

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

**Sent:** Thursday, March 12, 2009 7:20 PM

**To:** Dobbs, Elly

**Subject:** House District 53 Legislative Update

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#### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

##### Citizens Courtwatch Training

Fulton County Justice Center Tower  
185 Central Avenue SW  
Atlanta, Georgia

Saturday, March 7, 2009  
9 a.m. - Noon

Citizens' CourtWatch is a program that helps community members actively participate in the criminal justice system. The program is sponsored by the Fulton County District Attorney's Community Prosecution Program. Contact Janet Martin at 404-699-5297 for more information, or click the e-mail link below.

##### Request more information

##### Plant Trees in Your Community and Keep Atlanta Green

Volunteer with Trees Atlanta to plant trees in your community and other parts of Atlanta. Tree planting every Saturday morning this winter. Call 404-522-4097 for details.

## State Representative Elly Dobbs

GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE REPORT

March 4, 2009

### Greetings!

This is my third legislative newsletter, and the session is more than half over. The General Assembly has a maximum of forty legislative days to meet, and "cross-over" day is approaching soon, when most bills will have had to pass one chamber or the other in order to be acted on or become law this year.

Much of the legislation this year has dealt directly with the state budget, tax cuts, new taxes and a major change to a state grant program benefiting property owners. However, massive overhauls have been proposed for three of the state's biggest departments, including the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Transportation.

More than 825 bills have been filed between the House and Senate. Another 960 or so resolutions are on the books, though most of those simply honor an individual or a group. The following information gives you a brief summary of what has occurred this past week.

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

#### SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET:

House members voted Thursday to approve an amended \$18.9 billion state budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2009, which ends June 30. The budget had to be trimmed by \$2.3 billion because of the shortfall in state tax revenues resulting from the economic recession.

But thanks to an influx of federal funding from the economic recovery plan passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama, budget writers were able to come up with \$428 million to restore the homeowner tax relief grants. These grants, which were marked for elimination in Gov. Perdue's budget proposal, will save the average homeowner \$200-\$300 this year.

The supplemental budget measure, [HB 118](#), also includes \$145 million in federal funds for Georgia's schools and funding for additional Department of Agriculture inspectors in the wake of the recent salmonella contamination at a peanut butter processing plant in Early County. The House version of the plan also accounts for the furloughing of state employees in the Department of



Human Resources and Department of Corrections.

The Senate will now consider the supplemental budget while the House continues to work on the annual budget for fiscal year 2010.

#### GEORGIA POWER RATES:

After a long debate, a majority of the House of Representatives voted Thursday to authorize Georgia Power to begin charging its customers higher rates in 2011 for advance financing of the construction of two new nuclear reactors, which will not be in operation at Plant Vogtle before 2017.

I opposed this legislation, [SB 31](#), for several reasons. Utility rate decisions are under the authority of the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC), not the state legislature. Supporters of the bill were unable to give a clear reason as to why the Senate and House were being asked to act on this prepayment scheme, bypassing the PSC. Also, the measure exempts large companies from the rate hike, leaving residential consumers to shoulder the burden.

The additional charges will provide Georgia Power stockholders an estimated \$1 billion advance profit, plus prepayment of about \$400 million in federal and state income taxes. Customers will also be charged additional sales tax on the higher rates.

Concerns over how rates would be affected if, for any reason, the nuclear reactors are not built also went unanswered by the bill's supporters. But the measure passed by a vote of 107-66, and it is expected to be signed into law by the governor.

#### SALES TAX HOLIDAY

[HB 120](#), which passed 165-0, will continue the annual sales tax holiday for school supplies and energy and water efficient products. The dates for the school supplies exemptions are July 30 - August 2. The products which will be exempt from state and local sales taxes during this time are clothing and footwear with a sales price of \$100.00 or less, computers and computer accessories with a sales price of \$1,500.00 or less, and general school supplies with a sales price of \$20.00 or less. The sales tax exemptions for energy and water efficient products with a sales price up to \$1,500.00 when purchased for home or personal use are October 1 - 4, 2009.

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## **LEGISLATION IN PROGRESS**

Legislation approved by the House and sent to the Senate this week includes:

#### PRIVATE SCHOOL TAX CREDITS:

[HB 100](#) would expand a state program implemented last year that provides income tax credits to individuals and corporate entities that donate to organizations set up to provide scholarships for parents to pull their children out of public schools and send them to private schools. I voted against this measure because it is another reduction in state revenue at the expense of our already underfunded public school system.

#### 'MOVE WHEN READY':

[HB 149](#) would allow students in their junior or senior year of public high school to study at a post-secondary college, university or technical college and receive high school credit, which would count toward graduation. Unlike joint enrollment, this legislation allows students to leave high school entirely to complete the necessary graduation requirements. The Georgia Department of Education would use state funds to pay for the tuition, or the amount the school pays for the student's high school education, whichever is less.

#### JUDGES ON DUTY:

[HB 156](#) would allow elected magistrate judges who are serving on ordered military duty to remain in office and eligible for re-election during such duty.

#### PHYSICAL EDUCATION:

[HB 229](#) would require local school systems to conduct an annual fitness assessment and comply with state physical education instruction requirements.

#### TRUCK WEIGHT INSPECTORS:

[HB 343](#) would establish the position of weight inspector for the Department of Public Safety. The inspectors would enforce weight, registration, size and load regulations for commercial trucks.

**CHILD ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION:**

[SB 69](#) expanding the definition of child abuse to include sexual exploitation, passed the Senate.

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## MORE LEGISLATIVE NEWS

**TRANSPORTATION CHIEF FIRED:**

While the House and Senate are considering sweeping changes in the way Georgia's transportation system is funded and governed, the Department of Transportation board acted Thursday to relieve Commissioner Gena Evans of her duties.

**RECORD JOBLESS RATE:**

The Georgia Department of Labor reported that the state's unemployment rate hit an all-time record level of 8.6 percent in January. The previous record was 8.3 percent in January 1983. This is the highest seasonally adjusted rate in Georgia since 1976, when the U.S. Department of Labor standardized unemployment rates among all states.

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### Representative Elly Dobbs

Representative Elly Dobbs represents the 53rd District (Fulton County) in the Georgia House of Representatives. Contact her at 512 Coverdell Office Building, Atlanta, Ga. 30334; by phone at 404-656-7859; or by e-mail at [elly.dobbs@house.ga.gov](mailto:elly.dobbs@house.ga.gov). For more information, visit her web site at [www.ellydobbs.com](http://www.ellydobbs.com).

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