

## News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



# THE GATES PORTAL

## 2015 looks a lot like 2014 right now



by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

The legislature opened January 12, 2015 with the traditional ceremony to swear in all Constitutional Statewide Officers and the 236 members of the General Assembly. Governor Deal briefly addressed the legislature in his second inaugural acceptance speech focusing on school choice and criminal justice reform. Governor Deal linked all success to strong education and training. Of particular note was the recognition Governor Deal gave to Sean Walker, Banquet and Catering Sales Coordinator for Augusta's Goodwill Snelling Center. Sean was noteworthy because of his success since being incarcerated and working his way back to society as a tax-paying citizen. Governor Deal's justice system reforms were his key accomplishment in his first term and he believes it continues to be the most important piece of his legacy.

The second day of the session was very quiet in anticipation of Day 3 when Governor Deal gave his annual State of the State Address to a joint session of the House and Senate. To start the day the House and Senate adopted a schedule that would have them in four days a week proposing to take off Fridays, except for the MLK week when the Budget Hearings will take place. The legislative days are now set to February 12 by [HR19](#) that will establish the schedule until Day 15. There continues to be speculation on the length of this session and it is any ones bet on when they will end this year.

### State of the State

The theme of this year's State of the State Address was "[Great Challenges require Great Cooperation](#)". In Governor Deal's fifth State of the State he started by explaining "the state of our state is strong, and growing stronger every day". During his speech he focused on four themes: K-12 education, Criminal Justice and Child Welfare, children

## In This Issue

[2015](#)

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Special  
Announcements



**State Use  
Council**  
*January 22, 2015*  
*Location: Sloppy  
Floyd Twin  
Towers, Capitol  
Square*  
**10:00 AM**

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**GATES Board  
of Directors  
Meeting**

with severe seizure disorders and the transportation infrastructure. He revealed that he would restore the \$1 billion to the K-12 education system to bring it back to the funding of 2008 and ask for a Constitutional Amendment to create "Opportunity School Districts". The strongest statement in this part of his speech was...

*Liberals cannot defend leaving a child trapped in a failing school that sentences them to a life in poverty. Conservatives like me cannot argue that each child in Georgia already has the same opportunity to succeed and compete on his or her own merits. We have a moral duty to help these children who can't help themselves. The sea is great and the boat is small, but the boat must not have first and second-class seating.*

The rest of his speech talked about Child Welfare, children suffering from severe seizures seeking legal access to cannabis oil, and the juggernaut that is transportation in metro Atlanta. However, he did not reveal much of his actual budget recommendations and it was disclosed that the budget would not be released until Friday, a first for any Governor, leaving many wondering what the Governor was proposing in his budget.

#### **The BUDGET**

Let's just say upfront that for Employment, Health and Human Services this budget is very boring. There is no new funding proposed in any of these agencies to assist any more people with disabilities become full participants in Georgia's economy. As Tom Crawford, a Capitol Hill/Political reporter noted upon the release of the budget "If you liked the state budget Gov. Nathan Deal presented last year, chances are you'll be OK with the one he's just drawn up." Even the Governor's budget director Teresa MacCartney is quoted, "It's pretty much almost identical to the budget for last year. The budget really mirrors what the governor did last year." Well, that is certainly disappointing given that the Governor's budget is projected a 4.5% increase to \$21.78 billion, finally exceeding the highest budget proposal set back in 2008 of \$21.1 billion. Where is all that 4.5% going? Here are the big buckets that must be filled, leaving little for anyone else:

- 1% pay raise for state employees
- \$280 million to reduce local school systems funding shortfall
- \$70 million toward Medicaid growth
- \$46 million toward the state employee retirement system
- \$34 million to hire 278 DFACS caseworkers
- \$23 million to bonds to finish a parking deck connected to the Atlanta Falcons new stadium
- Increased tax breaks for people and businesses who contribute to private school scholarship funds

Certainly disappointing for those of us who know that people with disabilities are an important part of the economy and need access to reliable health care, job training and employment services.

#### **Budget Hearings**

It seems that since there is not much to talk about the Joint Budget Hearings are being compressed into one day, Tuesday, January 20th. You can find the schedule of hearings online [here](#). You can view the

**February 6, 2015**

**Location:  
Goodwill of  
Middle GA -  
Anderson  
Conference  
Center  
10:00 AM**

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#### **State Use Council**

**March 26, 2015  
Location: Sloppy  
Floyd Twin  
Towers, Capitol  
Square  
10:00 AM**

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#### **Working Wonders Recognition Luncheon**

**March 26, 2015  
Location: Empire  
Room Sloppy  
Floyd Twin  
Towers  
Noon**

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*THE PORTAL is a regular publication of GATES. If you have staff or others associated with your organization that you would like to receive THE PORTAL, please send their email address to:  
Charles Hall,*

hearings [live here](#). Only seven agency commissioners will address the Joint Committee. The House subcommittees will begin meeting Tuesday morning January 21st to hear about the Amended FY 2015, even though there are very few changes to discuss. The Governor will give a brief overview to the Joint Committee on Thursday January 22nd at 12:30pm.

The legislature will return on Monday, January 26th for the fifth day of the session.

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## Call for Information

*THE PORTAL* is a communication tool for GATES and GATES members. If you have stories about your organization, staff announcements, program descriptions, or other information you want to share with other GATES members, please send the info to Charles Hall, [chall@asginfo.net](mailto:chall@asginfo.net)



## GATES

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