

GEORGIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Policy Committee Update



The nine policy committees of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce were created under the Georgia Initiative to proactively develop and advance a pro-business agenda for Georgia. These committees are midway through their second year of existence and have played a role in positive success in the areas of water policy, business tax incentives, education, health care and civil justice reform.

The Georgia Chamber is proud to share this new quarterly update with our members to report on the activities and accomplishments of the committees. We look forward to sharing news from the policy committees and receiving feedback from our members throughout the year.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – Charles Tarbutton, Sandersville Railroad, Chair

The committee met February 3 and May 5 to offer guidance on pending legislation and review the 2009 legislative session. Dean Alford, co-chairman of the Governor's "Tough Choices or Tough Times" task force, presented his group's recommendations for improving student performance across Georgia, some of which became Chamber-endorsed legislation. Committee

members also participated in the Lt. Governor's April 17 career academy conference and began revising the Chamber's policy statement on education and workforce development. The committee is currently planning a major policy summit on education reform to be held this fall at Georgia College and State University.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY – Tim Lowe, Lowe Engineers, Chair

The committee maintains a monthly meeting schedule, holding meetings on January 6, February 3, March 3, April 7, May 5 and June 2, and has been engaged on key federal issues. The committee received an update earlier in the year from Sen. Saxby Chambliss' staff on the federal stimulus bill and energy issues. In April, members of the committee met personally with state leaders to discuss efforts in qualifying for Georgia's

allotment of federal stimulus dollars. The committee has also been actively engaged this year in the program planning and development of the Chamber's Georgia Environmental Conference being held August 26-28 in Savannah. As climate change legislation gathers momentum in Washington, the committee is taking a proactive role in educating Chamber members on the critical impact of this effort under way in Congress.

EXISTING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY – Alex Gregory, YKK Corporation, Chair

One of the roles this committee established in its January 16 and February 18 meetings is to collaborate with other policy committees in advancing important Chamber policies and programs. On March 31, the committee held a joint meeting with the tax policy committee to discuss with Heidi Green, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Economic Development, additional tools that might be useful in helping Georgia become more competitive for existing and new business. On April 23, the committee partnered with the International

Committee on a spring summit in Valdosta designed to help Georgia businesses with global growth. Another important work product from this committee was a survey developed to help gauge and measure the impact of the recession on our members. A summary of survey results is available on our website at www.gachamber.com. This committee continues to serve as the point for the Chamber in raising awareness and providing information on key federal labor-related issues like the Employee Free Choice Act.

HEALTH CARE – Sylvia Russell, AT&T, Chair

The Chamber was able to take a very proactive role in health care issues during the 2009 session of the General Assembly due to the work of the committee, defeating legislation that could have cost employers hundreds of millions of dollars. In meetings on February 11 and April 30, the committee also reviewed the

findings of the Georgia Uninsured Work Group; heard an update on the forthcoming federal health care reform package; and began fine-tuning the Chamber's health care policy statement. In addition, an affiliated group was established to promote passage of dedicated, sustainable trauma care funding.

INTERNATIONAL – Craig Lesser, The Pendleton Consulting Group, Chair

This committee has held monthly meetings and continues to expand its role in demonstrating the value of the policy committees to members and non-members around the state. At its January kickoff meeting, the committee created subcommittees on Trade and Arts and Culture to identify how both lead to economic growth, including international development. In an effort to expand the Chamber's outreach, the committee spent its February 12 and March 26 meetings planning events to sponsor and market the Georgia Chamber and Georgia businesses. That led to sponsorship of events including the Consular Corps Reception

and the China Foreign Trade Center delegation's visit to Atlanta. On April 23, the Committee held a spring summit, "Road to Recovery: Helping Georgia Businesses Identify and Bridge International Markets for Economic Growth," in Valdosta to provide education and assistance to members and non-members on growing their businesses globally even during difficult economic times. A similar event is scheduled for September 24 in Augusta. The committee has also begun planning a visit for Chamber members to the Georgia Ports Authority to raise awareness of this tremendous asset for international commerce.

LAW AND JUDICIARY – Tom Bishop, Georgia Power, Chair

This committee worked behind the scenes through its January 16, February 12 and March 26 meetings to provide support and guidance to the Chamber on several civil justice-related bills during the 2009 legislative session. In January, committee members met with the Governor's general counsel to hear explanations of the Governor's proposed tort reform bills. Following the conclusion of the legislative session, the committee has

turned its attention to updating the policy statements and determining what civil-justice issues should be a priority for the Chamber to pursue next year. Also, due to the employment change and relocation of its former committee chairman, Jim Snyder (formerly of Home Depot), the committee welcomed Tom Bishop as its new chairman in May.

TAXATION – Phil Gaffney, Club Car/Ingersoll Rand; Jimmy Patton, Patton Albertson & Miller; Co-Chairs

This committee served an important role this session during meetings on January 29, February 24 and March 31, vetting sometimes complicated tax legislation to offer guidance on the Chamber's advocacy efforts at the Capitol. The committee also has begun developing a tax forum to be held this fall to discuss tax policy

issues and potential changes important to business in Georgia. At its May 11 meeting, the committee worked on updating its policy statements to determine priority tax policy issues for the forum and for next year's session.

TOURISM – Dennis Kelly, Zoo Atlanta, Chair

The Chamber is re-focusing its efforts to develop and promote Georgia's tourism sector based on the work of the committee, which met January 28 in Atlanta and May 17 in Savannah. The creation of a strong cabinet-level position for state tourism -- a chief marketing officer or tourism commissioner -- is being examined,

as is a uniform, clear-cut hotel/motel tax policy. A working group on the former issue will meet in north Georgia in July. The committee is also looking at the potential impact of an expanded gaming industry on tourism in Georgia.

TRANSPORTATION – Bill Linginfelter, Regions Bank, Chair

The committee met regularly throughout the legislative session (February 3, March 11, March 18 and May 14) to assist Chamber efforts to secure new transportation funding and respond to the transportation governance bill offered by the Governor, Lt. Governor and Speaker. Committee members also heard first-hand from the chairmen of the House and Senate Transportation

Committees about their respective statewide and regional approaches to solving Georgia's transportation crisis. Identification and creation of a transportation funding mechanism remains a priority for the Georgia Chamber, and this committee will continue its work in support of that effort.

For further information or to request consideration for membership on any of the committees, please contact John Krueger at (404) 223-2490 or jkrueger@gachamber.com

