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State Representative Elly Dobbs*GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE REPORT*

February 8, 2010

Greetings!

This will be the fifth week of the General Assembly, with Monday, February 8, being the 14th day of this session. This past week the House Judiciary subcommittee, on which I serve, held hearings on [SB 57](#) and [HB 972](#). SB 57, the Georgia Fair Lending Act, will protect home buyers and borrowers from predatory lending practices. This legislation bans prepayment penalties and "yield spread premiums" on subprime loans, and would require that lenders determine that the borrower has the ability to pay before the lending process begins. HB 972 would increase the time(from 30 days to 90 days) that home owners have to cure the foreclosure and bring the debt current.

With the crisis of mortgage foreclosures in our State, these bills would assist in reducing the number of foreclosures, and reduce the number of abandoned homes in our neighborhoods.

As you will see below, the House is working on the key issues of Transportation, Water, and Education. In addition please be aware of the 2010 Federal Census that will be taking place this year. It is important for all of us to participate in the census and be counted. Read below why the outcome of this census is important to the state of Georgia.

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 Democrats introduce Transportation Jobs Development Act**

This week, House Democrats introduced the Transportation Jobs Development Act, a legislative solution to the transportation funding problem that has caused Georgia to fall behind other states in recent years.

The proposed legislation ([HB 1099](#) and [HR 1300](#)) calls for a constitutional amendment authorizing the formation of special transportation districts, which would give citizens in local jurisdictions the power to decide whether to levy a regional sales tax for transportation improvements in their regions. The proposal would also dedicate the fourth penny collected on the state's motor fuel tax to transportation purposes.



Georgia has been losing jobs and federal dollars to

other states because of the majority leadership's failure during the past two years to enact transportation funding legislation. For example, Florida and North Carolina were awarded nearly \$1.8 billion in federal rail grants last week, while our state received only \$750,000 due to the lack of support for rail projects by the Perdue administration and the legislative majority leaders.

The governor recently proposed a statewide vote on a one-cent sales tax for transportation to take place in November 2012, nearly two years after he has left office. It would be 2014 before those funds would have any positive impact on transportation improvements. Georgia cannot wait four more years to catch up with the needs of a population that has outgrown its transportation system.

The Transportation Jobs Development Act would establish a 10-county metropolitan transit district concurrent with the Atlanta Regional Commission (Cherokee Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties). A district board consisting of elected officials on the metropolitan area planning and development commission would oversee transportation activities in the district. At least 50 percent of the sales tax collected within the metropolitan region would go toward mass transit, except in DeKalb and Fulton counties, where a sales tax for MARTA is already collected.

The plan would also authorize counties outside that region to levy a special one-cent sales tax for transportation if approved by local referendum. The local governments within those regions would develop a list of projects to be funded prior to calling for the referendum.

The fourth penny of the motor fuel tax, which generated \$137 million in fiscal year 2009, presently goes to the state's general treasury. The legislation calls for those funds to be dedicated to transportation purposes on a phase-in basis between 2012 and 2015.

As a proposed constitutional amendment, HB 1099 and HR 1300 require two-thirds approval of both the House and Senate, and a majority approval by voters in the 2010 general election.

Water Conservation: Gov. Sonny Perdue, in his eighth and final year in office, this week unveiled a proposal for water management legislation that calls for some limited conservation measures for the construction industry and power utilities. The proposal would require builders to include low-flow plumbing devices in all new structures and would require large industrial and commercial buildings to deploy more efficient chillers and water cooling towers as part of their heating and air conditioning systems. Noting that the governor is proposing these measures on his way out of office, one water conservation expert said the proposal is "a good start, but it would have been a great start five years ago."

Education Flexibility: The House passed four measures this week aimed at giving local school systems more flexibility to deal with regulations and reduced funding imposed by the state. [HB 905](#) would extend until 2015 the sunset date for providing school systems advance funding for new facilities that are needed because of student growth or damage caused by fire or natural disaster. [HB 906](#) would extend the deadline for offering teacher contracts from April 15 to May 15 for the next three years. [HB 907](#) would allow local boards to decide the grade structures that make up their middle schools. [HB 923](#) would allow teachers who earn a leadership degree to be moved up the salary schedule if they earn the degree prior to July 1, 2013, and were enrolled in the leadership program by April 1, 2009. All of these bills now go to the Senate for its consideration.

Loans to Developers: The House approved and sent to the Senate [HB 926](#), which would make it easier for large developers to renew real estate loans with their local bank. State-chartered banks are currently barred from renewing loans to borrowers who owe an amount equal to at least 15 percent of a bank's available funds. This measure would eliminate that restriction, allowing these companies to stay in business.

Participate in this Year's Census!

This year, the federal government is conducting the 2010 Census. The census is a count of everyone residing in the United States. All U.S. residents must be counted, including both citizens and non-citizens.

The census is important for a number of reasons. It will determine state population counts and determine representation in the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as boundaries for state and local legislative and congressional districts. Census data also guides planning for new hospitals, roads, job training centers, schools and other programs essential to communities.

Your participation is particularly important in this year's census. Georgia is poised to pick up one or two congressional seats, expanding our representation in Congress.

You should receive your census questionnaire by mail in March. If you do not receive a questionnaire, you will be able to pick one up from several public sites. Households should complete and mail back questionnaires upon receipt. Households that do not respond may receive a replacement questionnaire in early April. Census takers will visit homes that do not return questionnaires to take a count in person.

The 2010 questionnaire consists of 10 short questions and takes about 10 minutes to complete. Households are asked to provide key demographic information, including: whether a housing unit is rented or owned; address of the residence; and the names, genders, ages and races of others living in the household. Federal law prohibits the sharing of information from the Census with any other organization or agency, so your information is secure.

I encourage everyone to participate in the 2010 Census. It is critically important and only takes a few minutes.

Earned Income Tax Credit Partnership launches 2010 campaign

Helping working families maximize tax refunds and financial incentives

The Atlanta Workforce Development Agency, Mayor's Office of Weed and Seed and the Atlanta Prosperity Campaign, a coalition of local nonprofits, government and corporate groups, have announced the kick-off of this season's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) services and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefits program in a press conference at the Atlanta Workforce Development Agency. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) services offer free tax preparation to individuals, families, or married couples whose households earned less than \$48,000 in 2009. Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefits offer qualified taxpayers refunds of up to \$5,600. For more information or to qualify, individuals and working families can go to www.atlantaworkforce.org or visit the VITA Center located at 818 Pollard Boulevard, Atlanta, Georgia, 30331.

Elly's Legislation

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

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