in his position as Majority Leader.

Governor could call special session

In a press conference Tuesday, Governor Perdue said a special legislative session may be necessary to work on the water dispute between Georgia, Florida and Alabama. Last July, a federal judge ruled that Georgia has few rights to Lake Lanier, the main source of metro Atlanta's drinking water.

"I sense a renewed spirit of cooperation between Florida and Alabama in order to get this done," Perdue said. "I appealed to my colleagues that, if we're going to leave a legacy in our states of solving this rather than punting it to another administration, we've got to move very quickly. I think they received that well. Congress and the three states have been given three years to reach a compromise before it restricts withdrawals for Atlanta from the lake to 1970 levels. During that time, Atlanta was a fraction of the size it is now.

"We are committed to doing it in the regular session," the Governor added. "But frankly, if we get a deal that doesn't fall into the parameters of that, I believe water is an issue for which I would be willing to call a special session, to ratify a compact among our states."

Special sessions can be called by the governor to address important issues that arise between regular sessions. To convene a special session, the governor must issue an executive proclamation stating the subjects to be considered. No law may be enacted that does not relate to the purposes stated in the governor's proclamation. In the last 100 years, 29 special sessions have been convened and have dealt with most recently with reapportionment or with state budget crises.

Issues to watch

Representative **Jay Roberts** (R-Ocilla) will sponsor legislation supported by the Georgia Forestry Association that will amend the Forest Land Protection Act (FLPA) of 2008. Last year during the rulemaking process for FLPA it became apparent that, in its current form, the FLPA statute could create an unintended liability for a landowner who sold a portion of the covenanted property if the purchaser later breached the covenant (by law, both ownerships continue in the original 15-year covenant). This liability obstacle must be removed from the statute so that any penalties for breaching a covenant are clearly the responsibility of the breaching party. The legislation is being drafted now and should be introduced soon after the legislature reconvenes following next week's break for budget hearings.

Rep. **Mary Margaret Oliver** (D-Decatur) introduced two bills this week that could potentially affect the way GFA contributes to candidates and elected officials. If passed, **house bills 890 and 891** would place a cap the amount of money an individual or an organization is able to donate. One of the tools the Association relies heavily on is its political action committee, *ForestPAC*. By utilizing the funds given to *ForestPAC*, GFA is able to help elect those who see the value of Georgia's forests.

Other things we know so far:

- ✓ The governor is working on water legislation which will likely focus on conservation. Our goal is to make sure that the water conservation measures already implemented by our industry are not overlooked and that our access to water is not curtailed in a way that would be damaging to our production capabilities.
- ✓ Senator **Chip Rogers** (R-Woodstock) will introduce property tax reform legislation primarily aimed at overhauling the appeals system. Currently, the legislation is still being drafted.

- ✓ Rep. **Debbie Buckner** (D-Junction City) is expected to be introduced legislation to strengthen Georgia's timber theft statutes.
- ✓ There will likely be a bill entitled the *Georgia Forest Product Fairness Act* aimed at insuring equal and fair treatment for existing forest product businesses that does not place them at a competitive disadvantage with other segments of the forest products industry. Similar legislation was passed by the Louisiana legislature last year.

For more information on the Georgia General Assembly, including contact information for your Representative and Senator, visit the Georgia Forestry Association website at www.gfagrow.org and click on Georgia General Assembly under the **Links** tab, or under the **Government Affairs** tab you may go to Contact Your Legislator, a particularly helpful resource if you are uncertain of the members in your local legislative delegation.

**For questions or information regarding GFA's legislative program, please contact
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