



PAUL LEAVY | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Council Chair Jeff Hanson welcomes the guests to the State Legislative Luncheon hosted by the Rotary Club of Valdosta Wednesday. Pictured from left is state Rep. Ellis Black, state Sen. Tim Golden, Hanson, Rotary President Greg Reid, state Reps. Amy Carter and Jason Shaw.

## Delegation maps out 2012 legislative plans

BY DAWN CASTRO  
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club of Valdosta hosted a presentation of issues affecting Georgia Wednesday during its State Legislative Luncheon at the Valdosta Country Club.

Approximately 200 guests gathered to hear upcoming legislative issues from state Sen. Tim Golden and state Reps. Ellis Black, Amy Carter and Jason Shaw. The area legislative delegation's members presented updates on key issues the state will face next year and shared some of their plans for the future.

Jeff Hanson, the chamber's vice chair of public affairs and executive vice president of Southwest Georgia Bank, said the event is something he always anticipates and spoke mainly on government affairs.

"Our government-affairs program is one of the most important programs and recognized as one of the most effective," Hanson said. "With 1,500-plus members, the only way to be effective is to have a single voice."

He encouraged attendees to become involved in the Chamber's Government Affairs Council, which seeks to address

**'We're not getting what we used to, but (economically) Georgia is better (in midst of the recession). It's just a slow growth.'**

**Amy Carter**  
State representative

business legislative issues. The program has seven issue-driven policy committees that work throughout the year to ensure Valdosta-Lowndes County remains a place where businesses can thrive.

Golden said his number one priority for the upcoming legislative session is funding for the Health Sciences Initiative, a partnership between South Georgia Medical Center, Valdosta State University and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College. The state senator said this initiative is essential not only to the growth of Valdosta-Lowndes County, but to the growth of the Southern region.

Golden said he will focus on removing the sales tax on energy used in manufacturing, a concept he introduced in the 1990s. Golden said Georgia is behind the curve and, to be

competitive, the state must pass this legislation this year.

Black addressed what he said is sure to be a controversial topic next year — the regional transportation tax. This will be a 1 percent regional sales tax, currently scheduled to appear on the July ballot. The representative encouraged everyone to educate themselves on the issue, stating that Georgia is the second lowest state in the country when it comes to per capita spending for transportation projects.

Carter's main issue will be the economic budget, reporting the 2011 fiscal year as the first full year to see positive monthly revenues in five years. Additionally, while five out of the eight Triple-A rated states are potentially going to be downgraded, Georgia is one of three that will not. The ratings reflect

Georgia's conservative fiscal management during the recession. Triple-A ratings mean the state typically pays very low interest rates on its debt.

In essence, "We receive funding from the federal government that will be decreasing, and there's no more stimulus," she said. "We're not getting what we used to, but (economically) Georgia is better (in midst of the recession). It's just a slow growth."

Shaw thanked the delegation for its continued support, stating that he will focus on regulation for copper theft. There are currently 500 buyers in the state but only 40 of these are known. Shaw will research similar legislation in other states to introduce a bill that will address this concern.

Kyle Jackson, state director of the National Federation of Independent Business, closed the meeting by presenting Golden with the Guardian of Small Business Award.

"Sen. Golden has always gone above and beyond for small business, and it is an honor for me to present him with this award," Jackson said.