



## COLUMN

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## Howard: Week Four Under the Gold Dome

By: Sen. Jaha Howard (D–Smyrna)



We are now four weeks into the 2026 Legislative Session, and Senate Democrats are continuing the fight for a Georgia you can truly afford.

Affordability is our top priority, and one way we are addressing it is by pushing back against the rapid expansion of data centers and their effects on energy bills in our state. Senate Democrats have introduced several pieces of legislation to give Georgia families greater transparency into the environmental and financial costs of these projects while also lowering and stabilizing utility bills.

At the current pace, data centers are cropping up faster than our state and the communities that live near them can handle. These facilities can use more water and power in a single day than entire cities, which should be a glaring cause for concern. We must establish guardrails that limit the environmental damage they cause and ensure surplus funds can be redirected toward healthcare, housing and education. This is why I'm still pushing my legislation, SB 436, which places a one-year pause on new data centers so the General Assembly has adequate time to listen and respond to you, the voters. From Rural Georgia to Metro Atlanta, families are facing rising costs, and we are committed to fighting for sustainable solutions that bring costs down statewide.

Making Georgia more affordable also means making our state more livable. Expanding Medicaid would be a vital step forward for the millions of Georgians, roughly 20% of our population, who rely on the program. My Democratic colleagues and I support SB 380, which would allow Georgia to draw down federal funding to better cover low-income households and extend Medicaid eligibility to more people. States that have expanded Medicaid have seen improvements in employment, quality of care and overall economic outcomes. Keeping Georgians safe and healthy is a fundamental responsibility of this legislature, and one we should be meeting head-on.

Senate Democrats are also working on long-term, pointed solutions to Georgia's housing crisis. We are pushing legislation that would protect homeowners from predatory corporations, protect renters from neglectful landlords and stabilize rental prices for more than a third of Georgia households. Instead of broad tax breaks that benefit only a small portion of our state, we want to bring stability directly to communities that need it most.

This week, I introduced Senate Bill 464 to prevent federal immigration agencies from using facial recognition, fingerprints or other biometrics to verify immigration status. While this may sound procedural on the surface, we have seen that federal immigration agencies use this information not to enforce the law, but to enforce violence. We can't focus on affordability while our community members are still living in fear.

I have also been settling into my committee work under the Gold Dome, and I have several legislative updates from our work so far. The Senate Committee on Agriculture and Consumer Affairs considered legislation related to lab-grown meat, such as House Bill 163, which would establish regulations requiring disclosure of plant-based, cell-cultured, or other alternatives. The Senate Committee on State and Local Government Operations is focusing on legislation relating to permitting and auditing processes within local government administration, such as House Bill 244. Being able to learn about a variety of issue areas through the various committees I serve on has been very rewarding, and I will continue to share more as we move throughout the session.

Finally, it was great to celebrate Public Health Day and Dental Hygienist Day at the Capitol to recognize the vital work of our public health workforce. As we advance legislation to make healthcare more affordable for everyone, it's important that we commend Georgians who provide the quality care that the people of our state have come to expect.

Thank you for your critical input and support. I'm always grateful to serve you, and I hope you continue to reach out with any questions or concerns you may have going forward.

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*Sen. Jaha Howard represents the 35<sup>th</sup> Senate District which includes portions of Cobb and Fulton counties. He may be reached by phone at (404) 657-2099 or by email at [Jaha.Howard@senate.ga.gov](mailto:Jaha.Howard@senate.ga.gov).*

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