

News from under the Gold Dome

The Georgia Senate convened on Monday, January 12, 2026, for the first day of the 2026 legislative session, marking the start of the second regular session of the 158th Georgia General Assembly.

We moved on with our session business Monday as the Senate voted to adopt House Resolution 998, the Adjournment Resolution establishing the legislative calendar for the entire 2026 legislative session. Georgia's Constitution requires the Georgia General Assembly to convene for 40 non-consecutive legislative days, and the final day of this year's session—also known as "Sine Die"—is scheduled for Thursday, April 2, 2026. With the goal of ensuring a smooth and efficient legislative process, this calendar provides a clear schedule for the session, allowing legislators, staff and visitors to plan ahead as we conduct the people's business.

On Wednesday morning, members of the General Assembly attended the Georgia Chamber of Commerce's annual Eggs & Issues breakfast, where Gov. Kemp gave a preview of some of his priorities for the year. He announced plans for a one-time \$35 million natural gas infrastructure fund through the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority and proposed major transportation projects, including \$1.8 billion for I-75 Henry County Express Lanes, \$200 million for Highway 316—University Parkway, \$250 million for local roads and \$100 million for rural bridge improvements. The governor also unveiled a one-time \$50 million Homeless Response Grant to support efforts ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup in Atlanta.

Later in the week on Thursday, members of the House and Senate gathered in the House Chamber for a

joint session to hear the governor deliver his final State of the State Address as Georgia's 83rd governor. Given annually, the address provides the governor an opportunity to share their assessment of the state's condition and outline their legislative priorities for the year ahead. Gov. Kemp's final address centered on lowering the cost of living for Georgians, while also prioritizing education, workforce training, school safety, strengthening retirement security for law enforcement and intensifying efforts to combat human trafficking and gang-related crime across Georgia. A video archive of the address is available here, and below is an overview of the key highlights.

Gov. Kemp began his final address by reflecting on the state's finances, noting that since 2021, Georgia has delivered more than \$3.2 billion in one-time tax relief, nearly \$1 billion in property tax relief, more than \$2.2 billion through motor fuel tax suspensions and nearly \$3.4 billion in permanent income tax savings—totaling almost \$9.7 billion—returned to Georgians. Gov. Kemp's remarks also focused on the continued impact of rising costs on Georgia families and businesses, emphasizing that his budget proposals are a direct response to those pressures. To provide additional relief, he announced that his budget proposals include a fourth one-time \$1 billion tax rebate—averaging \$250 for single filers and up to \$500 for married couples—bringing the total surplus revenue returned to taxpayers over the next four years to more than \$7.5 billion. He also noted plans to propose a 20-basis-point reduction to the state's personal and corporate income tax rate, lowering it to 4.99 percent.

The governor's address also highlighted his continued investment in Georgia's state employees and the state's broader economic development efforts, reflecting his view that state government should serve all Georgians, regardless of party affiliation or zip code. He touted the work of state employees and also pointed to his Administration's sustained focus on economic development and job creation, noting that over the past seven years Georgia has seen more than 219,700 new jobs and over \$118 billion in investment through projects supported by the state's economic development team, with many of

those jobs and investment dollars directed to communities outside the metro Atlanta region. To further recognize the efforts of the state workforce, Gov. Kemp announced that his Amended Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposals include a one-time \$2,000 pay supplement for state employees, including educators and state public safety officers.

After reflecting on the state's finances and budgetary actions, Gov. Kemp highlighted his Administration's efforts to improve Georgia's education system and bolster our state's education workforce. As part of these efforts, the governor announced that as of the current fiscal year, the state has fully funded the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) seven times and added an additional \$368 million to programs and initiatives to prepare Georgians for the workforce. Gov. Kemp then touched on the state's efforts to support school safety. The governor noted that in his first year, the state began with three campus security grants, totaling more than \$184.5 million, and since then, the state has added \$109 million into the base budget with the objective of providing funds to improve safety in Georgia's classrooms. Additionally, Gov. Kemp stated that his budget proposals would bring the total amount allocated to public safety during his time in office to more than \$511 million. He then touted that during his tenure as governor, his Administration has raised teacher pay by \$9,500—increasing the starting salary for a Georgia teacher by almost 28 percent.

Next, Gov. Kemp turned his focus to higher education and scholarship programs. Over the last several years, the Kemp Administration has returned the Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) scholarship to 100 percent of its promise, while the Board of Regents has worked to hold tuition rates in check across the system to allow greater opportunity for students. Since approximately 2019, tuition in Georgia has increased by only five percent, which he highlighted as a success in comparison to other states. Gov. Kemp then announced that the state is putting an additional \$2 billion toward higher education in Georgia, including \$40.7 million in his budget proposals for healthcare education facilities and medical workforce training programs. Gov. Kemp stated that since he first took office, the state has spent more than \$26 million for medical residency slots in Georgia, adding 897 positions, equaling 2,523 residency slots as of this fiscal year. His budget proposals add another \$2.1 million to bolster this critical workforce need in our state.

Moving on to the state's scholarship programs, the governor announced that his amended budget proposals support need-based financial assistance by investing \$326 million into the University of Georgia's Dedicating

Russ Goodman STATE SENATOR



Resources to Educationally Advance More Students (DREAMS) scholarship program—the first needs-based scholarship of its kind in Georgia history. This scholarship program is a one-time endowment to create opportunities for generational economic advancement for students, with the goal of allowing students to complete college and begin careers without large student debt. The DREAMS scholarship complements the Georgia MATCH program, which was launched in 2023. During the first two years of MATCH, Gov. Kemp noted that the state has seen a 5.9 percent rise in University System of Georgia (USG) enrollment and a 7.1 percent increase in Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) enrollment.

The governor also recognized the men and women who face danger on a regular basis to protect our communities, emphasizing how exceptional Georgia's law enforcement officers are for answering the call to serve. To that end, Gov. Kemp proposed an enhanced retirement plan for state law enforcement officers. Under the proposed model, Georgia would provide a higher match to the 401(k) savings accounts of eligible public safety officers through a steeper contribution schedule, noting that not only would the state's match increase at a higher rate, but the maximum percentage cap would also increase from nine percent under the current plan to 15 percent, essentially doubling the state's contribution for its law enforcement. Building on these efforts to support and protect those who serve, the governor also highlighted the importance of safeguarding the most vulnerable in our communities, including children and victims of exploitation. As one of the Kemp Administration's top priorities and building on the work of the GRACE Commission—led by First Lady Marty Kemp—the Georgia General Assembly has passed ten pieces of legislation targeting human trafficking. In his remarks, Gov. Kemp announced that his team will soon introduce an eleventh bill designed to further protect Georgia's children and hold abusers accountable. The governor further emphasized that his

continued efforts to fight human trafficking are matched by his ongoing initiatives to tackle gang-related violence, touting that since 2019, his office has funded the Anti-Gang Taskforce within the GBI—and since then, the GBI has investigated more than 1,800 gang-related cases, arrested nearly 2,500 offenders with a gang affiliation and seized more than \$95 million in drugs and illegal items associated with gang violence. Gov. Kemp closed his remarks by reaffirming his commitment to finishing the important work underway and ensuring continued support for all Georgia families. Gov. Kemp's proposals in his State of the State and Eggs and Issues addresses will certainly impact our work this legislative session.

To end the week, members of the General Assembly joined Gov. Kemp for a Celebration of Service event to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As we reflect on Dr. King's mission, we are reminded of the enduring call to service that my colleagues and I strive to uphold as we continue working on behalf of our constituents and for the betterment of our great state. His legacy challenges all elected officials to lead with compassion and unity to ensure that our work at the Capitol continues to serve every Georgian.

Following the observance of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, my colleagues and I will return to the Capitol on Tuesday, January 20, to begin work on one of the most important responsibilities of this session: the state budget. During what is often referred to as "budget week," we will hear directly from Governor Kemp and state agency leaders as they present their budget requests to the joint House and Senate Appropriations Committees. These committees will continue meeting throughout the week, and I look forward to providing updates as we work through the budget process.

Sen. Russ Goodman represents Senate District 8 which includes Atkinson, Clinch, Echols, Lanier, Lowndes and Pierce Counties and a large portion of Ware County. He may be reached at 404.656.7454 or at russ.goodman@senate.ga.gov

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