

# Georgia Legislative Highlights

*April 24th True Perspectives with Senator Ben Watson  
and Representative Jesse Petrea*



Our local representatives, Senator Ben Watson and Representative Jesse Petrea, led a True Perspectives Seminar on April 24 on what the State of Georgia has done lately to affect us. They also lamented that the mainstream press generally does not cover some things that the public is most interested in. For example, the first ever reduction in the state income tax – House Bill 918. It will reduce citizens' income taxes by some \$5 billion over the next five years, by a half percent rate reduction and a doubling of the standard deduction.



Now it is up to the residents here to decide their future status. It was also noted that the state legislature did not fund a study to see if Chatham County and the City of Savannah might benefit from a merger.



On other geographic news, the legislature is funding a study to evaluate the benefits of keeping or expanding military bases in Georgia, noting that Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field contain some 21,000 military personnel, a third of Georgia's total.

## **Questions and Answers**

1. What is happening legislatively on

The legislature still managed to balance the budget and even also fully funded the state's commitment to teacher pay and retirement programs. Georgia teacher pay is the best in the South, and the retirement program among the best in the nation. (Georgia spends 54% of its budget on education.) The legislature also expanded the support for charter schools, and increased the credits available for scholarships (House Bill 217) for needy public school children to attend private schools to \$100 million. The previous limit of \$58 million had been oversubscribed. It was noted that under Republican leadership since 2003, Georgia high school graduation rates have risen from 67% to 80%.

On promoting conservation of lands, they passed House Bill 332 that earmarks 40% of the sales taxes from sporting goods to promoting state parks and lands and trails for use in recreation.

On medical marijuana, they expanded the uses for those intractable pain or with PTSD or with certain kinds of seizures. It is recognized that this is still a

mental health issues? There has been a lot done on criminal justice reform over the past few years. For example, taking certain non-violent crime issues out of the basic prison system. Better to handle DUIs, some drug offences and mental health with other Accountability Courts and save hard time prisons for the more violent. Even moving some to community release with some protection is better for some violators than housing them with hardened violent criminals.

At the same time, more attention is now paid to stopping early release via the parole boards of those who juries have justifiably given long sentences for their heinous crimes. At a minimum notice must be given to the families of the victims of these crimes to try to oppose early release, for the sake of alleviating prison overcrowding.



It is recognized now that 71% of paroled violent criminals commit further crimes and need re-incarceration. Now there are more sentences of life without parole to

controversial issue as federal law considers THC a Class 1 drug offense similar to hallucinogens. Also, standard marijuana today has over 15% THC, the mind-altering part of weed, whereas decades ago it was only 5% THC.



### **Public Safety Issues**

On gun safety, they rebuffed a liberal Atlanta congress person's call for confiscation of handguns – a blatant violation of the second amendment, but an obvious appeal to a leftist base that likely has no chance of going anywhere in Georgia.

In contrast, they passed a measured bill (HB 657) forbidding intentionally providing a gun to a felon, who is already forbidden to acquire a gun on his own. This measure carries a mandatory imprisonment of at least one year. They also funded \$16 million towards school security grants (Editor's Note: \$267,199 for Chatham County).



On other public safety issues, they

prevent such recidivism and protect the public.

2. What can be done to reduce the sale of guns on the black market? And too easy sale of guns at gun shows? It is recognized that background checks need to be strengthened there. It is too easy to let someone merely sign an affidavit of no prior crimes or mental health issues. The new law on criminalizing furnishing guns to felons should help with the black market problem. Also, a previous bill (HB 1013) was enacted to promote a 72 hour evaluation of a person by psychological experts before allowing the keeping of a firearm.



3. Is there any truth to the story that some 2.5 million cases a year involve good guys with guns preventing bad outcomes? That is a bone fide statistic that the mainstream press studiously avoids covering.

4. What are we doing to prevent bad outcomes from attacks on our

passed House Bill 673 – combatting distracted driving, creating fines for holding a phone while driving.

electric grid? There are more and more backup systems being put in place to minimize the outages.

### **Incorporation of Skidaway Island**

Our representatives got the legislature to ok putting a referendum on the November ballot to be able to separately incorporate Skidaway Island.