

**GEORGIA STATE SENATE
BUDGET AND EVALUATION OFFICE**

Chairman's Column

December 22, 2009

TEN WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS 2009

As we wind down 2009 and prepare for the "Ten Reasons to Be Optimistic for 2010" due next week, here are ten "Wishes" that we sure hope happen...

Wish No. 1. -- We've lost track of the number of revised state Revenue Estimates due to the economy in freefall over the last year. Our first wish is for a January 2010 revenue that is sustained all year-long! And also tie one hand behind the backs of those economists so they can't say "on the other hand!"

Wish No. 2. -- We have gotten so used to each month being worse in state revenues than the last, we hereby officially wish for two consecutive months of less than 10% revenue drop over last year. Santa always told us to ask for something reasonable!

Wish No. 3. -- Since we all know that employment must improve for our state to come out of this recession: Here's wishing for an unemployment rate in Georgia that goes below the 10% range in 2010 proving the economists wrong once again.

Wish No. 4. -- This wish is in the "don't want to think about what will happen if it doesn't get better" category: A wish for the Christmas retail season to be better than predicted and considerably stronger than 2008. Strong retail tax collection over the holidays would help both local and state governments.

Wish No. 5. -- That the blessing of the wettest December on record and the full to overflowing Lake Lanier and other lakes and reservoirs along with the "Goodwill to Men" time of the year, will bring an agreement on Lake Lanier's water sharing sooner rather than later. And then we can be about planning for the difference we have to make up in conservation and additional storage reservoirs.

Wish No. 6. -- That the hundreds of millions of dollars of state bond projects and federal projects in the state will find their way to Georgia construction companies. Apparently the state bid award process has more flexibility than just "lowest bid" so maybe a home state advantage is not only legal but advantageous in a state economy crippled by the loss of construction jobs. All other things more or less equal, state businesses should benefit.

Wish No. 7. -- That legislative leaders will get together early in the 2010 General Assembly to resolve the transportation legislation conundrum and demonstrate a new direction for the two bodies' leadership.

Wish No. 8. -- That better banking policies come out of Washington to help Georgia banks and encourage lending for development instead of the reverse now being practiced by regulators. A little TARP funding for small banks would have kept foreclosures from forcing more homes on a saturated market. The current hand-wringing in Washington over job creation ignores the fact that community banks are the first line of job creation in small businesses.

Wish No. 9. -- That Atlanta's new mayor gets off to a good start. He enjoys wide support and goodwill from all who have worked with him in the past. A good dose of reality and a strong backbone will be needed. But if this recession has proven anything, it is how intertwined the future of the state, from metro to rural, is with the fortunes of Atlanta. It is not a cliché to say we are all in this together.

Wish No. 10. -- That each and every one of us finds a way to make a difference for someone in need this next year. The list is endless-returning and existing veterans, families reeling from the recession, children in numerous ways from helping foster parents to mentoring, senior citizens, particularly those homebound, family violence centers, and neglected and abandoned animals, just to name a few. There's a group or charity working in all of these areas that could use our active or financial support. It is truly amazing to see how the public responds even in these difficult times.

From James Taylor's "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas", "in a year, our troubles will be out of sight."