



Tax council restates 'neutrality' goal

By [Chris Joyner](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

6:46 p.m. Tuesday, February 1, 2011

The Special Council on Tax Reform and Fairness convened a special meeting Tuesday to confirm what members have said all along -- their plan to overhaul the state's tax code is not meant to be a tax hike.

"We said it at every doggone meeting," the council's chairman, A.D. Frazier, said during the conference call meeting.

The council voted unanimously for a resolution stating the tax plan released last month is intended to be "revenue neutral."

The council was created last year by the General Assembly to study the state tax code and recommend changes. The report released last month recommended lowering income tax rates for individuals and businesses and raising sales taxes, including reinstating the state's 4 percent sales tax on groceries.

The vote Tuesday was meant to appease the anti-tax group Americans for Tax Reform, whose founder -- Grover Norquist -- last month blasted the plan as a massive tax increase. Josh Culling, a spokesman for the group, said the vote is encouraging.

"We're very happy," he said. But he said the plan still needs work and recommended the Legislature abandon the proposed grocery tax hike and a separate increase in the tobacco tax.

The blessing of Norquist's group is important for the future of the plan. Fifty-five state lawmakers signed the Americans for Tax Reform pledge not to raise taxes.

Last week Norquist met behind closed doors with Frazier and fellow tax council member Roger Tutterow in a meeting of the Georgia Center Right Coalition to settle the disagreement.

"What was clear to me was that Grover Norquist, Robert and I were in violent agreement on the importance of revenue neutrality," Frazier said.

The legislative work on the plan is just beginning. A special joint committee charged with forging the council's recommendations into a bill will hold its first meeting Wednesday.

Culling said the group's ruling on whether lawmakers kept their no-new-tax promise will be based on the numbers in the final legislation.

The future is murky for the tax council's plan. Gov. Nathan Deal and Republican leaders in both the House and Senate have indicated a vote may not come until 2012, and rank-and-file members of both parties have voiced their concerns with details of the plan.

In the conference call, Frazier repeated his belief that the proposals must be taken as a whole, rather than "cherry-picking" the most attractive parts for passage.

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