



**February 28, 2010**



**The General Assembly will be back in session - for Legislative Day 21  
on Monday, March 8 - at 10:00 a.m.**



Passing a responsible, balanced state budget that meets the needs of all Georgians is the House's greatest responsibility and number one priority. Crafting a state budget is not a simple, overnight task. Setting spending for the state for the year requires extensive work and months of review of every state agency's budget.

Both the House and Senate are currently taking two weeks to work together in a joint effort, to review every instance of state spending. Our goal is to work together, along with the Governor, to create a budget that helps improve our economy, grows businesses and puts Georgians back to work. Members of both Appropriations committees will be meeting together in an unusual move to iron out major budget issues before the FY 2011 Budget is produced by either body.

During this recessed period, Representatives and Senators are meeting in the Capitol to hear how state agencies and departments could cut spending even further for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2011 budget. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Georgia ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in state spending per person, which means Georgia state government is one of the leanest in the country and your tax dollars are going further than ever. Some agencies, like the State Accounting Office, have already cut their budget by 29 percent from Fiscal Year 2009 to Fiscal Year 2011. Finding further savings in state agency budgets will require careful work, but I am confident we will pass a responsible, balanced state budget that meets our state's needs.

While we work to find new ways to bring greater investment to our transportation system, it is important to hold the Georgia Department of Transportation board members who oversee transportation funding accountable. In this respect, I was pleased to see the introduction of House Resolution 1446, a constitutional amendment to shorten the terms of GDOT board members from five years to two years and House Bill 1242, which brings the GDOT board under the same ethics requirements as the Georgia General Assembly. These initiatives will provide greater oversight and make for a more responsive transportation agency.

## PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT

I know times are tough and money is tight right now. That's why I want to make sure you are not paying more property taxes than you should be. It's your right to challenge your property tax assessment if it exceeds the fair market value of your home.

The deadline to challenge your property taxes is between March 1 and April 1 (check with your County Tax Assessor Office). In many instances the sales prices of comparable homes in neighborhoods have fallen so low that the county uses a higher value to calculate property taxes than you could get if you sold your home on the market.

Georgia law allows you to tell property assessors what the fair market price of your home is. This forces assessors to review your property tax assessment. The process is simple.

All you need to do is file form PT50R, the Georgia Property Tax Return Form. You can find the form on the Georgia Department of Revenue website: [etax.dor.ga.gov](http://etax.dor.ga.gov).

Section A of the form requires you to fill out certain information tax assessors use to identify your property. You can find this information by going to the Property Appraisal Department/Website for your county, and search for your street address.

You can tell the tax assessors what the fair market value of your house is in Section C. To determine the fair market price you need to figure out the sales prices of similar property in your neighborhood prior to January 1. You can find an estimate of the fair market price of your home at [zillow.com](http://zillow.com).

After you've completed the form, mail it to: Your County Property Appraisal Dept.

If you have any questions, the Property Appraisal Department for your county; and a customer service representative at the Property Appraisal Department will be happy to assist you.

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## MARTA TO BEGIN REPLACING AGING BUSES WITH NEW CNG VEHICLES THANKS TO FEDERAL AND STATE FUNDING

MARTA will begin rolling out new Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses, replacing vehicles that are scheduled for retirement. Thanks to federal and state funding, MARTA was able to purchase 101 of these new buses to update its aging fleet. MARTA's buses are replaced when they reach the end of their useful lives - approximately 12 years of age or 500,000 miles.

The buses were purchased with funding from the United States Congress, the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration, the Georgia Department of Transportation and MARTA.

These new CNG buses feature improved customer amenities and vehicle design as well as enhanced safety features. HVAC systems offer improved ventilation for customers and operators and seats and wheelchair restraints have been redesigned to offer enhanced comfort and convenience. On the exterior of the bus, four turn signals on each side of the vehicle provide greater visibility for pedestrians and motorists during bus turns.

The vehicle's new black-and-gray design is part of an overall update of MARTA's graphic standards. These new standards are being incorporated throughout the system when a vehicle or equipment is rehabilitated or replaced.

## **MARTA**

### **Fulton County Community Forum - Adamsville Recreation Center**

**Tuesday, March 2, 2010**

6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Adamsville Recreation Center

3201 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive NW

Atlanta, GA 30311-1301

The Authority will share information about the extent of its fiscal issues, the importance of the state legislative discussions currently underway, proposed transit service reductions and fare alternatives. MARTA intends to solicit community input and ensure the public is aware of the agency's decision-making process and timeframe for preparing and finalizing its FY 2011 budget proposal.

Last year, MARTA utilized significant, one-time federal stimulus funds to balance its budget. Due to the severe economic downturn, MARTA has continued to see a large decline in its sales tax revenues and will have to make tough decisions about its fiscal year 2011 budget, which takes effect July 1, 2010. Sales tax revenue accounts for 52 percent of MARTA's overall operating budget.

MARTA is currently facing a \$120 million budget shortfall and, without a significant and immediate additional investment in public transit, MARTA will be forced to reduce its budget by 25 to 30 percent, which would include significant transit service cuts and employee layoffs.

Community members can also submit comments to MARTA by calling 404-848-5026, emailing [custserv@itsmarta.com](mailto:custserv@itsmarta.com) or writing to MARTA's Office of External Affairs at 2424 Piedmont Road, NE Atlanta, Georgia 30324-3330.

### **NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOB SEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS**

#### **GEORGIA TEEN WORK**

The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) is helping youth aged 14-18 learn new work skills while earning income this summer. The federally funded effort will help youth build strong work habits while jump-starting Georgia's economy. TeenWork jobs are available June 1 to July 31, 2010. The jobs pay \$8.50 an hour for up to 35 hours a week. Jobs are available in many different businesses, industries and governments.

This isn't just a great opportunity for Georgia Teens; it is also great for Georgia businesses. TeenWork allows business owners to strengthen their business at no cost. TeenWork provides a 100 percent subsidy for businesses employing qualified youth for up to 35 hours a week from June 1 to July 31, 2010. Employers will not have to seek reimbursement. Employees will be paid using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

For more information visit [www.georgiateenwork.org](http://www.georgiateenwork.org) or call (888) 884-4712.

## JOBS FOR GEORGIANS

The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) is using federal stimulus dollars to help put 5,000 Georgians back to work. Adults who have dependent children and an annual income at or below 300 percent of the federal level for a family of four (approximately \$66,000), are currently receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and parents participating in the Child Support Fatherhood Program whose children are TANF eligible are among the Georgians who qualify for this program.

DHS is currently seeking employers across the state to employ Georgians. Employers will receive an 80 percent wage subsidy for hiring workers under the program using funds from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Employers will be eligible for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit as well as the Welfare-to-Work Tax Credit. DHS will prescreen prospective employees, conduct background checks (if required), and provide job coaching to prospective employees to ensure the success of the program. Employers cannot replace existing employees to take advantage of the subsidy.

Federal subsidies for the program are available through September 30, 2010. Positions must pay wages similar to wages paid to current employees performing similar tasks. The maximum subsidy for a six-month period per employee is \$26,000.

For more information, send requests to [TANF-Employers@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:TANF-Employers@dhr.state.ga.us).

### EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS

To apply for a position on a state board or commission, send a letter to the Office of the Governor expressing your desire to serve, along with a brief resume. Many boards have similar names, so be sure to state the full and correct name of your board preference, or call 404-656-1776.

[http://gov.georgia.gov/00/channel\\_title/0,2094,78006749\\_78013053,00.html](http://gov.georgia.gov/00/channel_title/0,2094,78006749_78013053,00.html)

As I continue to review legislation and work with my colleagues on the state budget, I want to know the issues that are important to you and your family. As your State Representative, I am always eager to hear your thoughts and concerns. Please feel free to call me with any questions or comments that you might have regarding our state. You can reach me at 404-542-8683.



for allowing me to serve as your State Representative for the 44<sup>th</sup> District.  
I thank you for your continued trust and support.

*Sheila*