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State Representative Elly Dobbs*GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE REPORT*

January 25, 2010

Greetings!

Monday, January 25, is Day 5 of the 40-day session of the General Assembly. Last week the Appropriations Committee held hearings on the Governor's proposed budget and to hear from the State departments and agencies. Difficult decisions will have to be made in order to balance the State's budget this year.

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****Governor releases budget plan; more cuts ahead**

A series of Appropriations Committee hearings this week began the legislative process for amending the state budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2010, which ends June 30, and the budget for fiscal year 2011, which begins July 1.

Gov. Sonny Perdue released his budget recommendations, which propose reducing the current year's budget from \$18.6 billion to \$17.4 billion to reflect severe declines in state revenue collections. With state services already cut to the bone, these new reductions average 8 percent among state agencies, including another \$299 million slashed from public school funding (bringing the total school cuts for this year to \$710 million) and three additional furlough days for educators and other state employees.



More education cuts will have a devastating effect on many school systems that are "teetering on the edge" financially, according to State School Superintendent Kathy Cox. She warned that some systems are already in the red, leaving local school boards with no choice but to expand class sizes up to 40 students or increase local property taxes, or both.

The governor is also reintroducing his plan for a 1.6 percent tax increase on hospitals and other health care providers to partially make up for an estimated \$506 million deficit in the Medicaid program. Lawmakers rejected the governor's so-called "sick tax" last year out of concern the extra costs would be passed on to patients' health care bills and/or force some already-struggling rural hospitals to close their doors.

Under the plan, hospitals would be taxed 1.6 percent on their net revenues, whether

they receive Medicaid reimbursement or not. The facilities handling the largest volumes of Medicaid patients would come out ahead financially, but the vast majority of hospitals would lose money, according to an analysis by the state's Office of Planning and Budget.

The changes to the FY 2010 budget are based on the governor's forecast that state revenues, which have been on a steep decline for more than a year, will be essentially flat over the next six months. Another dip in the economy, he said, will necessitate even further cuts in state spending.

For the FY 2011 budget, the governor is forecasting a 4.2 percent increase in state revenues and proposing \$901 million in additional state debt to pay for construction and other capital outlay projects. I am among the legislators and economic observers who are concerned that growth rate is unrealistically optimistic, with the state not expected to reach 2007 revenue levels again until 2014. If we instead planned on flat growth, it might prevent so many cuts and the need for deep budget adjustments next year.

Georgia Budget & Policy Institute: The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute is an independent, nonprofit, non-partisan organization that raises the level of public debate through research, analysis, and education on state budget, tax, and economic issues. The GBPI seeks to advance public policy that will expand opportunity for all Georgians. For more information on the state's budget crisis, [click here for a report](#) presented by Alan Essig, director of the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute.

Jobless Rate Increases: Statewide, the unemployment rate jumped to 10.3 percent in December, matching the record high jobless level registered last July. The percentage of Georgians without jobs was significantly higher than the 7.5 percent recorded in December 2008, with the number of payroll jobs down by about 175,000.

Texting While Driving: With the General Assembly scheduled to reconvene Jan. 25, the public safety issue of texting while driving is expected to move onto the legislative agenda. Two proposals have been introduced in the House of Representatives that would make it illegal to send or read text messages on a cell phone while driving, with fines for the offense running as high as \$300. Nineteen other states have outlawed texting while driving.

Water Issue Update: It was reported at the **Georgia Water Coalition Team Meeting** on January 20 that the governor's legislation package regarding water use and conservation is anticipated to be released the last week of January, or the first week of February. It is expected to be statewide in scope. When the legislative package is drafted, it is expected to include a strong proposal for the use of HETs (High Efficiency Toilets). We are following several other bills which have been filed to help with conservation of our water. Last Wednesday, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Georgia could appeal the decision by U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson that could drastically reduce our water supply from Lake Lanier. This ruling is a victory for Georgia and an appeal will likely follow soon.

Sign the petition for safer roads

I am on the Board of Directors of Road Safe America, a group trying to make roads in our country safer for all of us. This organization was created several years ago after Cullum Owings, the son of my good friends Susan and Steve Owings, was killed in an accident with a tractor-trailer on the way back to college. As a member of the Board I am reaching out to all of you to sign an on-line petition. This petition has a chance to make a real impact on pending decisions in Washington. Signing this Petition will:

- ~ Alert President Obama and other leaders that action is needed to reduce highway deaths.
- ~ Prompt political leaders to limit truck speeds by mandating use of speed governors.
- ~ Show national support for the use of safety technology on heavy commercial

vehicles.

Please take a moment, go to the web site www.roadsafeamerica.org and sign the petition and ask others to do so as well. Thank you for your help to increase the safety of our roads.

[Sign the petition...](#)

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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