

## CBA...continued from page 1A

District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch and House District 8 State Rep. Stephen Allison, spoke to the Alliance.

Sen. Gooch, a freshman in the State Senate, serves as a volunteer firefighter in his Dahlonega community. He's also the former Lumpkin County Commission Chair, and he opened the meeting by giving a brief overview of his stance on the issues affecting North Georgia.

Since taking office, his top priority has been the state economy and putting Georgians back to work. During the recent Georgia General Assembly session, Sen. Gooch and his colleagues were finished by the end of March and that alone saved Georgians thousands of tax dollars.

"We got out of there on March 30th and usually the Legislative Session runs through April. Sometimes the end of April," Sen. Gooch said. "Getting out of there on time saves a lot of tax dollars. Every day we are down there it costs about \$64,000."

"The sooner we get out of town, the better off we all are money-wise," he said.

Sen. Gooch stressed the importance of downsizing the



**State Sen. Steve Gooch**

state budget and creating a more efficient government across the board.

"We have cut the budget almost \$4 billion over the last four years," Sen. Gooch said. "Those decisions weren't easy to make. A lot of people had to anguish a lot of days and nights to decide what our priorities would be in Georgia."

"And as conservatives, we want to look for every way to make that dollar go as far as it can," he said.

Sen. Gooch has put his faith in a concept called "zero-based budgeting." He believes that is the most productive way of streamlining the budget process in Georgia. With zero-based budgeting, every line item of the budget must be approved, rather than only changes to the budget.

Sen. Gooch also touched

upon other bills he has supported that range from monitoring prescription drug abuse, banning synthetic marijuana, drug testing welfare recipients, along with prison and immigration reform.

State Rep. Allison followed Gooch by mentioning that he was going to discuss 10 topics but the Senator covered nine of them.

"Great minds think alike," Rep. Allison said.

State Rep. Allison recently was appointed as Deputy Whip in the Georgia House of Representatives and named the Secretary of the Judiciary Committee. Rep. Allison also was named to the Appropriations Committee, whose responsibility is to oversee and draft the state's budget.

Rep. Allison went into further detail regarding drug testing of welfare recipients and state prison reform. He commented that it was Town Hall meetings like this one where a lot of great ideas come from.

"It was a gentleman from Toccoa that came up with the idea about drug testing those receiving state benefits such as TANF," Rep. Allison said. "Other states, including

Florida, have already passed similar bills."

On the issue of prison reform, Rep. Allison said it costs \$18,000 a year to house an inmate, while Georgia spends \$8,000 to educate a child for one year.

"We had to decide where our priorities are," he said. "The head of the Georgia Department of Corrections told us the prisons were so overcrowded that we were patrolling the non-violent offenders out as soon as possible to make room for the criminals that needed to be there."

Allison explained that he was a proponent of "Drug Courts," that gave offenders, who were simply addicts, a chance to avoid prison through strict drug testing, addiction classes and counseling, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and intense supervision by the courts and probation offices.

"We had to divide the criminals into two groups," he said. "The ones we don't like and the ones we are afraid of; we may not like a drug addict but we're not afraid of them the same way we would be a child molester."

## Second Chance...continued from page 1A

has already been released; the second will be released in time to walk at graduation.

"They will have something that they did not have when they came into the Detention Center, a high school diploma," Sgt. Rhodes said. "This is a program that has changed two lives already. It has the potential to change many, many more."

Sgt. Rhodes said the program has been an inspiration to younger inmates - 17 is the minimum age to be incarcerated.

ated in the county jail. Anything over 21 years old is considered too old for the program. Thus, the 17-to 21-year-old age range.

"There are so many young people who come in here, who don't have a high school diploma and they get out and fall back into the same rut they were in before," she said. "Sheriff Stephens is so interested in the youth of this community."

"All of us feel that this is a positive option that these

kids wouldn't otherwise have," Sgt. Rhodes said. "The two kids that accomplished this incredible goal worked their tails off to get this done in time for graduation. It was a carrot at the end of the stick and they worked for it. I'm proud of them."

Shook said the program also is now in Pickens County. In the fall, MEC hopes to expand it to Gilmer County.

"Not every student who comes in that is in the 17-21-year-old age range is a candidate for this program," Shook said. "It's all a matter of how many high school credits they have. The kids in jail here are here for a short time. The kids that are reasonably close to graduation in that 17-21 years of age category can earn their high school diplomas."

"It's not easy, but these kids already know that life isn't easy," Shook said. "MEC applauds Sheriff Stephens for having the vision to make this program a priority and help those kids."

## Whittles, officers go to Washington for Peace Officers' Memorial Day

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Members of the Union County Sheriff's Office and members of fallen Deputy Derrick Whittle's family went to Washington, D.C. to take part in Peace Officer's

Memorial Day in the Nation's Capitol.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris reported that the contingent from Union County included Sheriff's Capt. Dallas Batson, Investigator C.J. Worden and the Whittle family, Karen, Nick, Leigha and Derrick Whittle's parents, Jim and Sharon Whittle were in attendance.

Deputy Whittle was the only child of Jim and Sharon Whittle.

The Whittle children, Nick and Leigha met President Barack Obama and had their picture taken with him.

Commissioner Paris also proclaimed May 15 as Peace Officers' Memorial Day in Union County.

Union County sheriff's Deputy Derrick Whittle died in the line of duty Sept. 18, 2011, three days after a crash while en route to a domestic disturbance on Mt. Pleasant Road.

Deputy Whittle was responding to a domestic disturbance involving weapons when his patrol car left the roadway and struck a tree near the intersection of Mt. Pleasant Church Road and Bowers Circle.

He was transported to Union General Hospital before being flown to Erlanger Hospital. Deputy Whittle had served with the Union County Sheriff's Office for less than one year. The Union County Sheriff's Office recently dedicated a memorial to the fallen Whittle, and Chief Deputy Charles King. A marble marker now stands at the entrance to the Sheriff's Office headquarters, the names Whittle and King are inscribed on the marker's face.

Union County Sheriff Scott Stephens also retired Badge 221, the one worn by the 38-year-old Deputy Whittle. He also retired his service revolver, and presented it to the Whittle family. He also presented the Whittle family with the fallen deputy's uniform.

The local contingent returned home safely from Washington on Thursday afternoon.



United States President Barack Obama takes time with Leigha and Nick Whittle during Peace Officers' Memorial Day in Washington, D.C. last week. The Whittle children attended with their family.