**GPHA Weekly Legislative Report**

For the Week Ending 3-20-15

By Scott Maxwell

Health-related issues have somewhat taken a back seat to transportation funding concerns this year at the Georgia General Assembly. The two may well end up related though, as money taken from the state’s “general fund” for transportation will no longer be available for healthcare needs. The major transportation funding bill, HB 170, currently calls for $250 million from the general fund be directed to transportation (not binding). Another $160 million will be lost from the general fund by switching our current percentage-of-a-dollar sales tax on gasoline to a per-gallon excise tax that must be spent on transportation.

Unfortunately, it does not appear that legislators are willing to allow a bump in the cigarette tax to come riding to the financial rescue. We joined advocates from the Cancer, Heart, Lung and other associations in an effort to convince legislators to utilize a per-pack tax increase of $1.23 to help solve the states financial woes. We owe a tip of the hat to the entire coalition who worked REALLY hard this session. However, the cigarette tax did not get introduced as a stand-alone bill, and it was not made a part of the transportation-funding bill.

There is a tax-reform bill that was introduced this year, but was held out to be worked on over the summer. We have made some headway with the author, Rep. John Carson (R-Marietta). He’s a CPA employed by SunTrust Bank, so John likes numbers . . . and he seemed impressed with numbers generated by a cigarette tax. As I have reported previously, there’s a real danger that a small cigarette tax might pass. Studies show that a small bump in price is not effective in keeping teens from starting the habit or others from quitting. We will keep you apprised on any developments.

Both the House and Senate included hold harmless funding in the Appropriations bill to benefit county public health departments that would otherwise lose dollars under the “new” distribution formula. This is actually year five of seven of the formula phase-in.

**Here are some bills of interest that saw action this week:**

[HB 362, Prescribing Albuteral Sulfate for Schools](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/362) (Rep. Valerie Clark-R)

Relating to pharmacists and pharmacies, so as to authorize licensed health practitioners to prescribe albuterol sulfate for schools.  **Status:** Referred to Health & Human Services, Passed Cmte by Substitute, Pending Rules Cmte, House Rules Calendar, House Postponed, Passed House by Substitute, Sent to Senate, Referred to Education & Youth Cmte, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte

[HB 426, Exemptions from Sales and Use Tax](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/426) (Rep. Darlene Taylor-R)

Relating to exemptions from sales and use tax, so as to provide a new exemption from state sales and use tax only for a limited period of time regarding the sale or use of tangible personal property to certain nonprofit health centers; to provide a new exemption for a limited period of time with respect to certain nonprofit volunteer health clinics. **Status:** Referred to Ways & Means Cmte, Passed Cmte by Substitute, Pending Rules Cmte, Passed House by Substitute, Sent to the Senate, Referred to Finance Cmte

[HB 436, HIV and Syphilis Testing of Pregnant Women](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/436) (Rep. Valerie Clark-R)

Relating to control of venereal disease, so as to require that physicians and health care providers offer HIV and syphilis testing of pregnant women in their third trimester of pregnancy. **Status:** Referred to Health & Human Services, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte, House Withdrawn, House Recommitted, Passed Cmte by Substitute, Pending Rules Cmte, Passed House by Substitute, Sent to the Senate, Referred to Health Cmte

[HR 601, Study Cmte on Saltwater Intrusion into Coastal Aquifers](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HR/601) (Rep. Lynn Smith-R)

A RESOLUTION creating the House Study Committee on Saltwater Intrusion into Coastal Aquifers. **Status:** Referred to Natural Resources & Environment Cmte, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte

[SB 130, Bans Smoking in Vehicle with a Passenger Under 15](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/130) (Sen. Bruce Thompson-R)

Relating to general provisions relative to the uniform rules of the road, so as to provide that any person in control of a motor vehicle who smokes or permits another occupant to smoke when a person under the age of 15 is in the vehicle shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. **Status:** Referred to Health & Human Services Cmte. Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte, Passed Senate, Sent to the House, Referred to Judiciary Non-Civil Cmte

[SB 109, General Provisions Relative to Health](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/109) (Sen. Nan Orrock-D)

Relating to general provisions relative to health, so as to clarify the use and effectiveness of Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment forms; to provide alternate terminology for do not resuscitate orders. **Status:** Referred to Health & Human Services Cmte, Passed Cmte by Substitute, Pending Rules Cmte, Passed Senate by Substitute, Sent to the House, Referred to Health Cmte, On Cmte Agenda for Monday

[SB 114, Protocol Agreements Between Physicians and RNs](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/114) (Sen. Chuck Hufstetler-R)

Relating to delegation of certain medical acts to advanced practice registered nurses, so as to revise provisions relating to the number of advanced practice registered nurses a delegating physician can enter into a protocol agreement with at any one time. **Status:** Referred to Health & Human Services Cmte, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte, Passed Senate, Sent to House, Referred to Health Cmte, On Cmte Agenda for Monday

[SB 1, Insurance Coverage for Autism](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/1) (Sen. Charlie Bethel-R)

Relating to insurance coverage for autism, so as to provide for certain insurance coverage of autism spectrum disorders. **Status:** Referred to Insurance and Labor Cmte. Passed Cmte by Substitute, Passed Senate by Substitute, Sent to the House, Referred to Insurance Cmte, Hearing Scheduled for Monday