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To: Dobbs, Elly

Subject: House District 53 Legislative Update

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State Representative Elly Dobbs

GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE REPORT

February 11, 2009

Greetings!

I am honored to be representing you at the State Capitol during this my first legislative session. I have been appointed to the House Judiciary Committee, Health & Human Services Committee and Game, Fish & Parks Committee.

I hope you find this e-mail interesting. Please forward it on to your friends and neighbors. If you wish to be added to or removed from the e-mail list, please see the instructions above.

In addition, please [contact me](#) with your views on any issue that needs to be addressed or whenever I can be of service to you.

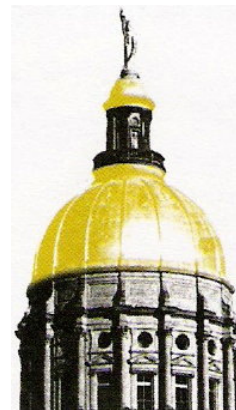


Elly Dobbs

This week at the State Capitol ...

Sales tax revenues, property assessment caps, HOPE Scholarship funding

Legislation was introduced Tuesday to address the state's budget deficit, which has grown to nearly \$3 billion following reports that January's revenue collections were down by 14.3 percent from last year. [HB 356](#) would help balance the budget by streamlining government and **improving the sales tax collection process**. The bill would transfer control over collecting sales taxes from the state Department of Revenue to local governments, allowing them to contract with private firms. A similar plan implemented in Alabama resulted in a revenue increase of more than \$1 billion.



A proposed constitutional amendment, [HR 1](#), would **limit the annual increases on the reassessment valuation** of both residential and nonresidential property to 3 percent, or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower. Under the proposed change, property values could be reassessed upon the sale or transfer of the property at fair market value, which would not exceed the sales price. The amendment would also ratify property tax freezes and limitations already in place in some counties.

Supporters of the legislation claim HR 1 would bring an end to the so-called "back-door" tax increases by local officials who use valuation assessment hikes to bring in more revenue without raising the millage rate. I support this concept. Opponents, however, contend that local government revenue decisions should not be mandated from the state level and should instead be left up to county commissioners and school board members who are more familiar with the needs of their communities. There are also some issues regarding the effect of the bill on the state's bond rating and also how the bill

treats residential property versus commercial properties. Lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle are now working on some provisions in the legislation to make it more acceptable.

Last Thursday, the House of Representatives voted unanimously to approve legislation that would make it easier for the state to keep **HOPE Scholarship funds** available for students' book purchases and related fees. Current state law requires that any time the total collection of state lottery revenues declines during a calendar year, the use of HOPE funds for books and fees is reduced by a set percentage.

[HB 157](#) would modify the law to require that lottery revenues decline by 8 percent before engaging the "trigger" to reduce grants to students for books and fees. The lottery reserves currently stand at \$960 million, which is high enough to justify this change and prevent deserving students from receiving their full HOPE benefits. The legislation now goes to the Senate for its consideration.

Chief Justice stresses importance of judicial branch

Chief Justice Leah Ward Sears of the Supreme Court of Georgia gave her final State of the Judiciary speech before a joint session of the General Assembly. Justice Sears will be retiring this summer and will be succeeded as Chief Justice by Justice Carol Hunstein.

In her speech she said, "We are frequently reminded that government cannot do everything. And that is true. Government cannot do everything, and in times like these, government cannot afford to do everything. But there are some things that only government can do, and these things it must do well. Administering justice under the law is a function that only government can fulfill. The determination of guilt and innocence, property rights and parental rights, legal privileges and power are judgments only government can make. Administering justice is one of the reasons governments exist. If we neglect this fundamental obligation to the people, we break trust with them, and ultimately, lose their confidence. And for government, public trust and confidence is everything."

In conclusion she noted, "Finally, I want to thank the people of Georgia for giving me this extraordinary opportunity. I want to thank the millions I've never met personally who are simply good, solid, hardworking people. Those who voted for me, called me with their words of support, sent me notes and wrote me letters along the way. They were the ones who decided - not once, not twice, but three times - that I was worth keeping around by electing me to office."

Lawmakers consider transportation funding solutions

Legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives that would generate \$25 billion in funding for transportation projects over the next decade through a special statewide sales tax. Under [HR 206](#), which as a proposed constitutional amendment must be approved by two-thirds of both the House and Senate and then by a majority of Georgia voters, the money would be allocated to an extensive list of highways, interchange and light rail facilities across the state.

Meanwhile, the Senate has already approved a regional approach to transportation funding. [SR 44](#) would authorize counties to join together and levy a sales tax on a regional basis, if voters in those counties approve, for local transportation needs.

I support a statewide approach to our transportation problems and feel that we must implement a comprehensive statewide transportation system if we wish to continue to attract businesses and jobs to the state, as well as reduce the congestion on our roadways.

On Jan. 26, the House of Representatives unanimously adopted legislation I co-sponsored, which would prohibit individuals who are not subject to state licensing requirements from holding himself or herself as being licensed to practice professional counseling, social work or marriage and family therapy. [HB 60](#) now goes to the Senate for its consideration.

Other bills I have co-sponsored are:

- ~ [HB 310](#), which would expand the statewide recycling program for state agencies, as part of the campaign to Make Georgia's Capitol Green
- ~ [HR 120](#), which would urge Congress to adopt the U.S. National Health Insurance Act for expanded and improved Medicare
- ~ [HB 19](#), which would restrict the use of cell phones by teenagers while driving
- ~ [HB 22](#), which would require pickup truck drivers and passengers and riders in the back seats of vehicles to wear safety belts
- ~ [HB 24](#), which would revise the Georgia Evidence Code and bring it in line with the Federal Evidence Code
- ~ [HB 324](#), which would give Georgia residents greater access to state parks and outdoor activities by reducing fees for our citizens while increasing fees for out-of-state visitors and encouraging their use.

Other issues I am strongly supporting this session include:

- ~ A Statewide Trauma Care Network
- ~ [HB 29](#), which would authorize the electronic service of legal documents
- ~ [HR 229](#), which would create a Citizens' Redistricting Commission

I will keep you posted on the progress of these measures throughout the session.

[Elly's legislation...](#)

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Representative Elly Dobbs

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