



## **Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce 2003 Legislative Wrap Up**

In a long and final day spent at the Capitol on Friday, the General Assembly completed the 2003 session by adopting several important pieces of legislation and sending them to Gov. Perdue for his signature or veto. We are very pleased close to 3/4 of our agenda passed.

### **The State Flag**

One of the most important actions this session was legislation creating a new state flag, HB 380. Our position opposing the controversial Confederate battle flag won out. This means that in a March, 2004 referendum, Georgians can choose between the current flag or a new design – the so-called “stars and bars” version of the pre-’56 flag. Gov. Perdue has indicated he will sign HB 380 into law.

We congratulate our legislative leaders for reaching this compromise and appreciate the hard work of our members. Special thanks go to Arthur Blank, John Rice, Allen Franklin, Mike Eskew, Duane Ackerman and David Ratcliffe, as well as Georgia Power, Turner Broadcasting and GE Power Systems for loaning their lobbyists. We can all be proud of this effort. You all helped play a key role.

### **Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District**

We are very pleased that in addition to the \$300,000 we were able to garner in the 2003 supplemental budget, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (MNGWD) was allocated an additional \$250,000 for fiscal ‘04, for a total received of \$550,000. The monies allow us to continue our development of a model water quality plan for the 16-county region.

We also were able to get the restriction removed in the statewide water management bill, ensuring our retention of inter-basin transfers. This insured that whether the bill passed or not, the District would be able to include inter-basin transfer as needed in future plans. The bill also proposed a controversial method of water allocation in Southwest Georgia that established the sale of water permits. The bill did not pass.

### **Economic Development**

Several of our business tax incentives were approved the final night of the session. HB 43 allows companies that move their corporate headquarters to Georgia and employ more than 50 people in qualified jobs will receive tax credits. HB 43 also provides a tax credit to companies using megasites when locating manufacturing operations in Georgia, provided they meet investment and job creation criteria. This tax credit applies to companies like DaimlerChrysler locating in Pooler, Ga., and may be applicable to companies in the Metro Atlanta area in the future.

We worked closely with the Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism to maintain \$250,000 in the ‘04 budget for our Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA) bid. The FTAA will create the largest free trade zone in the world. We are working actively to position

Atlanta as the headquarters for the trade zone's administrative office, known as the Secretariat.

### **Education**

The House and Senate approved SB 193, which will reinstate fair dismissal protections - or tenure - for Georgia's public school teachers. Perdue is expected to sign the bill into law. We opposed this legislation, believing that the elimination of teacher tenure was a key part of the state's education reform program.

In the Governor's education bills we supported, local school districts will now be allowed more spending flexibility. Classroom size reduction will be delayed for one year.

Locally, we are very pleased with the broad support we garnered for Atlanta Public Schools (APS) charter reform legislation. Key elements of the bill create an ethics review board, tighten up ethics language in the charter and allow the school superintendent, rather than the school board, to hire and fire the system's chief financial officer and legal counsel. These reforms of APS's charter will improve the school system's governance and accountability, critical to improving academic achievement and to realizing the system's success.

### **Transportation**

SB 127 would have modified the formula the Georgia Department of Transportation uses to balance funds across congressional districts. The bill remains in the Transportation Committee of the House and will be carried over to the 2004 legislative session. We will work during the interim to get this bill passed out of the House for the 2004 session.

We have already begun work on issues important to the business community in anticipation of the 2004 session. We look forward to working with all of you to build coalitions that successfully move our agenda forward.