

Georgia insight

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"She hath done what she could."
Mark 14:8a
"...and having done all ... stand."
Ephesians 6:13c

Voters have the final word!

Amendments to the Constitution or a new Constitution may be proposed by the General Assembly or by a constitutional convention, as provided by this article. Only amendments which are of general and uniform applicability throughout the state shall be proposed, passed, or submitted to the people.

– Constitution of the State of Georgia, Article X, Section I, Paragraph I

The proposed constitutional amendments you will see on the November Ballot were authorized by five bills that passed during the 2017-2018 term of the Georgia General Assembly. Below, a brief outline of each bill proposing each amendment is followed by the verbatim question that will be on the ballot. A majority "yes" vote will ratify a change, whereas a majority "no" vote will defeat the change. For your convenience, a place to practice your vote is provided.

Proposed Amendment: H.R. 51¹ Forest Land Fair Market Value Assessment, Taxation

"Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to revise provisions related to the subclassification for tax purposes of and the prescribed methodology for establishing the value of forest land conservation use property and related assistance grants, to provide that assistance grants related to forest land conservation use property may be increased by general law for a five-year period and that up to 5 percent of assistance grants may be deducted and retained by the state revenue commissioner to provide for certain state administrative costs, and to provide for the subclassification of qualified timberland property for ad valorem taxation purposes?"

Yes ___ No ___

Note: This changes the methods of assessing and taxing "forest land conservation use property." Currently, such *must exceed* 200 acres. This changes the required acreage to "at least 200 acres in aggregate" in one or two counties with at least 100 acres within a county. It defines a fair market value of forest land and allows the state to tax assistance grants five-percent for administration costs. A qualified timberland property appraisal manual would be adopted. However, Department of Revenue appraisals of timberland could be appealed.

Proposed Amendment: H.R. 993 Create State-wide Business Court²

"Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to create a state-wide business court, authorize superior court business court divisions, and allow for the appointment process for state-wide business court judges in order to lower costs, improve the efficiency of all courts, and promote predictability of judicial outcomes in certain complex business disputes for the benefit of all citizens of this state?"

Yes ___ No ___

Note: Georgia's judicial system has seven courts. If voters ratify H.R. 993, a "state-wide business court" would be the eighth, as part of the superior circuit. Future laws would determine the court's jurisdiction, powers, rules, procedure, selection, qualifications, and discipline of judges. The court would have state-wide jurisdiction; the superior court could remove a case to the new court; and pretrial proceedings could be conducted in any county. Judges would be appointed and reappointed by the governor for five-year terms, subject to approval by a majority vote of the Senate and House Judiciary committees.

¹ The enabling legislation for H.R. 51 is H.B. 85, which provides specific regulations for implementing the amendment.

² How could such massive government expansion reduce tax-payer costs? Is "predictability of judicial outcomes" the best or the most desirable judicial governmental goal? Who or what benefits from predictability of judicial outcomes?

Proposed Amendment: H.R. 238 Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act

“Without increasing the current state sales tax rate, shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to create the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund to conserve lands that protect drinking water sources and the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams, to protect and conserve forests, fish, wildlife habitats, and state and local parks; and to provide opportunities for our children and families to play and enjoy the outdoors, by dedicating, subject to full public disclosure, up to 80 percent of the existing sales tax collected by sporting goods stores to such purposes without increasing the current sales tax rate?”

Yes___No___

Note: If H.R. 238 is ratified, H.B. 332 would regulate implementation. A newly created Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund (GOSTF)would replace two current Georgia entities – Land Conservation Trust Fund and Land Conservation Revolving Loan Fund. GOSTF would be a separate fund in the state treasury, and would receive funds now in the entities that would be abolished. First, GOSTF would receive 40 percent of all state sales and use taxes collected by “sporting goods stores,” but that could increase to 80 percent. Up to ten percent of GOSTF funds would be allocated for local grants to offset resulting tax short-falls. Although an eleven-member appointed board would meet quarterly each year, no compensation or expense allowance is mentioned. A simple majority of the board could approve proposals, board actions, and recommendations for conservation lands owned by federal, state, or local governments, persons or entities.

Proposed Amendment: S.R. 146 Certain Rights for Victims

“Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to provide certain rights to victims against whom a crime has allegedly been perpetrated and allow victims to assert such rights?”

Yes___No___

Note: S.R. 146 would add “Paragraph XXX Rights of certain individuals” that defines new rights as “certain alleged juvenile acts” involving crimes against the victim’s person or property. (a) *Positive provisions:* Victims may request court proceeding notifications of the arrest, escape or release of the accused; scheduled court proceedings; the right to speak at scheduled proceedings concerning release, plea, or sentencing of the accused; and to be informed of these rights. (b) *Negative provisions:* It does not create a cause of action against state/local government or their employees; does not give victims a right to appeal criminal or delinquency proceeding decisions or challenge sentencing or verdicts; does not provide any victim participant-standing in proceedings, except to file a motion.

Yes___No___

Proposed Amendment: S.R. 95 Sales and Use Tax for Education

“Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to authorize a referendum for a sales and use tax for education by a county school district or an independent school district or districts within the county having a majority of the students enrolled within the county and to provide that the proceeds are distributed on a per student basis among all the school systems unless an agreement is reached among such school systems for a different distribution?”

Yes___No___

Note: In counties that contain independent school districts or a combination of school districts, this authorizes voters to direct full-time equivalent funding to follow the student.

Exonerated! SBC Chaplain Squires

“The relationship between endorsed military chaplains and their ecclesiastical authority is sacrosanct and protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In a technical sense, military chaplains are ‘on loan’ to the Armed Forces from their respective faith groups who, in turn, expect the military to be faithful stewards of our pastors in uniform.”

– Doug Carver, SBNAMB Executive Director and Former Army Chief of Chaplains

Since Army protocol requires all chaplains to conform to the tenets of their endorsing agency, chaplains have several legal protections for doing so. They are protected by the National Defense Authorization Act, four paragraphs in Army Regulation 165-1, and Department of Defense instructions that include sections of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Also, chaplains are constitutionally protected by the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.

Over 1,600 Southern Baptist chaplains serving in the U.S. military are endorsed by the North American Mission Board on behalf of the Southern Baptist Convention. That endorsement requires each chaplain to comply with the following SBC policy: “Endorsed chaplains will *not* conduct or attend a wedding ceremony for *any* same-sex couple, *bless* such a union or perform counseling in *support* of such a union, nor offer any kind of relationship training or retreat, on or off a military installation.”

Despite these constitutional rights and numerous legal protections, Fort Bragg, North Carolina Army Chaplain Scott Squires and his assistant Kacie Griffin were charged with discrimination and underwent investigations from April 2018 until August 1, 2018. The investigations began after a female soldier complained in early 2018 that she and another lesbian soldier were not immediately registered to attend a scheduled marriage retreat. The chaplain’s assistant was charged with discrimination because she did not immediately register the pair.

Chaplain Squires explained that he could not conduct an event that included same-sex couples. But, to accommodate her request, he rescheduled the retreat to be conducted by a non-SBNAMB chaplain who could conduct such event. The women registered, but did not attend.

Although the retreat was changed to accommodate the women, an investigation was initiated and charges against the chaplain and his assistant were announced August 1st, as recommended by an Army major. Charges were (a) dereliction of duty and (b) violation of the Army Equal Opportunity Policy. Both charges include prison sentences and discharge from the military. Conviction on either count would mean loss of military position and possible imprisonment.

Exonerated! On August 24th, three weeks after those charges, the U.S. Army exonerated Chaplain Squires and his assistant by announcing rejection of all charges, including dereliction of duty and discrimination against the lesbian soldier, who filed the complaint against him.

Chaplain Squires was represented by Mike Berry, who is General Counsel and Director of Military Affairs for First Liberty Institute, a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

Mr. Berry made this statement: “We are grateful that the Army has rejected and abandoned these baseless charges. The U.S. military is no place for anti-religious hostility against its own military chaplains. Chaplains like Scott Squires and assistant Kacie Griffin do not have to give up their First Amendment rights in order to serve their fellow soldiers.”

Christianity and Politics

Educating ourselves and voting God's way are, not only privileges, they are cultural and spiritual responsibilities.

Christians desiring to influence culture put on the armor of God. Then, they equip themselves with (a) the Word of God, (b) civic information, (c) knowledge of cultural issues, (d) political platforms, and (e) work for candidates who will confront imminent threats and stand against the cultural slide into corruption. Armed with facts, (f) Christians cast informed and wise votes.

Some claim the United States is not a Christian nation and was not founded on Christian values, but “claiming” does not make it true. Granted, some U.S. citizens do not profess to be Christian, but state constitutions provide stunning evidence of this country’s Christian heritage.

The word “God” or “the divine” is referenced at least once in all 50 state constitutions. Of the four state constitutions that *do not* mention “God,” three refer to a “Supreme Ruler of the Universe” or “Supreme Being.” Hawaii is the fourth state whose constitution has no reference to God, but mentions “Divine Guidance,” instead.

Although sixty-three-percent of all adults in Hawaii profess to be Christian, Hawaii is the *only* state without a Christian in its congressional delegation. However, congressional delegations in 28 states are comprised of 100-percent professing Christians.

Ten¹ of the most populous states in the U.S. are heavily Christian. Four have 100^{1*}-percent professing Christians in their congressional delegations; two^{1**} have 94-percent professing Christians; and the other four^{1***} have from 75- to 90-percent professing Christians.

Since Congress is filled with representatives and senators who profess to be Christian, it’s evident that, non-Christians, as well as Christians, prefer representatives and senators who present themselves as having Christian values.

Those who consider politics and political action to be distasteful should realize that without Christian influence corruption is inevitable. While all creation is held together by God, He expects mankind to “stand in the gap” for Him in this world, which operates through politics.

The Bible refers to Christians as “salt,” because Christians add flavor to culture and serve as preservatives against spoilage. Christians are deemed lights because they reflect the Light of Jesus in this world of darkness. Without salt and light the world would be overwhelmed with unrelenting darkness, lack of virtue, and overt corrosion. In this world, Christians are His ambassadors and soldiers, who must occupy until He returns. Meanwhile, as branches of the Living Vine, Christians are “runners” in God’s marathon for souls.

As national ambassadors facilitate communication with other nations, Christian ambassadors are expected to communicate God’s Word to family, friends, neighbors, and nations. Nations and dynasties *hire* soldiers to battle enemies, but God’s volunteer soldiers *are free to choose* to obey Him or live as AWOL deserters, leaving others to fill the gap.

¹ Ten most populous states, & their number of congressional delegates: California*** (55), Texas* (38), New York*** (29), Florida*** (29), Pennsylvania* (20), Illinois*** (20), Ohio* (18), Michigan** (16), Georgia** (16), and North Carolina* (15).