

# FINE GEDDIE

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

## THE FINE GEDDIE REPORT 2021 REGULAR SESSION PREVIEW JANUARY 28, 2021

### *ALABAMA LEGISLATURE TO CONVENE ON FEBRUARY 2*

The 2021 Regular Legislative Session will commence at noon on Tuesday, February 2, though logistics and procedures have been altered substantially due to COVID-19. An evolving and dynamic situation, it remains to be seen if lawmakers will begin the 15-week session with two long work weeks followed by a short Covid-19 recess as has been discussed. Nevertheless, consensus is emerging about initial priorities:

- **Renewing economic development incentives** – The expired Alabama Jobs Act had provided tax credits and rebates to new industries, and the expired Growing Alabama Act had provided tax credits for donations to economic development organizations.
- **COVID-19 liability protection** – Sen. Arthur Orr (R—Decatur) has prefiled SB30, which would provide broad civil immunity to businesses, healthcare providers, government entities and others against claims of coronavirus exposure, with extra protection for healthcare providers.
- **CARES Act tax relief** – Multiple bills have been introduced already to codify Gov. Kay Ivey’s executive order granting tax exemptions to businesses and individuals who received benefits such as stimulus payments and Paycheck Protection Program relief.

Beyond the budgets, there is no shortage of other issues on the table, especially since last year’s virus-truncated session left so much unfinished business. Sen. Tim Melson, M.D., (R—Florence) has pre-filed a proposal for a comprehensive **medical marijuana** program. A similar bill passed the Senate last year before the session’s premature halt. The Governor’s Study Group on **Gambling** Policy said the state could reap as much as \$700 million a year from a lottery, casino gaming and sports betting, and there is sentiment that it is time for Alabama to address the issue. The pandemic has spurred interest in revamping the marketplace for **alcoholic beverages**, and Rep. Gil Isbell (R—Gadsden) prefiled HB101 to allow delivery of alcoholic beverages. Legislation to limit the power of the State Health Officer and the Governor to order a quarantine and put the Health Department under the authority of the governor is expected. Following the census, legislative districts must be redrawn this year, but that is likely a subject of a special legislative session.

At present, the Senate will be operating without three members of the 35-member body. Special elections have been set to fill two vacancies. Sen. Cam Ward (R—Alabaster) stepped down to take the helm at the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles, and Sen. David Burkette (D—Montgomery) resigned. In addition, Sen. Priscilla Dunn (D—Bessemer) continues to be on medical leave.

Republicans are planning leadership changes resulting from vacancies and the decision of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh (R—Anniston) to step down from his post. The GOP caucus has nominated Majority Leader Greg Reed (R—Jasper) to succeed Marsh, with Sen. Clay Scofield (R—Guntersville) tapped as the next majority leader. The following Senate committee changes are also expected: Sen. Tom Whatley (R—Auburn) to chair the Judiciary Committee, Sen. Clyde Chambliss (R—Prattville) to chair the Confirmations Committee, and Sen. Larry Stutts (R—Tuscumbia) to chair the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee.

Fewer changes are expected in the 105-seat House, which will welcome two new members who won special elections since the Legislature adjourned in May: Rep. Russell Bedsole (R—Alabaster) and Rep. Ben Robbins (R—Talladega). Another special election has been set to fill the vacancy created when Rep. Matt Fridy (R—Montevallo) was elected to the Alabama Court of Civil of Appeals.