

**Representative Hall, Atlanta, Georgia**

**Wednesday, January 13, 2016**

**Third Legislative Day**

The House met pursuant to adjournment at 10:00 o'clock, A.M., this day and was called to order by the Speaker.

The roll was called and the following Representatives answered to their names:

Abrams	Cooke	Harden	Mitchell	Smith, L
Alexander	Coomer	Harrell	Morris	Smith, M
Allison	Cooper	Hatchett	Mosby	Smith, R
Atwood	Corbett	Hawkins	Nimmer	Smyre
Ballinger	Dawkins-Haigler	E Henson	Nix	Spencer
E Barr	Deffenbaugh	Hightower	Pak	Stephens, M
Battles	Dempsey	Hitchens	Parrish	Stephens, R
Beasley-Teague	Dickerson	Holcomb	Parsons	E Stephenson
Belton	Dickey	Holmes	Peake	Stovall
E Bennett, K	Dickson	Houston	Petrea	Stover
Bennett, T	Dollar	Howard	Pezold	Strickland
Bentley	Douglas	Hugley	Pirkle	Tankersley
Benton	E Drenner	Jackson	Powell, A	Tanner
Beskin	Dudgeon	Jasperse	Powell, J	Tarvin
Beverly	E Dukes	Jones, J	Price	Taylor, D
Blackmon	Dunahoo	Jones, J.B.	Prince	Taylor, T
Broadrick	Duncan	Jones, L	Pruett	Teasley
Brockway	Efstration	Jones, S	Quick	Thomas, E
Bruce	Ehrhart	Kaiser	Raffensperger	Trammell
Bryant	England	Kelley	Rakestraw	Turner
Buckner	Epps	Kendrick	Ramsey	Waites
Burns	Evans	Kirby	Randall	Watson
Caldwell, J	Fleming	Knight	Reeves	Welch
Caldwell, M	E Floyd	LaRiccica	Rhodes	E Weldon
Cantrell	Fludd	Lott	Rice	Werkheiser
Carson	Frazier	Lumsden	Rogers, C	Wilkerson
Carter, A	Frye	Mabra	Rogers, T	Wilkinson
Carter, D	Gardner	Marin	Rutledge	Willard
Casas	Gasaway	Martin	Rynders	Williams, A
Chandler	Gilligan	Maxwell	Scott	Williams, C
Cheokas	Glanton	Mayo	Sharper	Williams, E
Clark, D	Gordon	McCall	Shaw	Williamson
Clark, H	Gravley	McClain	Sims	Yates
Clark, V	Greene	Meadows	Smith, E	Ralston, Speaker
Coleman				

Due to a mechanical malfunction, Representative Ealum of the 153rd was not recorded on the attendance roll call. He wished to be recorded as present.

The following members were off the floor of the House when the roll was called:

Representatives Golick of the 40th, Jordan of the 77th, Metze of the 55th, Oliver of the 82nd, and Thomas of the 56th.

They wished to be recorded as present.

Prayer was offered by Pastor Insoo Jung, Korean Community Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, Duluth, Georgia.

The members pledged allegiance to the flag.

Representative Cheokas of the 138th, Chairman of the Committee on Information and Audits, reported that the Journal of the previous legislative day had been read and found to be correct.

By unanimous consent, the reading of the Journal was dispensed with.

The Journal was confirmed.

By unanimous consent, the following was established as the order of business during the first part of the period of unanimous consents:

1. Introduction of Bills and Resolutions.
2. First reading and reference of House Bills and Resolutions.
3. Second reading of Bills and Resolutions.
4. Reports of Standing Committees.
5. Third reading and passage of Local uncontested Bills.
6. First reading and reference of Senate Bills and Resolutions.

By unanimous consent, the following Bills and Resolution of the House were introduced, read the first time and referred to the Committees:

HB 710. By Representatives Turner of the 21st, Hawkins of the 27th, Willard of the 51st, Cooper of the 43rd, Dempsey of the 13th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 30 of the O.C.G.A., relating to disabled persons, so as to provide for the establishment of a qualified ABLE program in this state to enable the contribution of funds to tax-exempt accounts to pay for the qualified expenses of eligible individuals with

disabilities; to amend Code Section 48-7-27 of the O.C.G.A., relating to computation of taxable net income; to amend Code Section 50-13-2 of the O.C.G.A., relating to the definitions for purposes of the Georgia Administrative Procedure Act, so as to exclude the Georgia ABLE Program Corporation from the meaning of "agency"; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Ways & Means.

HB 713. By Representatives Raffensperger of the 50th, Ballinger of the 23rd, Cantrell of the 22nd, Carter of the 175th, Corbett of the 174th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 15-11-2 and Title 19 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to definitions for the Juvenile Code and domestic relations, respectively, so as to provide that causing a child to be conceived as a result of violating certain prohibitions relating to certain offenses is an additional ground for terminating parental rights; to revise definitions; to provide that causing a child to be conceived as a result of violating certain prohibitions relating to certain offenses is an additional ground for losing parental rights and is relevant in certain adoption proceedings; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Juvenile Justice.

HB 714. By Representatives Petrea of the 166th, Stephens of the 164th, Hawkins of the 27th, Yates of the 73rd, Hitchens of the 161st and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to revenue and taxation, so as to provide that retirement income received as retirement benefits from military service shall not be subject to state income tax; to increase the excise tax on cigarettes to offset the cost; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to provide for an automatic repeal; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Ways & Means.

HB 722. By Representatives Peake of the 141st, Powell of the 32nd, Meadows of the 5th, England of the 116th, Gravley of the 67th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to health, so as to provide for a patient registry program for the use of medical cannabis; to authorize rule making; to establish duties of patients, designated caregivers, physicians, and manufacturers of medical cannabis; to establish a medical cannabis tracking system; to provide for confidentiality of records; to establish patient protections; to impose penalties; to provide for nursing facilities; to establish fees; to establish a task force; to require impact assessment of medical cannabis therapeutic research; to require reports and audits; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Judiciary Non-Civil.

HB 732. By Representative Stephens of the 164th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Article 9 of Chapter 6 of Title 40 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to speed restrictions of motor vehicles, so as to provide for "super speeder" classification upon conviction of driving a commercial motor vehicle at a speed of ten or more miles per hour above the posted speed limit; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Motor Vehicles.

HB 733. By Representative Stephens of the 164th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Article 3 of Chapter 13 of Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to excise tax on rooms, lodgings, and accommodations, so as to reduce the amount of a certain fee imposed by innkeepers and to expand the types of innkeepers that must charge such fee; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Transportation.

HB 734. By Representatives Spencer of the 180th, Stephens of the 165th, Stephens of the 164th, Jones of the 167th, Corbett of the 174th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Titles 36, 41, and 51 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to local government, nuisances, and torts, respectively, so as to provide for the facilitation of space flight activities in this state; to provide for definitions; to prohibit local government regulation of noise associated with space flight operations; to provide that space flight operations shall not constitute nuisances under certain

conditions; to limit the liability of space flight entities related to injuries sustained by participants who have agreed in writing to such a limitation; to provide a short title; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Judiciary.

HB 735. By Representative Greene of the 151st:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend an Act creating the Stewart County Water and Sewerage Authority, approved March 24, 1988 (Ga. L. 1988, p. 4498), so as to revise method of membership appointments; to provide for related matters; to provide an effective date and applicability; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Intragovernmental Coordination - Local.

HB 736. By Representatives Atwood of the 179th, Jones of the 167th, Petrea of the 166th, Stephens of the 164th, Wilkinson of the 52nd and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 40-2-86 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to special license plates promoting certain beneficial projects and supporting certain worthy agencies, funds, or nonprofit corporations, so as to provide for a special license plate promoting marine habitat conservation; to provide for related matters; to require a two-thirds' majority vote for passage in accordance with constitutional requirements; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Motor Vehicles.

HB 737. By Representative Caldwell of the 131st:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, so as to revise, modernize, correct errors or omissions in, and reenact the statutory portion of said Code, as amended, in furtherance of the work of the Code Revision Commission; to repeal portions of said Code, or Acts in amendment thereof, which have become obsolete, have been declared to be unconstitutional, or have been preempted or superseded by subsequent laws; to codify a joint resolution; to provide for other matters relating to revision, reenactment, and publication of said Code; to provide for effect in event of conflicts; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Code Revision.

- HB 738. By Representatives Caldwell of the 131st, Welch of the 110th, Dickerson of the 113th and Kelley of the 16th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Chapter 15 of Title 36 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to county law libraries, so as to revise the uses of excess funds by a county law library; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

- HB 740. By Representatives Beskin of the 54th, Rakestraw of the 19th, Willard of the 51st, Wilkinson of the 52nd, Peake of the 141st and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Article 2 of Chapter 7 of Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to imposition, rate, and composition of and exemptions from income taxes, so as to create an annual tax credit for up to five years for taxpayers who purchase, own, and occupy a dwelling that qualifies for a homestead exemption located within a school attendance zone assigned to a public elementary school that is among the lowest 5 percent of academic achievement public elementary schools in the state; to provide for procedures, conditions, and limitations; to provide for definitions; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Ways & Means.

- HB 741. By Representatives Pak of the 108th, Kendrick of the 93rd and Efstoration of the 104th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Article 1 of Chapter 2 of Title 15 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general provisions for the Supreme Court of Georgia, so as to change provisions relating to the terms of court; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Judiciary.

- HB 742. By Representatives Knight of the 130th, Powell of the 171st, Harrell of the 106th, Carson of the 46th, Mosby of the 83rd and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to revenue and taxation, so as to revise the definition of the terms "Internal Revenue Code" and "Internal Revenue Code of 1986" and thereby incorporate certain provisions of federal law into Georgia law; to change certain dates for partnerships and corporations other than Georgia Subchapter "S" corporations; to clarify certain provisions relating to statements of wages paid; to change certain dates and clarify provisions relating to annual and final compensation returns; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Ways & Means.

HR 979. By Representatives Houston of the 170th, Ehrhart of the 36th, Tankersley of the 160th, Oliver of the 82nd, Efstoration of the 104th and others:

A RESOLUTION creating the House Study Committee on Programs That Provide Services for the Reading to the Blind and the Visually Impaired; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on Special Rules.

By unanimous consent, the following Bills and Resolutions of the House were read the second time:

HB 711	HB 723
HB 726	HB 727
HB 728	HB 729
HB 730	HB 731
HR 970	HR 977
HR 978	

Pursuant to HR 980, the House recognized and honored January 13, 2016, as Korean American Day at the State Capitol.

The following members were recognized during the period of Morning Orders and addressed the House:

Representatives Nix of the 69th, Rynders of the 152nd et al., Dawkins-Haigler of the 91st, Willard of the 51st, Hawkins of the 27th, Taylor of the 79th, Evans of the 42nd, and Stover of the 71st.

The Speaker called the House to order.

The hour of convening the Joint Session pursuant to HR 967 having arrived, the Senate appeared upon the floor of the House, and the Joint Session, convened for the purpose of hearing an address from the Governor, was called to order by the Speaker of the House, David Ralston.

The Resolution calling for the Joint Session was read.

Accompanied by the Committee of Escort and other distinguished guests, His Excellency, Governor Nathan Deal, appeared upon the floor of the House and delivered the following address:

Lt. Governor Cagle, Speaker Ralston, President Pro Tem Shafer, Speaker Pro Tem Jones, members of the General Assembly, constitutional officers, members of the judiciary, members of the consular corps, my fellow Georgians:

Every year during this second week in January, we gather in this chamber of the people to assess the condition of our Ship of State. We review its travel log for the prior year, we inventory its store of resources, we evaluate the effectiveness of its crew, we plan its journey for the coming year, and we attempt to forecast the weather and the condition of the seas it must traverse. Like mariners of old, we consult our charts as we plan how to best avoid the rocky shoals that would damage our vessel and jeopardize the safety of our crew.

But after we conclude our planning and are ready to set sail on our annual journey, what do we do if the wind does not blow, or worse, what if it blows from the wrong direction?

It is in those times that true leadership is required. It is for those occasions that each of us who are elected leaders must step forward. It is how we react to those events and circumstances we did not plan for and over which we have no control that determines the future of our Ship of State and the safety of its cargo. It is said that at such times, the Pessimist simply complains about the wind; the Optimist is content to wait in the harbor because he expects the direction of the wind to change. The true leader, however, gets about the task of adjusting the sails.

When I addressed you for the first time in January 2011, Georgia's Ship of State had been severely battered for two years by the storms of the Great Recession. Our reserves, that is our Rainy Day Fund, had been almost completely depleted in an attempt to keep our Ship of State from sinking. Over \$1.4 billion from that fund had been used during that two-year period, and yet the waves were still beating against our ship, and the wind was still blowing from the wrong direction. Our revenue had dropped by \$2.3 billion from 2007 to 2011. Our unemployment rate was 10.4 percent. Our prison population was the fourth-largest in the country and was projected to grow by eight percent over the next five years. Our high school graduation rate was an unacceptable 67.5 percent.

Georgia was losing tens of thousands of jobs, especially in the construction sector. Our manufacturing sector was at a disadvantage compared with other states because we were imposing sales tax on energy purchases. The Savannah Harbor deepening project, which was authorized by Congress 12 years earlier, was at a standstill with the real prospect that the larger vessels coming through the enlarged Panama Canal would not be coming to Georgia.

Many Georgians had seen their savings wiped out, business owners were in bankruptcy court, and families were losing their homes to foreclosure. Our revered HOPE Program was rapidly approaching the point of being unable to fulfill its promises to our best students.

Simply put, the Economic Winds were blowing in the wrong direction with an intensity and duration not experienced since the Great Depression. As leaders of our state, we could have been pessimistic and simply railed against the bitter wind and made excuses for our situation. Or, we could have been optimists and told our citizens just to be patient because it wouldn't last much longer. We watched some of our sister states take both approaches and conclude that until the Economic Winds shifted, their state governments could not operate on less revenue and therefore their citizens must pay more taxes.

Fortunately, with your support, we did not follow that pattern. Instead, we began the difficult, and sometimes painful, process of adjusting our sails. As a result, we grew our way out of hard times. By passing conservative budgets, coupled with the economic growth that was spurred by our reforms, our Rainy Day Fund that was almost gone five years ago has now grown to over \$1.43 billion.

By cutting taxes and removing regulatory burdens on businesses, our unemployment rate has been cut almost in half and now stands at 5.6 percent. And, the construction industry that was hit so hard by the waves of the Great Recession now has the third lowest unemployment rate in the country at just 4 percent. By removing sales tax on energy for manufacturing, there have been over 22,000 new manufacturing jobs, a 6.4 percent increase that is more than double the growth rate of the United States. These jobs represent over \$900 million in added wages.

The next step was addressing the jobs skills gap employers continued encountering. As we looked at job openings around the state, we found that almost all of them could be filled if our citizens would attend one of our Technical Colleges and receive the necessary training. With your support over the past three years, we have identified eleven areas where a student will receive a 100 percent tuition HOPE Grant to obtain that training. These Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grants cover 140 programs, and I am recommending that we add industrial maintenance this year to that important list. I am proposing to devote \$17.1 million in 2017 for all of these programs.

As our colleges and universities examine their degree programs and focus more of their resources on those that lead to employment, we will rapidly close the skills gap in our workforce. I am pleased that Georgia Southern University, for instance, is one of the only universities in the country and the only one in the Southeast to offer a degree program for precision engineering, yet another example of a high demand area.

In addition to directing more resources into post-secondary education programs that lead to employability, we have also moved our focus further down the education line. Our Move On When Ready legislation from last year, coupled with additional funding for Dual Enrollment, has greatly accelerated the pace of many students' educational journeys. This allows high school students to attend postsecondary institutions at no cost to them or their parents. Currently, there are approximately 22,059 students participating in this program. My FY2017 budget contains over \$58.3 million dollars to cover the cost of Move On When Ready, a 654 percent increase over FY2011.

In order to further modernize our K-12 education system, I asked the State Board of Education and the University System of Georgia to allow certain high school computer science courses to count as core courses in high school and for purposes of college admission. Both entities have agreed, and there are currently nine computer science courses that count towards a science or foreign language requirement. This will give us more early learners in a field that is and will continue to be in high demand by employers.

Addressing workforce development needs extends into another area we've made a priority: criminal justice reform. In order to curb the growth in our prison population, we created the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform, which has been chaired by Judge Michael Boggs and Thomas Worthy. I want to express publically my thanks to these two gentlemen and the other dedicated members of that Council. Please join me in expressing our appreciation for their work.

As a result of your passing legislation to implement the recommendations of the Council in prior years, we have seen a substantial drop in our prison population as thousands of non-violent offenders are being diverted into accountability courts where they are given a second chance to receive treatments for their addictions. By converting inmates into taxpayers, and by educating and giving paroled inmates marketable skills, we will begin to reduce our rates of recidivism, which will in turn make our state safer.

The same diversion is occurring in the juvenile justice system. In short, Georgia is recognized as the leading state for meaningful criminal justice reform.

There will be more recommendations from the Council this year which I ask you to consider and approve.

As you can see, we have made great progress over the past five years in improving and expanding the skills of our present and future workforce. But these successes are not enough. My administration has spent more of the state budget on K-12 education than any administration in the past 50 years, which included over 1 billion additional dollars for the past two years and an additional \$416 million for FY2017. However, our Education Boat is still leaking and needs some repairs.

As we contemplate modernizing our education system, it is important to acknowledge the progress we have made over the past five years. Our graduation rate from high school has increased by over 11 percent to 78.8 percent, an average change of 2.83 percent each year. As significant as that increase is, during that same five years, our dropout rate has remained unyieldingly stagnant at an average of 3.66 percent. To put it more bluntly, 96,660 students dropped out of school between 2011 and this school year. That is over 4,000 more than are currently enrolled in our entire Technical College system. That is a wind that is blowing in the wrong direction, and we must continue to trim our sails to bring that dropout number down.

Based on the success of our criminal justice reforms, we sought to improve and transform education in Georgia. I appointed the Education Reform Commission last January and tasked them with examining our entire education system and reporting back to me and the General Assembly with bold recommendations as to how we could better prepare our students for the 21st century.

That report has now been submitted, and I want to thank Dr. Charles Knapp who served as Chairman of the Commission as well as the other 33 members of the Commission and their support staff. Please join me in thanking them for their service.

Because of the magnitude of the recommendations contained in the report, some statutory changes will be necessary to implement them fully. Other recommendations can be achieved through the budgetary process. As an example, my proposed budget provides funds to implement a new compensation model for our Pre-K programs in order to retain lead teachers, increase assistant teacher salaries and maintain classroom quality. The Pre-K budget recommendation is in excess of \$358 million, which includes \$26.2 million for salary increases and an additional \$7.9 million for a 3 percent merit pay increase.

As the Education Funding Subcommittee was meeting this past year, I received a letter from the four legislators on that Committee expressing their desire that the reporting deadline be extended for one additional year, that is, until August 2016. My letter response dated June 3, 2015, extended the general reporting deadline to December 18, 2015. It further stated that during the 2016 session of the General Assembly, I wanted this legislative body to conduct a full review of the Commission's recommendations. That is what I ask you to do. My budget next year will include funding to implement my recommendations and those of the Education Reform Commission. This

will provide ample time to vet the full report. It is important that we get this right. It is also important that in the meantime, the debate be conducted in good faith and that your recommendations be based on facts and not rhetoric.

In order to assist you in your deliberations, I will be creating by Executive Order a Teacher Advisory Committee similar to the Governor's Education Advisory Board which I have had for the past 5 years.

Since I have been governor, my wife and I have visited many schools throughout our state. We have been impressed with the progress our students are making and by the dedication of their teachers, principals and staff. Since both of us grew up with parents who were teachers in the Georgia public school system in different parts of the state, we know that it takes a special kind of person to be a teacher. As society has changed and technology has advanced, many of the challenges our teachers face have become more difficult. As a classroom teacher herself, Sandra was particularly aware of the evolving demands placed on our teachers.

As we continue to discuss the recommendations of the Education Reform Commission, it is important for teachers and administrators to know that just because we are examining ways to more appropriately allocate taxpayer dollars and put in place different models to achieve better education results, it does not mean that you are not appreciated. Just as a sailor should not be insulted when someone repairs a leak in his boat and replaces his oars with a motor, neither should our teachers take offense when we try to do the metaphorical equivalent for them.

I fully understand that there are many factors that impact test scores and graduation rates, and many of these are not within the control of our teachers. A good parent that is dedicated to seeing his or her child succeed in school is the best ally a teacher can have. It really doesn't matter what the financial circumstances of those parents might be, if they insist that their children go to school every day and arrive on time, that they do their homework and that they not disrupt the classroom, they will be rewarded by the teachers who welcome the opportunity to work with students who do those things. So, parents, I know you love your children and want them to succeed in life, so please do those things and you and your family will be richly rewarded.

Over the past five years, members of this General Assembly and I have shown our appreciation for our teachers by making public education a priority, and we will do so again this year by appropriating an additional \$300 million for k-12 education, which is more than is required to give teachers a three percent pay raise.

We will distribute this money to your local school system under the existing QBE formula, but it is our intention that your local school system pass the three percent pay raise along to you. If that does not happen, it will make it more difficult next year for the

state to grant local systems more flexibility in the expenditure of state education dollars, as recommended by the Education Reform Commission.

We have given local school systems large increases in funding for the past three years and given them the flexibility to decide how to spend it. Based on a survey by the State Department of Education, 94 percent of school systems used those funds to reduce or eliminate furlough days. With the additional funding this year, furloughs should be a thing of the past and teachers should receive that three percent pay raise.

Now that the federal government has given states greater latitude regarding testing of students, I call on our State Department of Education and local school systems to evaluate their testing requirements. If a test is not necessary to advance and tailor instruction, it should be eliminated. I do not suggest that tests should be abolished simply because the results might be embarrassing. In fact, it is those tests that pinpoint areas in need of remediation. But tests that are duplicative and do not enhance educational achievement should be abolished.

Last year, this General Assembly did just that when it abolished the mandated graduation exam. It was decided that if students had successfully passed all of the required courses for graduation, they should not be denied a high school diploma based on one final test. As a result of that change, thousands of students have been able to enter the workforce, the military or post-secondary education without the stigma of not having a high school diploma.

The Education Reform Commission has recommended a student based funding formula to replace QBE, which is over 30 years old. Instead of spending money based on rigid, impersonal criteria, they recommend that we move to funding based on the characteristics of each student. For the first time, poverty will be one of those characteristics to be considered. They also recommend that school systems have the flexibility to utilize the talents of their teachers in expanded ways and be able to reward them accordingly.

The Gwinnett County School System, the largest and one of the most diverse systems in the state, has taken on many of the initiatives recommended by the Education Reform Commission. Under the leadership of Alvin Wilbanks, system superintendent and CEO, Gwinnett County is embracing innovation and is developing a teacher compensation model that rewards effectiveness, promotes flexibility and requires accountability. Superintendent Wilbanks, thank you for being a pioneer and doing what some are calling "impossible." Your example, and that of other great superintendents, administrators and teachers throughout our State working together, will be invaluable in removing the fear associated with change.

There will be those who will resist change, preferring to defend the status quo. For after all, the status quo as embodied in QBE has been in place for the entire tenure of most teachers in our schools.

To those who are either inflexible or cynical, I would ask them to consider the words of former Prime Minister of Great Britain Tony Blair, who made the following observation, and I quote: "The scope, speed and scale of change demands that we educate students for a future vastly different from our past."

The education of Georgia's children is too important to be held hostage to a status quo that may feel comfortable to certain adults but is a disservice to our students. The method whereby we educate our children must be as modern and adaptive to the changes in the world as our cell phones, our computers, our televisions and our automobiles. If it is not, our children will stumble and fall when they step onto the escalator of life outside the schoolhouse door.

Last year, this General Assembly took a major step in that direction by voting to put the Opportunity School District Constitutional Amendment on the ballot this November. Currently, there are approximately 74,000 students who are required to attend chronically failing schools, that is, schools that for three consecutive years have failed to achieve a score above a D or an F on our standard evaluation system. To put that number in perspective, that is about the same number of students currently enrolled at the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech and the University of North Georgia combined. I believe that in November, the voters of our state will help us trim our sails in order to overcome this vicious wind of chronic failure.

There are other items in my proposed budget that I wish to call to your attention, and I will do so quickly.

As you know our mandatory entitlement spending continues to grow through no fault of our own. Although we have seen our revenue grow, we have also seen mandated expenditures grow in the areas of health care and education, taking up ever larger segments of our overall annual budgets. In fact, the discretionary portion of the budget, which is now roughly 17 percent, continues to shrink.

Rising health care costs continue to be a major factor. Consider our State Health Benefit Plan. The state currently contributes \$842 million for health care coverage for state employees while also paying over \$1 billion for the employer share of health insurance for teachers in FY2015.

On top of that, we must also fund the state's Medicaid program and its growing rolls. The cost of this program has grown from \$2.6 billion in FY2013 to \$3.1 billion in FY2017, an increase of 15.7 percent. Medicaid and PeachCare spending per Georgia family amounts

to \$1,258 per annum. And when federal and other costs are added to this number, it amounts to at least \$4,365 each year. And that's without expansion. Had we elected to expand Medicaid, it would have required us to include approximately \$209 million in this upcoming year's budget alone to cover the added cost. That number would only continue to grow exponentially.

Those numbers don't even account for the reporting requirements levied by the Affordable Care Act on the state. To demonstrate our compliance with the mandates of the law, we must devote \$2.1 million in FY2017 budget just to turn in the paper work. When you combine the cost of federal dollars to that total, it is \$4.4 million. In other words, this is just what it costs to tell the IRS that everyone in our State Health Benefit Plan and Medicaid program is covered. I can assure you that those funds could have been put to better use than on bureaucratic paperwork.

If we want to talk about something we could throw overboard, there's a good place to start.

Once we have met our mandatory budget requirements, we must ensure that our crew is appropriately provided for, and so we have prioritized rewarding state employees for their hard work. Just as we are budgeting for a three percent pay raise for teachers, we are also including a three percent pay raise for all other state employees. Many of them have worked very hard as the Great Recession required the state to significantly cut the budgets of the agencies for which they work. In addition, they are seeing the number of fellow workers drop. There are four agencies that had over a 20 percent annual turnover rate, with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities losing almost one third of their employees last year. System wide, the turnover rate last year was 18.4 percent. For those agencies with the highest turnover rate, the budget allocates additional funds to be used to raise pay scales in addition to the overall three percent increase.

One of the highlights of last year's legislative session was the passage of House Bill 170. Yesterday, many of you attended a roll out of the most comprehensive plans for sustainable infrastructure improvement in the history of our state. That would not have been possible without the support of those who voted for H.B. 170. Over the next 18 months, approximately 60 percent of the user fees from H.B. 170 will be used to repair and maintain our existing infrastructure. The remaining 40 percent will be used for new infrastructure investments.

Last year, I told you that with the revenue that was available at that time, a road that was paved when you graduated from high school would not be paved again until you were eligible for Social Security. With the new user fees generated, we have brought that frequency down to every 12 to 15 years, with regular maintenance in between. In other words, if your road is paved the same year you graduate from high school, it will be

paved at least three times before you are eligible for Social Security and will further benefit from maintenance in the interim.

Another important agency of State Government that is often overlooked is the Georgia National Guard. In addition to being recognized as the nation's No. 1 Army Guard unit in 2013, more than 18,000 of our guardsmen and women have been deployed since 9/11, some 964 of them last year alone. They serve our state both at home and abroad with distinction, and they deserve our unfailing gratitude for their valor.

Although the vicious winds of the Great Recession have battered our Ship of State over the past five years, those winds have almost subsided and are now blowing in the right direction. To the members of this General Assembly, thank you for helping me trim our sails without a mutiny. And to the state employees and teachers, thank you for your labors as you "battened down the hatches" and kept us afloat. To our fellow citizens, thank you for your patience, your support and your hard work as we battled the storms together.

Now we are ready to unfurl our sails and set forth on the Ocean of Opportunity that lies before us as we lead the way for others to follow, with No. 1 proudly emblazoned on our mast.

To the members of the General Assembly, may God grant you wisdom as you deliberate during this legislative session, and may He continue to bless our great State of Georgia.

Representative Burns of the 159th moved that the Joint Session of the General Assembly be now dissolved and the motion prevailed.

The Speaker of the House, David Ralston, announced the Joint Session dissolved.

The Speaker called the House to order.

The following Resolutions of the House were read and adopted:

HR 991. By Representative Ealum of the 153rd:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Mr. Larry Thomas on the grand occasion of his retirement; and for other purposes.

HR 992. By Representative Belton of the 112th:

A RESOLUTION commending Mayor Fred Perriman; and for other purposes.

- HR 993. By Representative Belton of the 112th:  
A RESOLUTION commending Bruce Gilbert; and for other purposes.
- HR 994. By Representatives Dudgeon of the 25th and Raffensperger of the 50th:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending William Roberson Webster; and for other purposes.
- HR 995. By Representatives Carson of the 46th and Ballinger of the 23rd:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Alexandria Hartwig upon being honored with the Girl Scout Gold Award; and for other purposes.
- HR 996. By Representative Kelley of the 16th:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Gladys Y. Gipson; and for other purposes.
- HR 997. By Representative Kelley of the 16th:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Floreace and Kevin Stocks; and for other purposes.
- HR 998. By Representative Kelley of the 16th:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Curtis Vincent upon the grand occasion of his retirement; and for other purposes.
- HR 999. By Representative Kelley of the 16th:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Dr. Beverly Philpot Smith, a teacher at Lundy Christian Academy; and for other purposes.
- HR 1000. By Representative Kelley of the 16th:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending the Elm Street Class of 1965; and for other purposes.
- HR 1001. By Representative Kelley of the 16th:  
A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Ms. Beverly Battle; and for other purposes.

HR 1002. By Representative Kelley of the 16th:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Mr. Charles Troutman on the occasion of his retirement as the Chief Executive Officer of the Murphy-Harpst Children's Centers; and for other purposes.

HR 1003. By Representatives Belton of the 112th, Dickerson of the 113th, Welch of the 110th and Rutledge of the 109th:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending the Arts Association in Newton County; and for other purposes.

HR 1004. By Representatives Smith of the 70th, Nimmer of the 178th, Morris of the 156th, Williams of the 119th and Houston of the 170th:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending the Appling County Forestry Unit on being named the Georgia Forestry Commission 2015 Southern Unit of the Year; and for other purposes.

HR 1005. By Representatives Smith of the 70th, Yates of the 73rd, Stovall of the 74th, Nimmer of the 178th, Caldwell of the 131st and others:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending the Clayton-Pike-Lamar-Upson-Spalding Forestry Unit on being named the Georgia Forestry Commission 2015 Northern Unit of the Year; and for other purposes.

HR 1006. By Representative Dudgeon of the 25th:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Max Brauer; and for other purposes.

HR 1007. By Representative Yates of the 73rd:

A RESOLUTION recognizing January 25, 2016, as National Guard Day at the capitol; and for other purposes.

HR 1008. By Representatives Dickson of the 6th, Broadrick of the 4th and Tarvin of the 2nd:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Mr. James Bobby Hughes on the occasion of his retirement; and for other purposes.

HR 1009. By Representatives Smith of the 70th, Houston of the 170th, Werkheiser of the 157th, Carter of the 175th, Nimmer of the 178th and others:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending the Satilla District on being named the Georgia Forestry Commission 2015 District of the Year; and for other purposes.

HR 1010. By Representative Evans of the 42nd:

A RESOLUTION honoring the life and memory of Ms. Susan Jolley; and for other purposes.

HR 1011. By Representative Evans of the 42nd:

A RESOLUTION recognizing Ms. Triana Arnold James and friends' advocacy to expand Medicaid and raise awareness for cervical cancer in Georgia; and for other purposes.

HR 1012. By Representative Evans of the 42nd:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending the work and career of Ms. Triana Arnold James; and for other purposes.

HR 1013. By Representatives Battles of the 15th and Coomer of the 14th:

A RESOLUTION commending the 2015 Cartersville High School football team; and for other purposes.

HR 1014. By Representative Hatchett of the 150th:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Peyton Christopher Cook; and for other purposes.

HR 1015. By Representative Belton of the 112th:

A RESOLUTION recognizing Mr. Steve W. Schaefer as the Georgia Public Library Service Librarian of the Year; and for other purposes.

HR 1016. By Representatives Taylor of the 173rd, Carter of the 175th and Watson of the 172nd:

A RESOLUTION recognizing Thomasville, Georgia, as "Georgia's Rose City"; and for other purposes.

Representative Burns of the 159th moved that the House do now adjourn until 10:00 o'clock, tomorrow morning, and the motion prevailed.

The Speaker announced the House adjourned until 10:00 o'clock, tomorrow morning.