

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



THE GATES PORTAL

2014 Georgia Legislative Primer



By Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

Session Length - Super Short

It is certain from every perspective that the House and Senate Leadership intend for this legislative session to move fast and finish up by mid-March. That would make this the quickest session since Republicans took the majority and since the beginning of this century. Under House Speaker Murphy the session was typically out by mid-March, but lately it has marched further and further into April. There is truly only one reason why the leadership intends this session to end as soon as it can and that is a federal judge has ordered the primary elections be moved from July to May 20th. Because of the strong gerrymandering most legislative districts are not very competitive between parties, but primary challenges within parties is now where an election for an incumbent legislator can be held or lost. There are plenty of candidates out there trying to knock out incumbents. In addition, statewide and legislative elected officials cannot raise campaign funds while the session is in progress, therefore the sooner they end the sooner they can raise funds. This fact alone shows strong predictions for a mid-March sine die, barring any natural or fiscal disaster.

Budget - Revenue Growing but Very Tight Margins

Given the speed of the session the question is how that will impact the budget process. Early indications are that it will speed the timetable up considerably. Two very strong signals were sent this week. First the Joint Budget hearings were announced for both the Amended 2014 and 2015 fiscal years and will take place the first week of the session on Wednesday, January 15 from 1-6pm. Typically the Appropriations Committee plans for three days of hearings during the second week of

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Special
Announcements



**GRA
Legislative
Reception
Thursday
January 16, 2014
4:30 PM - 7:30 PM
Capitol - Depot
Hall
Atlanta, GA
For more info:
chall@asqinfo.net**

**GATES Board
of Directors**

the session but not this year. The Joint Appropriations hearing will only cover four state agencies K-12 Education, Higher Education, Community Health (Medicaid & State Health Benefits), and Transportation. That leaves all other agencies to be considered in subcommittee meetings. The second strong signal came later in the week from House Speaker David Ralston; he said they plan to have the Amended 2014 budget completed in a week and a half to two weeks. It typically takes a month to review, adjust and pass the amended budget.

**WATCH Governor Deal's State of the State Address LIVE
WEDNESDAY, January 15, 2014 at 11 AM**

Go to

<http://www.esenetworks.com/profile.aspx?id=590>

During this week at the Georgia Budget and Policy Conference Executive Director Alan Essig gave an overview of the revenue projection and budgeting reality he sees happening this session. Based on current revenue collection trends he said it is only possible to have a 4.5-5.5% increase in revenues for the year translating into \$850-900 million collected in state revenues. While the positive movement of revenue growth has allowed state agencies to hold on to current funding levels it does not allow for much room in real growth. Each year the state budget must account for enrollment growth in education, Medicaid and behavioral health obligations. Those three areas will take up between \$500-600 million. The Governor would like to give teachers raises, costing about \$125 million for every one percent increase. If the Governor and legislature provide teachers with a 2-3% pay increase that would take up most of the remaining revenue. Leaving many agencies with only a few million dollars that is clearly not enough for relief from all the cuts since 2009. In addition, the Governor and leadership have expressed their desire to build the state's revenue reserve (rainy day fund) beyond its current level.

Vocation Rehabilitation Funding

While the budget picture looks bleak there is no time to rest to get the message across to fully fund Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. A brochure by GVRA will be available the first week of the session and GATES own Fact Sheet will be in front of every legislator. We will be watching for the Governor's recommendation once the budget is released on Wednesday, January 15th and sharing that information quickly. ***There will be very little time to get the message out and these first two weeks will be vital.***

Session Scope - Limited

While there is always talk about bold policy initiatives by elected officials there seems to be very little will this session to consider highly controversial issues which could draw unwelcome attention to legislative ambitions. In terms of impact on folks with disabilities and non-profit organizations that support them, we will keep watch and provide updates and action when needed as the session progresses.

Happy New Year and hoping 2014 brings successful policy and

Winter Meeting
Thursday
January 30, 2014
9:30 AM
Goodwill of the
Southern Rivers,
Columbus, GA

**State Use
Council
Meeting**
January 23, 2014
10:00 AM
Location: Sloppy
Floyd Bldg - West
Tower

**State Use
Council
Meeting**
March 27, 2014
10:00 AM
Location: Sloppy
Floyd Bldg - West
Tower

**Working
Wonders Day**
March 27, 2014
Noon
Location: Sloppy
Floyd Bldg

**GATES Board
of Directors
Spring Meeting**
April 25, 2014
Location: -TBD

**Galaxy of Stars
and Tommy
Awards
Luncheon**
April 30, 2014
Cobb Galleria
Centre

budget progress.

***(sponsored by
Nobis Works)***

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Charles Hall,
chall@asginfo.net*

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