

Georgia Senate approves plan to reduce income tax

By Ty Tagami
Capitol Beat News Service

The Republican-led state Senate adopted an historic income tax cut plan Thursday that Democrats decried as an election year ploy that would undermine the state budget.

There was no official estimate of the cost of Senate Bill 476, which calls for no income tax on the first \$50,000 in annual earnings by an individual and \$100,000 for a married couple.

The absence of an official analysis of the impact to the more than \$40 bil-

lion budget led Democrats to assert the plan would cost \$9 billion while Republicans touted it as a boon for working people.

"It would represent the largest tax cut in state history," Lt. Gov. Burt Jones, a Republican, said after the measure passed 32-18, with all Republicans in favor and nearly all Democrats opposed.

Sen. Blake Tillery, R-Vidalia, the lead co-sponsor of the legislation, said it would help firefighters, teachers, restaurant employees and middle-class workers in general, ridiculing Democrats' arguments against it.

"The mental gymnastics you have to jump through to vote against this bill are astounding," he said.

Democrats said the wealthy would benefit more, since the bill would also reduce the base income tax rate to 4.99% from the current 5.19%. They said it would result in budget shortfalls in the long run, forcing budget cuts and sales tax increases that would drive up prices for groceries, child care and other expenses that are making life difficult for many Georgians.

They called the measure a trick to mislead

voters.

Several Senate Republicans are running for higher office, including Jones, who wants to succeed Brian Kemp in the governor's office, and Tillery, who hopes to follow Jones as lieutenant governor.

Sen. Kim Jackson, D-Stone Mountain, called the bill "a scam." Sen. Derek Mallow, D-Savannah, said it was "robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Sen. Nikki Merritt, D-Grayson, said it would "devastate" the economy. "It's not a plan for working families," she said. "It's a plan working fami-

lies will pay for."

Kemp's own budget proposal would reduce the income tax rate to 4.99%, but it does not include increases in the standard deduction for income.

That led Sen. Josh McLaurin, D-Sandy Springs, also running for lieutenant governor, to say SB 476 was a "senseless tax cut that Brian Kemp's going to veto on sight ... this is election year stuff."

McLaurin said reducing the base rate to 4.99% would cost \$3 billion a year while deducting the first \$50,000 thousand in income per tax filer

(and \$100,000 per couple) would cost \$6 billion.

Tillery had a much lower estimate, less than \$3 billion for the package, which he said would be balanced by cuts to tax credits and exemptions that collectively cost the state treasury about \$30 billion.

SB 476 would eliminate them initially for a variety of recipients, including business headquarters, banks, medical manufacturers, telecommunications facilities, boat repairers, crab fishermen and for low- and zero-emission vehicles and electric vehicle chargers.

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"We love because he first loved us."
1 John 4:19 (NIV)

Love in Daily Living

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Christ declares the commandments of love (for God and one's neighbor) as the greatest. As the month of February is filled with feelings of love and sentimentality, it serves as a good time for reflection upon what love truly means to us. Particularly, we are called to love in emotion, but also action. As Christ tells his followers of the aforementioned greatest commandments, in Luke's gospel, He follows this declaration with the well-known Parable of the Good Samaritan. In His teachings, Christ ensures to convey the distinction in solely emotional love and active love. As we reflect upon our feelings on the matter, perhaps a good question we can ask ourselves is whether we feel that we live out these teachings of active love in our relationships? Are there areas where we can improve?
-James Stone

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