

{{FirstName or 'Friends'}} --

**We just finished week three of the 2023 Legislative Session, and things are starting to heat up!**

A number of our bills have been filed and assigned to committees. Governor Kemp gave his State of the State address, which lays out a roadmap for what we might expect to work on in the weeks leading up to Sine Die. Meanwhile, events close to home and across the country continue to shape our perspective and hone our commitment to the work ahead.

*Let's dive in.*



## LEGISLATION AND ISSUES TO WATCH



This week **Governor Kemp** gave his [State of the State address](#), in which he customarily lays out his priorities at the top of the legislative session, giving lawmakers a blueprint as we start to work on his [\\$32.5 billion budget plan](#), as well as tipping us off to the challenges we may face.

[There were several things I was excited to hear](#) the Governor note in his address, many of which he'd highlighted in the previous weeks. Among them:

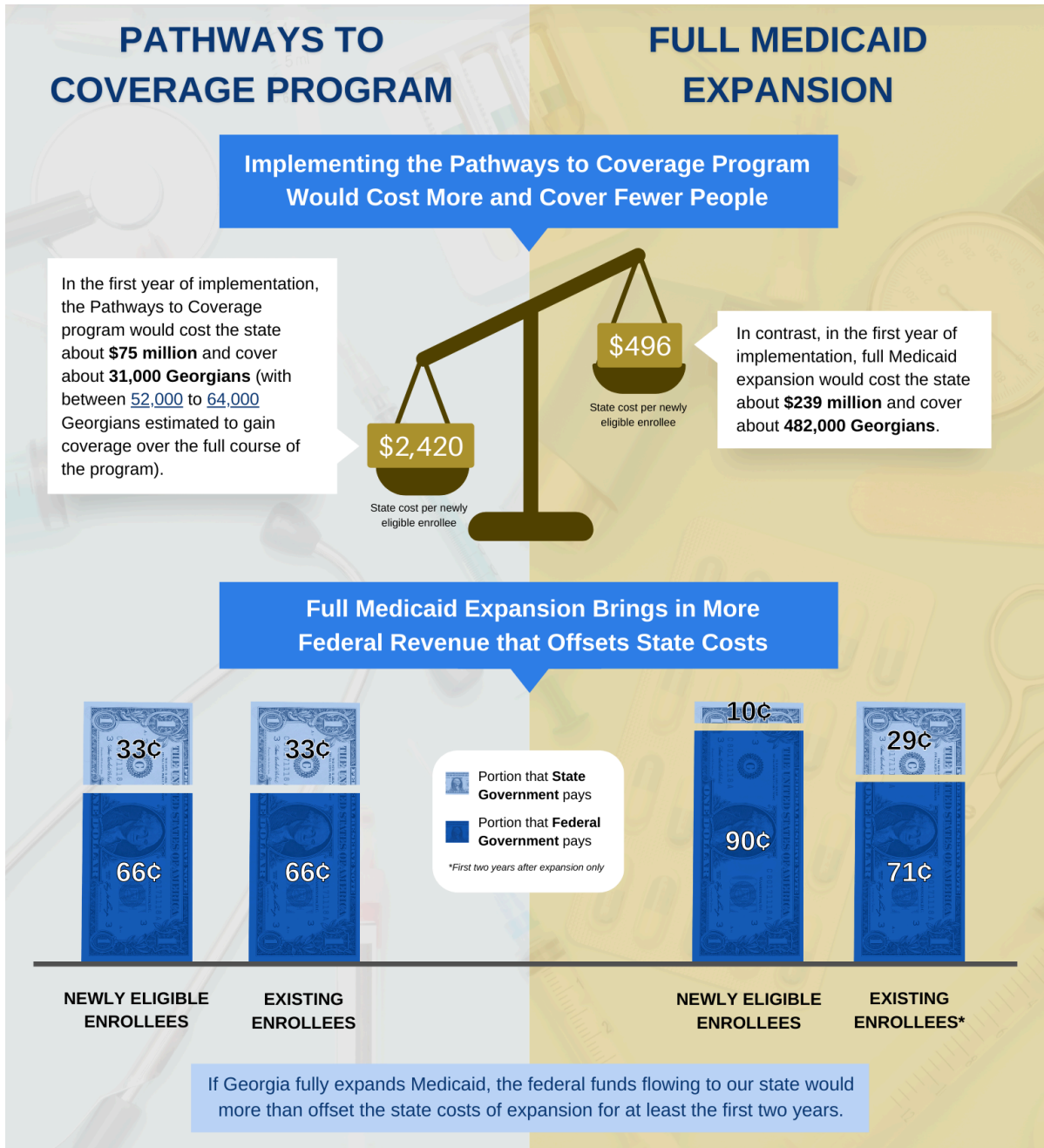
- A [proposed \\$2000 pay raise](#) for all state and university employees and public school teachers.
- A proposal to [fully fund HOPE Scholarships and grant awards](#), increasing their coverage from 60% to **100% of in-state tuition**.
- An [investment in “workforce housing,”](#) particularly focused on rural housing development to accommodate the growing workforce resulting from several large economic development projects across the state.
- Proposing legislation to **extend [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) benefits](#) to pregnant people**. At present, expectant

parents can't apply for TANF benefits until after a child is born. (That said, TANF will still only be available to those who qualify, and [criteria are quite stringent.](#))

I was, however, **disappointed to note many missed opportunities to invest in Georgia's future**, particularly in light of the state's two consecutive years of record budget surpluses.

For instance, the Governor continued to **double down on his commitment to his Medicaid Waiver program** (dubbed "Pathways to Coverage"), which several projections note will **cover less than 1/10th of uninsured patients in Georgia at ~5x the cost to the state** [vs. the cost of full Medicaid expansion.](#)





Source: *Prior GBPI analysis by L. Harker of data from state fiscal note and from Pathways to Coverage application and approval; Kaiser Family Foundation; Pathways to Coverage approval from CMS.*

Further, I was dismayed to see prioritization of half-measures that fail to fully address the issues faced by many of those we represent. Rather than one-time rebates and salary increases, **I would have preferred to hear Governor Kemp address raising the state’s minimum wage** (which, [at \\$5.15/hour is tied with Wyoming for the lowest minimum wage in the nation](#)), along with a **larger pay increase for teachers and public employees** at a time we are hemorrhaging these vital workers due in part to our state’s refusal to pay them a living wage.



Watch the official **Georgia Democrats response** to the 2023 State of the State address [HERE](#).



Members of the Georgia House and Senate introduced the Georgia Reproductive Freedom Act during a press conference at the Capitol on Tuesday, January 24, 2023. The elected officials were joined by a cohort of allies, including representatives from the organizations Amplify Georgia, Access Reproductive Care - Southeast, Feminist Women's Health Center, NARAL Pro-Choice Georgia, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, SPARK Reproductive Justice Now!, Women Engaged, and YWCA of Greater Atlanta.

This week also marked what would have been the **50th anniversary [Roe v. Wade](#)**, the landmark Supreme Court decision establishing a Constitutional right to abortion care. As we know, that right was obliterated this summer after the ruling on [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#), and here in Georgia, the passage of **HB 481** has **eliminated access to safe, legal abortion care after approximately 6 weeks gestation**, before many patients even know that they are pregnant.

This week, [Georgia House Democrats announced](#) we had filed the [Reproductive Freedom Act](#), which would **repeal HB 481 and expand access to essential reproductive healthcare**. I am proud to cosponsor this bill with many of my colleagues.

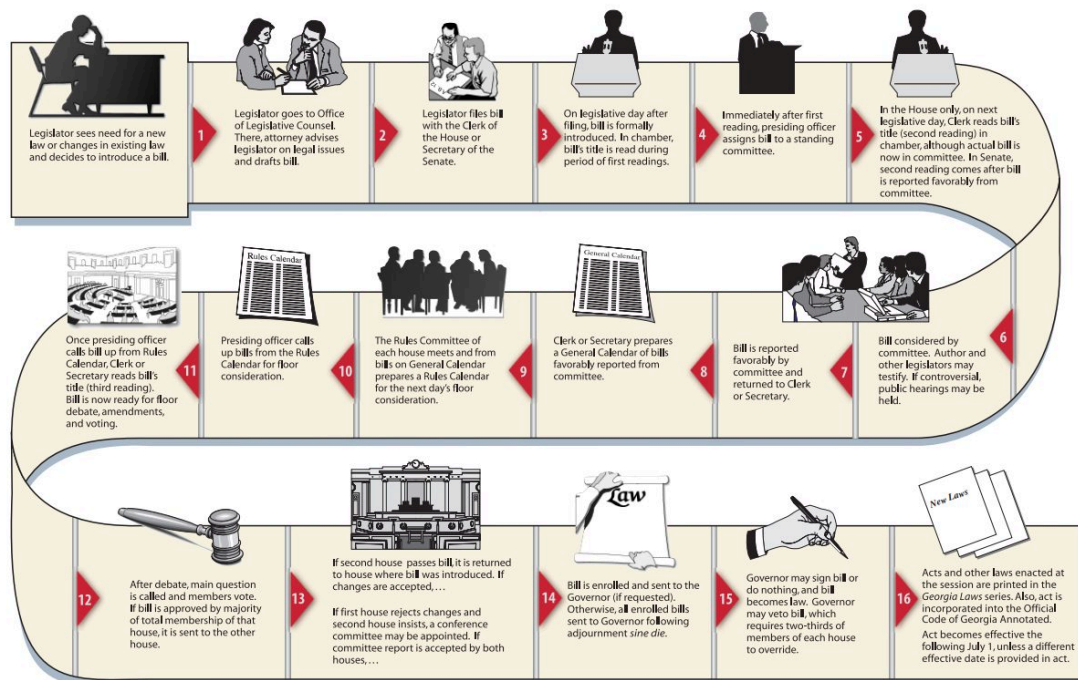
I'll save you the trouble of pointing out that **Georgia has a GOP trifecta**, meaning anti-choice Republicans hold control of both legislative chambers and the governor's office. It does, however, invite the observation of how this state manages to pass such **extreme, restrictive legislation—[with more possibly](#)**

**to come**—through an ostensibly representative government despite such laws running counter to **what a plurality of voters want**.

## TEAM AU BILL TRACKER

Several **pieces of legislation I've authored** are now moving through the often Byzantium legislative process of the Georgia General Assembly. I encourage people to **follow along with these bills and resolutions** as the term progresses!

### How a Bill is Passed in the Georgia Legislature



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### Several of my priority pieces of legislation include:

- **HB 44:** Requires **private gun sales and transfers to be subject to background checks**, which prevent felons, those convicted of domestic abuse, and people with a serious history of mental illness from easily purchasing a firearm.
- **HB 45:** Requires a **3 day waiting period for firearm purchases**, thus building in a “cooling-off” period to defuse violent acts of impulse such as mass shootings, domestic violence, and suicide.
- **HB 46:** Allows for **extended penalties for assault and battery of healthcare workers**, regardless of specialty or location within a clinical facility. At present, Georgia Code only considers assaults on healthcare

workers in the field or in the Emergency Department setting eligible for extended penalties, but particularly in the past few years with the advent of COVID, **violence against healthcare workers has been escalating in all clinical settings**, and this lack of protection and enforcement is contributing to a **massive attrition of staff and a dangerous environment for patients**.

Read the [Senate Study Committee report recommendations](#) on which HB 46 was based. Here I also discuss the issue with Doug Richards on [11 Alive News](#) (*click below to watch video*):



- **HR 18:** Would allow for a ballot referendum to amend the Georgia Constitution and **allow for an Independent Redistricting Commission** to draw our electoral maps and address the issue of gerrymandering, which leads to non-representative legislatures. (To answer a common question, the reason this is a “House *Resolution*” rather than a “House *Bill*” is because it **would require an amendment to the Georgia Constitution**, and therefore would have to gain a **2/3rds vote** of support in both the House and the Senate in order to pass.)
- **HR 43:** Would create a **study committee to examine the healthcare costs of tobacco smoking in Georgia**. This study committee is a companion piece of another piece of legislation I’m working on, which aims to **raise the state tobacco tax up to the national average**. (Georgia has the [second lowest tobacco tax in the country](#).)





Our government works best when everyone participates, and I **encourage everyone to follow along with the legislation I'm sponsoring** as they move through the machinations of (hopefully) being passed into law. All my bills can be tracked on [my legislator page](#): click "SPONSORED LEGISLATION" to see them all and at what point in the legislative process they are currently.

Further, **if there is legislation you would like me to support or author, contact me** and let's have a conversation!

## LEGISLATIVE AAPI CAUCUS NEWS

This week **members of Georgia's Legislative AAPI Caucus put out a statement** after the horrific [mass shooting in Monterey Park, California](#), which took place on the eve of the Lunar New Year.

Unfortunately, this was [not the only mass shooting](#) this week, and not even the only one where a majority of the victims were members of the AAPI community. In what has become the familiar refrain of a uniquely American phenomenon, **it seems we don't even have time to mourn the first tragedy before learning about the next.**

***We simply cannot talk about public safety and being tough on crime without discussing guns.*** A majority of our constituents are in favor of common sense gun safety measures like universal background checks and waiting periods for firearm purchases, and **the continued inaction of those who value guns more than they value people is inexcusable.**

[I spoke with 11 Alive News](#) on how many members of the AAPI Caucus have been trying to advance gun safety legislation at the behest of our communities for years, and such **public safety bills continue to be a priority for many of us.** *(Click below to watch video)*



**People in this country deserve to feel safe going about their lives.** They deserve to feel safe sending their kids to school, going to the supermarket, taking a walk, driving home from work. And it's not possible to talk about public safety this week without also acknowledging the pain and suffering so many of our community members feel about the **unjust, barbaric death of Tyre Nichols**, and the systems flourishing with little accountability that allow such incidents to happen, disproportionately affecting communities of color, especially Black Americans.

We grieve with Mr. Nichols' family and loved ones, and feel **every level of government should hear their anguish and act**—not just with words but deeds—to reform the systems and practices that enable this to happen over and over and over again.

In the wake of tragedy I did feel it important to represent our communities, reflect on what we've lost and what we've gained, and look towards new beginnings. And so I was honored, along with [Rep. Sam Park](#), to represent Georgia's Legislative AAPI Caucus at **the first ever full-scale Lunar New Year reception at the White House.**

Here are [President Biden's remarks](#) at the event. I especially appreciated his **continued commitment to gun safety legislation**, particularly in [renewing his call for a ban on assault weapons](#). "I did it once as a senator," he told us, "We're going to do it again."

Additionally, I appreciated him and Dr. Biden **ensuring that AAPIs could feel seen, heard, and valued in every space in American life.** To say, in the White House, in a room filled with Asian Americans, "**This is your home,**" was incredibly meaningful, and I am so grateful to the President for [always being an ally to Georgia's AAPI community.](#)



## TEAM AU EVENTS





**Thanks to all our donors** this Thursday, 2022's first **#TeamAu Gold Dome Blood Drive** was a huge success, bringing in 19 units of whole blood—which, when spun down, can yield components that could **save up to 57 patients** in need of blood products!





**Our next #TeamAu Blood Drive will be on MARCH 23rd**, so if you missed out this week, see you then! (We chose the date far out enough so that if you gave at the first blood drive this week, **you will be eligible to give again!** Just eat plenty of green leafy veggies until then! 🥬)

We were busy in session this week but we also had plenty of guests at the office, including **medical students from the [Morehouse School of Medicine](#)** on a legislative advocacy rotation and visiting with the **[Georgia Chapter of the](#)**



**American Academy of Pediatrics**! It was wonderful to talk with them about all the different ways we can take care of our patients, and I know that our future is bright with these **socially conscious doctors-to-be** ready to jump in and care for our patients even outside the four walls of the hospital!



We also hosted a **Town Hall in Johns Creek** Friday evening. **HD 50 is extremely politically engaged**, and we had a wide-ranging discussion that included the FY 2024 budget, health insurance legislation, the Mental Health Parity Act, gun safety bills, and criminal justice reform. Follow [Team Au's social media feeds](#) or make sure you're [subscribed to our mailing list](#) to be the first to hear about **our next Town Hall in a few weeks!**





As always, **please do not hesitate to [reach out to our office](#)** should you need any assistance, would like to drop by to visit the Capitol, or if you have any concerns you'd like me to address on your behalf.

***It is my honor to be your voice in the Georgia House of Representatives.***

**In Service,**

Paid for by Au for Georgia Inc.

5805 State Bridge Road, Suite G238  
Johns Creek, Georgia 30097  
United States

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