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State Representative Elly Dobbs*GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE REPORT*

February 24, 2010

Greetings!

Last Thursday was the 20th legislative day, marking the halfway point of the 2010 session. The House of Representatives and the state Senate voted Thursday to adjourn the current legislative session until March 8 to allow Appropriations Committee members to work full-time over the next two weeks on the budget proposal for fiscal year 2011, which begins July 1 this year. In addition to the Appropriations Committee, several other committees will also be meeting.



This past week the Judiciary Subcommittee, upon which I serve, met several days and many hours hearing testimony on two proposed bills dealing with mortgage foreclosure. I also heard testimony, as a member of the Health and Human Services Committee, on a proposed bill placing restrictions on tanning facilities and on the dangers involved with the use of tanning beds. Both bills are discussed below. If you would like additional information about these bills or any other bills, do not hesitate to [contact me](#).

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**The State Budget**

State revenues have declined for 14 consecutive months and are down 13 percent from this time last year and approximately 23 percent from two years ago. Lawmakers are seriously concerned that Gov. Sonny Perdue's forecast for 4.2 percent revenue growth next year is unrealistic and they are taking extreme actions in the difficult process of balancing the FY 2011 budget as well as amending the 2010 Budget.

The House Amended Fiscal Year 2010 Budget ([HB 947](#)) is \$17.4 billion; this is almost twenty percent less than the 2009 budget of \$21.2 billion. The 2010 budget will be close to 2005 spending levels and, if adjusted for both population and inflation, will be near mid-1990s levels.

The Governor has ordered agencies to curb spending and set aside funds totaling over \$900 million in response to the decline in revenues. Some of the Governor's recommendations to achieve budget savings include:



Furlough Days (6 for teachers and state employees)-\$261 million
Recapture funds for other post employment benefits-\$140 million
Savings from State Health Benefit Plan-\$65 million
Executive Branch agency reductions (Most at 8%) \$338 million
K-12 reductions (some protection at 4%)-\$281 million
Medicaid Reductions-\$65 million
Legislative (at 8%) and Judicial Reductions-over \$10 million
Debt savings due to favorable rates and AAA rating-\$88 million

The House worked with the Governor's revenue estimate and adopted some of his proposals for both reductions and additions to come up with their own amended budget for 2010. Now work will begin on the 2011 Budget. While the General Assembly is in official recess over the next two weeks, the House and the Senate will be giving full attention to the appropriations process.

Legislation Approved by the House of Representatives

Superintendents' Raises: The House voted Thursday to make it more difficult for local school superintendents to receive salary increases in years when classroom teachers forced to take unpaid furlough days. [HB 977](#), approved unanimously, would prohibit the use of state funds by a school board to give its superintendent a raise in years when teachers are furloughed. If the school board uses local or private funds for a superintendent's raise, a public hearing would have to be held. HB 977 now goes to the Senate for its consideration.

Other legislation approved by the House and sent to the Senate last week includes:

[HB 122](#), which would require county and city governments with an annual budget exceeding \$1 million to post their budget and annual audit report on a public web site.

[HB 249](#), which would allow the Georgia Firefighters Pension Fund to make alternative investments, private placements and private investments up to a certain amount.

[HB 991](#), which would enact methods of resolving disputes between city and county governments regarding the distribution of joint sales tax collections.

[HB 665](#), which would establish a pilot program for the electronic transmission of absentee ballots for military personnel and citizens who are overseas in the 2012 election.

[HB 901](#), which would remove an exception for capital felons and require them to serve the maximum sentence upon conviction of a fourth or subsequent felony.

Legislation Pending in House Committees

Hospital Tax: Gov. Perdue's proposal for a 1.6 percent tax increase on Georgia hospitals was not well received in the Health Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee last Wednesday. Representatives from the medical and business communities spoke against the tax increase, which they feared would be passed along to patients who are already dealing with sharply rising health care costs. Hospital officials recommended that lawmakers instead consider a \$1 per pack cigarette tax to deal with the state's Medicaid deficit. The committee chairman said no action on the proposal is imminent.

Health Insurance: On Feb. 16, the Governor proposed legislation that would allow Georgians to buy health insurance across state lines. Current state law allows only health plans that have been specifically approved for Georgia to be sold in the state because they incorporate all of the state's coverage mandates. Georgia law, for example, requires that health insurance policies include things like mammograms and prostate exams, needed colonoscopies, appropriate

inpatient care after childbirth and regular check-ups for young children. [HB 1184](#) would undo all those requirements by allowing insurance companies to sell here in Georgia plans that had been approved for sale in other states without our consumer protections. The governor argues that opening access across state lines would lower costs for consumers and help uninsured Georgians find a plan they can afford. The legislation was referred to the House Insurance Committee for its consideration.

Transportation: [HB 1218](#) would enable voters in different regions around the state to decide on specific transportation projects in their area and to fund these regional projects with a penny sales tax. Local elected officials in each region would propose a list of programs that need to be fast forwarded. A referendum will then be on the 2012 ballot in order to give citizens of Georgia a voice on how their dollars are spent. There would be 12 special tax districts, and all of the revenue would stay in the district from which it was collected. There would be an eight-year sunset which means that the tax would be repealed in 2020.

Water: [HB 1094](#) requires efficient water fixtures in all new residential and commercial construction statewide as well as the installation of efficient cooling towers in new industrial construction beginning in July 2012. In addition to other requirements, the bill will require sub-metering for all new residential and commercial multi-unit projects so that each unit will receive consumption reports and have incentive to practice conservation measures.

Mortgage Foreclosure Protection: [SB 57](#) is being heard in the Judiciary Subcommittee on which I serve. Our committee is working with consumer protection advocacy organizations, bankers and mortgage brokers in an effort to craft a bill that not only protects borrowers from the dangers of sub-prime mortgage loans but also will protect our state's economy in the future. We are continuing to work on language for this bill during the next two weeks after which time the bill will be taken up by the Committee.

Tobacco Tax: [HB 39](#) would add a \$1 excise tax to a package of cigarettes and lesser amounts to other forms of tobacco. It is projected that this bill has a 70% approval rating among voters around the state and growing support from the health care industry. I am supporting this bill as an alternative to the Governor's "provider tax" on hospitals to help fill the hole in the state budget.

Tanning Facilities: [HB 853](#) relating to tanning beds and facilities was heard last week by the Health and Human Services Committee, of which I am a member. This bill would require tanning salons to be registered with the state, among other requirements and would also require parental consent for minors to use the services of a tanning facility. The Committee heard extensive testimony of the dangers associated with the use of tanning beds.

Other Matters Happening Around the Capitol

Are HOT lanes coming to Atlanta?

On Tuesday morning I attended a presentation by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and representatives from other states at the Georgia Freight Depot to provide information on bringing High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes to I-85 in Atlanta. HOT lanes have been used around the world as a viable form of pricing control on traffic flow. The first HOT lane in the United States didn't come online until 1996 in San Francisco. It was argued that HOT lanes help manage capacity, manage demand, raise revenue, attract private investment and increase traffic volume. In 2008, Governor Sonny Perdue announced a \$110 million federal grant to the State of Georgia for Phase I implementation of a long-term HOT lane strategy in metro Atlanta. This first phase will demonstrate the success of HOT lanes on approximately 15 miles of the I-85 corridor. The total cost of the project will be \$182 million.

Question of the Week:

Do you think that HOT lanes will help ease the traffic congestion in the

Atlanta area and would you use a HOT lane if it was available?

[Click here to respond 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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