



## Federal Dollars at Work – Georgia take heed

by Todd Smith, Steve Gordon, & Jesse Weathington | Apr 4, 2018 | News | 0 comments



Congress is currently out of session for a two-week recess, during which time Members of Congress attend events back in their states and districts and meet with constituents directly. Before they left for the break, Congress passed the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 omnibus bill containing about \$1.3 trillion in government funding through September 30, 2018.

Aside from providing the largest year-to-year increase in funding for the Department of Defense in 15 years with an increase of \$80 billion, the omnibus also provided for increased funding in key federal programs which state and local authorities will be able to use through the grant process. Some of these key programs are in the areas of fighting the opioid epidemic, promoting school safety, securing the homeland, and improving the nation's infrastructure.

The omnibus provides nearly \$4 billion in widespread funding to address the opioid epidemic. Some of this money funds new initiatives like the Rural Communities Response which supports treatment and prevention with a focus on communities at highest risk. The FY 18 funding bill also included legislative directives for the State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis Grants, such as giving states the flexibility to direct resources based on local need. It also requires a report on how states have spent funds and program evaluations.

Speaker Ralston recently commented that he felt this past legislative session in the General Assembly was good for rural Georgia. Well, the omnibus also includes funding which helps rural communities in a number of ways. It includes \$600 million for a pilot program to expand broadband access for state and local governments. The bill also provides an additional \$500 million for water and waste grants and loans to address infrastructure needs in rural areas. This adds to loan subsidies, direct loans, and other funds provided through the Rural Utilities Service.

Infrastructure is on the minds of Governor Deal, Speaker Ralston, Lt. Governor Cagle, and the General Assembly, particularly given the Amazon HQ2 interest. Improving the nation's infrastructure is key to safety and economic growth. The omnibus includes over \$21 billion for infrastructure projects across the country. This funding is spread throughout a number of programs which provide funding for highway infrastructure, transit infrastructure, airports and rail, just to name a few.

Major education programs received sustained or increased funding under the FY 18 omnibus. Key among these funding levels is a 175% increase in the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) block grant. SSAE is authorized at \$1.6 billion for FY 2018 and funded at \$1.1 billion. The bill states that SSAE can fund a wide range of activities, including those related to

school violence prevention and response. To help protect children and to promote safe learning environments, the bill provides more than \$2.3 billion in new funding to effective mental health, training, and school safety programs at the Departments of Justice, Education, and Health and Human

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## Deal steps in on insurance dispute



Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal on Tuesday ordered Blue Cross Blue Shield and Piedmont Healthcare back to the negotiating table on behalf of the nearly 600,000 employees, retirees and their families left without insurance following the sides' ongoing contract dispute. The governor also announced that the state will help cover out-of-network claims for affected employees for up to 30 days to help ease their financial burdens. The messy dispute continues, but strong leadership from Deal to ensure the well-being of state employees has the governor's ship **RISING...**

Services.

The FY 18 budget bill funds \$380 million for the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). This program provides for payments to states to improve the administration of elections for federal office, including enhancing election technology and making election security improvements, as authorized under HAVA. Payments to states are to be made within 45 days of the budget's enactment, and states are required to provide a 5% state contribution not later than two years after receiving a payment. Georgia will receive over \$10 million of this funding, in addition to its matching funds.

The Department of Homeland Security received an increase of \$5.4 billion over the last fiscal year, for a total of \$47.8 billion. Some of this money is available for security at our nation's ports – think Savannah and Brunswick. Other parts of this funding will go towards border infrastructure, improved surveillance technology, and disaster relief.

While our report is not a comprehensive review of the myriad federal programs funded by the latest appropriations bill, these are just a few of the areas Georgia's leaders and citizens certainly have on their minds. And, if these issues aren't top of mind, then they should be.



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