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State Representative Elly Dobbs*GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE REPORT*

February 15, 2010

Greetings!

This will be the sixth week of the General Assembly, with Tuesday, February 16, being the 18th day of this session. The House will not meet this Monday in honor of Presidents' Day. The most important action taken in the House last week was the approval of the supplemental state budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2010. Overall state spending is reduced by \$1.2 billion to reflect the fact that state revenues have declined for 14 consecutive months. Please read more about this bill below. Hearings will begin on the 2011 budget which will also require additional cuts into important state programs without new revenues.



This week's question of the week concerns the Governor's proposal to appoint several of our Constitutional officers rather than continue to elect them. I would like to hear from you if you have a position on this issue. I hope that you had an enjoyable Valentine's Day and that you have the opportunity to take advantage of the long weekend resulting from the Presidents' Day holiday.

Feel free to circulate this email to friends and neighbors. You can subscribe to our newsletter by emailing 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.

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**House majority approves more cuts to education**

A majority of the House of Representatives voted Thursday to approve an amended state budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2010. Overall state spending is reduced by \$1.2 billion to reflect the fact that state revenues have declined for 14 consecutive months.

In [HB 947](#), the \$17.4 billion budget plan includes spending cuts of 8 percent in most state agencies and three more unpaid furlough days for public school teachers and other state employees between now and June 30. Earlier this week, it was reported that state revenue collections fell by another \$137 million in January, bringing the total decline for the first seven months of this fiscal year to \$1.28 billion, nearly 13 percent off from last year.

Areas of the House version of the budget where spending is increased include \$5.9 million to the Department of Community Health for the Indigent Care Trust Fund, which is allocated to disproportionate share hospitals. These are hospitals that provide uncompensated care to patients without adequate health insurance and \$169,000 for the Department of Revenue to hire six



investigative agents and four financial analysts for the agency's fraud detection group. These new employees would start work April 1 in an effort to bring in more uncollected tax revenue.

The House budget also does not include Gov. Sonny Perdue's effort to take \$33 million in lottery revenues away from the HOPE Scholarship program and use that money for other scholarships that are presently funded out of the general treasury. The measure also puts back \$17.4 million for equalization grants to low-wealth school districts that the governor proposed to cut.

Deciding how to vote on this bill was very difficult since this budget cuts education funding for the City of Atlanta by \$2,630,196 and \$4,539,734 for Fulton County. It cut \$281 million from Quality Basic Education funding to local school systems state wide, bringing the total reduction in local school funding under the Perdue administration to nearly \$2.5 billion. This not only shortchanges our students, it forces local boards of education to raise local property taxes in order to make up the difference.

While overall spending cuts are necessary, this budget again reflects the wrong priorities. I cannot support additional cuts to public education without first looking at the special-interest tax breaks that are a major factor in the state revenue shortfall. The budget proposal now goes to the Senate for its consideration.

Legislators will likely begin hearings on the 2011 budget during the coming week. Choices will have to be made about whether to accept Governor Perdue's recommendations about measures such as the unpopular hospital tax, make deeper cuts, or adopt new revenues such as a proposed tobacco tax. To make decisions more difficult, revenues declined again last month, heightening concerns about the need for more service cuts or additional revenues.

Sales Tax Collections: House Democrats introduced legislation this week aimed at recovering sales revenues that consumers are paying but are not being collected by the state. [HB 1137](#) would require cities and counties to collect information that identifies local businesses and turn that data over to the state revenue department, which in turn would provide local governments a list of all businesses that have been assigned a sales tax identification number. The matching of data would enable the state to zero in on businesses that are not turning over sales tax money, thus generating revenues without raising tax rates. HB 1137 is under consideration in the House Ways & Means Committee.

Education Spending Waiver: The House voted Tuesday to waive state regulations on how local school boards spend state funds over the next three years. [HB 908](#), which now goes to the Senate for its consideration is intended to provide flexibility during current economic conditions and in light of budget cutbacks.

Transportation Funding: In addition to the Transportation Jobs Development Act proposed last week by House Democrats, bipartisan legislation was proposed this week that would set aside 25 percent of any future increases in the state's general sales tax revenues for transportation purposes. Had this plan been in place over the past 10 years, it would have generated approximately \$1.5 billion for transportation. [HR 1358](#) was referred to the House Transportation Committee.

Business Identity Theft: House members voted unanimously to approve legislation that would allow businesses to be treated the same as individuals by prosecutors when they are victims under state laws on identity theft. [HB 1016](#) now goes to the Senate for its consideration.

Question of the Week

Should some of our state elected offices be appointed by the Governor?

Do you support Governor Perdue's proposal to allow the Governor to appoint as Cabinet members the Commission of Labor, the Commissioner of Agriculture, The Superintendent of Education and the Commissioner of Insurance instead of these positions being elected by the people as independent constitutional officers?

Proponents say that Georgia is in the minority of states that elect these officers. Taxpayer's money could be saved by appointment these offices instead of electing them. In addition, it is argued that the Governor is entitled to assert his or her leadership for the state, and should not have to compete with other elected officers who may have their own agendas. Voters elect a Governor to lead who should make decisions which would effect these departments and should be able to change department regulations consistent with the Governor's plans for the State. Term limits on these appointed positions would also bring new ideas and discourage the influence from the industries they regulate.

Opponents say the state of Georgia is a diverse state and these constitutional officers can offer views from different parties with differing policies. Electing these officers instead of appointing them gives the voters more direct power, and allows for the development of expertise and leadership over time without terms limitations.

Do you think these constitutional officers should be appointed rather than elected? Please [click here](#) to reply by e-mail.

Elly's Legislation

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

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Representative Elly Dobbs

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