

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



Hold on... I think we are in for a bumpy session.

Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

January 12, 2021

Key Events This Week

Monday, Jan 11th the first day of the 2021-2022 legislative session. Schedule for the first 5 voting days over the next two weeks is [HR 10](#). They will be in Monday - Thursday this week.

Wednesday, Jan 13 - 1-2:30pm [GVRA Board Meeting](#)

Thursday, Jan 14 - 11:00am Governor Brian Kemp - State of the State and Highlight of Budget Recommendations. Online video broadcast under House Schedule. [Click on the Link](#) for name House Floor Session or Joint Session for Thursday.

We have entered the Twilight Zone. At least that is how it feels to me. Viewing the session remotely still is surreal. The House and Senate are working under even tighter COVID-19 rules than they were last summer. Galleries are closed to the public and lobbyists so that a third of House members can sit in the House Gallery and Press can sit in the Senate Gallery. There are no rope lines to wait to talk with legislators and no pages to deliver notes. One must make an appointment with the legislator's office to talk with a legislator. No one can just walk up to a legislator and start a conversation. Legislators are required to get tested for COVID-19 twice a week (Mondays and Thursdays) and masks are required this time by everyone. Committee



In This Issue

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Special Announcements



State Use Council Meeting

Thursday,
January 28, 2021
Conference Call -
10:00 AM

rooms are very limited in attendance and we are still trying to determine how the public will testify. Remote committee participation by legislators are in the works and the first test will be the budget hearings next week. In the first two days of the session four members are out with COVID or because of exposure and the Senate Majority Leader Mike Dugan is now out today/Tuesday because he tested positive yesterday/Monday. Finally, there are armed police and National Guard everywhere with a very intimidating fence circling the Capitol

Flow of the Session

We have our first adjournment resolution, [HR 10](#). It seems they will be scheduling in two week increments in case they must adjourn because COVID numbers/infections are such that they cannot conduct in-person business.

- First week will be four days Monday - Thursday Jan 11-14
- Budget and State of the State Address by the Governor on Jan 14 at 11am. You can watch it [live online](#) listed by name on the House website or clicking on the camera icon.
- Budget Week Jan 19-21. Here is the [schedule](#). GVRA Executive Director is not on the list to speak, nor has the position for the last several years. DHS Commission Robyn Crittenden will present at 8:05am on Thursday, Jan 21st and she will cover the GVRA Budget.

New Website!

The entire Legislative Branch of the Georgia General assembly now has a new website - [Under the Gold Dome](#). This gives you combined access to the proceedings and documents for both chambers. I am still learning my way around this new site since it launched in mid December. So far I am very pleased with the ease of finding information on this site. I am sure my daily use will uncover more of its functions.

Ceremony

The first week of a new term really is about ceremony. The first day, January 11th, all legislators were sworn in. Unlike in the past there were few family members and no guests allowed. Each legislator was allowed one family member to be with them as they took their oath of office. Legislators have not received committee assignments yet and office assignments are still being juggled. Leadership positions in the Republican party did not change. However there was a huge turn over of Democratic Leadership with not a single person remaining in their past position. You can find leaders of the [House here](#) and the [Senate here](#).

The Budget

Governor Kemp and [Speaker Ralston](#) in speeches this week said that our tax collections are strong and there is no need for further budget cuts. The Governor said he is trying to restore funds to education and healthcare. The Speaker feels the priority needs to be restoring

GATES Board Meeting

Friday,
February 5, 2021
ZOOM Call -
10:00 AM

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funding to the state reserves or what we call "The Rainy Day Fund". The Budget will be released after the Governor's address to a joint session on Thursday.

First priority will be to pass the Amended Budget. Speaker Ralston has charged Appropriations Chairman Terry England (R-Auburn) to get the amended budget done very quickly just in case they must suspend due to an increase in COVID-19.

Session Issue Priorities

Elections - Speaker Ralston will be appointing a special committee on Election Integrity. Election processes will be the number one priority for the Republicans because they have lost the two US Senate seats and a Presidential contest. They want to make it more difficult to vote absentee and early. They want IDs for absentee ballots. While Speaker Ralston, in his press address, said he was not convinced to reduce reasons for absentee ballots he did emphasize he wanted it to be secure. This will likely be the most contentious issue during the session and a lead up to the fight for reapportionment that will take place in the fall special session.

Mental Health - there was a focused effort over the past year examining mental health services in Georgia. Speaker Ralston mentioned in his annual opening address to the Press and the first day of the session in his acceptance speech to continue as speaker that Mental Health will be a top priority. The committees examining mental health really only focused on those with a mental health diagnosis, not physical or intellectual diagnosis. It is unclear as to how broad this will be considered for all disabilities.

Education - Speaker Ralston said Dyslexia as a learning disability is still not recognized in Georgia's education system and wants this need to be addressed.

Special Session

Every ten years, as a result of the census, the Georgia General Assembly must convene a special session to realign house, senate and congressional districts. I believe we will pick up one and maybe two new Congressional seats with the growth in Georgia's population approaching 11 million. The party in control of the legislature will be drawing the lines. Georgia is not just trending more toward the Democratic Party, it has arrived. Every legislator's district is on the line as they attempt to ensure the Republican Party can maintain control of both chambers for the next decade. This issue will be the undertone for all issues during the regular session.

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