

Opinions

Everybody has one...

It's a Small World

It is truly amazing what a small world this is. And anyone who is familiar with "A Few Good Men," "Animal House" and "Murder in the First" knows that the common thread is Kevin Bacon, famously known for the "Six Degrees of Separation" theory – ostensibly, everyone and everything is just six connections removed from Kevin Bacon, to appreciate just how interconnected our society and our world have become.

So, my husband went to the Transfer Station recently, and one of the bags of garbage was a little too heavy, so he asked another gentleman at the station for assistance. A short conversation ensued, and come to find out, they were both Air Force Veterans who, as children, lived only a block from each other in Miami. They knew all the same places, favorite haunts, popular spots for kids, and shared a lament for how things have changed in the neighborhood around the Orange Bowl.

And just last week, while perusing Facebook, I ran across a bunk mate from when I was stationed in Germany at Fliegerhorst Kaserne, by virtue of belonging to a helicopter Facebook page. It was a gas to relive some of the shared experiences.

It really is that way, especially with military folks. Often following each other from duty station to duty station through predictable rotation, it is very common to meet up with past service mates. I doubt there isn't a one of us who really enjoys that grounded connection of, and to, the past. Knowing where we've been often points us in the right direction for the future.

Hope to see you on the flip side, and until we muse again, I bid you, "At Ease!"

Military Musings

Janice Walters-Taylor



Honest Unbelief

If you do not identify as a Christian, have you ever thought about why you don't? Perhaps you haven't thought about it at all. Please let me help you with that.

Maybe you're like the non-believer who responded on social media to the disconcerting things happening today. He said, "I'm coming out. I'm officially Bible-curious." That's honest truth-seeking. Only God knows what makes a seeker out of a skeptic or cynic. A skeptic is unsure what is true; a cynic is not interested in what is true. You can be either or both. You can also be changed.

You live by what you believe is true whether you realize it or not. Consider the following truth claims: People are basically good. All paths lead to god. Nature is god. Science has all the answers. The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be. Follow your heart. People wrote the Bible and their thoughts are no better than mine. Jesus is a mythical figure. Any of these would contribute to living by something other than the truth about Jesus Christ.

You may object, "If Christianity is true, why doesn't everyone see and embrace it?" The answer lies at the heart of the Christian gospel. Humans are good at deceiving ourselves. St. Augustine wrote, "Because man hates to be proved wrong, he will not allow himself to be convinced that he is deceiving himself. So he hates the real truth for what he takes to his heart in its place." You can find evidence for the real truth about God in history, science, logic, and changed lives.

Since "the heart is more deceitful than all else" (Jer. 17:9), the solution is what the Bible calls being "saved." It says, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7).

To be saved means that "you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and ho-

See Fowler, page 5A

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

We have tried to explain the property tax revaluation process, but it is still fairly complicated to many.

As I have been telling residents - do not panic. All the numbers about your property tax doubling or tripling are unfounded and very unlikely to occur unless you have a very expensive house or tract of property that has previously been valued way below what it is actually worth.

Q. My property tax bill says there will be a significant tax increase. Why are you saying there probably won't be an increase or if there is an increase, it will be very small?

A. First of all, you have not received a tax bill for this year. What you received is an estimate. The State of Georgia requires that LAST YEAR'S mil (tax rate) be used to ESTIMATE the amount of your property taxes. The combination of last year's mil rate plus the revaluation for fair market value does make that estimate look high. But here's the reality: You won't know your tax bill until we set the mil rate. We won't set the mil rate until we decide on the 2022 budget. The estimation that you received is definitely NOT the final outcome. We fully expect the mil rate to go down.

Q. How much will my property tax go up?

A. Right now, NOBODY KNOWS until the county sets a budget for next year. However, the average property tax increase should be under 10%. Of course, there will be some exceptions. For example, if the value of my home went up \$100,000, I may see a slightly larger tax increase, but still many others will see no tax increase at all.

Q. Why don't you charge the new homes in the county more money so they help pay for the improvements to our county?

A. We all have our opinions about who should and should not pay property taxes, but the State of Georgia requires that those property values be equalized so that if you do pay property taxes, you only pay a fair share based on the value of your property.

Q. Why did you have the county do this revaluation?

A. I did not. The Board of Assessors made the recommendation and the county funded it.

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Letters to the Editor

Stop Tax-and-Spend Now

Dear Editor,

First came notice of the potential for a significant increase in property taxes, then notice that a not new/previously attempted TSPLOST would be on the ballot in November, then ESPLOST/SLUSH coming a year early. A new elementary school, get real! What could go wrong?

Last week's news seemed to indicate what is going to go wrong. We live in one of the most conservative areas in all of Georgia. Conservatives have a mantra of "taxed enough already" (remember the TEA Party, folks?). And there it was right in the letters to the editors. So what is going to go wrong or right, hopefully, is that neither SPLOST/SLUSH will make it to the ballot.

The "penny" tax shared by the tourists is an abject joke. It's 1%! Soon to be 3 penny percents? The tourist drops 18 cents, assuming the SPLOST/SLUSH goes to 3%, for his \$6 burger

See Blanchard, page 5A

Dismayed

Dear Editor,

As a backwoods hunter, I was dismayed to learn of the Forest Service's decision to permit the semi-private Union County Gun Club to build a shooting range on the border of the Mark Trail Wilderness Area on Forest Service land. Congressionally mandated Wilderness Areas are the few areas where a hunter like myself can put some distance between himself and the parking lot. Caving in to political pressure from former Secretary of Agriculture Russ Perdue, whose Department controls the Forest Service, the Agency ignored its mandate to protect the wilderness character of Wilderness Areas and as a result the Mark Trail Wilderness Area will be forever polluted with noise.

See Govus, page 5A

Derail TSPLOST Slush Fund

Dear Editor,

According to election records, the majority of registered voters in Union County vote Republican. How Lamar Paris, a tax-and-spend commissioner, was elected to the CEO position of Union County government is beyond my understanding.

My observation, based on having lived 65 years in a Democrat controlled state and retired from the Treasury Department, is that the majority of Republicans in Union County apparently do not expect their sole commissioner to practice fiscal responsibility.

Paris is telling us that his TSPLOST must be passed to counter further property tax increases. How is last year's large property tax increase working out for you under the current

See Harper, page 5A

Against ESPLOST

Dear Editor,

Why does the Union County School Board always have a reason to take more tax dollars from the citizens of the county? In the July 14, 2021, edition of the North Georgia News, School Superintendent Hill stated that, "The issue, if anyone is not aware, is that cap that we've left on ESPLOST was the same one, to my knowledge, that we've always used of \$21 million." Is the saying it does not matter what the cost of the projects to be funded are? Is it only a matter of how much tax the Union County School Board can put on the people?

See Burch, page 5A

Let's Pass TSPLOST

Dear Editor,

I see that the moaning and crying about the proposed TSPLOST has begun. These same moaners and criers would be the first to plant themselves at Commissioner Paris' office door as soon as the potholes and unsafe bridges reared their ugly heads.

Paving doesn't come cheap. I retired 16 years ago this month, and I never had enough paving money to resurface the state park roads in my region that were in need of it. Extensive resurfacing can't be done from a regular operating budget, nor can other repairs to our transportation infrastructure. The TSPLOST will give Commissioner Paris an opportunity to plan to do the work on a timely basis before our road system is allowed to deteriorate.

See Reed, page 5A



Wildland Fire Prevention

Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D is a leader in Wildfire education and prevention in the Appalachian Mountain for Georgia, western North Carolina, and into Southwest Virginia. We preach the wildfire message to any groups in these areas that will listen, such as civic clubs, homeowner associations, county commissions, state fire agencies, federal fire agencies, local fire departments, and any other group that will give us time to tell our story about the dangers of living in the Wildland Urban Interface where wildfire risk is a way of life whether they know it or not.

When an unusual event occurs, or is predicted to occur, we enlist the help of a team of experts in wildfire prevention. These expert teams are called Wildfire Prevention and Education Teams and are ordered by state or federal fire agencies to provide resources to support the local resident teams. When severe wildland fire situations occur because of extreme fire weather, it can cause extensive loss of property, community resources, and even lives. As extreme conditions approach or worsen, wildland fire prevention/education is often overlooked as a possible source of help.

Because fire weather conditions are predictable, wildland fire prevention/education teams can be mobilized in advance of fires, when fire danger becomes extreme. Prevention/education teams are available to support any geographic area preceding and during periods of high fire danger or fire activity. Some of the purposes of Wildland Fire Prevention/Education Teams are: complete fire risk assessments; determine the severity of the situation; facilitate community awareness and education in fire prevention including prescribed burning; coordinate announcement of interagency restrictions and closures; coordinate fire prevention efforts with the public, special target groups, state and local agencies, and elected officials; promote public and personal responsibility regarding fire prevention in the wildland/urban interface; assist Incident Management Teams in accomplishing their objectives in working with the public develop fire protection plans.

Mobilization of a team may occur when an unusual event or circumstance warrants or is predicted, such as; severe burning conditions; unusually high fire occurrence; majority of firefighting resources committed; preparedness levels above normal; Some of the benefits of Wildland Fire Prevention Education Teams are; can help reduce the loss of human life and property; can help reduce resource losses; reduce the cost of suppression; improve interagency relations. Increasingly, people in the wildland/ur-

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RC&D Executive Director

Frank Riley



The Chase

I don't know about you, but I always dreaded the day of our polio vaccinations at school. The process didn't hurt, but I was always scared of those needles. I can remember as a child running from a Doctor when he pulled out a needle to give me a shot. I have always dreaded vaccines and even visits to the Doctor's Office. My blood pressure increases even with a simple check-up. My hypothesis is that being scared of those vaccinations was a part of my DNA. My father did not like Doctors, Dentists or even Nurses.

When my Dad, Paul, was really young, he had a bad toothache, so Papa took him to a friend who could pull teeth. This man was not a dentist. He never went to any dentistry schools. But, in the mid 1940s the closest dentist to Traptown, Alabama, was in Birmingham. So, the only alternative was a trip to Mon Dye's house. According to Papa, Mon had worked on horses' teeth, so, the man knew a little about teeth. Mr. Dye strapped Paul to a chair and without any pain medicine pulled one of the young boy's teeth with the biggest pair of pliers the young boy had ever seen. As a result, my father has had a fear of dentists and doctors since he was 7 years old.

After WWII, the Health Departments in Alabama began vaccinating school age children for varied maladies. Some kids went to school, and some did not. So, health workers would pick out a community leader's home and go there to give vaccinations to all the kids in that community. The vaccinations were free and most of the younger generation wanted their kids to receive the vaccinations. But the older generation was not convinced. My great grandmother, Laura West, was afraid for her grandchildren. So, upon the arrival of her grandchildren on the vaccination day, Laura ushered them into her home and had them convinced their blood would leak out of their bodies due to the vaccination process. When it was announced the County Nurse had arrived to give the vaccines, Jimmy Wehunt ran for the woods. Wallace and Freda began to buddle with an extremely high pitch. Dad and Bud ran for Laura's bedroom and dove under the big old bed. All this commotion had a profound effect upon the other kids in the community. Kids were running and screaming for their lives. Papa was the first father to catch his children.

Papa said, "I reached under the bed while my mother was hitting me with the broom handle and grabbed them boys by their ankles. I

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Chamber of Commerce

I would like to take a minute to thank Commissioner Lamar Paris and Representative Stan Gunter for being our guest at our Eggs & Issues this past week. It's exciting for North Georgia to have a State Representative that has already been assigned to the House Appropriations Committee, the House Economic Development and Tourism Committee and is Vice Chair of the House Judiciary Committee. Stan has assisted with several bills that earned him the recognition of Freshman Legislator of the Year by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

Commissioner Paris provided insight into what was going on in Union County and several SPLOST projects that are ongoing. It is great to have a Commissioner that is looking out for the needs of all generations in our County including the children that are our future. Commissioner Paris also spent time explaining that the Property Tax re-assessments that were the result of State law that threatened fines if the difference

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Leyland Cypress

Leyland cypress trees are a very common and popular landscaping plant. I've seen them planted by people all over Georgia. However, there are a couple of issues that are commonly seen in Leyland cypress trees. Let's talk about Leyland cypress trees, what some of those issues are, and what steps you can take to reduce the chances of your Leyland cypresses getting diseased.

Leyland cypress was bred in 1888. It is a cross of Alaska cedar and Monterey cypress. They can grow to be over 40 feet tall. When they are young, they grow very rapidly. They'll grow at a rate of 3-4 feet per year. Later on in life, they will continue to grow very rapidly at rate of about 2 feet per year. They typically have a Christmas tree shape. In some places, people have even begun to grow them to be sold for Christmas trees. Typically, people plant them for a barrier or privacy screen.

Leyland cypress trees are relatively insect pest free. They are very prone to environmental stress and a few canker diseases. Environmental stress such as heat, lack of water, or too much water leads to the insides of the trees turning brown. Another thing to keep in mind is that these trees have an effective lifespan of 15-20 years. So if your trees are that age and don't look healthy, they probably aren't going to get any better.

The two canker diseases that Leyland cypress trees get are Seiridium and Botryosphaeria canker. Seiridium canker is the most common and destructive of the two in Georgia. The symptoms from both diseases look very similar. You will see individual branches begin to die off. Sometimes you'll see resin in spots on the branches because of the cankers. These cankers are essentially suffocating the branch, leading to the branch turning brown.

Stressed trees are going to be more susceptible to cankers. During times of drought, trees that are already infected will spread the disease much more quickly. Ice damage and spring freezes can create wounds where infection is able to occur. Trees that are near buildings that reflect sunlight will also be more stressed.

Unfortunately, with canker diseases there is not a fungicide that can be used to eliminate the pathogen. Even if there was, spraying a 40-foot tall tree is not practical. Once a tree has been infected the best treatment is to remove the dead branch and dispose of the branch. Try to keep plants from becoming stressed by laying mulch around their base. This will increase the moisture retained by the soil, and suppress competitive weed growth. During dry, hot summer

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Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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Cummings... continued from Page 4A

pulled them from under the bed and carried them by the ankles outside to the nurse. The whole time they sounded like little pigs a'squealing." Dad and Bud knew not to run anymore, but they were still scared. As the nurse reached for the arm of Bud, with tears streaming down his face, the 8-year-old looked up at the nurse and said, "Lady, I'll have to kill you if you stick me with that needle."

Papa said, "My little boy looked plum pitiful, and all I could do was to hug him during the vaccination." After the vaccination, Bud looked surprised when he realized his blood wasn't leaking out of his body. The vaccinations for the other kids took a while, because their dads all had to chase and catch their children. But eventually all the kids received their vaccinations, and everything calmed down in the little community.

When Paul was 14, his father, Coon, developed some sort of infection in the tip of his

thumb. He and Paul went to see a Dr. Wilson in Haleyville, Alabama. The Doc had to lance Papa's thumb and scrape the bone to get rid of the infection. The whole process was done with no pain medicine. Everything was fine until my grandfather stood up to leave. The grown man passed out and didn't wake up until they made it home an hour later. The young boy had to sit on a pillow to reach the throttle and starter to be able to drive home. He and my grandmother used smelling salts to wake up his father and get him in the house. Papa stayed in bed for a couple of weeks and could not work in the cotton fields until harvest time. All the neighbors came and helped to plant the crops, but the cultivation was left up to the 14-year-old Paul and his younger brother Bud.

Paul has been afraid of doctors and dentists for a long time, and if I'd had the same experiences as him, I guess I would be afraid as well.

Williams... continued from Page 4A

days, water the trees if the soil has become dry. If trees are extensively damaged by cankers, then they will need to be removed. When planting Leyland cypress make sure to dig out an area 3-4 times larger than the diameter of the root ball. This will improve soil drainage, resulting in your trees being less stressed and less susceptible to root rot diseases. In addition, planting trees at least 15 feet apart will reduce disease incidence.

There are some alterna-

tives to Leyland cypress trees that are better adapted to our environment. Green Giant arborvitae and Arizona cypresses are both trees that serve the same purpose in landscape and are more disease resistant. For anyone planting trees as a barrier or screen, I would encourage them to look into these alternatives.

If you have questions about Leyland cypress please contact your county Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Chamber... continued from Page 4A

between the actual property value and the assessed value of the property was too great. Union County was warned that we would be fined if our property was not re-assessed. Many in the crowd were comforted to learn that while the values may be increased our taxes would not increase by the same percentage since there would be an adjustment to the millage rate. The Commissioner let the crowd know that if anyone thought their valuation was incorrect that they should appeal the valuation.

I know I have mentioned it several times but we are so

excited to have the Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruizin coming to Meeks Parks July 29, 30, & 31. As a part of the planned activities there will be a Barbecue Cook-off at the Farmers Market where 5 of our local restaurants will be battling for the rights to be called Blairsville Best BBQ.

Check the Chamber website for a list of restaurants scheduled to participate and checkout our Chamber Magazine for a visual sampling of the fare to be presented. It will make your mouth water! And remember, It's always better in Blairsville!

Reed... continued from Page 4A

I only wish that these latecomer moaners and criers could have lived in Union County some 60 years ago, when few roads were paved. During wet winters with frequent freezing and thawing, schools had to be closed simply because the roads were impassable. Now, we have a great road system in the county, and there are those who would appar-

ently love to see it deteriorate, if for nothing else than political purposes.

Let's pass TSPLOST and keep our roads and bridges safe and in excellent condition. By the way, TSPLOST is NOT a slush fund. It has to be used for transportation purposes, and the state maintains a close watch on the expenditures.

Ed Reed

Harper... continued from Page 4A

two SPLOST programs? Did you receive your notice of increased property assessment? Is Paris going to lower the millage rate to coincide with last year's property tax? What does the expect taxpayers to give up so he can tax and spend more?

An overwhelming Republican majority in Union County means nothing until voters elect leaders with conservative monetary and moral values. Union County must move to a three-member commission. In fact, the sole commissioner should

put this question on the ballot referendum along with his desire to increase our taxes again. One person should not be managing Union County. Yes, it was on the last election cycle ballot, but timing is everything!

The people need to stop sipping the Paris "Kool-Aid" and start gulping conservatism — unite in November to derail the TSPLOST slush fund train and to increase the commission to three members for the next election cycle.

Robert Harper

Blanchard... continued from Page 4A

at the omnipresent fast foods, and you, resident, pay \$1,760 for your new Mustang Mach-E if it is ever delivered or whatever SUV or float boat you buy. Tourists bring their own Mustangs, SUV's, float boats, etc., with them.

So if you don't vote for SLUSHs, "your property taxes will go up" is the omnipresent threat. And yes, they must, to provide the maintenance on the mon-needed creations of previous SLUSHs. Conversely, SLUSHs must continue in order to pay for the overreach of previous SLUSHs. But increasing property taxes is touching the third rail

(see recent letters to the editor). Too much increase in property taxes and folks exfiltrate and the tax base goes down.

So a tax-and-spend administration (what we have) needs to be thrifty and prudent with a property tax increase and spending, in difference to a SLUSH fund going to non-line items on no-bid contracts. He has to be careful first and foremost (his priority, not mine) to protect his job and then to not lose tax base.

Stop tax-and-spend now. Do not authorize SLUSHs (SPLOSTs).

Zeb Blanchard

Riley... continued from Page 4A

ban interface zone are feeling the effects of wildland fire. Every year families are evacuated and structures are destroyed as the result of wildland fires all around the world and extra help is needed to help these families plan and survive the fires. NFPET teams are tools that can assist professionals and homeowners in mitigating the risk of damage from a wildland fire. The prevention team processes and analyzes risks, hazards, and values; outlines an operational plan for the protection of resources from wildfire; and develops wildfire prevention program implementation costs. They can take over the details for community protection plans during a fire or before a fire while the local emergency agency is tied up managing the fire.

A team consists of a Team Leader, a Public Affairs Officer, Prevention Specialist(s), and an optional trainee (I am one) or other team members as the situation dictates (Finance Officer, Logistics Specialist, etc.). Trained interagency personnel can be mobilized through normal dispatch channels to assist in fire prevention/education at any level of an organization. The individuals ordered for prevention/education teams must have the skills required to fill the position for which they have been ordered.

The mission of National Fire Prevention and Education Teams (NFPETs) is to provide unit and agency managers with skilled and mobile personnel which can supplement or enhance ongoing local wildfire prevention and education activities, where hazard or risk is, or is expected to be, elevated above normal. Teams are highly effective in their ability to reduce unwanted human-caused wildland ignitions and are equipped to rapidly complete on-site prevention assessments and plans, initiate implementation of such plans, and to begin immediate prevention and education activities. The teams are not "firefighters" in the nor-

Fowler...

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liness of the truth" (Eph. 4:22-24). It means you have a new identity!

How do you embrace the grace, forgiveness, renewal, and eternity the gospel offers? Believe in a Person. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Do that, and your honest unbelief gives way to saving, life-changing faith.

Govus...

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As a retired grading contractor, I was surprised to see the proposed site which was selected by gun club members with no experience in site preparation. It was clear that this site would require an enormous amount of earth-moving and would never yield the 200-yard range desired. I was not surprised to learn that the finished plans call for only a 150-yard range and estimate the cost at \$2.4 million.

As a conservative, I was dismayed that all of this \$2.4 million would be paid out of taxpayer dollars with Union County agreeing to pay \$600,000 dollars. Not surprisingly Union County has just raised its ad valorem tax rate as well as property valuations and is proposing another SPLOST sales tax hike. To cap off this classic case of government mismanagement and waste, there is an underutilized shooting range available to the public, located on Forest Service land, the Chatuge range, less than 4 miles away.

David Govus

Burch...

continued from Page 4A

The fact that the Board of Education received a waiver from the Department of Revenue to continue collecting the ESPLOST does not relieve them of their promise to stop collecting the tax when the cap was reached.

Now we are told that Union County School Board will put ESPLOST VI on the May 2022 ballot for the citizens to vote on. That will be six ESPLOSTs at 5-year intervals or 30 years of tax collection for special projects. I wonder what is so special after 30 years. Wouldn't it be nice to be given an itemized list of proposed projects with some detail estimated cost and the reason for each project? Total cost of the projects should determine the cap on the ESPLOST, not how much tax they can put on the citizens.

George Burch

mal sense of the word, but they are fire "preventers" coaching resident of how to prepare their homes and businesses when a wildfire threatens.

Wildfire prevention and education is mostly common sense that we already know

but sometimes it takes a team of "experts" from the outside to show us the obvious ways to save our property and lives. Our ancestors had to know how to protect their homes from wildfires because they did not have a fire department to call on when a fire threatened, and

when one did, they could lose everything they owned and their way of life.

For more information on WFPET or wildfires, contact Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D; info.ccrd@gmail.com or contact your local state Forestry Agency.