

Chapter 3

Georgia's Legislative Branch

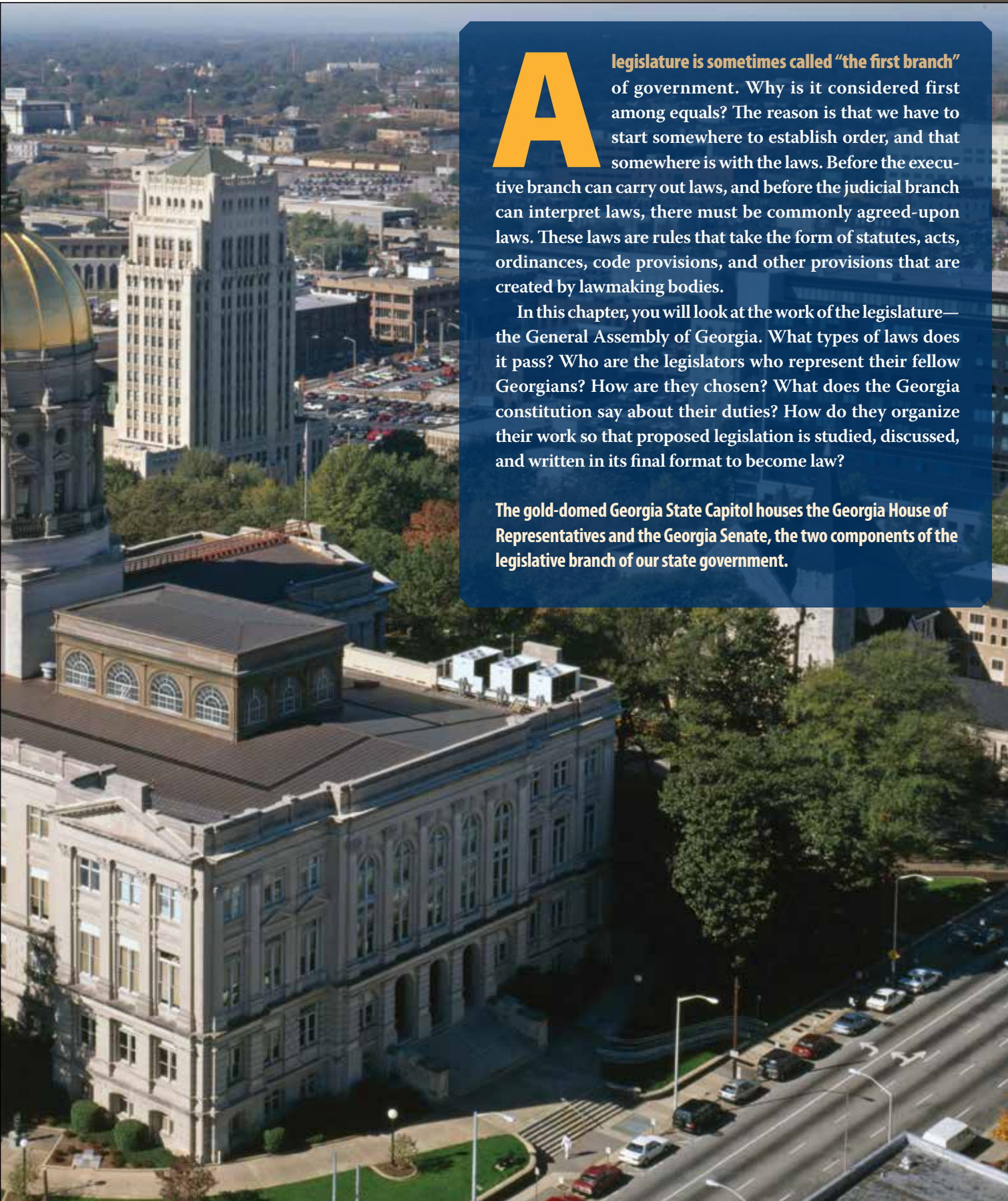
Chapter Preview

TERMS

bicameral, constituent, census, apportionment, redistrict, quorum, caucus, bill, amend, treaty, monopoly, veto, appropriate, budget, revenue, fiscal year, line item veto

PEOPLE

speaker of the House,
president of the Senate



A legislature is sometimes called “the first branch” of government. Why is it considered first among equals? The reason is that we have to start somewhere to establish order, and that somewhere is with the laws. Before the executive branch can carry out laws, and before the judicial branch can interpret laws, there must be commonly agreed-upon laws. These laws are rules that take the form of statutes, acts, ordinances, code provisions, and other provisions that are created by lawmaking bodies.

In this chapter, you will look at the work of the legislature—the General Assembly of Georgia. What types of laws does it pass? Who are the legislators who represent their fellow Georgians? How are they chosen? What does the Georgia constitution say about their duties? How do they organize their work so that proposed legislation is studied, discussed, and written in its final format to become law?

The gold-domed Georgia State Capitol houses the Georgia House of Representatives and the Georgia Senate, the two components of the legislative branch of our state government.

Section 1

Membership of the General Assembly

As you read, look for

- the qualifications for members of the General Assembly,
- how representation in the Georgia House of Representatives and Senate is determined,
- terms: **bicameral, constituent, census, apportionment, redistrict.**



Above: To serve in the Georgia House of Representatives, a candidate must be at least 21 years of age, a U.S. citizen, a resident of Georgia for two years, and a resident of his or her district for at least a year. Rep. Bob Bryant of Garden City, a Democrat, represents the 160th House District.

The General Assembly is the lawmaking body for the state of Georgia. It was formed in 1777 and thus is older than the United States Congress. Today, Georgia has a **bicameral** (two-house) body, consisting of a House of Representatives and a Senate. The House of Representatives has 180 members; the Senate has 56 members.

Qualifications for Legislators

At the time of the election, a legislator must be at least twenty-five years old to serve in Georgia's Senate. A young person who has not yet graduated from college can serve in Georgia's House of Representatives. The minimum age for serving in the House is twenty-one.

Each legislator must be a U.S. citizen and a citizen of Georgia for at least two years. Each must also have been a legal resident in the district he or she represents for at least one year. Legislators receive a modest salary, as well as reimbursement for expenses they incur while working on legislative matters.

House members and senators serve two-year terms of office. There is no limit on the number of terms a legislator can serve. The entire membership of each body is up for election or reelection at the same time. That election takes place in November of even-numbered years.



Left: Requirements for candidates to the Georgia Senate are the same as those for the House, except that the minimum age is 25. **Above:** Sen. Ross Tolleson of Perry, a Republican, represents the 20th District and is chairman of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee.

Something Extra!

Most of the state's U.S. senators and governors have served in the General Assembly before seeking higher office.

Equal Representation and Apportionment

Each seat of the Georgia House represents about the same number of constituents. The same is true for the Senate. (A **constituent** is a person in a legislator's district.) The idea is that persons living in all parts of the state should have an equal voice in the lawmaking process. Lines drawn for each election district do not necessarily follow county or city boundaries. Some districts are much larger in land area than others. Seats in the General Assembly represent *people*, not land characteristics such as mountain ranges, coastal regions, or rivers.

Something Extra!

Using Georgia's population of 9,687,653 from the 2010 census, each member of the Georgia House represents 53,820 constituents. Each member of the Georgia Senate represents 172,994 constituents.

Below: The Georgia General Assembly does not meet year round as the United States Congress does. Sessions are limited by law to 40 days, from early January to late March. Legislators receive a small salary, and are reimbursed for any expenses related to their legislative duties.

Deciding how many constituents are represented in each district is handled through a mathematical step called **apportionment**. Here is how it works: For the Georgia Senate, the Georgia population is divided by the number of seats (56). The resulting answer is the number of Georgians each senator will represent. For the House of Representatives, the population total is divided by 180 to determine the number of constituents each house member will represent.

The state's population is determined by the **census** (the official count of the population) of the United States, which is conducted every ten years (2010, 2020, and so on). People move from place to place over time. For example, a county in rural middle Georgia may have lost population because some of its residents moved to a nearby county where a manufacturing plant opened up new jobs. Therefore, every ten years the Georgia legislature **redistricts**, that is, it redraws the boundaries of the voting districts to account for population changes. Obviously the boundary lines for the senate districts will be different from the boundaries for the house districts. Do you see why?

At the same time that the legislature reapportions the election districts for the Georgia General Assembly, it also redraws the voting districts for Georgia's seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Legislative Sessions

The Georgia General Assembly is a part-time legislature. It was designed to be a citizen-assembly, with its members holding other jobs and returning to their home communities after the session ends. A session (meeting to conduct business) of the General Assembly is limited to 40 days. It begins on the second Monday in January and ends sometime around the end of March.





Left: The stairs and hallways of the Georgia State Capitol bustle with activity while the legislature is in session. **Above:** The Warner Robins Little League softball team, winners of the 2009 Little League World Series, are given a tour of the Capitol. They were honored in the state Senate for their accomplishment.

This may be confusing. How can the General Assembly convene (begin its work) in January, adjourn (formally end its work) three months later, and still call it a 40-day session? The answer is that the Georgia constitution allows the legislature to “adjourn any regular session to such later date as it may fix for reconvening.” For example, the legislature usually begins its session, meets for at least five days, and then takes a recess for a week so that its members can study the proposed budget and be prepared to vote on it when they come back into session. Neither the House nor the Senate may adjourn during a regular session for more than three days at a time without coordinating with the other chamber.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define: bicameral, constituent, apportionment.
2. What are the two houses of the Georgia General Assembly?
3. Why is it important for voting districts to be equal in population?

Something Extra!

As a result of Georgia’s increased population, reflected in the 2010 census, the state has qualified for an additional member of the United States House of Representatives, bringing the total to 14.

Section 2

The Organization of the General Assembly



Above: David Ralston was elected to be speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives in 2010. Prior to his first election to the House in 2002, he had served as a state senator. He represents District 7.

As you read, look for

- the leaders of the Georgia House and Senate and their roles,
- the purpose of the committee system,
- terms: **quorum**, **caucus**, **bill**.

For the members of Georgia's Senate and House of Representatives to do their jobs properly, there must be some form of organization. The presiding officer for the House of Representatives is the *speaker of the House*, who is chosen by the members of that chamber. The speaker is a regularly elected member, and the duties of speaker are in addition to his or her role as a representative.

The leader of the Georgia Senate is the lieutenant governor. The Georgia constitution gives the lieutenant governor the title of *president of the Senate*. Because the lieutenant governor is elected by Georgia voters from across the state, he or she is an officer of the Senate, not a voting member.

Responsibilities of the Presiding Officers

The chief responsibility of these two officers is to preside over the meetings of their respective chambers. They do have other powers set out in Senate rules and House rules. For example, presiding officers have the power to

- make members attend sessions in order to have a **quorum** (the number of members—a majority—who must be present in order to conduct business),
- control debate by deciding which member has the “right to the floor” (the privilege of speaking) at any given time,
- decide on the order of business to be taken up,
- refer proposed legislation to committees,
- rule out proposed amendments that do not apply to the subject of the legislation, and
- order a roll call vote on any issue.

After Georgia's governor, the speaker of the House and the lieutenant governor are generally considered to be the two most powerful state leaders. Depending upon the actions and preferences of these two officers, legislation is either moved along smoothly or stopped in its tracks.

Additional Leaders

Each chamber also elects one of its own members to serve in the absence of its presiding officer. The Senate selects a *president pro tempore* (which means "for the time being"). This person acts as president of the Senate in case of the temporary disability of the lieutenant governor. If the lieutenant governor dies, resigns, or is permanently disabled, the president pro tempore steps in and presides over the Senate. If the lieutenant governor must, for whatever reason, assume the role of governor, the post of Senate president is filled by the president pro tempore.

Succession is slightly different in the House of Representatives. The House elects a *speaker pro tempore*. That person becomes speaker in the event of the death, resignation, or permanent disability of the speaker. The speaker pro tempore serves until a new speaker is elected by the members.

In both houses of the legislature, members of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party establish their own internal party organizations. A group of political party members (House Democrats, for example) is called a **caucus**. A caucus meets regularly to keep its members informed and in agreement on important upcoming votes. Each caucus selects a party leader, a caucus chair, and a party whip. The job of the party whip is to stay in contact with party members and line up their votes on issues before the chamber. For the political party (Republican or Democratic) that holds the greatest number of seats, these officers are designated as *majority leader* and *majority whip*. The other party's officers have the titles of *minority leader* and *minority whip*.

Legislative Committees

In a typical session of the General Assembly, as many as 1,200 **bills** (proposed laws) are introduced in the House and the Senate. Only about one-third of these are actually passed and signed into law. Suppose that all 56 senators and 180 House members had to read those bills, line-by-line, and to study the advantages and disadvantages of each. It would take considerably longer than the 40 days allowed for the session.

The committee system divides the work load and saves time. Members become knowledgeable about the subject matter of their committees and then share their evaluation of and recommendations for bills with the larger group of lawmakers. For example, a retired nurse serving on the House Health and Human Services Committee can share knowledge and experience on proposed legislation regarding immunizations.



Above: Sen. Tommie Williams was elected president pro tempore in 2009. Prior to that, he was the Senate majority leader, having first been elected to the Georgia Senate in 1998.

Something Extra!

In each house of the General Assembly, the governor may name an *administrative floor leader*, who introduces legislation favored by the governor.



Above: Rep. Jay Roberts, chairman of the House Transportation Committee, discusses pending legislation with Rep. Tom McCall, chairman of the House Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee. Rep. Roberts represents the 154th District, and Rep. McCall represents the 30th District.

Something Extra!

The Georgia House of Representatives has 36 standing committees.
The Senate has 26.

Committee Chairpersons

Because the real work of the General Assembly gets done in the legislative committees, committee chairpersons are especially powerful. They decide when committees will meet, when bills will be “taken up” (considered), and when (or if) a vote will be taken. In the House of Representatives, committee chairpersons are appointed by the speaker. In the Senate, they are appointed by the lieutenant governor.

Types of Committees

Some committees are called *standing committees* because they are permanent. They “stand” from one session to the next. Both the House and the Senate

have standing committees. These include the Appropriations Committee, which works on the budget; the Higher Education Committee, which handles legislation concerning the University System of Georgia and other colleges and universities; and the Interstate Cooperation Committee, which deals with issues concerning Georgia’s relations with other states.

Other committees are considered to be temporary, or *ad hoc* (created for a specific purpose). For example, members on an *interim study committee* work on a specific issue before the start of the January session. The study committee sometimes hears from citizen groups who are interested in the particular issue. As an example, the Senate created an interim committee to study whether it was worthwhile to make biodiesel fuels from Georgia agricultural crops. A *joint committee* is made up of members of both the House and the Senate. A *conference committee* is appointed when the House and the Senate pass different versions of a bill. Three senators and three representatives meet and work out the differences between the two versions. The compromise bill must be passed by both houses for it to become law.

Each senator and representative serves on several committees. The larger committees are divided into subcommittees. For example, the Transportation Committee of the House of Representatives has its members serving on subcommittees relating to state highways, interstate highways, railways, aviation, and ports.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define: quorum, caucus, bill.
2. What is a standing committee?
3. Why is the committee system important?

Of Special Interest

Become a Page in the Georgia General Assembly

Historically, a *page* is a young person who serves as an attendant to someone of royalty or nobility. Today, you may serve as a page, or assistant, for your representative in the Georgia General Assembly. The Page Program gives young people a first-hand look at the legislative process as they spend a day working in the General Assembly during the session. Pages carry messages to and from legislators, their staffs, and others so that the lawmakers do not have to leave the floor during debates. They distribute

documents and perform general tasks. Pages must be at least twelve years old.

If you are interested, talk to your teacher or principal. Then contact your state senator or the House member who represents your district in the General Assembly and ask for a page application.

Below: A group of pages waits outside the chamber of the Georgia House of Representatives. Pages run errands and provide other services to their respective legislators.



Section 3

The Lawmaking Process

As you read, look for

- types of legislation that the General Assembly may address,
- how a bill becomes law,
- terms: **amend, treaty, monopoly, veto, appropriate, budget, revenue, fiscal year, line item veto.**



Above: Before voting on legislation, state representatives and senators must familiarize themselves with the contents, and consider the impact, of the bills before them.

All legislation starts as an idea. Perhaps it is a problem to be solved, or an error to be corrected, or a state service to be updated or expanded. The idea is drafted (put into writing) and prepared as a bill.

Types of Legislation

The Georgia General Assembly can pass laws on any issue not forbidden by the U.S. Constitution. It can **amend** (change or make an addition to) state laws or do away with them. The General Assembly can pass legislation on such issues as state services (such as education or consumer protection), criminal matters, contracts, raising and spending money, land use and natural resources conservation, real and personal property, and the organization and operation of local government (counties, cities, and towns).

The Georgia constitution states that the subject content of a bill must be single-purpose. That is, the bill must deal with only one subject. Bills to raise money or spend money must be first introduced in the House of Representatives before going to the Senate.

In addition to acting upon bills, the General Assembly also passes resolutions. Resolutions are not meant to be binding legal statements. Instead, they express legislative opinion. For example, the General Assembly may pass a resolution to honor a Georgian who has accomplished something notable or to thank a civic volunteer for outstanding community service. Resolutions have also been passed to honor sports teams and congratulate them on their winning records. In most cases, resolutions do not require the signature of the governor.

There are some issues that cannot be addressed by the General Assembly. The U.S. Constitution forbids states from entering into **treaties** (formal agreements between two or more nations). Only the federal government may negotiate treaties. The General Assembly may not pass laws that limit business competition or create monopolies. A **monopoly** is the exclusive ownership or control of a product or an industry by one company or group. A monopoly often results in higher prices. An example would be the sale of gasoline. The General Assembly cannot pass a law restricting the sale of gasoline by just one oil company or just one brand of gasoline.

How a Bill Becomes Law

Each bill introduced in the General Assembly is assigned a number. If the bill originates in the House of Representatives, its number begins with “HB.” If it begins in the Senate, it will have the prefix “SB.” As an example, HB 228 is a House bill; SB 196 is a Senate bill. Each bill must have a title. The “title” spells out the subject of the bill and briefly summarizes its purpose.

Let’s look at the path a bill introduced in the House of Representatives takes.

Something Extra!

Georgia’s constitution requires that the title of each bill be read three times on three separate days in each house.

Bills can originate in either the Senate or the House of Representatives (below); however, all bills must pass both chambers, and in identical form.



Assignment to Committee

The clerk of the House of Representatives assigns a number to each bill when it arrives. We'll call this bill HB 160. HB 160 is the Super Speeder Law which sets up additional fines for "super speeders," drivers who greatly exceed the speed limit. Each representative receives a copy of the bill.

When HB 160 is introduced in the House, it has its first "reading." After the clerk reads aloud the title of the bill, the speaker of the House assigns the bill to a committee (usually a standing committee). On the next legislative day, the bill has its second reading.



Above: Committee chairpersons exercise great influence over the progress of bills through the legislature. Rep. Amos Anderson, left, is chairman of the Science and Technology Committee, and Rep. Roger Williams, right, is chairman of the Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee.

Committee Action

Once the committee receives HB 160, the chairperson decides when—or whether—to consider it. The chair may assign the bill to a subcommittee if appropriate. Often, the committee schedules public hearings on the bill, either before the subcommittee or the full committee. Interested citizens and groups are allowed to speak at these hearings, either in favor of or in opposition to HB 160. The committee may invite experts or witnesses to testify and may ask the legislative research office for records or reports about the bill. Lobbyists (those who are paid to represent an

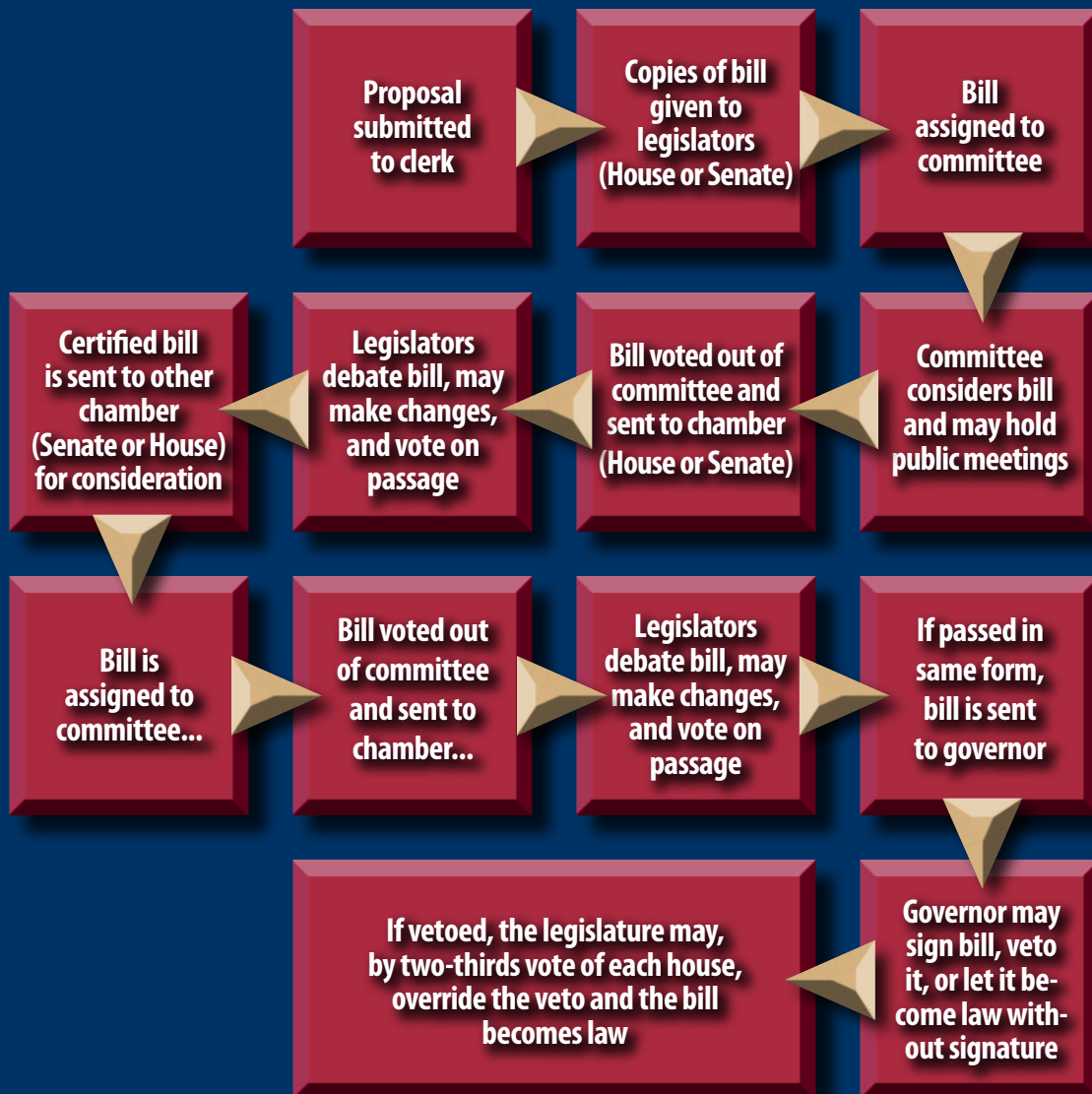
interest group) often meet informally with committee members to present their group's recommendations on the bill.

After the committee members study the bill and hear from all interested parties, the chairperson calls for a vote on the bill. The committee has several options.

- It can recommend that the House "do pass" the bill in its original form (with no changes).
- It can recommend that the House "do pass" the bill with changes (amendments made by the committee).
- It can recommend that the House "do pass" a substitute bill written by the committee.
- It can vote the bill out of committee with no recommendation.
- It can recommend that the House "do not pass" the bill (an "unfavorable" recommendation).
- It can hold the bill and take no action.

If the committee votes "do not pass," the bill is considered dead, at least for that session. If the committee holds the bill, it is "killed" unless the whole House votes otherwise.

Figure 5 How a Bill Becomes Law



House Action

If the committee report is favorable (first three options), HB 160 is returned to the House and is placed on the general calendar. (A *calendar* is a daily listing of bills that are ready to be considered by the full House.) Debate on HB 160 begins when the speaker calls for the third reading. Members of the House take turns speaking, trying to convince the other representatives to support or defeat HB 160. Members may offer amendments to the bill. Each amendment must be voted upon before the actual vote on the entire bill is held.



Above: Members of the House of Representatives receive a Daily Report, listing the current status of the bills up for consideration, and the schedule for future action.

Something Extra!

Unless otherwise stated, new laws go into effect (become enforceable) on July 1.

The speaker will formally close debate and tell the representatives to cast their votes. This may be done electronically, with each lawmaker pressing a “yes” or “no” button on his or her desk. A *roll call* vote records in sequence how each legislator voted. On minor issues, a voice vote or a show of hands is all that is needed. In those instances, no individual’s vote is recorded.

In order to pass, a bill must receive the approval of a majority of the membership of the chamber. In the House of Representatives, this number would be 91.

Senate Action

Let’s assume that HB 160 passes in the House of Representatives, with few amendments. It is closer to becoming a law, but it must pass both houses of the General Assembly in exactly the same form. HB 160 is *engrossed* (certified) by the House and sent to the Senate, where a similar process takes place.

The secretary of the Senate receives the bill, and it goes through its first reading. The president of the Senate (the lieutenant governor) assigns it to a Senate committee. Committee hearings and public testimony begin again. HB 160 goes through a second reading. The Senate committee may decide to recommend do pass, do pass with changes, do not pass, or to not pass the bill out to the full Senate (to hold the bill).

Let’s assume that HB 160 makes it to the Senate floor for debate, and that a majority of the senators vote to pass it. During the debate, the senators made a number of changes to HB 160, making it a different bill from the one that the House passed. However, each house of the General Assembly must pass the bill in the exact same form for it to become law.

The House must have the chance to review the changes made by the Senate. If the House approves the changes and agrees to the new version of the bill, HB 160 is sent to the governor. If the House disagrees with the Senate amendments, the bill is assigned to a conference committee composed of three House and three Senate members. The committee resolves the differences between the two bills and sends the compromise bill to both chambers for a vote. If both houses pass the final version of the bill, HB 160 is sent to the governor.

Action by the Governor

Sending HB 160 to the governor is usually the last step in the bill’s journey. If the governor approves HB 160 and signs it, the bill becomes law. It receives a new number, such as Act 160, and becomes part of the *Official Code of Georgia Annotated*. On January 1, 2010, HB 160 became Georgia’s Super Speeder Law.

If the governor does not agree with the bill, the governor can **veto** (reject) it. The bill is dead unless the General Assembly votes to override the governor's veto. To override a veto requires the vote of two-thirds of the members of each chamber of the General Assembly. The bill would become law without the governor's signature. This does not happen very often.

The governor can also take no action on the bill. In that case, the bill becomes law automatically without the governor's signature.

A Special Category of Legislation: The State Budget

Each year the General Assembly **appropriates** (sets aside for a specific purpose) the money needed to operate all departments and agencies of state government. The State of Georgia is required to maintain a balanced budget. (A **budget** is a plan for receiving and spending money.) This means that the state cannot spend more than it takes in through **revenue** (income from taxes and fees) in a fiscal year. The **fiscal year** (the budgetary spending year) for Georgia begins July 1 and ends June 30.

The governor submits a budget message and financial report to the General Assembly after it convenes in January. In the message, the governor recommends spending priorities. The financial report provides revenue estimates for the coming year. The governor also submits a draft of a general appropriations bill for the legislators to consider.

Once it is passed, the general appropriations bill goes to the governor, who can sign the entire bill or use the **line item veto**. The line item veto allows the governor to veto specific spending proposals that he or she considers to be wasteful without vetoing the entire appropriations bill.



Above: The final act in the passage of a bill is the signature of the governor. This is frequently done in the form of a ceremony with interested parties and legislators in attendance.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define: amend, veto, appropriate, budget.
2. What actions may a governor take on a bill that has been passed by the General Assembly?
3. Why do you think a bill must be read three times in each chamber of the General Assembly?

Of Special Interest

Funding Georgia's Government

One very important concern of the legislature is to make certain that the state has enough money to operate. The government needs revenue to fund everything from public school classrooms to highway construction and maintenance. Most of Georgia's revenue comes from taxes. Taxes are levied on income, property, and most purchased items.

The *individual income tax* is based on Georgians' income from salaries and investments. The individual income tax is Georgia's leading revenue source. It brings in about 41 percent of the state's total

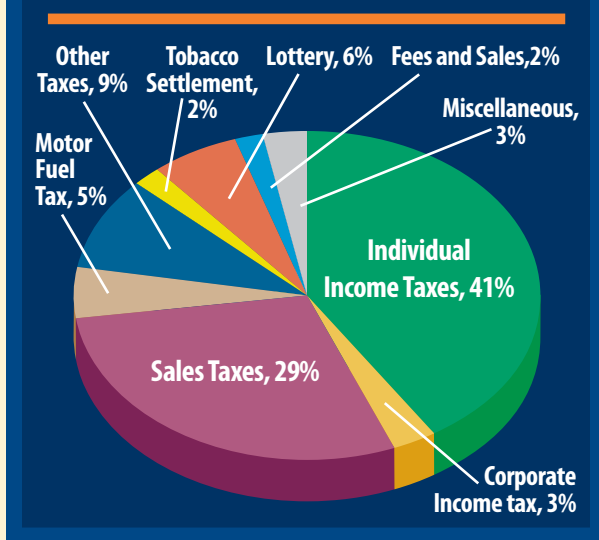
revenue. Corporations operating in Georgia pay a *corporate income tax* on their profits.

Georgians also pay a *general sales tax* on items bought at retail stores. Most food items and prescription drugs are exempted from (are not charged) the state sales tax. Georgia's sales tax rate is 4 per-

Below: This symbolic check for \$853 million, presented to the Georgia Department of Revenue by groups representing the "Georgia Tourism Industry," demonstrates the importance of tourism to the state's economy.



Figure 6 Budget Revenues



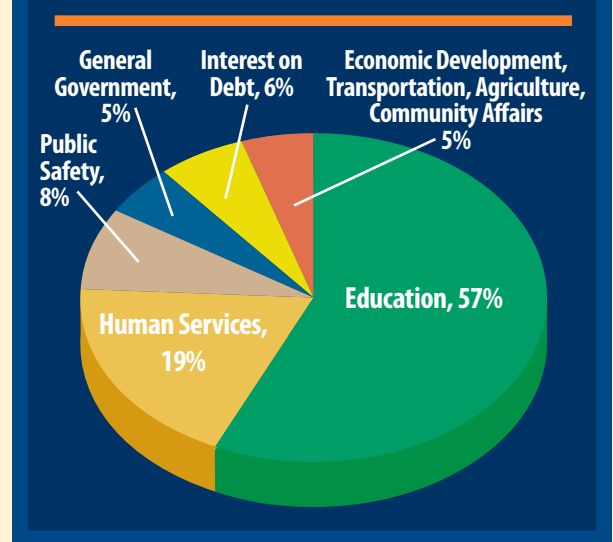
cent. The sales tax is the second most important tax source in Georgia. It brings in about 29 percent of the state's revenues.

A type of sales tax called an *excise tax* is placed on the manufacture or use of certain specialized items such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, and motor fuel. Excise taxes are fixed amounts per item, rather than percentages of the price. The motor fuel tax is the largest excise tax, contributing about 5 percent of state revenues.

Georgia also receives a smaller part of its revenue from nontax sources: user fees and regulatory fees. The state collects fees for access into state parks and licenses to practice certain occupations, such as dental hygienist or cosmetologist. Fees are also collected for licenses and permits for activities such as driving a vehicle, operating a boat, or hunting and fishing. The most visible nontax revenue source in Georgia is the state lottery, which produces about 6 percent of total state funds each year. By law, lottery funds can be spent only for education-related programs.

Federal grants provide another source of revenue. A federal grant comes in the form of money given to state agencies by Congressional appropriations. Some

Figure 7 Budget Expenditures



grants are "earmarked" for specific purposes or to address specialized needs; others are more general. In both cases, the federal government sets application requirements and standards for how the money is to be spent.

Georgia's constitution requires the state to maintain a *balanced budget*; that is, the government cannot spend more money than it takes in. If income and sales tax revenues fall short of the estimated amounts (less money coming in than originally planned), the governor must adjust spending in executive agencies and program areas. Sometimes this happens in mid-year. In 2009-2010,

for example, employees in several state agencies were directed to take furloughs (days off without pay) in order to reduce personnel costs. Travel and equipment expenditures may be restricted. The success or failure of the state to generate adequate revenue in a healthy economy directly affects the quality of services offered to the people of Georgia.

Left: The sale of tickets for the state lottery is responsible for about 6% of total state revenues every year.



Chapter Review

Chapter Summary

Section 1 Membership of the General Assembly

- Georgia's legislative branch is called the General Assembly. It is a bicameral, or two-house, legislature consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- Members of the General Assembly must be U.S. citizens, residents of Georgia for at least two years, and residents of their districts for at least one year. Candidates for the House must be at least 21; candidates for the Senate must be at least 25.
- Members of the General Assembly are elected to two-year terms in elections in even-numbered years.
- Voting districts for the Georgia House and Senate are redrawn every ten years after the U.S. Census results are known.

Section 2 Organization of the General Assembly

- The presiding officer of the Georgia House is the speaker of the House. The leader of the Georgia Senate is the lieutenant governor (president of the Senate). The lieutenant governor may not vote on issues before the Senate.
- The duties of the presiding officers include presiding over the sessions of their respective chambers, assigning legislation to committees, and controlling debate.
- Most of the work of the legislature is done in legislative committees. Legislators are assigned to 2-4 committees during their term.

- Standing committees are permanent committees.

Section 3 The Lawmaking Process

- Legislators may propose bills on any issue that is not forbidden by the U.S. Constitution or the Georgia constitution.
- Bills are assigned to committees for study and debate. Committees may hold hearings at which individuals or groups may speak for or against passage of the bill.
- A bill must pass both houses of the General Assembly in the same form before it can become law.
- After a bill is passed by the General Assembly, it is sent to the governor, who may sign it, veto it, or take no action on the bill.
- If two-thirds of the members of each house of the General Assembly vote to override a governor's veto, it can become law.



Understanding the Facts

1. Describe the difference between unicameral and bicameral legislatures.
2. List the three branches of Georgia's government and provide a brief description of their basic responsibilities.
3. Identify the presiding officers of the state Senate and House of Representatives.
4. Compare the numbers of representatives and senators. Why do you think one has many more members than the other?



Developing Critical Thinking

1. Why are budget decisions hard to make?
2. Look at Figures 6 and 7 on page 87 describing the revenue and expenditure areas of Georgia's budget. If you could change the categories and percentages spent in each, what would you recommend?



Writing Across the Curriculum

1. Select a legislative topic that should be addressed during the next session of the General Assembly. Write a persuasive essay that describes the issue and makes a recommendation as to what your legislator should do about the problem.
2. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper concerning an important legal or policy issue that interests you.



Extending Reading Skills

Use a Venn diagram with two circles to compare and contrast the qualifications to serve as state senator and member of the House of Representatives.

Right: At what point during the process of a bill becoming law does debate take place?



Exploring Technology

Use your favorite search engine to visit the website of the Georgia General Assembly. While at the site, look up information on your state senator and member of the House. Also look at various bills that are/were proposed at the most recent legislative session.



Practicing Your Skills

Locate and examine district maps for state senators and representatives. Note the size and shape of your own district. Notice that some of the districts have bizarre shapes. Make a list of the reasons why districts might have the shapes they do. It may be helpful to compare the legislative district boundaries to a Georgia map that includes cities, towns, highways, and so on.

