

Tax...continued from Page 1A

rise and will continue to do so, when people purchase vehicles out of state, Knight said.

"We had one individual who purchased a car from a dealer in Murphy, NC," Knight said. "They paid the sales tax on the vehicle, and Georgia got the sales tax money. However, under the current legislation, the out of state purchases are not allowed to opt into the Title Tax without paying an additional 6.5 percent for the title tax fee on cars purchased over the past 14 months.

"The state is aware of that problem and the state lawmakers are working to fix that with House Bill 80," Knight said. "Unfortunately, they can't get it fixed soon enough."

Over the week leading up to March 1, the Tax Commissioner's Office did 136 title transfers, Knight said.

"Normally, we probably would have done 30," Knight said. "I think a lot of people have been reading the newspaper.

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Tawana Aaron

come in here, they've given a car to their daughter, sold one to their neighbor or bought one from a friend," Knight said. "Those folks were coming in to take care of business before the title tax went into effect."

Most customers will like the new system, Knight said.

"The staff from our office have prepared for the recent changes in the state

tag computer system called GRATIS," Knight said. "As of March 1, customers that buy a car from an individual will wind up paying more to get their title and tag.

"This new registration system will charge 6.5 percent to register your car in Georgia and replaces state and local sales tax," Knight said. "If you move in from out of state you will be able to pay half the tax when you register the car and the other half in 12 months.

"Customers that buy a car from a dealer and normally pay sales tax on that vehicle will wind up saving money," Knight said.

The savings will come from paying the title tax instead of the sales tax.

The title tax is a one-time fee. From then on, when you buy a tag, you'll pay a simple \$20 fee regardless of make and model.

The fee rate for the title tax will go up in January 2014 to 6.75 percent and to 7 percent in January 2015.

The Georgia legislature has left in provisions to raise the rate to as much as 9 percent if the revenue does not meet the state's expectations, Knight said.

"The state expects this to bring in more money as they believe that 40 percent of all car sales are private individual sales," Knight said. "We will do our best to explain the new TAVT system to our customers as they come in and hope they understand we are only the messenger and work for them the taxpayer."

Though the legislation has been dubbed as an end to the "birthday tax," all customers will still renew their tags on their birthday, Knight said. "That part isn't changing," he said. "There will always be a connection to each person's birthday."

Knight said if you own or bought your car before Jan. 1, 2012, drivers will see no change and will continue to pay the Ad Valorem tax on their birthday when their tag comes up for renewal.

ESPLOST...continued from Page 1A

PLOST as principal rather than bond," Board member Tony Hunter said.

Board members Julie Barton and Cindy Byers also agreed that no bond is necessary right now.

ESPLOST has paid for millions in improvements for Union County Schools. Beginning with the first ESPLOST, Union County was using 20 trailers for classrooms throughout the system.

The first ESPLOST built a new high school, the second a new middle school. ESPLOST IV will provide school security in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary tragedy in Connecticut. It also will provide for construction of a multi-use auditorium, that will house the system's exploding chorus and band populations. It will buy 10 new school buses to replace buses that are long overdue for replacements.

Security improvements cost money, funds that the school system doesn't have, Superintendent Gary Steppe said.

The school system has two schools to watch over, Union County and Woody Gap.

"In one day, we experienced more than 9,000 attempts to crack our school's computer system," Steppe said. "Those attempts originated in China.

There were another 1,500 attempts in the same day that originated from Korea.

"They're trying to use our computer system to make themselves untraceable in cyberspace," Steppe said. "We need to focus on several security measures, including making sure our students are as safe as we can possibly protect them."

School buses are another issue, with the system in need of 10 new buses to replace antiquated buses that have outlived their usefulness, Steppe said.

"We've got some major expenses coming up," he said. "A roof that needs replacing, school buses that need to be retired and replaced. We can use ESPLOST to pay for all of that."

The board answered another question that had the crowd worried. How the board decides to spend taxpayers' property tax dollars.

The crowd was shocked to learn that before Georgia sends Union its share of the local \$16 million property tax dollars back home, a huge portion is missing.

For starters, the first 5 mills of local property tax money is lopped off to send to the poorer school systems in South Georgia. Last year, the state's Quality Basic Education formula determined that Union

owed the state \$5.19 million as its local fair share.

Second, the state then cut off another chunk of cash, almost \$2 million, for what it deemed as austerity cuts, cuts initiated by the Perdue administration and cuts that are still in effect.

Third, the state managed to put another \$1 million in its pockets for other items it deemed should come out of the local property tax distribution.

When it's all said and done, Union County's property tax collections dwindled from \$16 million to \$7.3 million. It's called the state's Quality Basic Education formula.

One person at Thursday's ESPLOST Town Hall meeting sponsored by Union County's Tea Party asked the board why the state does business the way it does.

"Good question," Assistant Superintendent Jeremy Williams replied.

Actually, it is a good question.

In 1995, the state paid for 65.5 percent of local education in Union County. Today, those dollars have dwindled down to 35 percent.

"Every time the state makes its cuts and passes the buck to the local school systems, we end up having to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps just to get by," Davenport said. "Times are hard and it's not easy to keep having to do that. That's why we need a sales tax

extension, to keep from having to raise the millage rate to support education.

"If we had all the money the state takes away from us, we'd have the lowest millage rate in the state and we wouldn't need to ask anyone to pass ESPLOST, we wouldn't need it," Steppe said. "But, that's not going to happen in my lifetime and that's why we're all here tonight, to ask for your support."