



GPSC News



Making Business and Safety Decisions Affecting Tomorrow

Volume 3 Issue 4

Spring 2004

- *Special Session begins May 3
- *Special Session can last no more than 40 days
- *Governor issues call
- *Call limited to Indigent Defense Legislation
- *Governor Wants Session to last five days

Special Session Begins

Lawmakers will be returning to the Capitol for a Special Session beginning May 3 to fix problems with the state's 2005 budget. Governor Sonny Perdue issued his call April 24 to legislators for the Special Session.



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Gov. Perdue has said he wants to limit the session to five days to fix what he said is the unbalanced budget the General Assembly sent him before adjourning April 7. "The members of the General Assembly are perfectly capable of passing a compromise bill in five days," the Governor said in his press release. The \$16.4 billion budget which lawmakers approved relies in part on \$57.7 million in new

money lawmakers anticipated would be raised by a measure that ultimately failed to pass when the midnight deadline fell on April 7. Perdue announced then he would summon lawmakers back to try again. As director of the state budget, Perdue probably could have chosen to use his administrative powers to manage the budget un-

til lawmakers met again next January. He already has used those powers to keep the current budget under control even though it relied in part on a funding bill that failed to pass in last year's session. Perdue said however he wanted to force fiscal discipline on legislators. The budget collapse wasn't purely about numbers,

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2004 Regular Session Ends

The Commission did not fare well in the 2005 Budget, as the final conference committee report restored the Governor's recommended additional cut of more than \$275,000. The Senate had restored the funding to the Commission but in the end, all adds were removed as the conference committee haggled over

the budget. The Governor's recommendation does include an enhancement of more than \$176,000 for the upcoming rate cases. Our total budget for FY 2005 is \$8,073,708 in state funds. This compares to \$9,027,853 for FY 2004. The Commission fared better in the 2004 Fiscal Year Amended budget,

as the final conference committee version restored \$119,000 for per diem and fees. The House had recommended a \$219,427 cut instead of our requested fiscal affairs transfer.

Three Commission sponsored bills failed

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The Fruitman Is Back



State workers in the Capitol Hill complex bombarded the Georgia Building Authority last month with a deluge of e-mails and phone calls after learning that Gerald Reid, known as "The Fruitman", had been banned from his familiar post outside the 47 Trinity Building for unspecified violations. Reid's absence was brief however and he returned on April 27 to again sell fruit and vegetables to Capitol Hill workers. GBA officials have not said exactly what laws or regulations Reid violated. Reid says his departure was due to a misunderstanding when a new Captain assumed his duties on Capitol Hill but everything has



If you have a story for the next GPSC News, please send to Bill Edge, bille@psc.state.ga.us. Next issue deadline is July 15, 2004.

been resolved. Reid says he was never told what specific law he was violating.

"The Fruitman" has been a familiar sight outside the 47 Trinity Building for over 30 years, selling a variety of fruits and vegetables from the back of his pickup truck. Crowds of happy customers welcomed Reid back and he told them he appreciated their support during his absence.

Special Session

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however. At the heart of it is a dispute between Perdue and House Democrats over a measure increasing fines in criminal cases to help fund the state's indigent defense program that is worth \$57.7 million to the state budget. The governor wanted more executive oversight over the spending but the House and some of the state's top jurists

insisted he was encroaching on the independence of the judiciary. Perdue said he is concerned the judiciary will run amok with the money without additional gubernatorial controls. The Governor also said if lawmakers fail to reach an agreement on the indigent defense bill within the five day limit, he will veto the entire 2005 budget and immediately call another special session for May 10. Perdue hinted he

might include other legislation if he calls a second special session. Other such legislation might include tort reform and ethics legislation. Estimates of the cost of a special session run up to \$45,000 a day.



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to make it through the regular session of the 2004 General Assembly though two bills did pass out of the House only to die in the Senate. House Bill 1352, which would have brought cities and counties under the penalty provisions of the Call Before You Dig Law, stalled in the Senate Regulated Industries Committee. The measure easily cleared the House by a vote of

137-25. The Commission worked tirelessly with both the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) and the Association County Commissioners Georgia (ACCG) to find common ground to overcome these groups' objections to the proposed legislation but ultimately failed to resolve our differences. House Bill 1354, which would have increased the amount of the annual utility fee assessment and

required the natural gas marketers to contribute to the assessment, actually made to the Senate floor only to be tabled and die on Day 39. House Bill 1356 to allow the Commission to charge fees for filings and proceedings was held in the House Public Utilities Committee for the entire session.



Natural Gas Safety Campaign Kickoff

Over 300 participants attended a Pipeline Safety Seminar in Macon April 20-22 to witness the unveiling of the Commission's statewide campaign to promote natural gas safety. The statewide campaign features Skunk Sniffy who will deliver the safety messages through radio and print advertising, as well as public and community relations programs.

Danny McGriff, manager of the Commission's Facilities Protection Unit, said, "This is an important safety program to spread the word on what actions to take if you smell gas.



Seminar participants (above) listen as Diane Devaney(right) of Devaney & Associates unveils the Natural Gas Safety Campaign.



The entire campaign has been designed in English and Spanish as we hope to reach the Hispanic community through our use of bilingual safety materials." Commission Chairman

Doug Everett recently announced the statewide natural gas safety and awareness campaign. It is designed to educate the public about precautions and actions to

take when natural gas odors are detected in the home, workplace, or in the environment.

Over the past several years, the number of natural-gas-related injuries in Georgia has risen, McGriff said, because many Georgians are unaware of the proper steps to take when they smell natural gas. The Commission's statewide awareness campaign, featuring "Skunk Sniffy" and the safety mes-

sage "Smell Gas? Act Fast!" will help educate consumers on how to protect themselves and their loved ones if a natural gas leak occurs. Consumers will be directed to the campaign's Web site, www.safegas.org.

Local natural gas companies will be taking the lead by spreading the word in their communities with information provided by the Commission. Those who attended the April 20 meeting received a Natural

Gas Safety Awareness Kit which contains all the campaign materials including posters in English and Spanish, sample press releases and other public relations materials. The Commission will make the kit available to all natural gas providers in Georgia.

Devaney & Associates of Baltimore, Maryland designed the campaign under contract with the Commission.

Staff Strategic Planning Session Set

Senior staff members will take part in a two day Strategic Planning Session May 11-12, 2004 at the Capitol Education Center. Dave Wirick, of Babbage Simmel, formerly of the National Regulatory Research Institute, will facilitate this



meeting. Staff will build upon the work done at a similar gathering held last August. Commission Executive Director Deborah Flanagan said, "I look forward to

another frank discussion on how we can improve our operations and work environment. Last year's 'no holds barred' exchange resulted in several improvement efforts, including the development of an incentive awards program."

Commission Begins Integrated Resource Plan Hearings



Hearings on Georgia Power's and Savannah Electric's triennial Integrated Resource Plans (IRP) are underway as the Commission held the first round on April 19 and 20 at the Commission's offices on Capitol Hill. The Commission first heard from several public witnesses before moving on to witnesses from Georgia Power and Savannah Electric.

As required by law since 1992, the IRP is the utilities' long-range plans for and forecasts of the state's electric



Commissioners listen to testimony as the Integrated Resource Plan hearings begin



power needs for the next three years. Additional hearings are scheduled for May 25- 27, 2004 and June 21-22, 2004. The Commission is scheduled

to issue a decision on the Georgia Power and Savannah Electric IRPs at its regular Administrative Session July 6, 2004. Hearings will resume on May 25.

Consumer Affairs— A Work in Progress

by Bernard Cameron

During the past several months, changes have been made that define how the Consumer Affairs Unit conducts business and is viewed externally and internally. A concerted effort has been ongoing for more than six months to increase the visibility of the Commission

in the community through outreach efforts that have included participation in more than 15 activities reaching more than 900 people – the majority of them senior citizens.

These activities were the result of collaborations with Fulton and DeKalb county governments, community action agencies, Georgia Department of Human Resources, gas marketers (Georgia Natural Gas, Infinite, Scana Energy and Scana Energy

Regulated Division), Atlanta Gas Light Company and PSC Consumer Affairs' staff.

Our role in these activities has been to educate both the trainers and direct recipients of utility services about: (1) ways to reduce energy costs, (2) available discounts for utility services, (3) Commission consumer protection rules, (4) funding sources to help pay bills (eligibility requirements), and the Regu-

lated Provider program.

From an equipment standpoint, a new Automated Call Distributor (ACD) was installed that includes several new features designed to assist in the efficient operation of the office. Some of the new features are: real time reporting, recording all calls - agents also have a record on demand, the ability to

create numerous groups (allows for specialization of talent), ability to track calls based upon groups created.

Some time ago, the Commission approved funding for a new Consumer Response System (CRS), which is the database used to capture customer complaints and some inquiries. Staff has participated in several meetings with

the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) regarding the new database, which will be web-based. We hope to provide consumers with the ability to enter their own complaints, ask questions or make comments directly into the database, pull reports about various companies, allow service providers to respond di-

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Commission Helps Celebrate Joyce Hull Retirement



Longtime state employee and Commission friend Joyce Hull retired April 1 with a send off from friends, family and other well wishers, including Commissioners David Burgess and Angela Speir.

Joyce retired after 34 years of service with the state, most of it with the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR). In her most recent position as director of the State's Low Income Heat Assistance Program (LIHEAP) she had worked closely with



the Commission in coordinating the dispersal of Universal Service Fund monies to match LIHEAP grants to low-income families and Senior Citizens. Commissioner Burgess said,"

We will certainly miss the contributions that Joyce Hull made in making this joint effort between the Commission and DHR a great success. A person with her knowledge and skills will be greatly missed."

Since the program began, DHR has dispersed more than \$15 million in funds from the USF to match LIHEAP grants.

Georgia Relay

Georgia Relay is a service administered by the Commission to help those who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech disabled to use the phone. Georgia Relay provides many services including two-way communication between TTY (text telephone) users and anyone who uses a standard phone. Anyone can initiate a Georgia Relay call, simply by

dialing 7-1-1. After dialing the number for Georgia Relay, the person initiating the call gives the Georgia Relay Communications Assistant (CA) the phone number of the person or business being called. As the call progresses, the CA voices the TTY user's text and types the words of the standard phone user, relaying the conversation back and forth. Georgia Relay

is free within the local calling area and there are no set-up fees. The service can be accessed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with no limit on the number or length of calls a user may make.

The Commission has established the Web site www.GeorgiaRelay.org. For individuals with other speech and hearing needs, Georgia

Relay offers an array of state-of-the-art features, including Voice Carry-Over, for people who have difficulty hearing conversations through the telephone and prefer to speak for themselves; Speech-to-Speech, for individuals with mild to moderate speech difficulties and limited or no typing skills; and Hearing Carry-Over, for those with no audible or intelligible speech. Spanish-speaking

individuals can take advantage of Georgia Relay's Spanish relay service.

Through the Georgia Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program, qualified applicants can receive free assistive telephone equipment. Free training on proper equipment usage, along with warranty repair services, also are provided. To apply, individuals complete an application and provide docu-



ments verifying their level of income, Georgia residency, phone service and disability.

Commission Staff Takes Part in Opening of New DeKalb Tech Program



Danny McGriff, Facilities Protection Unit Director, represented the Commission March 18 at the ribbon cutting ceremony for DeKalb Technical College's Utility Locate Technician Program. An advisory board comprised of 17 industry experts came together to develop curriculum and a program of study that will prepare students for entry-level positions as underground utility line locators. Also taking part in the ribbon cutting were Consuelo Godden, the College's Industrial Technologies Department Chair; Claudette Campbell, the



Pipeline Safety Unit Director Danny McGriff takes part in DeKalb Technical College Ribbon Cutting

Utilities Protection Center Executive Director; and Jim Weldon, Vice-chairman of the Georgia Utilities Coordinating Committee. This program and test facility are the result of assistance from several utility companies, government agencies and private industry. Classes for Utility Locate Technician will begin this spring quarter. For more information visit www.dekalbtech.edu.

Consumer Affairs

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rectly into the database, pull company-specific reports (but not view other companies' information), develop an investigatory component to the CRS that will identify complaint trends, alert operations analysts of a potential problem based upon a predetermined threshold of contacts

(complaints/inquiries), just to name a few things on our wish list.

Our goal is to provide Georgia's citizens with the very best customer service and protection from abuse across all industries. It's a work in progress.

Federal Judge Rules Against Commission

A federal judge on April 6 remanded the Commission's decision in the BellSouth cost docket on the issues of cost of capital and line growth. On cost of capital, the Court concluded that the Commission did not apply the standard set forth by the FCC. On line growth, the

Court directed the Commission to reach a determination on the admissibility of an affidavit attached to BellSouth's Motion for Reconsideration before the Commission. The Court also found that it was irrational to conclude that BellSouth could experience line growth without any corresponding costs. The

Court ordered the Commission to make BellSouth whole for any damages it incurred as a result of the rates from the June 24 and September 22, 2003 Commission orders.





Employee News

Congratulations

To Tim Hopkins and wife Judy on the addition of grandchildren five and six with the birth of Emma Louise Peters on November 13, 2003 and Haley Noel Hopkins on March 1, 2004.

To Candy Roland who took 3^d Runner Up in the Mrs. Georgia Pageant held on April 4 at the Gwinnett Performing Arts Center. The winner was Julie Graybill from Dacula.

To Gary Mason whose daughter gave birth to his very first grandchild Collin-Scott Napinski who weighed 7 lbs 3oz and 19 in. long on April 13. Mother and baby are home and all is well. Gary is a proud grandfather!

Commission Chairman Doug Everett recently attended a briefing in New York City on how financial analysts view state regulatory agencies and the utilities they regulate. Commissioners heard from such firms as Moody's, Standard & Poors, Lehman Brothers and J.P. Morgan. Everett will also attend Utility Rate Making School in San Diego, California May 8-15. NARUC sponsors the school.

To Jamie and Amanda Ellis who graduated from Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa on April 2, 2004. Jamie received his Doctor of Philosophy in entomology while Amanda received her Masters of Science in zoology with distinction. Amanda also received the Southern Africa Association for the Advancement of the Sciences Bronze Medal which is awarded by Rhodes University to the best Masters thesis in the sciences. Both graduated with the high-



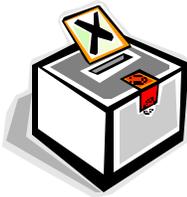
est honors awarded by their respective degrees. Amanda is the daughter of **Bruce and Theresa Morgan** of Sparta. The couple now resides in Athens where Jamie is a Post Doctoral Research Fellow at The University of Georgia.

Farewell

To Brandon Marzo, who is leaving to take a job with the law firm of Troutman & Sanders.
To John Cogburn, who has accepted a position with Atlanta Gas Light Resources.

Sympathy

Our condolences go out to **Carol Metz**, who lost her only sibling to cancer on March 12. Mr. Garry Cooper, of St. Joseph, MO, fought a courageous battle with this disease for more than 9 years.



Qualifying for the 2004 elections began April 26 and ended April 30. All 236 seats of the General Assembly are up for election this year as well as one Public Service Commission seat, one U.S. Senate seat and all thirteen U.S. House seats. The General Primary is July 20 with a runoff if needed for August 10. The General election is November 2. The last day to register to vote for the Primary is June 21. The last day to register for the General Election is October 4.

We extend our sympathy to **Pat Welcome** on the passing of her Grandmother, Susie "Mala" Kirse, 84, March 10, 2004; her Great Aunt, Louise Irick Singleton, 87, on March 30, 2004; and her cousin, Serrenda Irick, 42, on April 3, 2004. Our thoughts and prayers are with Pat and her family.

Commission News



Georgia State Holidays For 2004

Commission Calendar



News Year's Day	January 1
Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday	January 19
Confederate Memorial Day	April 26
Memorial Day	May 31
Independence Day	July 5
Labor Day	September 6
Columbus Day	October 11
Veterans Day	November 11
Thanksgiving	November 25
Robert E. Lee Birthday	November 26
President's Day	December 23
Christmas	December 24

May

4-Administrative Session
13-Committees
18-Administrative Session
18-Vectren Hearing
25-27 IRP Hearing
27-Committees
31-Memorial Day Holiday

June

1-Administrative Session
10-Committees
13-16 SEARUC
17-Administrative Session

Commission Calendar

21-22—IRP Hearings

July

1-Committees
6-Administrative Session
15-Committees
20-Administrative Session
29-Committees

August

3-Administrative Session
12-Committees
17-Administrative Session

NARUC

Summer Meeting

July 11-14, 2004
Salt Lake City, Utah

Annual Convention

November 14-17, 2004
Nashville, Tennessee

Winter Meeting 2005

February 13-16, 2005
Washington, D.C.

SEARUC

June 13-16, 2004

Charleston, S.C.

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