

From: Rep. Elly Dobbs [newsletters@wordexpress.ccsend.com] on behalf of Rep. Elly Dobbs [newsletters@wordexpress.info]

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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 24, 2009

Greetings!

The legislature has been busy since my last newsletter to you. I have summarized some of the legislation that has passed the House of Representatives and other bills in progress that may be of interest you.

Since our district is near the Capitol I encourage you to come and visit me under the Gold Dome. I am always available to discuss any issue important to you while the General Assembly is in session as well as being available to you during the year after the session. If you would like for your children to visit the Capitol please contact my office as it is an interesting educational experience. I also encourage your schools or youth organizations to arrange a trip. Our office can also help you schedule a tour of the Capitol for your group. In addition if a student, 12 years or older, would like to serve as a page during this General Assembly please call my office.

Finally, if you have a community, neighborhood, church, PTA, NPU or Civic group that would like a visit from me, please contact me. I will begin attending as many of our district group meetings as I can throughout the year.

Do not forget to [contact me](#) with your views on any issue that needs to be addressed or whenever I can be of service to you.

Elly Dobbs



CAPITOL UPDATE ...

Public school choice, technical colleges, flu vaccines, property tax assessments

PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

House members voted Thursday to approve [HB 251](#), which would allow parents to enroll their students in **any public school in their school district**, as long as the school has classroom space after its assigned students have been enrolled.

Parents would be responsible for transporting the student to and from school. This school choice proposal is different from legislation that would create universal school vouchers, because this measure involves only public schools rather than private schools. HB 251 now goes to the Senate.

TECHNICAL COLLEGES:

Last year, **several of Georgia's technical colleges were combined** without any input from the legislature, which is responsible for appropriating funds for the system. Georgia has outstanding technical colleges, and 80 percent of the



people graduating from a technical college do so with a job.

Believing we need to continue to fully support programs that are working for our citizens, House members passed [HB 294](#), which would require legislative approval for any consolidation, suspension or discontinuation of a technical college or institution under the State Board of Technical and Adult Education. The Senate now has HB 294 under consideration.

FLU SHOTS

Also this week, the House passed [HB 217](#), which would allow physicians to issue **protocols for nurses or pharmacies to administer influenza vaccines**. Doctors could issue up to 10 protocols under the bill, which moves to the Senate for its consideration.

PROPERTY TAXES

A majority of House members voted Tuesday to **reconsider previous action on a proposed constitutional amendment** that would take some revenue decisions out of the hands of local government by limiting annual property assessment valuations.

[HR 1](#) would have placed a cap of 3 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower, on assessment increases for both residential and commercial property. As a proposed constitutional amendment, it needed 120 votes in the House for passage and failed Feb. 12 on a vote of 105-67. The vote to reconsider means HR 1 goes back to the Rules Committee and could return to the House floor later in the session.

[HB 233](#), however, needed only a simple majority to move on to the Senate, and it passed 110-63. This legislation would **place an immediate moratorium on assessment increases** for two years.

Although initially in favor of these bills, I voted against both proposals. While our property tax system needs reform and I believe in transparency in our tax system, this mandate simply forces local governments to raise millage rates, reduce vital services and lay off employees, including police officers and fire fighters. Our already underfunded public schools would be especially harmed by this restriction on local control. Furthermore, by capping existing commercial properties we are discouraging new businesses from coming into our state as they would be paying much higher property taxes on newly purchased properties. In this economic climate we should encourage jobs coming into our state rather than discouraging them.

HOMEOWNER TAX RELIEF:

Gov. Perdue reversed his position on **Georgia's homeowner tax relief grants** this week and signed [HB 143](#) into law. The bill requires the state to put \$428 million into the budget to fund the grants, which will keep local governments from having to raise property taxes by \$200-\$300 on the average homeowner this year, but requires a 3 percent increase in state revenue for the grants to be funded in future years.

The governor reiterated his opposition to the grants in principle but said the money will be available this year because of the federal economic recovery package passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama.

LEGISLATION IN PROGRESS

TRANSPORTATION:

Legislation that could lead to a statewide 1 percent sales tax for transportation funding cleared a key House committee Thursday. The House Transportation Committee favorably reported [HR 206](#) and [HB 277](#), sending the proposal one step closer to a vote on the House floor.

If approved by two-thirds majorities in both the House and Senate and then by a simple majority of voters in the next general election, the additional sales tax would bring in an estimated \$25 billion to fund transportation projects across the state over the next 10 years. An 11-member oversight committee would include five members from metropolitan Atlanta, five members from the rest of the state and one member at large to ensure the funds are invested

equitably for both urban and rural projects.

At the same time, the governor and legislative leaders are supporting legislation to create a **new State Transportation Authority** to replace the current Department of Transportation board, which has governed the highway program in the state for decades. Authority members would be appointed by the governor, the lieutenant governor and the House speaker, instead of being elected by state legislators within congressional districts, as the DOT board is chosen now.

PARKS AND LICENSES:

On Tuesday, the House approved [HB 326](#), which I co-sponsored as a member of the House Game, Fish & Parks Committee. In 2008, there was a great deal of controversy over plans by the state Department of Natural Resources to "farm out" the sale of Georgia hunting and fishing licenses and boat registrations to a private company in Missouri.

HB 326 would allow anyone in Georgia who wants to sell licenses to do so but also has other provisions. Under the bill, outdoor enthusiasts could obtain hunting or fishing licenses online or by phone. They would also receive a \$2.75 discount for purchasing licenses before they expire, and the primitive weapons license would be eliminated. In addition, hunting fees for non-Georgia residents would be increased, raising \$2.2 million, and a combined hunting and fishing license would be established. Georgia is the nation's No. 1 destination for hunters.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION:

[HB 229](#), was favorably reported Tuesday by the House Education Committee. The Student Health and Physical Education Act would require public school systems to conduct an annual fitness assessment and comply with state physical education instruction requirements. I am supporting this bipartisan proposal as it would ensure our school programs are appropriately committed to student fitness. The bill is now awaiting action on the House floor.

MINIMUM WAGE:

[HB 290](#), has been introduced which would raise the state minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour, and also cover many persons, such as in-home health care workers, tipped workers, and others not covered under the federal minimum wage guidelines. Employers of tipped workers would receive a credit toward the cost of paying the minimum wage.

MENTAL HEALTH:

This bi-partisan bill ([HB 339](#)) would provide for a competent adult, or adults, to be authorized to oversee a mental health patient's care directly through written instructions, or indirectly through an agent appointed to make mental health decisions in behalf of the patient. The bill is now being read for the second time in the House Judiciary Committee.

ENVIRONMENT:

This bill ([HB 158](#)) would require new multi-family residential buildings to install meters on each unit to measure more accurately water usage and cost calculations. Currently, most people who live in such multi-family buildings do not receive a water bill. Their landlords do. This bill would help individuals and families measure and conserve their water use.

MORE LEGISLATIVE NEWS:

Georgia to benefit from federal stimulus funding

The \$787 billion economic stimulus plan passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama includes an estimated \$6 billion in aid for Georgia in the form of grants for new roads and bridges, mass transit, local schools and other critical needs. Some of the highlights of Georgia funding, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, include:

- ~ More than \$1 billion for highways and bridges
- ~ \$168 million for transit capital grants
- ~ \$97.8 million for weatherization of modest-income homes to make them more energy efficient

- ~ \$420 million for Title I schools
- ~ \$333 million for special education
- ~ Additional stabilization funds for modernization and renovation of schools
- ~ \$220 million in additional unemployment insurance trust fund dollars
- ~ \$1.73 billion for increased Medicaid payments.

The Senate and House Appropriations committees are still working on the supplemental budget for fiscal year 2009 and the annual budget for 2010. This week, Gov. Perdue lowered the current-year revenue estimate by another \$450 million, bringing the total budget deficit closer to \$3 billion.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Citizens' CourtWatch Training

Learn how to advocate for your community

Citizens' CourtWatch is a program that helps community members actively participate in the criminal justice system. Join us for our next training session Saturday, March 7, from 9 a.m. to noon at the Justice Center Tower, 185 Central Avenue SW.

[Contact Janet Martin](#) at 404-699-5297 for more information. The program is sponsored by the Fulton County District Attorney's Community Prosecution Program.

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Representative Elly Dobbs

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