

LEGISLATIVE RECAP

February 7, 2008

2008 SESSION BEGINS

The Alabama Legislature convened for their annual legislative session on Tuesday, February 5 at Noon. The Legislature will meet no more than 30 legislative days over the next 3-1/2 months. The House leadership has pledged to take up ethics legislation and non-controversial legislation that has passed the House in the past but ultimately died in the Senate. The House likely will then wait to see if the Senate resolves the impasse that has virtually shut down the Senate for the past several years. Whether the Senate majority and minority come to some agreement to allow the flow of legislation remains to be seen.

GOVERNOR ASKS LEGISLATURE TO PRIORITIZE IN FACE OF LIMITED BUDGETS

In his annual State-of-the-State address on Wednesday night Governor Riley urged the Legislature to prioritize programs in the State general and education fund. With as much as an \$800,000,000 to \$1,000,000,000 shortage to fund the states schools and government, the Legislature will have to make decisions on what programs they must cut in order to balance the State's budgets. In addition, the Governor asked the Legislature to pass income tax for working families and give tax breaks to small businesses for paying employee health insurance benefits. He also asked the Legislature to expand the funding of his pre-k education initiative and to pass a statewide water policy to avoid problems during droughts.

SENATE LOOKS FAMILIAR

The beginning of this session was reminiscent of the end of the 2007 legislative session. As you may recall, an argument between Senators ended physically with a blow to the head of one Senator by a fellow Senator. One of the first orders of business was the introduction and passage of a Senate resolution proposed by the majority that resulted in stripping Senator Charles Bishop of all committee assignments and the possibility of appointing a security detail to be assigned to him for the safety of others while at the State House. Bishop pledged to sue the Senate on the grounds that his constitutional rights have been violated and that the Senate has broken their own rules by taking his committee assignments away but later recanted and said he wanted to put the issue behind.

Although the Democratic leadership picked up two additional votes since this time last year, their numbers still do not reach the 2/3 majority number of 21 votes. With only 20 votes, the majority does not have the votes to cut off debate on legislation debated prior

to the budgets being passed. (Budgets are traditionally passed on the final days of the legislative session.) The remaining 15 Senators appear to be committed to solidarity until Senate rules that they believe discriminate against them are rewritten.

HOUSE BEGINS WORK

The House made a pledge to work on legislation beginning with ethics reform and would wait and see what the Senate planned to do with House legislation. Last year the House sent up several pieces of legislation only to see the Senate focus on Senate legislation in the committee process and ignore House legislation until the impasse in the Senate made it apparent that very little House or Senate legislation would pass during the session.

The House leadership has said that they will begin work on ethics legislation and, after they have dealt with that, they will then turn their attention to debating previously passed uncontested legislation. If the Senate does not begin work on those bills, the House will then reappraise their options.

NEXT WEEK

There have been a total of 697 bills introduced during the session thus far.

The House and Senate will reconvene next week on Tuesday, February 12 at 1:00 PM and 2:00PM respectively.