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**May 2010 Town Hall Meetings**

In order to keep you informed as to legislation that will have passed during this General Assembly, as well as other State issues that affect our communities, we have scheduled three Town Hall Meetings during the month of May. By then, we should have a final State budget and know its impact on our taxes and services. I would like to hear your comments and concerns and what you believe should be on our legislative agenda for the future. I hope that you will be able to attend one of these meetings. Together, we can build a better community and a better State. The meetings are scheduled as follows:

**Tuesday, May 4,**  
Trinity Presbyterian Church, 3003 Howell Mill Rd., Atlanta 30327 6 to 7 p.m. (before the

**State Representative Elly Dobbs***GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE REPORT*

April 19, 2010

**Greetings!**

Tuesday, April 20, will be the 37th legislative day of the 2010 session of the General Assembly. This past week, the House passed an Appropriations Bill and addressed several other revenue and budget issues. The newly proposed budget for 2011 severely affects the services provided by the State as explained below. The bill now goes to the Senate for their review.



We have just four days remaining in this General Assembly, and the session will end the last week of April. This is one of the longest running sessions in the history of Georgia. In order to keep you informed as to legislation that will be passed and provide a more in depth evaluation of new laws, we are scheduling three Town Hall Meetings in May. I hope that you will be able to attend one of these meetings.

Feel free to circulate this email to friends and neighbors. You can subscribe to our newsletter by emailing [newsletters@wordexpress.info](mailto:newsletters@wordexpress.info) or visiting my web site at <http://www.ellydobbs.com>. I also welcome any submissions for news stories or community events and information that would be interesting to those in our District. Please forward them to my email address at [elly.dobbs@house.ga.gov](mailto:elly.dobbs@house.ga.gov).

As always, please 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****Legislation Approved by the House of Representatives**

**State Budget:** A majority of the House of Representatives voted this week to approve a \$17.8 billion state budget for fiscal year 2011. I was among the 52 House members voting against the spending plan because of misplaced priorities and fiscal irresponsibility. The budget was cut to the bone, requiring the layoffs of thousands of teachers and state employees. Important state programs such as the Georgia Council of the Arts were eliminated, and the state's ability to borrow money and receive federal funds was jeopardized. Public education should always be the state's top budget priority, but [HB 948](#), the appropriations bill, proposes to reduce another \$527 million in Quality Basic Education formula funding to local school systems. This brings the total reduction in public school funding under the Perdue administration to more than \$2.1 billion, hurting our children and shifting the tax burden from the state level to local property owners. HB 948 now goes to the Senate for its consideration.



**New Fees and Hospital Tax:** Before the budget vote, House leaders maneuvered to pass a tax increase totaling more than \$250 million by amending

NPU C meeting)

**Thursday, May 20**, City of Atlanta, Police Dept., Zone One Precinct Office, 2315 Donald Lee Hollowell Pkwy., Atlanta, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., (before the NPU G meeting)

**Tuesday, May 25**, Atlanta Job Corps office, 239 West Lake N.W., Atlanta, 30314, 6 to 6:45 p.m. (before the NPU J meeting)

### **Homebuyer's Tax Credit ending soon**

If you or someone you know wants to take advantage of the Homebuyer's Tax Credit, now's the time. The buyer must be under contract by April 30, 2010 and close no later than June 30, 2010.

### **More information...**

### **Census Assistance**

Having questions or need assistance with filling out your census you can call the following contact numbers:  
Telephone Questionnaire Assistance (TQA)  
English: 1-866-872-6868; Chinese: 1-866-935-2010; Korean: 1-866-955-2010; Russian: 1-866-965-2010; Spanish: 1-866-928-2010; Vietnamese: 1-866-945-2010; TDD (Telephone Display Device for the hearing impaired):

the legislation to include two relatively insignificant tax cuts. [HB 1055](#) was originally a proposal to increase registration, licensing and user fees on more than 80 services provided by the state, bringing in approximately \$96 million. The increased costs to citizens affect a broad range of fees, including civil court filings, business registrations, specialty car tags and numerous annual license fees charged by the Department of Agriculture. Some state fees which had not been raised in many years and did not cover costs needed to be raised, but when the bill was brought back to the House from the Senate, it did much more.

As passed, HB 1055 also includes a 1.45 percent tax increase on hospitals and their patients, which will generate approximately \$169 million. It had been approved earlier in the session, but differences between the House and Senate versions led to a compromise under which it would be rolled into HB 1055.

House leaders attempted to make the measure more politically palatable with the addition of two minor tax cuts. One would phase out the state's 0.25-mill property tax over time, an almost insignificant gesture considering how much of the tax burden the state has shifted to local property owners over the past eight years.

The other tax cut would gradually eliminate the income tax on retirement income for Georgians 65 and older between now and 2016. Because retirement income of up to \$35,000 for individuals and \$70,000 for couples is already exempt, this action would actually help only the wealthiest retirees in the state.

The likely impact of these two tax cuts is to cost taxpayers more in increased county property taxes than they receive from the cuts themselves. Cutting state funding for local government and for our schools tends to have costly unintended consequences.

There is an additional concern over whether the legislation is even legal because it combines tax code changes with fee increases. Sadly, this bill balances the state budget on those already suffering: sick hospital patients, underfunded public schools and overburdened property tax payers.

**GEFA Loan Sell-Off:** Also this week, a slim majority of House members voted to approve an amended version of [HB 244](#), which includes the governor's proposal to sell a portion of the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) loans on Wall Street in order to raise some \$290 million to help balance the budget. Because these loans are valued at \$676 million, it makes no sense to sell off these assets at possibly less than 50 cents on the dollar for a one-time budget fix. GEFA loans are made by the state to local governments at low interest rates to finance infrastructure projects across the state. Selling off this revolving revenue source will likely destroy the program, possibly ruin Georgia's AAA bond rating and force more expensive borrowing by local governments.

### **In other action this week, the House approved the following legislation:**

[HB 194](#), which as amended would require a pharmacist who substitutes a generic drug for a brand-name prescription to include on the prescription label that the substitution has occurred.

[SB 355](#), which addresses the issue of who has the right to handle the disposition of the body of a deceased U.S. service member, utilizing a form that allows service members to designate an authorized person to handle their bodies in the event of their death.

[SB 374](#), which would create the Legislative Economic Development Council to evaluate the state's overall economic development strategy, including tax breaks aimed at job creation, and report its findings to the governor and legislature.

[SB 397](#), which would create a "Blue Alert" system to assist in the apprehension of violent criminals who have killed or seriously injured a law enforcement officer.

[HB 903](#), which would extend Atlanta's hotel-motel tax to generate funding for a new domed stadium or renovation of the Georgia Dome to keep the Atlanta Falcons in downtown Atlanta.

1-866-783-2010

**From the website...**

**Join Crime Stoppers Atlanta**

Help solve crime in our community - join Crime Stoppers Atlanta today! Serving all of Metro Atlanta, call 404-586-0180. If you witness a crime, call 404-557-TIPS (8477).

**More information...**

## Concern over Eliminating Arts Council

There are many victims of Georgia's budget problems, one of which at this stage is the Georgia Council for the Arts. If the state budget for fiscal year 2011 as passed by the House of Representatives remains intact, Georgia will be the only state in the U.S. without a statewide arts agency.

The only arts funding of any sort left in the budget is \$250,000 in grants that would be transferred to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to distribute to arts programs around the state. This is one of the reasons I voted against the House budget, as well as the financial impact to so many other programs.

The elimination of the Arts Council would have many negative long-term effects. The nonprofit arts industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity across the country every year. Spending by arts organizations and their audiences totaled \$274.8 million in Atlanta during the 2005 fiscal year.

It's hard to say exactly how much of the economic benefits of having a thriving arts scene - or an arts scene of any sort - might be lost across the state, but there will certainly be a negative impact. Eliminating the state's arts agency would impact larger economic development by sending conflicting messages about the quality of life that a business could expect for its employees here. In addition, nearly \$900,000 in federal funds may be in jeopardy if the Council is eliminated.

It's one thing to cut spending on arts, but completely eliminating the state's arts agency is short-sighted. Hopefully, funding for the Arts Council can be restored in the Senate version of the budget and remain there when the final budget legislation is approved at the end of the session.

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## Georgia Economic Update

Gov. Perdue announced that for the first time since November 2008, the monthly collection of state revenues reflected an increase in March. Net revenue collections grew by \$10.5 million last month, to \$998.2 million from \$987.9 million in March 2009. While representing only a 1 percent increase, it was the first positive piece of economic news in well over a year for Georgia lawmakers and is hopefully the sign the downturn in state revenues is beginning to level off. Less encouraging was the unemployment report for March, which showed Georgia's jobless rate increased slightly to a record 10.6 percent.

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## City of Atlanta - Contact Information

Our office is always ready to help you with questions and concerns about city services. However, in order to expedite any complaints you may have, please feel free to personally contact the city agencies listed below.

During your call, please make note of the following: Date and time of call, Name of city customer service representative, Note remedy given by the representative, and Ask for estimated time to have issue addressed.

**Department of Public Works 404-330-6333** Potholes, Traffic light malfunction or non-function, Missed garbage / recycling / yard waste pickup, Missing street / directional signs, Dead animal removal (for loose animals please call Fulton County Animal Services 404-794-0358)

**Department of Watershed Management 404-539-9211** Billing questions, brown water, low water pressure, main break, filling swimming pool, manhole covers and drain grates.

**Department of Law - Claims 404-330-6400** Claims for repairs from damage due to potholes, moved metal plates, etc.

**Bureau of Code Compliance 404-330-6190** Website lists four ways to file a code compliance violation. Citizens may also call the number above to file a complaint. Violations can be tracked on the website.

If an issue is not properly addressed by the department, citizens can contact Mayor Reed's Office of Constituent Services at 404-330-6026. You may also call your representative on the City Council.

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### Elly's Legislation

[Click here](#) to review 2009-10 legislation sponsored or co-sponsored by Rep. Elly Dobbs.

#### Quick Links

- [Rep. Elly Dobbs](#)
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- [Fulton County Schools](#)
- [Democratic Party of Georgia](#)
- [Register to Vote](#)
- [Georgia Crisis & Access Line 800-715-4225](#)

### 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).

Newsletter email: [newsletters@wordexpress.info](mailto:newsletters@wordexpress.info)  
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