

OPENING (WHIP HUGLEY):

Good afternoon, and thank you all for joining us today.

The 2016 Legislative Session proved that transcending the politics of division is how we achieve progress for Georgia families. We worked alongside Republicans in the House, as well as colleagues from both sides of the aisle in the Senate, to pass legislation in support of military families, survivors of sexual assault, and students with disabilities.

We are stronger and safer than we were a year ago. Georgians from every part of our state – even those without Democratic representation – traveled to the Capitol to talk to us about the issues that matter to them. Dedicated advocates armed us with facts and lent us their expertise. Survivors of violence bravely told their stories in public and made the case for urgent action. Without their voices, we would not have been able to fulfill our tremendous responsibility to the people we serve.

As we begin the 2017 session, the Georgia House Democratic Caucus will continue to promote common-sense legislation anchored in the Democratic values of educational opportunity, economic security, and shared responsibility. We will continue to advocate for bills from our “A Promise Kept” initiative in support of military families to ensure that Georgia fulfills its obligation to our service members. New legislation, some of which will be brought forward by new voices to the Caucus, will tackle our challenges with a fresh approach and build upon past successes. Finally, as Democrats we will always remain steadfast in our commitment to solutions for our most vulnerable citizens, and champion legislation to end poverty and inequality. Our agenda remains bold and pragmatic in service of a singular goal: to make life better for families in our state.

THE THREE PILLARS (CHAIR EVANS):

Educational opportunity, economic security, and shared responsibility are core values – and aspirations – shared by all Georgians. As a Caucus, they are the pillars that allow us to offer concrete solutions to our state’s toughest challenges.

The Georgia House Democratic Caucus is offering a slate of ambitious proposals, which strive to make opportunity more accessible to hardworking families, rather than a product of luck or chance.

We are proposing legislation to improve the quality of our public schools and make it easier for families in our state to afford higher education. We know that healthy citizens are essential to a strong economy, and we know that the best solution for Georgia's healthcare crisis is the "Expand Medicaid Now Act." Medicaid Expansion will extend healthcare to 500,000 in our state, including 25,000 veterans and their spouses, and create 56,000 new jobs. Working families who need our help to access out-of-reach health insurance and protect their livelihoods.

Workplace fairness is essential to economic security and to progress. Demanding pay equity for women, ensuring all workers earn a fair wage, and protecting job applicants from discriminatory hiring practices are essential components of our proposals for creating a stronger workforce.

No matter where you live, educational opportunity, economic security, and shared responsibility are the cornerstone of healthy families and a thriving state.

KEY LEGISLATION:

CHAIR EVANS:

I would like to welcome Representatives Sheila Jones and Brenda Lopez to highlight two key proposals to expand educational opportunity.

Educational Opportunity

Representative Sheila Jones: Student Online Personal Info Protection Act

I am proud to sponsor the Student Online Personal Information Protection Act, along with co-sponsors Representatives Valencia Stovall and Shelia Clark Nelson. This legislation would prohibit on-line website operators from targeting advertising to students or their guardians, as well as prevent them from using personal information to create an online profile of a K-12 student.

Most importantly, it makes it a crime for these companies to sell a child's personal information. The Internet has provided students with remarkable opportunities to enrich their learning experience, but that access has increased their vulnerability. It is our goal to ensure that every child has a chance to learn without being targeted for profit.

Representative Brenda Lopez: “College Completion Access Act”

A college education is increasingly important for working Georgians. Approximately 60% of jobs in Georgia will require some form of postsecondary education by 2020. But too many hard-working students who deserve to receive financial assistance to attend college are barred from access because of their age. I am thrilled to introduce the College Completion Access Act with co-sponsor Representative Keisha Waites. The bill will eliminate the current bar on eligibility for HOPE Scholarship applicants who are more than seven years removed from high school, which would broaden access to the University System of Georgia for non-traditional students.

Students should not be penalized because they had to care for family or enter the workforce immediately after high school, or because they are striving for a better job and better wages in a rapidly changing economy.

CHAIR EVANS:

Representatives Dar'Shun Kendrick and William Boddie will outline key legislation promoting economic security.

Economic Security

Representative Dar'Shun Kendrick: Angel Investor Act

Small businesses are the backbone of Georgia's economy. This session, I offer the Angel Investor Act, which will open the door for a wider range of investment by creating a new investor class eligible for tax credits. To qualify for the tax credit, the investment must be made in a small, Georgia-grown business engaged in an emerging technology-based industry. I am thrilled to work with co-sponsor Representative Craig Gordon to help more small business owners get the capital they need to grow and thrive.

Representative William Boddie: The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act

No woman in Georgia should be afraid that starting a family could lead to her losing her job. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act would require employers in Georgia to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace for pregnant individuals, and it prohibits businesses from penalizing an employee for becoming pregnant or denying someone a job because she is pregnant. The bill also allows pregnant workers to take action if they are discriminated against. This is common-sense legislation essential to helping women achieve basic fairness in the workplace, and I am proud to stand alongside Representatives Park Cannon and Erica Thomas as we work towards helping Georgia women achieve economic security.

CHAIR EVANS:

Representatives James Beverly and David Dreyer will highlight two initiatives on shared responsibility.

Shared Responsibility

Representative James Beverly: Domestic Violence Helping Hands Act

One in four American women will experience domestic violence at some point in her lifetime, and men are not immune to domestic abuse. In Georgia alone, at least [1,400 Georgians](#) lost their lives between 2003 and 2014 because of domestic violence. It is within our power as elected officials to prevent these tragedies and provide victims with a path to remove themselves from a dangerous relationship. The Domestic Violence Helping Hands Act, which I will introduce with co-sponsors Representatives Doreen Carter and Stacey Evans, would require the Georgia Secretary of State post free Internet-based training and resources on recognizing domestic violence and abuse to hairdressers, barbers, cosmetologists, and nail technicians when they obtain and renew their licenses. This legislation will give women and men who see their clients on a regular basis the tools they need to identify the signs of domestic violence, and we will help more Georgians receive the help they need, and hopefully, save lives.

Representative David Dreyer: Georgia Voters' Bill of Rights

Right now in Georgia, voting is far too difficult for many communities -- including seniors, students, people of color, persons with disabilities, and low-income Georgians. The General Assembly has an obligation to make it more efficient for voters to exercise their franchise. The Georgia Voters' Bill of Rights will make it easier for eligible citizens to make their voices heard during every election. The bill will require:

- 1) Allow registered voters to change their address and vote on Election Day.
- 2) Require that counties make voting precincts available within 25 miles of every voter.
- 3) Require that early voting locations must be geographically distributed throughout the county.
- 4) Create automatic voter registration when obtaining a driver's license or other interaction with a state agency, or while registering for classes at a public university or college.
- 5) Require that precincts cannot be moved or closed within 90 days of an election except in limited circumstances.

My co-sponsors Representatives Sandra Scott, Carl Gilliard and I, are committed to ending the erosion of voting rights in our state. It is time for Georgia to make it easier, rather than harder, to vote.

CHAIR EVANS:

Representatives Al Williams and Gloria Frazier will now discuss our “A Promise Kept” initiative.

REPRESENTATIVE AL WILLIAMS: “A PROMISE KEPT”

Georgia military families are essential to our state. Servicemen and women work on our bases, their spouses enter the local workforce, and their children attend our public schools. In fact, over 105,000 service members and civilian support staff in Georgia draw their paychecks from the United States military. Together with their families, our military generates \$21 billion annually for communities across the state. Supporting these families is not just a moral imperative, it prevents our bases from ending up on the chopping block in the future, threatening the economic engines of communities in every part of Georgia.

Last year, our Caucus was proud to spearhead the passage of three bipartisan bills in support of military families, and this year we will continue those efforts with two new pieces of legislation to continue to keep our promise to our military families.

Representative Al Williams: The Military Spouses Employment Act

This session, I will introduce the Military Spouses Employment Act with co-sponsors Representatives Scott Holcomb and Carolyn Hugley. It would require that the Georgia Department of Education create and adopt a simpler process to help military spouses qualify for temporary teaching licenses, teaching licenses by endorsement, or expedited teaching licenses. Most families in Georgia rely on two incomes, and this common-sense bill will make it easier for the families who have moved her to fulfill their duty without worrying about making ends meet.

Representative Gloria Frazier: “Credit for Service” Resolution

Service members take on a diverse range of skills and responsibilities equivalent to, and sometimes greater than, what traditional students learn in technical college. But burdensome regulations often prevent them from getting the college credit and jobs they have earned. The Credit for Service resolution, which I am proud to introduce with lead sponsor Representative Darrel Ealum and fellow co-sponsor Dexter Sharper, would urge the University System of Georgia and Technical College System of Georgia to create standards that will allow separating service members to translate their military training and experience into academic credit. It is our hope that this legislation will make it easier for women and men in the military to pursue higher education and transition in to the civilian workforce.

CLOSING (LEADER ABRAMS):

Georgia is a vibrant state with a bright future, but our responsibility is to ensure that we succeed together – leaving no Georgian behind. Thus, we begin every legislative session by inviting the public to hear more about our ideas, and to share their thoughts on how we can build a stronger future for all of us. All politics is local, and in this new political era, the engagement of every voice becomes vital and necessary.

In a time where difference has been used as a wedge and opportunity seems to accrue only to billionaires, Georgia has the chance to leverage our full capacity to be a beacon for American values. Together, we can rebut the misogynistic rhetoric and bigoted invective from Washington with concrete policy proposals that will reject the notion that any Georgian can be treated as a second-class citizen.

The Georgia House Democratic Caucus stands at the forefront of a permanent campaign to reclaim American values: that we are a great nation that seeks to do good, that we are a tolerant society that welcomes diversity and that we are not a haven for the wealthy but we are a home for every person willing to dream and work hard. We will confront nationalism with patriotism, bigotry with democracy. And we will win.

In the coming weeks, I invite Georgians from every corner of our state to engage with your elected officials on the issues that matter to you. The Georgia House Democratic Caucus has launched georgiaresists.com, a mobilization site where Georgians can learn about upcoming legislation, learn how to advocate to your legislators here at the Capitol, and how to reach your members of Congress to make sure your voice is heard in Washington.

Showing up and speaking out is how we protect Georgia. Staying informed and separating fact from fiction is how we arm ourselves against any effort, at any level of government, to deny Georgians access to educational opportunity and economic security and how we preserve our shared responsibility for the state and nation we deserve.

Democrats see government as a partner, not the enemy, but our government must respond to our needs. As your House Democratic Caucus, we stand ready to stand up for Georgians.