

Last day of 2021 session, Legislative Day 40, "Sine Die"



My colleagues and I returned to Capitol Hill on Monday, March 29 for the final two days of the 2021 legislative session. The last day of session, Legislative Day 40, is commonly referred to as "Sine Die," which is a Latin term meaning "without assigning a day for further meeting." On Sine Die, the Georgia House of Representatives worked diligently until shortly after midnight to ensure that significant legislation had every chance to be considered this year.

During Legislative Day 39, we unanimously passed Senate Bill 117 to close a loophole in Georgia law by creating a new crime for certain entrusted individuals who engage in sexually explicit conduct with minors. This crime would specifically apply to a "person in a position of trust," such as athletic coaches, educators or any other person whom a parent or guardian has trusted and entered into an agreement with to educate or supervise their child until the agreement has ended. SB 117 would ensure that these sexual predators receive adequate punishment for their crimes.

The House also gave final passage to Senate Bill 105. Under this bill, offenders on probation in Georgia may petition to end their probation early if they have paid all restitution owed, not had their probation revoked in the past two years and not been arrested for anything other than a non-serious traffic offense. If the offender has met those requirements, their probation could be terminated early. By streamlining this early termination process through this bipartisan bill, our state could incentivize and allow more offenders to move forward in their lives. This bill has also been sent to the governor's office. Before adjourning Sine Die, the House

fulfilled its only constitutional obligation by adopting the conference committee report on House Bill 81, the state's Fiscal Year 2022 (FY 2022) budget. This budget for the next fiscal year begins July 1, 2021, and is set by a revenue estimate \$27.2 billion, which is an increase of \$1.34 billion, or 5.2 percent, over the original Fiscal Year 2021 budget that was passed last June. The state's fiscal position has exceeded expectations since last year, and as a result, we were able to allocate approximately 90 percent of the new revenue for the FY 2022 budget to Georgia's education and health and human services agencies. The upcoming fiscal year budget also restores 60 percent of the reductions made to K-12 education, as well as preserves and increases funding for our other top priorities, such as expanded mental health care and crisis intervention services, rate increases for health and human service providers, access to health care and salary increases for critical state workforce positions. Governor Brian Kemp will now review the budget bill before signing it into law. The House also voted to give final approval to several other important bills this week, including House Bill 479, which would repeal Georgia's antiquated citizen's arrest law, also received final passage on Sine Die. In addition to repealing citizen's arrest, HB 479 would clarify certain instances in which law enforcement officers may make arrests outside of their jurisdiction, as well as authorize retail stores, food service establishments and certain licensed private security professionals to detain someone if they reasonably believe an individual is committing a crime. We also adopted a conference committee report for Senate Bill 6, or the "Tax Credit Return on Investment Act of 2021," which would establish opportunities to examine our state's tax revenue structure, as well as expand tax incentives for several industries to restore our economy. House Bill 154 also received final approval and would reform several of Georgia's adoption and foster care laws, including lowering



the age at which a person can petition for adoption from 25 to 21 years old. Senate Bill 60, which would require indemnification payments to be made to a public safety officer who suffers a heart attack, stroke or vascular rupture while the officer was on duty after performing work-related activity or no more than 24 hours after performing work-related activity; and directly or proximately resulted in the death or partial or permanent disability. Senate Bill 100, which would provide that Georgia would observe daylight savings time year-round as the standard time only if the U.S. Congress authorizes states to keep daylight savings time year-round. Senate Bill 237, which would create a specialty license plate to support members of the U.S. Army Rangers. These bills will also undergo consideration by the governor, as well as several other pieces of legislation.

Now that the 2021 legislative session has come to an end, Governor Kemp will begin reviewing all legislation that received final passage in the House and Senate. The governor can sign or veto legislation over the next 40 days, and any legislation that has not been signed or vetoed will automatically become law. With this session behind us, I will be spending more time in our district, where I look forward to continuing to serve you and your family. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding bills that passed this session or suggestions for future legislation. You can reach me throughout the year at my Capitol office at 404-656-0325, or by email at Stan.Gunter@house.ga.gov. Also, since I will be spending more time in our district now, feel free to contact me locally at 706-897-5609.

As always, thank you for allowing me to serve as your representative for House District 8.

Community Hopeful...from Page 1A

to get vaccinated so that some of the restrictions that are still in place can begin to be eased. "I'm happy to see everyone getting vaccinated," Becket said. "We can finally get ready to take off these masks and get back to seeing each other's faces. I'm ready to get out again and have fun with my family."

"We usually go on a vacation every year, and we didn't last year, but we are hoping to get out a little this summer and enjoy the weather. It will be good for people to take some time to recover and have a little bit of fun with their families."

Eric Purcell of Florida believes the COVID numbers will continue to decrease over the next few weeks and hopes people will continue to stay safe.

"I think the worst is over," Purcell said while shopping on the Blairsville Square April 2. "Winter has gone by, and we were all cooped up in our houses and not doing anything. With the weather getting warmer, people are getting back out."

"Sure, I think the pandemic is coming to a close, or at least really low numbers, but it wouldn't hurt for people to be a little safe when going out and about. Just keep some distance and practice good hygiene, at least. Just because we are getting out doesn't mean

we need to be close again." Allen Darby of Ellijay thinks it is time to overcome the fear of the pandemic and work toward building a better community where we coexist with the virus since it looks as if it is here to stay.

"I don't think this COVID is going anywhere," Darby said at Home Depot on Saturday. "It will be around probably as long as I live, but that doesn't mean we should be doing this for that

long. We need to get back out and do things normal again."

"We have overcome every virus the world has thrown at us, and this will be nothing in a few years. It was a hard time for everybody, and it really hurt a lot of families, but we all got through it."

"Now is the time for us to brush it off and get on with our lives. It doesn't care if we are waiting for it to go away."

Spring Weather...from Page 1A

"Now, we are three stimulus packages in, and it seems like nobody is talking about our economy. It is all about the vaccines, which are well and good, but that doesn't help the small business down the street fighting to make ends meet. We need to keep them in mind and recover our economy."

Local businesses have participated in numerous events over the last year to encourage local shopping amid COVID-19 challenges, which has proven successful so far in leading to creative opportunities for the area, like "The Easter Bunny Shops Local."

Tiffany Dahlman of Union County said it's important for the community to come together and forge strong relationships, especially considering everything people have been through in

recent memory.

"Community is the most important thing right now—I mean any community, really," Dahlman said while shopping at the Family Dollar April 3. "It is important for people to be involved with a group that supports them and works together for a cause bigger than themselves."

"That could be a city, community or a church group or an organization anything. We as people need others to help us through our lives even if we don't like to admit it. A lot of good comes from being a part of something bigger than yourself."

"Now that things are getting back together, finding a community is something I would recommend for everyone."

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