

On Monday, January 14, 2019, the Georgia House of Representatives convened for the first day of the 155th Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly. Since Monday marked the first day of the new 2019-2020 term, every member of the Georgia House of Representatives took the oath of office and was formally sworn in. The first order of business was the election of leaders to guide the House these next two years. After nominations, Speaker David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge) and Speaker Pro-Tempore Jan Jones (R-Milton) were both re-elected to their respective positions.

After completing our business in the House Chamber Monday morning, the House and Senate reconvened that afternoon for a joint session for the inauguration of Georgia's 83rd governor, Brian Kemp. Thousands of citizens gathered to witness as Governor Kemp took the oath of office at Georgia Tech's McCamish Pavilion in Atlanta. Gov. Kemp then administered the oath of office to Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan and other constitutional officers. Our new governor began his term with an impactful inaugural address and encouraged our leaders and citizens to continue to build on our state's accomplishments. The governor finished his address by calling for bipartisan leadership with the hope of Georgia becoming a "state united."

Three days later, on Thursday, January 17th, the House and Senate reconvened for another joint session with Gov. Kemp to hear his first annual State of the State address. This annual speech before a joint legislature, judiciary, special guests and the public gives the newly elected governor the opportunity to present his assessment of the current condition of our state government and offer his goals for continued progress and success in the new year.

Gov. Kemp began his State of the State address by reflecting on the leadership and legacies of Governors Sonny Perdue and Nathan Deal. Gov. Kemp commended the work that has been done to make Georgia the epicenter of job growth, the Hollywood of the South and soon to

be the Cyber Capital of the World. He also praised Deal's criminal justice reform initiatives and announced that he will continue to build on those reform efforts during his time in office.

Throughout his speech, Gov. Kemp celebrated Georgia's victories, while challenging us to accomplish even more.

As governor, Brian Kemp vowed to continue to work with state and local officials to recruit industry leaders to Georgia. He highlighted Georgia's rising wages and low unemployment rate – the lowest it has been in 18 years. In the last eight years, Georgia has seen 800,000 new private sector jobs created, which includes industries like agribusiness, aerospace, aviation, healthcare, manufacturing and transportation infrastructure. To continue this incredible achievement, Gov. Kemp will establish the Georgians First Commission to review regulations that make it difficult for companies to hire, expand and invest in our state.

Gov. Kemp also expressed his commitment to strengthening our public schools by recruiting and retaining top talent for our classrooms by keeping teacher pay competitive. Therefore, Gov. Kemp's 2020 budget proposal includes a \$3,000 salary increase for certified Georgia teaching professionals which represents the first installment of the \$5,000 increase he promoted during the campaign.

Not only did Gov. Kemp pledge to invest in school personnel, but he also outlined his plan to prioritize school safety. Starting with the Amended Fiscal Year 2019 budget, Gov. Kemp will include \$69 million one-time funding for school security grants. Under the governor's proposal, all 2,294 public schools in Georgia would receive \$30,000 to implement school security priorities that would be determined by local school boards, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. This would allow each school community to prioritize safety according to their specific needs.

In another effort to keep our classrooms safe, Gov. Kemp challenged the General Assembly to address mental health issues that lead to violence in our public schools. To aid in this effort, Gov. Kemp's budget proposal includes an additional \$8.4 million in funding through the APEX program from the Georgia Health Policy Center. APEX is a successful pilot program that increases access to mental health services for school-aged youth. Our state officials would partner with the APEX program professionals to implement critical resources for struggling students.

Gov. Kemp continued by announcing another priority - tackling the rise of gang activity in Georgia. Over 71,000 confirmed gang affiliates reside in Georgia and at least 1,500 suspected gang networks are located throughout the state. To address this growing threat, his proposed budget will include \$500,000 to form a gang taskforce within the GBI. The proposed taskforce would be comprised of highly qualified law enforcement officers and prosecutors to stop and eradicate organized crime.

Gov. Kemp went on to highlight the importance of equal opportunities for all citizens in our state, regardless of their zip code or county. For this reason, Gov. Kemp will work closely with the House Rural Development Council and our colleagues in the Senate to expand access to high-speed internet, quality healthcare and great education for rural Georgians. He advocated for strategic partnerships to ensure that every region of the state has access to opportunities.

Finally, the governor reminded us that even though different parts of our state face unique challenges, all citizens deserve access to healthcare. He announced that his budget proposal will include an additional \$1 million for the Department of Community Health to create state flexibility options for Georgia's Medicaid program. Gov. Kemp expressed his commitment to working with the legislature to allow greater access to healthcare options that deliver

exceptional results, grow the rural hospital tax credit, tackle the doctor shortage and build a healthier Georgia.

After hearing a few highlights from the governor's budget proposals, the House of Representatives will use the governor's recommendations as a starting point to determine the state's budget for the last half of fiscal year 2019 and for fiscal year 2020. Representing you, I will take my seat on Tuesday, January 22nd, at the Joint House and Senate Appropriations Hearings to review the budget proposals during a week. I look forward to diving deeper into the details of the governor's budget plans to ensure that we are spending your tax dollars in the most efficient way possible.

This week, we also received our committee assignments for the 2019-2020 legislative term. I am honored to announce that Speaker Ralston and the Committee on Assignments appointed me to serve on the following House committees: Appropriations, Budget and Fiscal Affairs Oversight, Energy Public Utilities & Telecommunications, Higher Education, Regulated Industries, Retirement, Rules, Science & Technology, Ways & Means and the Working Group on Creative Arts & Entertainment. I am appointed to serve as Chair of House Higher Education..

Finally, we took time during session this week to honor and remember our dear friend and colleague, John Meadows, who recently passed away shortly after being reelected to House District 5. Chairman Meadows was elected in 2004 and served as the chairman of the powerful House Rules Committee, which serves as a gatekeeper in deciding which bills go before the full House for a vote. With his family present in the House Chamber, Speaker Ralston introduced House Resolution 5 in John Meadows' memory. House Resolution 5 honors our friend by renaming the entryway of his former office as the "John Meadows Mezzanine." He left a legacy at the Capitol and will be missed terribly. Now that session is underway, I will be working

diligently on behalf of everyone in our district while I am at the Capitol. I hope you will take the opportunity to review updates like this to stay informed on legislative matters that affect our district and state. Our House website, www.house.ga.gov, has a number of tools to help you stay up-to-date on what's going on at the Capitol: you can watch a live stream of the House proceedings, view live and archived committee meetings and review legislation we are considering.

I welcome you to reach out to me and share your thoughts and opinions as we move throughout the legislative session this year. I can be reached via email at chuck.martin@house.ga.gov, or by phone at 404-656-5064.

I thank you for the great honor of allowing me to continue to serve as your voice at the Capitol for House District 49.