

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



THE GATES PORTAL

It Ain't Over Yet - Longest Session with the Toughest Decisions



By Dawn A. Randolph, MPA
GATES Legislative Consultant

Four days to go and two weeks to get there. This will officially be the longest session in well over a century. Many historians say you would have to go back to the 1800's to find a longer session. Currently the State House and Senate have set a calendar to be in Tuesday (20th) and Wednesday (21st) of this week and Tuesday (27th) and Thursday (29th) the following week to sine die on April 29th. So what have they been doing this whole time?

First of all, in an election year it is all about posturing to see who can gain the upper hand. With both Chambers and the Governor's office under Republican Leadership it has been a tough struggle between balancing a budget, considering the various needs of local and statewide constituents while grappling with taxes to fill the financial gap. Very tough. So tough that Senators Preston Smith (R-Rome) and Judson Hill (R-Marietta) both lost their chairmanships when they voted no on the hospital tax, even though it had been sweetened with tax cuts down the road. In a recent radio address Lt. Governor Casey Cagle explained, "*All the [caucus] members voted by a two-thirds vote to move down this path. He [Judson Hill] chose to violate the [Republican Caucus] rule and as a result he had to step down as the chair of that committee. He knew what the consequences were . . .*". Senator Preston Smith did not bow out quietly and the next voting day took the time to explain the arm-twisting he believed violated his ability to represent his constituents.

So with all the anxiety concerning revenues over; at the end of the day, literally today, the House and Senate Conferees have agreed to the

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Special Announcements



GATES Board Meeting

10 AM
May 14, 2010
Location -
New Ventures, Inc.
LaGrange

GATES Annual Meeting and Training

June 10-11,
2010

Amended FY 2010 Budget. This fiscal year will end at \$17.1 billion, down \$1.5 billion from the first try last session. Legislators were only able to reach this point by pulling back \$300 million in federal stimulus money from the FY 2011 Budget and the Governor lowering the revenue projections while cutting nearly every state program and service. The Chairman of Senate Appropriations, Senator Jack Hill (R-Reidsville), commented that we are back to 2004 budget levels.

By the end of the session the Georgia State Budget has fallen from a high of over \$22 billion in FY 2008 to just above \$17 billion for FY 2011. That is a \$5 billion cut or nearly 24% in state funding to everything from education to senior services to veterans homes to vocational rehabilitation services. Some agencies have seen as much as a 30% cut in their services while only Medicaid and the services in Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities have seen an increase. Medicaid has been helped greatly by the federal stimulus money and the eventual negotiation of the hospital tax, while mental health and developmental disabilities benefit from federal action in terms of US Department of Justice intervention (mental health) and a lawsuit (Olmstead) for DD.

Fortunately all along the way Community Rehabilitation Providers have held the line on the percentage of cuts to contracts for services. During the House subcommittee, full appropriations committee and the final floor vote the state portion of the cut has remained at \$288,627 across programs. In these very tight budget times, when so much uncertainty and anguish has occurred over every budgetary decision, it is a victory to hold the line. The Senate Appropriations Committee is scheduled to approve the FY 2011 Budget and then the full Senate can pass it out on Wednesday.

We must do the same in the Senate and the conference committee. With four voting days over the next two weeks a lot can happen. But the solidarity that has held this cut to as low as possible is a great testimony to the hard work at home each provider has done with legislators. Let's stay vigilant until the end.

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Call for Information

Location - TBD

*State Use
Council Meeting
Thursday
June 24, 2010
Atlanta, GA*

*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,
chall@asqinfo.net*

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



GATES

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports

44 Broad Street
Suite 503
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: 404-523-6674

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GATES | 404-523-6674 | 44 Broad Street | Suite 503 | Atlanta | GA | 30303