

## Will the majority last?

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The 2008 session of the Georgia General Assembly is a little more than half over. Our elected representatives have managed to accomplish a few things like passage of the statewide water plan, which passed both the House and Senate and has been signed into law by the Governor. The Senate passed a ban on those annoying robo-calls from political candidates. And in an effort to appear tough on crime, the legislature is tackling some of the constitutional issues with the sex offender bill after the Georgia Supreme Court threw out the law last year over property rights concerns. The new law is very similar to what the court threw out. It would bar convicted sex offenders from living within 1,000 of a church or school.

But the session has not been without tension and drama.

The State House has been dysfunctional, and that may be an understatement. The session started with tension between the House Speaker Glenn Richardson and Gov. Sonny Perdue as the House overrode twelve vetoes. The Senate, acting as a cooling saucer, deferred the overrides to committee. This created somewhat of a war of words between the two bodies of the legislature and debate over the wording of the state Constitution on vetoes. One member, State Rep. Ron Forster (R-Ringgold), went as far as filing articles of impeachment against Lt. Governor Casey Cagle for not acting quickly enough on the vetoes.

Republicans run on limited government, less spending and less regulation. I don't buy into the social authoritarianism of Republicans, but I believe in Jeffersonian principles and capitalism. However, after four years of complete control of the legislature, Republicans have proved that they are as much tax-and-spend liberals as their Democratic counterparts. And if Republicans in the House have their way, they will pass a bill that would allow for a one-cent statewide sales tax, the largest tax increase in Georgia history.

The original bill, sponsored by State Rep. Vance Smith (R-Pine Mountain), would have collected \$22.2 billion over the course of ten years. An updated proposal brings the number of years down to eight. Republicans are also pushing a T-SPLOST proposal. A T-SPLOST is very similar to a SPLOST; however, counties would only be allowed to use the funds for transportation projects. Both proposals would require voter approval.

State Rep. Ron Stephens (R-Garden City) is pushing a one dollar increase in the state's cigarette tax to fund new healthcare initiatives. Evidence suggests that these types of tax increases are regressive, most smokers are poor or lower middle class, and sales of cigarettes will decline, meaning that expected revenues will not be met, meaning that new programs are likely to be funded through other means.

That brings us to the Glenn Richardson. Richardson has spent much of his political capital since the end of the 2007 session. His agenda has been met with skepticism, hostility and defeat at virtually every turn.

Richardson's tax plan, the so-called "GREAT plan" (known as the GlennTax in the Georgia blogosphere), did not receive any support from local governments. Gov. Perdue and members of the Senate were cool to the proposal. Support among his fellow Republicans in the House was weak. The proposal seemed to change every week as the skepticism mounted.

Last week the Speaker pitched the latest version of the plan, now called the "Property Tax Reform initiative." The new version would phase out the car ad valorem tax and the school portion of the property tax. Local governments and school boards would rely on the state for funding for schools and subsidies to replace lost revenue for the car tax.

Under the proposal the state would tax 174 new services, everything from construction contractors, movie tickets, taxis, limos, recording studios, cable, cell phones, various banking activities, legal services, tax preparation services, rental services (video, electronic, etc.), trash service, various real estate and property services, sports event tickets, historical sites, museums, the zoo, golf courses, car washes, barber shops, beauty salons, parking lots and garages and the sales tax exemption on groceries would be lifted as well.

In 2003, Stephen Moore, then president of the Club for Growth, wrote an article in the National Review condemning a tax increase proposal by Gov. Sonny Perdue. He called Republicans the new "pro-tax party" in Georgia and "fiscal frauds." This was before the Republican takeover of the Georgia General Assembly, but those words were prophetic.

This Republican majority, like their national counterparts, have abandoned limited government and embraced an expansive, more intrusive philosophy of governing. They don't cut spending and they have done nothing to decrease the tax burden of Georgians; in fact they want to increase the tax burden in order to fund their personal pork projects in their districts. They don't work within the budget they already have and that budget has increased by a billion dollars each year that Republicans have been in control of the legislature, in addition to several billion dollars in bonds over the same amount of time.

Majorities don't last forever, especially in politics. If something doesn't change inside the Georgia House, which is the source of so much contention, the Republican majority will come to an end sooner than anyone expected and at this point, I'm not so sure that is a prospect that shouldn't be welcomed.