

The 2021 legislative session of the Georgia General Assembly completed its business just after midnight on Wednesday, March 31st, and we officially adjourned Sine Die. We began the legislative session worried about the pandemic and Atlanta riots, but ended with vaccinations being administered at a record pace with a healthy economy under way. There is much legislation that now heads to the Governor for his signature or veto.

Much of the legislation considered during this final week were House bills that came over to the Senate before the end of crossover day, as well as legislation that had been amended by one or both Houses, such the budget.

I worked particularly hard to pass House Bill 317, a bill which will update the definition of an innkeeper to define a “marketplace innkeeper” to include marketplace facilitators. HB 317 will also provide certain taxation requirements for marketplace innkeepers and would adjust some of the authority of counties and municipalities. This bill essentially would require innkeepers of vacation-by-owner rental properties to collect the hotel/motel tax. This is an effort to ensure an even playing field and standardized pricing by ensuring both hoteliers and innkeepers pay the same taxes.

The General Assembly changed state law regarding our citizens’ arrest laws. H.B. 479 repealed Georgia’s citizen’s arrest law which many believe contributed to the death of a man in Glynn County. The legislation also changed the range of people who could hold and retain suspected criminals, such as store managers in the case of shoplifting. The bill also enabled a law enforcement officer to make an arrest outside of his or her jurisdiction, without requiring a warrant, under specified emergency circumstances, including incidents in which an offense occurs in the officer’s presence or when an officer is assisting another law enforcement officer in another jurisdiction.

House Bill 32 establishes a teacher recruitment and retention program within the State Board of Education for qualifying schools. Within the program, teachers would be offered a \$3,000 refundable tax income credit to teach in rural and low performing schools in high-need subject areas.

Recognizing that millions of Georgians are now relying on private services to deliver packages to home doors, particularly during the pandemic, the General Assembly passed H.B. 94 making stealing mail and porch piracy a felony. We also revised dating violence orders through H.B. 231, legislation that would provide issuance of certain protective orders regarding dating violence and updates definitions and orders relating to dating violence.

House Bill 617 was a result of the national debate regarding compensating student athletes for the use of their likeness in advertising. The legislation would allow student athletes at public and private Georgia colleges and universities to be compensated for the commercial use of their name, image and likeness.

While the 2021 session may be over, that does not mean that your elected representatives are done working for you. Throughout the interim, we expect to have several Study Committees where we will analyze specific policy issues in-depth so to have legislation ready for next year.

Additionally, at some point this fall or winter, we expect to be called back in for a Special Session to work on the reapportionment and redistricting process resulting from the 2020 Census.

Thank you for your continued interest in the General Assembly session. As your state senator, I am here to help and assist you. Please feel free to schedule meetings with me or reach out to me by phone or email. My office phone number is [\(404\) 656-7880](tel:(404)656-7880) and my email is ben.watson@senate.ga.gov. I look forward to serving you.