



The Life of a Lobbyist: Former GAC Chairs Reflect on Experiences at the Capitol

GEORGIA CHAMBER GAC CHAIRS

Former GAC Chairs

- Charlie Campbell
- Brian Foster
- Connell Stafford
- Bill Short
- Kip Loggins
- Ovid Davis
- Herschel Palmer
- John Stevens
- Linda Womack
- Jim Newman
- Peter Banks
- Tom Boller
- Charlie Hood
- Ed Holcomb
- Mack Chandler
- Ric Cobb
- Skin Edge
- Haydon Stanley
- Harold Bevis

Current GAC Chair

- Kevin Curtin

Business leaders throughout Georgia are anticipating the start of the legislative session of the Georgia General Assembly, knowing that business-impacting bills regarding transportation, tax reform, immigration and water will be on the table in 2011.

All bills take a specific route through the Georgia Legislature before being signed into law or falling short (see page 8), and they do not travel alone. Government affairs professionals, also known as lobbyists, provide higher-level knowledge about the issues throughout the session and advocate for or against bills.

Lobbyists from both contract firms and companies form the Georgia Chamber's Government Affairs Committee (GAC), a group of approximately 400 government affairs professionals representing the more than 3,500 members of the Georgia Chamber. Within the GAC, there are nine committees assigned to various policy areas, and each committee is responsible

for studying issues carefully and providing action recommendations that ultimately become the Georgia Chamber legislative agenda.

For this article, three former GAC Chairs reflected on their experiences at the Capitol and also how the landscape has changed since each one began his or her career in government affairs.

“In order to make it in this field, you have to have integrity, honesty and a willingness to be open not only with the legislators, but others working towards those same goals.” - Harold Bevis



Harold Bevis

Vice President of Public Affairs
Delta Air Lines
GAC Chair: 1988-91

An Atlanta native, Harold Bevis joined the employee ranks of Delta Air Lines in 1965 as an Avionics Technician after serving four years in the U.S. Air Force. The 45-year employee worked in several divisions of the company before being named Vice President of Public Affairs, a position he has held since 1989. Since that time, he has worked tirelessly to represent the business interests of Delta Air Lines at the state and local levels.

"The Georgia Chamber has given me tremendous support as I advocate on Delta's behalf," said Bevis. "It's incredibly helpful to have contact with other government affairs professionals who are working towards the same goals and specific outcome."

Throughout his years in the government affairs field, Bevis counts Pete Petersen (Gilman Paper Company, retired), Zell Miller (former Georgia Governor and U.S. Senator), Tom Murphy (former House Speaker, and also the longest reigning Speaker in the nation) and U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson among his mentors.

"Pete Petersen took me under his wing and gave me wise counsel. Speaker Murphy, the longest reigning speaker in the nation, was a fair and honest mentor to both lobbyists and legislators," Bevis said. "And Senator and Governor Miller was an astute governor who ruled with a no-nonsense attitude but fair and always looked after the state and its people."

In addition to being a member of the Georgia Chamber GAC, Bevis is a current member of the Clayton Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Allies, and Georgians for Better Transportation; and serves as the Chairman of the Board for the Delta Heritage Museum.

"In order to make it in this field, you have to have integrity, honesty and a willingness to be open not only with the legislators, but others working towards those same goals," said Bevis. "Otherwise, you will fail."



Linda Womack

Director of State Government Affairs
Emory University
GAC Chair: 1991-93

Although information regarding bills, committee notices and other important legislative news can be found by clicking on the Georgia General Assembly website, Linda Womack still likes to start her day by reading her subscription from the House Clerk and Secretary of the Senate's office.

"The change in technology at the Capitol over the years is incredible, but I still like to go by each morning, pick up my packet and read the first readers while taking notes in my red composition book," laughs Womack.

Womack started her career in the office of U.S. Representative Bo Ginn in Washington, D.C. After returning to Georgia, Womack spent time as the Legislative Director at the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation. She also worked for a large pharmaceutical and consumer products company, with responsibilities for lobbying in Georgia and nine other southeastern states, before landing at Emory University 10 years ago.

"The Georgia Chamber has been an important ally on many of our issues, and one of great importance was leading the effort in achieving meaningful tort reform in 2005," says Womack, who is responsible for representing and advancing Emory's position on state public policy initiatives that affect academic and medical research, higher education and health care.

"Always know your issue. Always provide accurate information to the legislator or at a committee hearing when you are testifying on specific legislation. If you don't know the answer to a question, say you don't know, but will follow back up ASAP," says Womack. "You will be known as a person who is honest and provides credible information on a given issue, and this is most important in the governmental affairs process."



Arthur B. "Skin" Edge, IV

Principal
GeorgiaLink Public Affairs Group
GAC Chair: 2004-08

For Arthur B. "Skin" Edge, lobbying was an unplanned career move. Edge had planned to return to his law practice full-time after announcing his retirement from the Georgia Senate in 1996. However, 14 years later, he is still working in the government affairs arena.

"After I announced my decision to leave the Legislature, I was approached by Trip Martin about joining GeorgiaLink Public Affairs Group," said Edge. "I enjoy the legislative process and the people involved in it, and I decided to give lobbying a chance."

Edge credits Martin and GeorgiaLink's General Counsel Boyd Pettit as two of his mentors, specifically in their strong ethical behavior and loyalty to clients.

In his fourteen years at the Capitol, Edge has experienced the shift in political landscape and emphasizes how important it is to work and communicate well with all parties. He also notes the positive aspect of more women and minorities involved in lobbying.

Edge finds his involvement with the Georgia Chamber invaluable to his work as a lobbyist. "The Georgia Chamber helps me stay abreast of the issues being considered by the Legislature – having the Georgia Chamber on my client's side on a particular matter is a huge advantage, given the respect the organization enjoys at the Capitol," he commented.

Georgia Trend magazine has named Edge as one of its "100 Most Influential People in Georgia" and Business to Business magazine has called him one of "The Ten Most Influential People Under the Gold Dome." However, Edge is aware of the great trust placed in him by legislators and the people he works with each day. "Your credibility is your greatest asset and it must be protected at all costs – both by your actions in the Capitol and outside of it," says Edge.