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## COLUMN

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## Howard: Weeks Two & Three Under the Gold Dome

By: Sen. Jaha Howard (D-Smyrna)



We're now well into the 2026 Legislative Session, and things are really moving under the Gold Dome. Even though winter weather tried to slow us down (again), the work hasn't stopped, and we've stayed focused on getting results for you.

Over the past few weeks, we've been digging into Governor Brian Kemp's proposed budgets for the rest of this year and for 2027. There are some important investments included, like \$325 million for Georgia's first needs-based DREAMS Scholarship Program and \$50 million to help communities address homelessness. Those are meaningful steps, and I'm glad to see them included. But the truth is, one-time funding alone won't fix the bigger challenges families are facing. If we're serious about making healthcare, housing and education affordable, we need long-term solutions that actually lift people up.

On the legislative front, I am proud to announce that I have introduced my very first bill. Senate Bill 436 requires local governments to be transparent about how much electricity and water large facilities use by banning nondisclosure agreements that hide those numbers from the public. It also puts a one-year pause on new state tax breaks for data centers, starting July 1, 2026.

I am also the co-sponsor of Senate Bill 421, titled the Data Center Transparency Act. This legislation would require local governments, authorities and political subdivisions to publicly disclose their water and electricity usage relating to data center projects. The rapid expansion of data centers is putting significant pressure on Georgia's water, land, and electric infrastructure. These bills promote transparency and accountability to help ensure future growth does not come at the expense of local communities. I will be sure to provide you with updates on these measures as they move through the legislative process.

This week also came with some heavy news. As we entered week three of the session, many of us were heartbroken by the killing of Alex Petti in Minneapolis. Alex was a 37-year-old ICU nurse, a veteran, and a licensed gun owner. Despite claims from federal officials, video evidence shows he never brandished a weapon during the encounter. His death raises serious questions about the use of force and the protection of basic constitutional rights.

In response, the Senate Democratic Caucus introduced Senate Resolution 605 to condemn Alex Petti's killing and to reaffirm two fundamental rights: the right to peacefully assemble and the right to keep and bear

arms. Alex was exercising both of those rights legally. This resolution makes clear that no one should lose their life simply for lawfully exercising freedoms that Americans across the political spectrum agree are fundamental.

That's why I was proud to see the Senate Democratic Caucus roll out our legislative priorities for the rest of the 2026 session this week. At the heart of it all is affordability. Families are feeling squeezed from every direction with rising utility bills tied to data center development, the lack of affordable childcare forcing parents to make impossible choices and growing concerns about unregulated artificial intelligence and its impact on kids and communities. These issues don't exist in isolation. They pile on top of one another, making it harder for families to get ahead.

We're laying the groundwork to tackle these challenges head-on, and I'm committed to supporting these efforts every step of the way.

As always, I'm grateful to hear from you and thankful for your continued support. If you ever have questions, concerns, or ideas, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm proud to work alongside you for Georgia's future.

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