



1-16-26 GHLA

Welcome to GHLA @ the Capitol, your weekly update about news you need to know related to Georgia's lodging industry and the 2026 General Assembly. GHLA's legislative team will be your eyes and ears under the Gold Dome.

Capitol Report Week 1

Anti-Human Trafficking Press Conference

GHLA will host an industry-led press conference in support of one of the association's top legislative priorities this session: strengthening Georgia's anti-human trafficking laws to require prevention training for all lodging businesses, including short-term rentals.

As Georgia prepares to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup, GHLA is working to ensure the hospitality industry continues to lead with a clear message that there is No Room for Trafficking in our state.

- **When:** January 22 | 1:00–2:00 PM
- **Where:** Capitol – South Wing
- **Audience:** Georgia hoteliers and members of the media

[Click Here To Register](#)

Confirmed / Pending Speakers include

- Chris Carr, Georgia Attorney General
- Hannah Palmquist, Chief Prosecutor, Human Trafficking Unit
- Chris Hardman, President & CEO, GHLA
- Kevin Carey, President, AHLA Foundation
- Brett Horton, Chief Advocacy Officer, AHLA
- Vik Zaver, AAHOA
- IHG Representative
- Governor's Office (pending)
- Legislative Sponsor (pending – Senator Shawn Still)

Week at a Glance

The General Assembly officially convened Monday morning for the start of the 2026 legislative session, meeting for Legislative Days 1–5. Lawmakers adopted the legislative calendar, setting

Sine Die for April 2 and confirming a 40-day session. Opening week activity centered on the Governor's State of the State address, release of the Governor's budget recommendations, and the annual Eggs and Issues Breakfast.

Session Preview

2026 is shaping up to be a watershed year under the Gold Dome. Georgia voters will elect a new Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, and every seat in the State House and State Senate. Many legislators are running for higher office, and legislative priorities reflect both affordability pressures and the political dynamics of a statewide election year.

Senate Priorities – Income Tax Elimination

- Senate leadership is prioritizing elimination of the state income tax, building on the work of the Senate Special Committee on Eliminating Georgia's Income Tax, which finalized its recommendations on January 7.
- The committee's plan would exempt the first \$50,000 of income for individuals and \$100,000 for joint filers beginning in 2027, immediately eliminating income tax liability for roughly two-thirds of Georgians. Remaining income tax liability would be phased out over six years, with full elimination projected by 2032, subject to revenue triggers and without increases to sales or property taxes.

House Priorities – Property Tax Relief

- House leadership, including Speaker Jon Burns, has emphasized that the House will focus on lowering property taxes, particularly on primary residences, framing property tax reform as a direct response to housing affordability concerns.

Kemp's Final State of the State Address

In his final State of the State address, Governor Kemp emphasized Georgia's strong fiscal position, conservative budgeting, and continued economic growth. Major highlights included:

- A proposed one-time \$1 billion tax rebate, returning up to \$250 for individual filers and \$500 for married couples
- A 20-basis-point cut to the personal and corporate income tax rate, bringing the rate to 4.99 percent
- Continued commitment to maintaining more than \$10 billion in state reserves
- Investments in infrastructure, workforce development, education, and public safety
- A one-time \$2,000 pay supplement for state employees, educators, and public safety officers

On public safety, the Governor highlighted Georgia's national leadership on anti-human trafficking efforts and announced plans to introduce an 11th piece of human trafficking legislation, modeled after Trey's Law, to further protect children and victims.

Eggs and Issues Breakfast

Hundreds of lawmakers and business leaders gathered at Mercedes-Benz Stadium for the Georgia Chamber's annual Eggs and Issues Breakfast, where legislative leaders outlined priorities for the session.

Governor Kemp opened his remarks by previewing major transportation investments, including \$1.8 billion to expand roadway capacity along the I-75 corridor in Henry County through construction of dedicated express lanes in both directions. State estimates indicate the project could increase rush-hour vehicle throughput by as much as 70 percent.

Additional highlights included:

- A one-time \$50 million Homelessness Response Grant for local governments and nonprofits
- \$200 million for improvements along Georgia 316
- \$250 million for local road projects statewide
- \$100 million for bridge improvements in rural communities

Affordability dominated the discussion, with Senate leadership focused on income tax elimination and House leadership emphasizing property tax relief.

Budget Highlights

As part of the Governor's Amended FY 2026 and FY 2027 budget recommendations, the following items are of particular interest to the hospitality industry:

- \$3 million for the Department of Economic Development to support marketing of Georgia's tourism opportunities and update agency marketing materials
- \$10 million for the Georgia World Congress Center Authority for infrastructure and security costs related to the 2028 Super Bowl

The Governor's inclusion of \$3 million for tourism marketing is a significant win for the tourism and hospitality industry. Increased tourism marketing was a central theme during the Senate Study Committee on Making Georgia the #1 State for Tourism, and this recommendation reflects the hard work and sustained advocacy of GHLA and industry partners during the off-season. It also signals that tourism and hospitality are top-of-mind as state leaders consider investments that drive economic growth.

While this recommendation represents important progress, GHLA will continue working to ensure tourism marketing funding is increased further before the budget is finalized and to secure long-term, sustainable investment in promoting Georgia as a premier destination.

Special Elections

At least eight legislative seats are expected to change hands during the 2026 session. While Democrats flipped one Republican-held House seat, two potential vacancies could offset that gain. Democrats also gained two seats on the Public Service Commission. Because state legislators are prohibited from fundraising during session, several members resigned in order to focus on higher-office campaigns, triggering a series of special elections and appointments.

- [HD 23](#) will be represented in 2026 by Republican Bill Fincher following the passing of Rep. Mandi Ballinger.
- [HD 94](#) became vacant after Rep. Karen Bennett resigned following an unemployment fraud indictment. A special election for this seat has not yet been scheduled.
- [HD 106](#) elected Democrat Akbar Ali after Rep. Shelly Hutchinson resigned.
- [HD 113](#) is expected to become vacant following the suspension of Rep. Sharon Henderson after an unemployment fraud indictment. Governor Kemp appointed Attorney General Chris Carr, Senate Minority Leader Harold Jones, and House Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones to serve on the review commission.
- [HD 121](#) flipped party control, with Democrat Eric Gisler replacing Republican Marcus Wiedower.
- [HD 130](#) will hold a special election following the resignation of Democrat Lynn Heffner.
- [SD 18](#) will hold a special election on January 20 to replace Sen. John F. Kennedy, who resigned as Senate President Pro Tempore to focus on his campaign for Lieutenant Governor.
- [SD 21](#) elected Republican Jason Dickerson to replace Brandon Beach, who resigned after being appointed United States Treasurer.
- [SD 35](#) elected Democrat Jaha Howard to replace Jason Esteves, who vacated his seat to pursue a gubernatorial campaign.

The Senate also enters the session with new leadership, as Jason Anavitarte replaces Steve Gooch as Majority Leader and Larry Walker replaces John F. Kennedy as President Pro Tempore. Both Gooch and Kennedy are running for Lieutenant Governor.

Legislators Running for Higher Office

Statewide races have a number of candidates, but these politicians will vacate their seats in pursuit of higher office.

Governor

- Burt Jones - Lieutenant Governor
- Chris Carr - Attorney General
- Brad Raffensberger - Secretary of State
- Jason Esteves - SD 35 (resigned, seat filled)

- Derrick Jackson - HD 68
- Ruwa Romman - HD 97

Lieutenant Governor

- John F Kennedy - SD 18 (resigned, special election Jan 20th)
- Steve Gooch - SD 51 (Former Senate Majority Leader)
- Blake Tillery - SD 19 (Senate Appropriations Chair)
- David Clark - HD 100
- Josh McLaurin - SD 14

Secretary of State

- Tim Fleming - HD 114

Attorney General

- Brian Strickland - SD 42
- Bill Cowsert - SD 46
- Tanya Miller - HD 62

Insurance Commissioner

- Nabilah Islam Parkes - SD 7

State Senate

- Will Wade - HD 9, running for SD 51

Congress

- Houston Gaines - HD 120, running for 10th Congressional
- Colton Moore - SD 53, running for 14th Congressional
- Jasmine Clark - HD 108, running for 13th Congressional

Legislative Tracking Update

House Bills:

[HB 896](#) - Hall County; levy an excise tax

[HB 902](#) - Insurance; transparency and accountability in rates and rate regulation after enactment of tort reform law; provide

[HB 910](#) - Georgia Lottery Game of Sports Betting Act; enact

[HB 911](#) - Torts; prohibit individuals from bringing defamation actions against another individual who makes a communication regarding an incident of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination; provisions

[HB 914](#) - Commissioner of Labor; ensure certain employees receive comparable pay for comparable work in jobs which require comparable skill, effort, and responsibility; authorize

[HB 915](#) - Law enforcement officers and agencies; authorize county and municipal law enforcement agencies to employ civilian personnel to assist in certain investigations

[HB 919](#) - Conservation and natural resources; outdoor stewardship; eliminate reductions in appropriations

[HB 920](#) - Hate-Free Heroes Act; enact

[HB 922](#) - Georgia Boater Bill of Rights; enact

[HB 930](#) - Income tax; refundable credit for grocery, transportation, and utility costs; provide

[HB 932](#) - Revenue and taxation; tax credits for business enterprises; provide that certain military zones qualify for designation as less developed areas during a limited period of time

[HB 933](#) - Lake Lanier Islands Development Authority; property held is for public purposes for the benefit of the people of this state; provide

[HB 948](#) - Property; debtors in foreclosures to receive certain information and forms in a notice of foreclosure; provide

[HB 956](#) - Solid Waste Trust Fund; authorize use of funds for implementation of provisions of a solid waste management program

[HB 967](#) - Criminal Justice Coordinating Council; provide financial assistance to law enforcement agencies to equip certain motor vehicles with bullet-resistant features; establish grant program

[HB 973](#) - Supplemental appropriations; State Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

[HB 974](#) - General appropriations; State Fiscal Year July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027

[HB 975](#) - Supplemental appropriations; State Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

[HB 976](#) - Supplemental appropriations; State Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

[HB 977](#) - General appropriations; State Fiscal Year July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027

[HB 978](#) - General appropriations; State Fiscal Year July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027

[HB 980](#) - Georgia-Ireland Trade Commission; create

[HB 986](#) - Motor vehicles; personal delivery devices; revise operation procedures and restrictions

[HB 987](#) - Voluntary Portable Benefit Plan Act; enact

[HB 992](#) - State parks; free admission on certain public and legal holidays; provide

[HB 994](#) - Crimes and offenses; riot; provide for a felony penalty

[HB 996](#) - Agriculture, Department of; food deserts; require annual reporting

House Resolutions:

[HR 998](#) - Adjournment; relative to

[HR 999](#) - Georgia citizens, cities, and counties; remember and honor the sacredness of America's 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026; urge

[HR 1001](#) - State of Georgia; ethical investment of all state funds and public resources; express support

[HR 1008](#) - State-wide water management plan; ratify amendments

[HR 1023](#) - State of Georgia; every parent has a fundamental right to direct the upbringing, education, care, and control of their children; provide - CA

Senate Bills:

[SB 379](#) - "Georgia Health Insurance Affordability and Consumer Protection Act"; enact

[SB 382](#) - Ad Valorem Taxation; make the state-wide base year homestead exemption mandatory for all political subdivisions

[SB 385](#) - General Assembly; abolishment of the office of administration floor leaders; provide
[SB 387](#) - Revenue and Taxation; state income tax in its entirety; repeal
[SB 388](#) - "Property Owners Protection Act"; enact
[SB 389](#) - Law Enforcement Officers and Agencies; covered immigration officers wear visible identification during public immigration enforcement functions; require
[SB 390](#) - State Military; deployment of armed military forces of other states into this state without the permission of the Governor; prohibit
[SB 391](#) - Offenses Involving Illegal Aliens; immigration enforcement in certain locations absent a judicial warrant; prohibit
[SB 392](#) - "Waste Reduction Act of 2026"; enact
[SB 393](#) - "HOA Accountability and Training Act"; enact
[SB 396](#) - Labor and Industrial Relations; retaliatory actions by certain employers against certain employees for disclosing potentially unlawful activities; prohibit
[SB 397](#) - Torts; remedies for deprivation of constitutional rights of state citizens by civil immigration enforcement officers; provide
[SB 398](#) - Wiretapping, Eavesdropping, Surveillance, and Related Offenses; criminal offenses of virtual peeping; establish
[SB 406](#) - "Georgia Property Owners' Bill of Rights Act"; enact
[SB 408](#) - State Sales and Use Taxes; data center equipment sales and use tax exemption; advance the sunset date
[SB 410](#) - State Sales and Use Taxes; the data center equipment sales and use tax exemption; repeal

Senate Resolutions:

[SR 558](#) - Apportionment for General Assembly; changes to apportionment and districts; provide
[SR 560](#) - Congress; reaffirming the 35th parallel as Georgia's northern border; urge

[GHLA Full Legislative Tracking Update](#)

Please [click here to go to our Legislative tracking page](#) for the complete list of bills we are watching.

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