

Hill...from Page 1A

can reach out to any time I need to. That's a wonderful thing."

Added Hill: "We're concerned about Dr. Rayfield's

health and wellbeing. We'll be praying for him and hope everything turns out okay."

Following a brief search last semester, the school board named Hill sole finalist for the position in December, then made their decision official in January by hiring him to start the 2018-2019 school year as superintendent.

Since joining the school system in 2004, Hill has been a teacher and coach, a school principal and board administrator, serving most recently as director of human resources and operations at the board office.

Now that he's taken the lead for the system, Hill can begin to focus on some of his educational goals for the next school year, such as the rebranding and development of the system's strategic plan.

The strategic plan is important because it will cover planning for the next five years and involve both the vision and mission of Union County Schools.

"That process will include stakeholders from every part of our community," said Hill in January.

"It'll include the staff, it'll include students,

parents, community members, businesses. It'll be a very large undertaking.

"That falls right in line with our reaccreditation, which will happen in February of 2019. So, we're doing all this, and there's basically no wasted effort, because it all needs to be done and has to be done for reaccreditation, and just to provide our staff with the direction of the school."

Continued Hill: "We all need to be rowing the boat in the same direction for the kids, and this process is very involved and very difficult, but the end result is something

that everybody will have had their hand in, and that we all developed together.

"I think it will help unify us even more and guide us in the direction we need to go to serve these kids in our county."

Another major goal for Hill moving forward, one that is likely to play a significant role in the upcoming strategic plan, will be a continued emphasis on employability in the schools and preparing students for their next stages in life, be that technical school or college, the military or straight into the workforce.

BRMEMC...from Page 1A

recommended by committee.

The Credentials and Elections Committee is scheduled to meet tentatively on July 26, some 10 days after the July 16 deadline for petition nominations.

Elections are expected to open on Aug. 3, and automatically mailed paper ballots will return this year.

Once more, board members will rely on the independent election management company Survey & Ballot Systems (SBS) to run their elections.

The EMC has used SBS for several years, and Nelms said in the April board meeting that utilizing a third-party allows the EMC to maintain credibility throughout the process and also takes the burden of election logistics off EMC staff.

Last year, the board

decided to save money by forgoing the automatic mailing of paper ballots, instead implementing online and annual meeting in-person voting only.

The EMC did save money – more than \$30,000 considering postage and the cost of printing and mailing paper ballots – but voter turnout dropped more than 10 percent between 2016 and 2017.

"Based on the results that we got, the juice was not worth the squeeze," said Nelms in the April 10 meeting.

Online voting will close on Sept. 6 in preparation for the annual meeting, and in-person voting will take place during the annual meeting on Sept. 8 inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Director seats up for grabs this year are one each in Union, Fannin and Towns County, and current directors who decide to run for re-election to the board will be subject to the same nominating requirements as new candidates.

The board is still determining whether or not it will hold a town hall forum to introduce the candidates prior to the start of the election this year.

In other business, the board approved a change to a

policy that previously allowed for EMC employees to earn an extra vacation day for having no accidents in a year.

After examining the policy, the Policy Committee determined that EMC employees should get the extra day without the accident-free requirement, as promoting such incentives could potentially lead to accidents going unreported.

The policy change also embraces best workplace safety practices as espoused by the Occupational Health & Safety Administration, which has determined in the past that "if employees do not feel free to report injuries or illnesses, the employer's entire workforce is put at risk."

Also in the April 10 meeting, the board approved the 2018-2022 Revised Work Plan.

Every four to six years, the EMC develops a Construction Work Plan that operates as the immediate and short-term rollout of the EMC's Long-Range Plan, which in turn serves to accommodate trends like population growth and future power needs.

Following a bitter cold January, during which the EMC set a new peak demand record for the most power used in a given hour at 229 megawatts, the EMC determined that it needed to revise parts of its most

recent work plan.

Specifically, the EMC has decided that upgrades to the Nottely substation are in order, to safeguard power delivery capabilities in those areas even during worst case weather scenarios.

All told, the budget impact of the newly suggested upgrades on the four-year work plan will be about \$3.1 million, bringing the total cost of system improvements in the work plan to about \$30.5 million.

As part of its work plan and long-range plan, the EMC will be adding substations in the Murphy and Shooting Creek areas of North Carolina in the coming years.

The board welcomed EMC foremen Kevin Moss and Brad Wilson to their April meeting to discuss the overwhelmingly positive impact of a leadership training course they participated in last month.

Moss, Wilson and 27 other members of BRMEMC's management and supervising staff took part in the training, which challenged them to work together to make a difference.

The training was a first of its kind for EMC employees, and Moss commented in the meeting that it helped to bring everyone together and made them feel "part of a family."

Charges...from Page 1A

Opioids through Prosecution and Enforcement," according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.

The operation is cited as being an initiative "combining our efforts (criminal, civil, and educational) with those of our law enforcement partners" to create one unified front in the battle against the opioid/heroin epidemic. One important aspect of Operation SCOPE is to prosecute those who

are illegally prescribing, or distributing, pain killers."

The Drug Enforcement Administration is investigating the case with assistance from the Union County Sheriff's Office, Cherokee County (North Carolina) Sheriff's Office, Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, and Zell Miller Mountain Parkway Drug Task Force.

As previously reported, Enotah Judicial Circuit District

Attorney Jeff Langley's office presented evidence last year for the local indictment of Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton, and the district attorney has been in contact with U.S. Attorney Pak.

"We're going to work closely with the federal prosecutors as they work their case and we work our cases," said Langley on April 6. "They are not mutually exclusive. Both cases can be prosecuted. But certainly, we're going to coordinate our work with the federal prosecutors."

Underwood...from Page 1A

From there, the vehicle drove off an embankment on the shoulder of Georgia 325, then struck the ground with its front end and rolled onto its roof, according to GSP.

"The area of impact was approximately 96 feet from the edge of the roadway and approximately 132 feet from the stop bar on GA 325," according to GSP. "This was

determined by vehicle tire marks and a gouge in the dirt in front of the vehicle."

Underwood was wearing her seatbelt at the time of the crash, according to authorities.

The lifelong Union County resident was a mother of four who enjoyed being outdoors and was a hairdresser by trade, according to her

obituary.

Funeral services for Underwood were held on Saturday, April 14, at Meadow Grove Baptist Church in Hayesville, North Carolina.

In lieu of flowers, the family has asked that donations be made to Rock Bottom Recovery and Support of Hayesville.

Mountain View Funeral Home of Blairsville had charge of the arrangements.

Collins...from Page 1A

abilities to come back into society and not recidivate," said Rep. Collins, "and not go back into jail, and have those tools that they need to be profitable members of a community in society.

"It really just goes back to a God-given belief. I believe that all people have value and infinite worth, and we need to be able to at least provide the opportunity – not that we can force anybody to do so – but provide the opportunity to cut the rates of recidivism down so that we're spending money wisely and not just housing people."

The congressman's bill, which enjoys tremendous bipartisan support, would direct the Department of Justice to develop a "Post-Sentencing Risk and Needs Assessment System" for use by the Bureau of Prisons.

This new system would be designed to "assess prisoner recidivism risk; guide housing, grouping and program assignments; and incentivize and reward participation in and completion of recidivism reduction programs and productive activities," according to Congress.gov.

"We're hoping to have markup in the House Judiciary Committee (this week)," said Congressman Collins. "The president is supportive. Jared Kushner, his policy advisor, we've been talking a great deal in coordination with the White House and the Department of Justice.

"So, we feel very good about coming forward in the House Judiciary Committee and getting it over to the Senate and seeing where it can go."

On the recent omnibus spending bill, which President Donald Trump signed and later signaled he'd like to make rescissions to, the congressman said, "He's like all of us, we'd love to have seen some things different, we always would."

"But I think at this point in time, we've done the things

that we needed to do," said Rep. Collins, "which was rebuild our military, put money toward a border wall – 100 miles of border wall will be built with \$1.6 billion within this bill. So, there's some things in it that the president was wanting and that we were wanting, the biggest of which being the military."

When it came to his friend Paul Ryan's retirement, Collins said he will be missed in the United States Congress.

"I want to thank the Speaker for his leadership and his friendship," said Collins in a statement following Ryan's announcement. "He has led and will continue to lead our majority until the end of this Congress, and

I look forward to working with him to complete our agenda.

"As he leaves the House of Representatives after 20 years, I believe we as a nation are better off for his service."

Of course, someone will step in to fill Ryan's shoes as party leader when he leaves the House of Representatives, and Collins said that, on that note, time will surely tell.

"Everybody is focused on how this is going to play out," said Collins. "It's still new for a lot of us. I think Paul did a very admirable thing in what he did, but it has left a little bit of a vacuum on what's next.

"Kevin McCarthy is a good leader ... it just depends on what the conference itself wants to do. Give it a little more time and we'll see how it plays out here in the next week or so."