

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – October — 2016



Soon after the completion of the 2016 session, I began receiving a number of questions in regards to the upcoming amendments on the November general election ballot. Anytime the General Assembly wants to “change” the Georgia Constitution, we are required to first pass the proposal with a 2/3 vote in both the Senate and the House. Further, proposals passed will then move to the general election ballot, allowing Georgia citizens to have the final say. I know that amendment wording can be tricky so to cut down on the confusion and misinformation, I have taken the liberty of explaining each amendment below.

Amendment 1: Shall the Georgia Constitution be amended to provide greater flexibility and state accountability to fix failing schools through increasing community involvement?

In order to turn around struggling school the General Assembly passed Governor Deal’s proposal for the creation of an Opportunity School District (OSD). The OSD is modeled after successful initiatives in Louisiana and Tennessee, and would authorize the state to temporarily step in to assist chronically failing public schools and rescue children languishing in them. Every day, nearly 68,000 of Georgia’s children attend “failing schools.” There are approximately 127 “failing schools” in the State, representing 6% of public schools that have received an “F” from the Georgia Department of Education three consecutive years. Unfortunately, amongst the 50 states, Georgia has been rated very low in overall education standards for many years. Many education bills have been passed in an effort to help our educational systems. This amendment gives you an opportunity to voice your opinion. Supporters of the amendment believe that persistently failing schools should be held accountable, while opponents fear the loss of “local control” in the school system. Below are bullet points of what the constitutional amendment will accomplish if passed.

- Persistently failing schools are defined as those scoring below 60 on the Georgia Department of Education’s accountability measure, the College and Career Performance Index, for three consecutive years.
- The OSD would take in no more than 20 schools per year, meaning it would govern no more than 100 at any given time.
- Schools would stay in the district for no less than 5 years but no more than 10 years, and would then return to local control

Amendment 2: Shall the Georgia Constitution be amended to authorize penalties for sexual exploitation and assessments on adult entertainment to fund child victims’ services?

The second amendment pertains to helping those victimized by sex trafficking in our state. Sadly, Georgia has one of the highest “sex trafficking” rates which continues to increase each year. Essentially, if passed this amendment would allow the creation of the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund and the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund Commission. The commission is intended to help increase protection and resources for children who have been sexually exploited. The commission overseeing this Fund will have eight members. Funds would come from additional penalties assessed for violations relating to certain sexual crimes and fees on certain businesses. If passed, the amendment would also impose an additional fee for each adult entertainment establishment. This fee would be in addition to any required by the county or municipality where the adult entertainment business is operating.

Amendment 3: Shall the Georgia Constitution be amended to reform and re-establish the Judicial Qualifications Commission and provide for its composition, governance, and powers?

The Judicial Qualifications Commission is the state’s “watch-dog agency” over the judicial system. In essence, this agency is designed to ensure that our judicial system performs appropriately. Under the amendment, the JQC would abolish and remake the seven member commission moving more governing authority of the commission to the state legislature.

Amendment 4: Shall the Georgia Constitution be amended to dedicate revenue from existing taxes on fireworks to trauma care, fire services, and public safety?

If Amendment 4 is passed in November, a portion of the taxes collected from the sale of fireworks in our state will be designated to trauma care, fire services and public safety. This is not a “tax increase”; this is simply saying that it is “ok” to allocate funding already collected to the services listed above.

I hope these explanations have helped you muddle through the language and further give you an idea about what the amendments would actually accomplish. Folks so often think that their vote doesn’t count. Well let me tell you, when you have amendments like the ones listed above? Amendments that will eventually effect education, child welfare and public Safety.... Every VOTE counts! I highly encourage you to research each amendment, reach your own conclusion and vote your conscience in November. Of course, if you have further questions regarding amendment questions or anything at all, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jimmy Pruett", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jimmy Pruett, Representative of the 149th