

# Lawmaker's column 'wilted on facts'

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Dear Editor:

This letter is to state Rep. Carl Von Epps.

Thank you for your service to our state, including writing for your local newspaper, LaGrange Daily News. However, I must say that your article headlined "A rose is still a rose - and so is a tax increase" in the Tuesday edition is a little wilted on the facts.

The Special Council on Tax Reform made its recommendations (including a special meeting) to formally state that their recommendations were to be revenue-neutral. It is up to the General Assembly to take those recommendations and engineer them into something other than revenue neutral. In short, that would be entirely up to you and other lawmakers to change the recommendation of the council and pass legislation that would either lower or increase taxes collected from the residents of our state.

Please don't confuse the overall revenue structure of the state with the micro-economics of taxing or exempting any special-interest group. The modernization proposed by the council will set back the tax breaks given to those special interests over decades with little or no study to support the cost and benefit to our state.

Regarding new services subject to tax, the council made those recommendations based on the reality that businesses and not individuals are more adept to managing tax administration. The council's report attempts to move the burden of collecting and filing away from individuals and to businesses that are already doing it. It was the intent of the council to eliminate or at least curtail the complexity of Form 500 (such as reducing it from the current six pages down to one or two).

The vast majority of the new services picked by the council will impact businesses that are already collecting and remitting Georgia sales tax on the products they sell (shampoo bottles sold by the salon are already taxed). Moreover, more than 20 other states, including several surrounding states, are taxing these same services. Taxing those services would not result in a "newly blazed trail." Moving to a consumption-based system and one that is administered more by businesses and less by consumers results in a more efficient, transparent and fair form of taxation.

Lastly, there was never any intent by the council to tax dues of 501(c)(3) organizations such as the Girl Scouts. An updated version of HB 385 makes this explicit.

As for the cookies, the council recommended a sunset for the exemption in three years. That gives the legislature time to study and decide if this exemption (and 100 others) should remain. And if it doesn't remain, then neither Sally nor Sally's mom should collect the tax. The two national bakers for the Girl Scouts (one of which is located in the state) will.

Your article is entertaining and provocative, but my hope is that our legislature will be serious about improving the state's economy and the standard of living of our citizens. That's the bigger picture that a few are missing.

The views herein are my own and not those of the Special Council, of which I am a member.

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Atlanta

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