

# Pre-Legislative Breakfast

In December, Chamber members met with state legislators, **Rep. Bill Cummings, Rep. Barry Loudermilk, Rep. Barbara Massey Reece, Rep. Paul Smith,** and **Sen. Preston Smith**, to discuss the Chamber's legislative agenda. Below are the issues we are presenting to our legislators for 2005:

## 2005 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

### TRANSPORTATION

- Immediate construction of the extension of US 411 to I-75.
- Support construction of Memphis to Atlanta Highway at interstate standards through Rome and Floyd County.
- Upgrade GA Hwy 140 to a 4-lane highway from US 27 to I-75.
- Inclusion of road improvement plans for GA Hwy 101 from East 12th Street to US 278 in the Transportation Improvement Plan.
- Increase funding for local paving efforts through LARP or other sources of funding.
- Provide relief for intra-city traffic congestion by the immediate widening of the Turner McCall Boulevard Etowah River Bridge and completion of Second Avenue bridge project and the study of additional bridges within the urban area.
- Immediate purchase of access rights by GDOT along Highway 411 to preserve this as a controlled access highway with a minimum of cuts.
- Support State aid to local governments in the high cost of utility relocation in roadway construction.

### EDUCATION

- **Floyd College** - Minimize cuts for Higher Education.
- **Shorter College and Berry College** - Increase Georgia Tuition Equalization Grant.
- **Coosa Valley Technical College** - Minimize budget cuts for the college.
- **Quickstart** - Continue to increase funding for the **education program for expanding** and new industry and other primary employers.

- Provide **full funding** for PreKindergarten through Postgraduate education.

### WATER

- Support legislation which will insist upon the return of treated wastewater to the basin of origin in interbasin transfers.
- Limit the counties from which the Metro Atlanta area can withdraw water to no more than two surrounding counties.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Continue to take an aggressive approach to promoting economic development in Georgia, specifically in Northwest Georgia and Floyd County current and future manufacturers and other technology based employers.
- Funding cuts of Georgia Department of Economic Development and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs should be minimized during budget shortfalls. Instead these vital economic development programs should be funded at levels that would increase new job creation and spur the economy.
- Enact **improved environmental rules and regulations** that would foster growth of expanding and new industries.
- Strongly support the continued funding for Department of Technical and Adult Education's Hope Grant program and Quickstart workforce training program.
- Strongly **oppose** any legislation which proposes **to broaden the definition of unemployment insurance benefits** to include part-time employees or employees who quit due to family hardship or as a result of domestic violence.

### HEALTH CARE

- Support the cap on non-economic damages for medical malpractice, and with the cap of \$250,000, medical coverage should increase due to more insured, doctors continuing to practice, and insurance rate reductions for all insured and for those who pay for health insurance.



### WORKERS' COMPENSATION

- Support legislation which will keep the original intent of Workers' Compensation intact. The intent of Workers' Compensation is to provide funds to employees who have been injured on the job. It is not intended as a social services program.

### CIVIL JUSTICE REFORM

- Elimination of Joint and Several liability. Defendants would be held liable only for their own degree of fault.
- Strengthening of the Expert Witness rule. Would strengthen the current weak rule regarding who qualifies as an "expert" witness.
- Venue reform. Would make it more difficult for the plaintiff's attorney to move a defendant into a plaintiff-friendly court.
- Offer of Settlement. Would encourage litigants to reach agreement early, rather than enduring long, protracted, and costly trial.
- Class action lawsuit reform. Current law makes it much too easy for lawyers to have cases certified with class action status, which greatly increases the cost of Georgia's tort liability system.
- Mandatory non-binding arbitration in medical cases. Would encourage for less costly resolution of medical lawsuits.

The Chamber is interested in the forth coming recommendations regarding Commission for A New Georgia – especially economic development (strategic industries, entrepreneurial development, incentive) and education/workforce development. Also, of interest would be recommendations from the joint work group regarding transportation funding. ■