



Habersham County
GA Democrats



October 29, 2018

**Joint Press Release from the Habersham County GA Democrats and
the Habersham County Republican Party**

For Immediate Release:

The Habersham County GA Democrats and the Habersham County Republican Party are in agreement in their opposition to the new 2018 T-SPLOST tax which would raise the current sales tax paid in Habersham County by 14.3%. This new sales tax would raise the total sales tax rate to 8 cents and unlike some of the existing sales taxes already in place, no items would be exempt from this new tax. This tax would apply to groceries (currently exempt from some sales taxes already in place), phone bills, gas bills, water bills, etc.

This is not a replacement or renewal of our current SPLOST, a common misunderstanding expressed by numerous people when discussing this tax with them. Habersham County already has in place a SPLOST (VI) passed in 2014 (collection starting in 2015) which runs till 2021. This SPLOST already has funds allocated for transportation. Numerous roads and bridges that were listed in the 2014 SPLOST are relisted in this T-SPLOST.

Ads in The Northeast Georgian and on radio stations WCHM and WCON, paid for by a group calling itself “Investing in Habersham”, make false and misleading statements and representations. Here are a few of them:

- Nearly 1/3 of bridges in Habersham County require immediate repair or replacement. Per a report prepared by county officials, Habersham County has 56 bridges with 6 bridges listed as functional obsolete and only 2 bridges listed as structural deficient. County officials further state that none of the functional obsolete bridges require immediate structural repairs. A bridge rated deficient or functional obsolete does not mean a bridge is structural deficient. In Fiscal 2018, the County funded repairs or replacement of 10 bridges utilizing SPLOST VI funds.
- Visitors to Habersham County, represented 40% of sales tax revenues collected. Habersham County Manager Phil Sutton has stated that there were **NO** such report or reports verifying this number or any number stating what the real percentage of sales

taxes collected from visitors to Habersham County and that he has no idea what the actual percentage is. While we concede that visitors do pay some sales taxes, we can guarantee that 100% of people living in Habersham County pay sales taxes and would pay this tax increase if passed.

- In Georgia, 12 counties have approved individual T-SPLOTS (Fulton County and Clarke County to name a few) and 3 Regions (63 counties) having a Regional T-SPLOTS. Habersham County already voted on a Regional T-SPLOT in 2012, and spoke loudly on their feelings about T-SPLOT's by defeating it by a vote of 77% to 23%.

What the County or "Investing in Habersham" won't tell you, is that numerous studies and reports rank the State of Georgia tops in the nation for roads and bridges. Here are few that are readily available on the internet for review:

- 24/7 Wall Street Report dated August 2, 2018 lists Georgia as the 2nd Best State in the Nation in Infrastructure (5th Best in Roads and 7th Best in Bridges).
- US News and World Reports Transportation Ranking dated February 27, 2018 lists Georgia as the 10th Best State in the Nation in Transportation (1st in Road Quality and 6th in Bridge Quality).
- Reason Foundation 2017 Annual Report dated February 8, 2018 lists Georgia as the 9th Best State in the Nation for Bridges in Deficient Conditions.
- United Rentals / Project Uptime Report dated April 20, 2018 lists Georgia with the Best Roads in the Nation with a Number 1 ranking.

Here are some additional items of concern that should be addressed when deciding on your vote for this new tax:

- 1) County officials indicate that the current rate of county road re-pavement is 40 years (at 10 miles per year) but should be 15-20 years. They further state that in 2018 they planned on paving 10.32 miles of road at an estimated cost of \$1,235,304 with \$697,874 coming from GA Department of Transportation and \$537,430 from SPLOST VI. With only \$550,000 of County funds needed to obtain \$700,000 in matching State Funds, why do we need to burden the taxpayers of Habersham County with additional new taxes of \$7,120,000 a year?
- 2) In 2015, the Georgia State Legislation voted a 6.7 cent gasoline tax increase, making our current fuel excise tax for a gallon gas \$0.26 cents plus the federal fuel excise tax at \$0.18 per gallon. While taking away the County's ability to directly tax gas via a sales tax, this increase allowed rate increases with inflation and vehicle fuel-efficiency improvements which gives the State multi-billion dollars in additional transportation revenue for the next decade. This increase was supposed to be passed along to all Georgia Counties for their current transportation needs. ***Where are our increased funds?***

- 3) \$2,000,000 of the proposed T-SPLOST is slated for the Habersham County Airport. Over the last several years, the County has spent millions of dollars for additional land acquisition, runway extension and other improvements to the airport. While only serving less than 0.05 percent of our county population, why spend so much money on something so little utilized by the majority of the County population?
- 4) The County just increased their budget for 2018/2019 by approximately \$2,600,000 funded by an increase in the mileage rate of 8.56%. Do we really need another tax increase after just having our taxes raised this year?
- 5) Passing this additional layer of taxes on our Habersham County citizens could jeopardize the important need to renew SPLOST (VII) in 2020. The County most likely will need to pay for a new Habersham County Detention Center by then, a project we both whole heartily support!
- 6) This additional tax will adversely affect Habersham County residents who can least afford to pay more taxes, the elderly, the poor and small business owners. While the County and “Investing in Habersham” all scream that this is a Fair Tax and it spreads the burden off the backs of tax payers, these individuals and companies will be hit the hardest.

Join us, the Habersham County GA Democrats and the Habersham County Republican Party in voting “NO” on T-SPLOST 2018 and this additional burden of tax being proposed.

Habersham County GA Democrats

Virginia Webb

Chair

Habersham County Republican Party

Carl Blackburn

Chair