

State needs a balance between more revenue and prudent investments in infrastructure and education.

*BY Ken Mitchell and Kim Anderson
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We inaugurate a new governor in January. A new Legislature convenes. The hard tasks of governing await.

Our state faces a serious and widening gulf between the money coming in and the money we Georgians need to invest in real solutions to our everyday challenges. Now more than ever we need leaders with a clear vision for our state — a vision that recognizes the importance of public investments that solve problems.

Georgians feel the lack of public investments every time they sit in gridlocked traffic or take a child to school in an overcrowded classroom taught in a trailer. It hits home when they hear of another business lost to a neighboring state because of our aging infrastructure or unprepared workforce, when they have to ration water during drought, or when they read about another abused spouse waiting for a space at a shelter.

They know it when they wonder how long EMT or fire department response to a 911 call will take, or meet another new college graduate who could not find a good job and had to move back home.

There has never been a collapse in revenues like we've seen these past couple of years due to the national recession. At the same time, the population — and what it takes to invest in real solutions — has grown. This is not a problem that can be solved by cuts in spending alone. Most states have raised revenue during this recession as part of a balanced approach.

A family sitting around the table in hard times like these discusses what they can do without, but they also look for ways to bring in more money. Families and businesses do their best to plan and invest for the

future. States must do the same thing; when they don't, families and businesses pay the price.

That's why we now need a balanced approach — one that includes revenues; one that brings in enough money to pay the bills and also to invest in the future. A balanced approach would move beyond cuts alone and include solutions like increasing the cigarette tax; eliminating narrow, ineffective special interest tax breaks while preserving broad-based exemptions like that on groceries; modernizing the sales tax to cover more services, like pet grooming, dry cleaning and club memberships; maintaining diversified revenue sources for stability and reflecting today's economy; and enacting a state earned income tax credit to support working families.

The partners of 2020 Georgia, a new and growing alliance of community leaders and organizations, look forward to working with the new governor, state legislators, and the 2010 Special Council on Tax Reform and Fairness for Georgians to craft policies that ensure that Georgia is a great state in which to raise a family and start a business.

Every year that we fail to address our problems only shifts greater costs to the future. Today's bill-you-later budgeting and hollowed-out tax system increase tomorrow's needs and mean hardworking families will have to pay more someday. We just haven't gotten the bill yet.

A balanced approach that brings in enough money to pay the bills and invest in the future is the real solution for the challenges Georgians face every day. Innovative funding and revenue solutions will promote a faster, more sustainable recovery and a more competitive economy. Long-term strategies and lasting solutions that thoughtfully invest in education, public safety, health, the environment, and our state's natural and cultural resources will ensure Georgia's prosperity.

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