

Your Views: Enough of state budget cuts that hurt Georgians

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The state of Georgia is facing a fiscal crisis, and even though Gov. Sonny Perdue ordered almost \$1 billion in state budget cuts in July, it is apparent that the state will not meet its revenue targets. Our state lawmakers have been relying solely on budget cuts to bring the state budget into balance, and the lieutenant governor is calling for even more cuts. But the state's budget should not be balanced on the backs of Georgia's middle and low-income citizens or by jeopardizing the education of our children. Those folks with lower incomes are affected most by the budget cuts, and I was one of the first to endure one of such cuts. The ink was barely dry from the governor's signature on the fiscal year 2008-09 budget that gave a provider increase which would have allowed me to give my personal care assistants a small raise. I had worked with fellow advocates to help get the increase in the Independent Care Waiver Program, a Medicaid program under the Department of Community health that provides me with eight hours of care per day. But Gov. Perdue recommended to cut the increase before it could even be implemented. Before I got on this program, I was on a waiting list for a year and a half. There are more than 7,000 people with disabilities and senior citizens that are on the same type waiting list for home and community-based services, according to the nonprofit organization Unlock the Waiting List. While these people wait for the state to help them, their health will continue to deteriorate, some getting forced into a nursing home, costing the state even more, or end up dying. A new study found that 1,841 people in Georgia die each year because they lack health insurance. Hopefully the problem will be fixed soon in Washington so that state lawmakers won't have to choose between pet projects and those less fortunate than others. **Alan Essig** at the **Georgia Budget and Policy Institute** called further budget cuts at this point "inefficient and counter-productive," and said "a more thoughtful and practical approach to balancing the state budget is imperative." I am sure the thousands on the waiting lists, and their families and friends will agree. I also agree with the Institute's recommendation that before more budget cuts are made, the state should hold hearings on the impact of budget cuts already implemented and new budget cuts being proposed, and that it is time that the governor calls a special session to address the problem and take action to implement additional revenue sources to help balance the state budget, as two-thirds of other states have already done. We could wait until next month's revenue figures come in, but why delay the inevitable?

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