



Seize the opportunity

By state Rep. Tom Graves, R-Ranger

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— This week the Georgia General Assembly reconvenes in Atlanta for the 2010 Session, and, as Chairman of the 9th District Legislative Caucus, I wanted to give you a first hand look at what this session holds. Many are saying that the legislature faces insurmountable challenges as we gather in Atlanta. Continued declining revenues and multi-billion dollar cuts in recent years have certainly created significant challenges. But, it's times such as these that create the greatest opportunities. Despite the budget "crisis" as some would call it, this is a Session of opportunity! Opportunity to lay the groundwork for future recovery, opportunity to change the way we do business and a reminder that more government is not the answer.

The most important thing government can do for our struggling economy is to get out of the way of individuals and small businesses. Last year, I authored and the legislature overwhelmingly passed the Jobs Opportunity and Business Success (JOBS) Act, which focused on helping small businesses and creating, expanding and attracting jobs through a series of tax credits, cuts, and incentives for businesses to hire Georgians. Unfortunately, the legislation was vetoed. This year, House and Senate leadership are again committed to passing pro-jobs legislation firmly rooted in our conservative principles. The way out of this recession is not through higher taxes, expanded government, deficit spending, or bailouts. The road back is found through getting Georgians back to work through an expanded private sector. This will be the 9th District Legislative Caucus' number one priority again this year.

During this session, there are some additional measures that the 9th District Legislative Caucus is encouraging our colleagues to advance. First, we should pass Zero-Based Budgeting, which will open up the state budget to increased scrutiny by requiring state departments to begin at \$0, not the previous year's budget number. Second, now is the time to pass the Taxpayer Dividend Act, which would require a certain percentage of any surpluses to be placed in the state's rainy day fund and to return whatever remains to the taxpayer. Enacting these types of reforms now will ensure that when we do recover, fiscally conservative principles will not be forgotten.

As many of you are aware, the House of Representatives will have new leadership for the first time in five years. Speaker David Ralston, a member of the 9th District Legislative Caucus, will lead the Georgia House and assisting him will be the new Speaker Pro-Tempore Jan Jones and new Majority Whip Ed Lindsey. I look forward to working with them in serving the people of this state.

There are other issues facing this state, issues like transportation, education, health care and water resources just to name a few. As the session progresses, I will keep you updated on our progress and I ask for your ideas, your input, and most importantly your prayers as we seek to serve this state and those we have been elected to represent. Members of the 9th District Legislative Caucus are optimistic about our future. The road to prosperity is never easy, but if we are committed to our conservative principles and willing to do the work required, we can come out of this recession stronger and Georgia will be better prepared for the future.

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