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Ott's lone 'no' vote on budget

Commissioner: Too much is paid with tax increases

By Geoff Folsom
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MARIETTA — Commissioner Bob Ott was alone in voting against the county's \$322 million budget for 2012 and water and sewer rate increases Tuesday morning. The budget and utility increases passed in 3-1 votes. Commissioner Woody Thompson was absent.



Bob Ott

The budget, which goes into effect Oct. 1, balances revenue and expenses at \$321,948,188 and is based on an 11.11 millage rate. That's an increase of \$2.5 million, or 0.78 percent, over the amended 2011 budget passed in April.

Ott, who also voted against raising the millage rate in July, said after the meeting that he voted against the budget because too much of it was paid with tax increases,

while the county added some positions in the process.

Commissioners agreed that they would continue to look for ways to cut spending in the coming months. Commissioner JoAnn Birrell said she looked forward to the final report of the Citizen Oversight Committee, which is making recommendations for how the county can better spend its resources.

"I'd like to see that we revisit this in

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Stafffile

Georgia Tea Party Chairman J.D. Van Brink says the planned TSPLOST tax referendum is 'fundamentally flawed.'

ARTS FLOURISH-ING



Staff/Reid Traylor

The Kennesaw State University's College of the Arts played host to its fourth annual Flourish Luncheon on Tuesday at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. The Flourish awards honor individuals and organizations in the community who support, promote or participate in the arts in metro Atlanta and northwest Georgia. Proceeds benefit scholarships and student-learning initiatives. **Top:** KSU College of the Arts Dean Joseph Meeks presents the 2011 Flourish Award as the Nonprofit Organization/Arts Company to the Georgia Ballet's board of trustees. From left are: Chairwoman Patti Pearlberg, executive director and school director Michele Ziemann-DeVos and artistic director Gina Hyatt-Mazon. **Above,** from left: Meeks presents the Flourish Award for Community/Public Service to Bill Pinto, president of Hard Construction Company. Meeks presents the Flourish Award for Arts Leader to Robert Farley, founder and director of the Georgia Ensemble Company. Meeks presents the Flourish Award for Arts Educator to Jennie Collier-Johnston, art teacher at Hillgrove High School.

Georgia Tea Party opposes TSPLOST

Marietta-based group's leader lambasts light rail proposal

By Jon Gillooly
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MARIETTA — The Marietta-based Georgia Tea Party has announced it is opposing the 10-year sales tax referendum that will come before voters next year.

"We are opposed to the TSPLOST in principle because we don't believe that nine other counties and the city of Atlanta have the right to impose a tax increase on the citizens of Cobb County," said J.D. Van Brink, who chairs the group's board. "We believe that the law itself is fundamentally flawed and needs to be repealed."



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There are many other good reasons to oppose the tax, he said, including the fact that the vast majority of Cobb's portion of the tax's proceeds is earmarked for a Midtown-to-Cumberland light rail line.

"It's very heavily weighted to the light rail, to the detriment of much better ways of resolving our transportation issues," Van Brink said. "Also, Cobb County gets back only 83 cents for every dollar we put in. Why on earth would we want to subsidize transportation in the other counties and the city of Atlanta?"

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Critic says senator's support of light rail a conflict of interest

By Jon Gillooly
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SMYRNA — State Sen. Doug Stoner (D-Smyrna) works in business development for Croy Engineering of Marietta, a company that has directly benefited from a proposal for mass transit in Cobb County, which critics say creates a conflict of interest.



Sen. Doug Stoner

Croy Engineering is the project manager for the county's \$1.8 million Northwest Atlanta Corridor Alternatives Analysis Study, which will examine what kinds of mass transportation will work on the Interstate 75 and U.S. 41 corridors, how much it will cost and where it should be built.

Tom Maloy of the Marietta-based Georgia

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Ga. poverty level 3rd-highest in U.S.

State also ranks 8th in number of uninsured residents at 1.9M

By Errin Haines and Kate Brumback
 Associated Press Writers

ATLANTA — New Census data shows that Georgia's poverty rate was the third highest in the country in 2010, up two spots from last year, with more than 1.8 million residents counted among the poor.

The only states with higher poverty rates in 2010 were Louisiana and Mississippi. Nationally, 15.1 percent of Americans were living in poverty last year.

Georgia also ranked eighth in the nation in the number of uninsured residents, at a

rate of 19.4 percent. Roughly 1.9 million Georgians did not have health insurance last year when the state joined a challenge to President Barack Obama's health care plan, meant in part to address rising numbers of people without health insurance.

Only Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina and Texas had higher rates of uninsured residents.

Nationally, the ranks of the poor have swelled to a record 46.2 million — amounting to nearly 1 in 6 Americans — and the number without health insurance has reached 49.9 million, the most in over two decades.

University of Georgia demographer Doug Bachtel said there is a clear correla-

tion between the rise of Georgians living in poverty and the number of uninsured residents.

"If you're living below the poverty level, you probably ... don't have a good job," Bachtel explained. "You're not going to have any excess money to buy your own insurance. They're not into preventive care."

Georgia's population swelled to nearly 9.7 million, according to the 2010 Census, an increase of more than 1.5 million people. The state became the country's ninth most populous and grew at a rate of 18.3 percent, outpacing the national growth of 9.7 percent.

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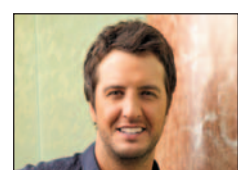
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SHAKIN' IT UP

Georgia native Luke Bryan finds country music success with his third album 'Tailgates and Tanlines' PAGE 2A



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