

# news release

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## Georgia Chamber Names Legislators of the Year

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday honored five lawmakers with its annual Legislator of the Year awards and presented Lifetime Achievement awards to three legislators at its spring Government Affairs Council conference in St. Simons Island.

State Sens. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) and Ross Tolleson (R-Perry) and state Reps. Earl Ehrhart (R-Powder Springs), Larry O'Neal (R-Warner Robins) and Jay Shaw (D-Valdosta) were each recognized with the Georgia Chamber's highest honor for their exceptional efforts to promote the chamber's 2008 legislative agenda.

In addition, Sen. Eric Johnson (R-Savannah) and outgoing Reps. Barry Fleming (R-Harlem) and Richard Royal (R-Camilla) were given the state chamber's inaugural Lifetime Achievement award for career support of business at the Gold Dome.

"These lawmakers have helped Georgia become one of the most business-friendly states in the nation," said Georgia Chamber President George Israel. "They work hard to reduce the regulatory burden on Georgia businesses and advance free-market policies that stimulate economic development and create quality jobs for Georgians. We applaud them for their efforts."

### ***Legislators of the Year***

Sen. Rogers, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, has earned a well-deserved reputation as one of Georgia's most pro-business lawmakers. Since moving from the House to the Senate in 2005, he has sponsored numerous bills to cut taxes and curtail the expansion of government. He led debate in the Senate this year on tax reform, which is expected to take center stage once again in 2009. A radio station owner and talk show host, Rogers represents Cobb and Cherokee counties at the capitol.

Sen. Tolleson, chairman of the Senate Natural Resources and Environment Committee and a longtime supporter of the Georgia Chamber, this year oversaw the development of the first-ever statewide water plan and led on a number of other environmental bills important to business. When not at the Gold Dome, Tolleson works as a tree farmer and financial advisor in Perry – which he has represented in the Senate since 2003 – along with Bleckley, Dodge, Johnson, Laurens, Pulaski and Telfair counties, and parts of Houston and Wilcox counties.

Rep. Ehrhart, chairman of the House Rules Committee, has been a stalwart defender of free enterprise and a staunch opponent of anti-business legislation since his election to the House 20 years ago – even more so since becoming Rules chairman in 2005. As one member of the GAC put it, "The rules committee is a place where bad bills are stopped as often as good bills are moved

forward.” Ehrhart represents Cobb County and is senior vice president at architectural and engineering firm The Facility Group Inc.

Rep. O’Neal, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, has received widespread praise from the business community for his careful analysis of every tax bill introduced at the Gold Dome. He regularly sponsors significant pro-business incentives and provided invaluable insight and guidance during this year’s tax reform debate. A tax attorney and accountant by trade, O’Neal also previously served as a former floor leader for Gov. Sonny Perdue. He has represented Houston County at the capitol since 2001.

Rep. Shaw, now in his seventh term at the General Assembly, has been a reliable and respected advocate of the Georgia Chamber’s legislative agenda for years and an effective supporter of the interests of Peach State employers, especially those in south Georgia. A small business owner, he represents Clinch and Lanier counties, as well as parts of Berrien and Lowndes counties.

***Lifetime Achievement***

Senate President Pro Tem Johnson has built a record of distinction as a tireless advocate of free-market legislation in his 18 years in the General Assembly. Under his tenure in the Senate, where he became Minority Leader in 1999 and President Pro Tem in 2003, the legislature has passed bills benefiting a wide variety of Georgia industries; lowered the tax and regulatory burden on companies of all sizes; and improved the legal climate for employers. Johnson represents Bryan County and parts of Chatham and Liberty counties, where he is an architect and developer.

House Majority Whip Fleming – who is leaving the state capitol after three terms to run for Congress – has fought for Georgia’s business community on countless occasions. An attorney by trade, he was one of the prime forces behind passage of tort reform in 2005 and a turn-to shepherd for some of the most complex and difficult issues in the General Assembly. Fleming represents Lincoln County and parts of Columbia and Wilkes counties. His departure from the House creates a void that will be difficult to fill.

Rep. Royal, chairman of the House Budget and Fiscal Affairs Oversight Committee and former chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, was for many years the legislator to whom all others turned for guidance and leadership on tax policy. A brilliant and knowledgeable lawmaker whose soft-spoken style won the admiration of all who worked with him, Royal will be greatly missed when he retires from the legislature this year. He represents Mitchell County and part of Colquitt County and is a consultant to the petroleum industry.

The Georgia Chamber is the grassroots voice of business, vigorously representing its diverse membership in the public policy arena. As it constantly works to protect Georgia’s enviable pro-business environment, the Georgia Chamber remains mindful of its mission to keep the state economically prosperous, educationally competitive and environmentally responsible.

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