

FINE GEDDIE

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

THE FINE GEDDIE REPORT

2019 REGULAR SESSION · PRE-SESSION OUTLOOK · FEBRUARY 1, 2019

A NEW QUADRENNIUM IS UNDERWAY

Now that the inaugural ceremonies have concluded and our office holders have settled in, we want to give you a pre-session report on a few agenda items. The 2019 Regular Session will convene on March 5 and will conclude by June 17.

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey is popular and a strong decision maker. Her administration is robust and stable. The key players in the Ivey Administration are in place for the new quadrennium, with the exception of Steve Pelham as Chief of Staff. Pelham has been named Chief of Staff for Auburn University President Steve Leath and announced his move the day after the inauguration. Former Congressman Jo Bonner has replaced Pelham as the Governor's new Chief of Staff. Pelham was an essential and effective confidant to Ivey and did a first-class job throughout his tenure. Jo Bonner's background (as a former Alabama Congressman for the 1st District) and long-standing friendship with Ivey should make for a seamless transition. He previously served as Senior Advisor to the Governor and his move was no surprise to those familiar with the administration.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh (R—Anniston) and Senate Majority Leader Greg Reed (R—Jasper) bring consistency to the State Senate and the Senate committee structure brought few surprises. Senator Jabo Waggoner (R—Vestavia) will continue at the helm of the Senate Rules Committee. Note that Alabama has two budgets: the Education Trust Fund and the General Fund. Senator Arthur Orr (R—Decatur) will continue as Chairman of the Senate Finance and Taxation Committee on the Education Trust Fund. Senator Greg Albritton (R—Atmore) is the newly-appointed Chairman of the Senate General Fund. While Albritton is a second-term state senator, he is now the most senior Republican member of the Mobile delegation and steps into the chairmanship previously held by retired Senator Trip Pittman (R—Montrose). Senator Bobby Singleton (D—Greensboro) is the Senate Minority Leader.

Speaker Mac McCutcheon (R—Monrovia) begins his first full term as Speaker of the House with few leadership changes among his team. Former Representative Mark Tuggle has been named his new Chief of Staff and his relationship with colleagues should provide the Speaker with closer communication with his members. Chairmen Bill Poole (R—Tuscaloosa) and Steve Clouse (R—Ozark) are the House Ways and Means Committees on Education and the General Fund, respectively. Representative Mike Jones (R—Andalusia) is the House Rules Chairman. Representatives Nathaniel Ledbetter

(R—Rainsville) and Anthony Daniels (D—Huntsville) are the House Majority and Minority Leaders, respectively.

ISSUES TO WATCH

The difficult work begins with the Governor's infrastructure priority. Alabama's Road & Bridge Program has lagged for the past two decades and Gov. Ivey has set her sights on fixing it. Rep. Bill Poole of Tuscaloosa will lead the effort with legislation to add additional taxes to gasoline and diesel to fund a state highway and bridge program as well as revenue sharing for county and municipal projects. Department of Transportation Director John Cooper has been working on the plan for several years to solidify stakeholders' support for infrastructure funding including a plan to deepen the channel for the Port of Mobile.

At present, Gov. Ivey has been meeting with various groups in an effort to secure early support for the legislative package. These meetings are ongoing. Ivey has made it clear that transportation infrastructure is her primary priority during the session and she aims to tackle this legislative issue before all others until it is successfully resolved.

Once complete, other issues will be prioritized. Those could include a plan for prison construction and personnel issues, a renewed emphasis on funding for workforce development and early childhood education. Other items could also include school security, school choice, ethics reform and privatizing the sale of alcoholic beverages.

We predict Gov. Ivey will be thorough and her priorities will be well-planned and executed. Positive revenue forecasts should give the budget committee chairs more flexibility in crafting the Education and General Fund budgets for 2020.

The Alabama Legislature convened for the Organizational Session on January 8 – 9 during which time the standing committees for both the House and Senate were slated. Attached is a complete list of committee assignments. ■