

## **Budget to dominate Georgia's legislative session in 2009**

With less than two months until the legislature convenes, members of the General Assembly are focused on this year's biggest issue: the largest budget deficit since Gov. Sonny Perdue took office in 2002.

According to MAG Legislative Associate Rebecca Greener, the budget is the only bill that the legislature is required by state law to pass during the session. And, she says, that isn't something that happens in one day – the budget is often passed after 40 long and grueling days.

“As legislators decide how to spend our tax dollars, each will want a piece of the pie in the form of budget initiatives that will bring infrastructure and prosperity to their district,” says Greener, who joined MAG in September after working as a member of Gov. Perdue's staff for nearly two years. “None want to see budget cuts, but that's not practical during these difficult economic times. In 2009, you'll see a budget that's quite different from others in recent years.”

She says it's not clear how a smaller budget will affect health care in Georgia. “There are 203 members of the General Assembly, each with personal interests,” Greener explains. “Between education, water, transportation, taxes, economic development, natural resources, ethics, insurance, the military, and technology, health care is but one issue.”

MAG staff has worked hard to develop relationships with members of the legislature, according to Greener. “As a government affairs team, we spent a considerable amount of time in recent months with our friends at the state house to foster relationships.”

She adds that, “Our message has been consistent. It's one of appreciation, thanking them for their work on our behalf. And it has been a message of optimism.”

Greener is confident that MAG's top-tier issues – including trauma and insurance reform – will receive the proper attention during the legislative session in 2009. She says, “We are determined to work with all parties involved to support fair and reasonable legislation that is supportive of physicians and patients.”

As January closes in, Greener asks MAG members to formulate their own list of priorities. “If one of our members believes that a particular piece of legislation is going to harm physicians, they should let us know,” Greener says.

“The most powerful tool physicians have is their experience, and this is something we want them to share with the General Assembly,” she concludes. “Testify before a committee either for or against a bill. Come to the Capitol for a day and let the lawmakers see that physicians care deeply about the political process. Get involved.”

Greener can be contacted at [rgreener@mag.org](mailto:rgreener@mag.org) or 678.303.9273.