DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

From the desk of

State Sen. Jim Butterworth

Focusing on critical issues

For a legislative session so heavily focused on passing a balanced budget in the face of unprecedented revenue gaps, we managed to produce vital solutions to some of Georgia's other critical issues. State lawmakers worked throughout session to ensure issues important to you such as trauma funding, transportation funding solutions, clarity in weapon carry laws and ethics received the attention they deserved. We delivered legislation based on commonsense conservative principles.

The trauma care network in Georgia desperately needs a reliable funding source. A great extent of Northeast Georgia and much of rural Georgia has little access to trauma care. Trauma is the number one killer of Americans between the ages of one and 44, and the third cause of death across all age groups. Georgia's trauma death rate has been as high as 20 percent above the national average due to the state's lack of an adequate system. Therefore, the General Assembly worked to pass Senate Resolution 277, which creates the Georgia Trauma Trust Fund (GTTF). This resolution proposes a constitutional amendment that will transfer motor vehicle registrations to the state treasury for the purpose of funding a Georgia Trauma Trust Fund. There will be a $10 annual charge on each licensed passenger vehicle. Fees collected would be placed into the GTTF and be solely for management and improvements to the state trauma care system. If voters approve the measure in November, the fund will become the state's first dedicated funding source for the statewide trauma network, possibly generating up to $90 million a year and saving over 1,000 lives each year in Georgia.

Fixing the complex transportation problems in Georgia required two strategic aspects: a structure to manage and handle funding appropriately and a funding mechanism. Last year, we passed a transportation governance package (SB 200). This year, the General Assembly came together with the governor's office to agree on the Transportation Investment Act of 2010 (HB 277). If approved by voters in a referendum, this legislation provides for a 1 percent regional transportation sales and use tax to be imposed for ten years in 12 newly-created special districts. This comprehensive package includes voter approval on regional projects, funding those projects, and proper checks and balances for use of taxpayer dollars. Transparency and accountability is of utmost importance when you trust us with your money.

We passed legislation that clarifies laws for Georgia's 400,000 lawfully carrying citizens and Georgia's law enforcement officials. The Lawful Carry Act, or Senate Bill 308, successfully removes the confusing public gathering clause and provides specifics as to where it is lawful to carry a weapon. It also provides clearer penalties for infractions. It will be unlawful to carry into a restaurant or bar, unless permission is granted by the property owner. No weapons will be allowed in any K-12 school, but those with a license will be able to keep them in their vehicle parked on the lot. This is the same provision that teachers have currently. Citizens with a carry license will be able to leave their weapon in a parked vehicle on college and university campuses. However, it will be a misdemeanor if they have a license and carry onto a college or university campus. It will still be a felony crime to carry a weapon onto a campus if one does not have a license to carry.

Since Republicans took over leadership in the state legislature, Georgia moved from being ranked 39th in our state's ethics laws to 7th in the country according to independent nonpartisan groups. We continued this trend, passing an ethics reform bill, which will bring significant change to the political system in Georgia. This bill will require disclosure of campaign contributions greater than $100 and it details the reporting procedure for campaign contribution disclosure reports. Additionally, the process for filing a complaint against a member of the General Assembly is outlined.

Earlier in the session, we passed The Water Stewardship Act (SB 307). This bill is a significant step toward ensuring the future growth of our state as we move forward in deliberations to determine how Georgia will access one of our most precious and indispensable resources. This bill encourages water conservation by reducing wasteful loss and incentivizing innovation in increasing water supply and lessening demand. Beginning in July 2012, the legislation requires efficient water fixtures in all new residential and commercial construction and the installation of efficient cooling towers in new industrial construction. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division will set standards for water loss and leak detection for all medium and large public water systems, which serve 91 percent of Georgia's water customers. Additionally, farmers throughout the state have voluntarily agreed to have ground water and surface water withdrawals monitored.

The economy necessitates that we create a culture of efficiency and cost savings within state government. I sponsored The Transparency in Government Act and the Paper Reduction Act. The Transparency in Government Act requires the General Assembly and the judicial branch to be included in the auditing and tracking functions of open.georgia.gov. This bill will ensure all fiscal actions of state government are available for the general public, increasing accountability and transparency to the people of Georgia. The Paper Reduction Act is a prescription to save time and money, and increase efficiency. It will increase electronic distribution and publication in state government, providing you with easier, more instantaneous access to government information. It will also save taxpayer dollars by cutting costs of printing, paper, and mailing.

I am honored to serve and represent the 50th Senate District in the State Senate. I will continue to work on your behalf for tax relief, education, economic development and a strong, sustainable economy. Please continue to contact me with your thoughts, questions and concerns.

Sen. Jim Butterworth serves as chairman of the State and Local Governmental Operations Committee. He represents the 50th Senate District which includes Towns, Rabun, Habersham, Stephens, Banks, Franklin, and Hart counties along with a portion of White County. He can be reached by phone at 404.463.5257 or by email at jim.butterworth@senate.ga.gov.

Towns County Herald

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The Middle Path

by Don Perry

"And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died." Revelations 8:9

Somewhere off the coast of Louisiana under the tranquil waters of the Gulf of Mexico, millions of gallons of crude oil are suspended in gigantic poisonous plumes. Toxic chemicals in the oil, and in the chemicals used to disperse it, are contaminating shellfish and destroying the fishing industry along the Gulf Coast. The actions of microbes trying to digest the oil are depleting the water of oxygen, which means that from plankton to whales, an entire food chain is being compromised. Despite the best efforts of BP to contain the spill, hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil continue to join the mess every day. The contaminated waters are near, or according to some estimates already in the loop current which will carry the toxic soup around Florida, through the Keys and up the eastern seaboard.

The oil has been leaking for almost a month now and there is no end in sight. Even if the flow of oil were to be miraculously stopped today, the damage that has already been done will take decades to heal. It is an overused word suited more for disaster movies and end-of-the-world best sellers, but the destruction of the Deep Water Horizon and the oil released into the waters that supply 40 percent of US seafood are fast becoming an event which promises to be, in every sense of the word, "apocalyptic."

From our arm chair judge's benches we require that our media supply us with names and faces to which we can assign blame. BP is a likely target with its history of safety compromises.

Barack Obama, who last year awarded the Deep Water Horizon with a safety award, also comes to mind; even George H. W. Bush who in 1990 gifted the oil companies with a $75 million liability cap is a good candidate for blame. Nevertheless the number one candidate for responsibility in this disaster is the one most often overlooked, and that is the person we glimpse in the rear view mirror as we are backing the car out of the driveway. We Americans just don't get it. We don't.

We expect the lights to come on when we flip a switch. We expect the car to crank when we turn the key. We might flip and crank less often were we to hang a picture of a coal mine next to the thermostat or tape a picture of a dead pelican on the dashboard, but too few of us make that connection. The price of instant energy gratification is ugly and toxic and inimical to life on earth.

We have alternatives, but we approach them so late in the game and so reluctantly that the transition, when we are ultimately forced to make it, is bound to be a rough ride.

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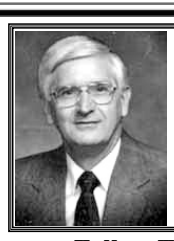
GUEST COLUMNS

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO: Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor, PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546. Our email address: tcherald@brmemc.net. Letters should be limited to 200 words or less, signed, dated and include a phone number for verification purposes. This paper reserves the right to edit letters to conform with Editorial page policy or refuse to print letters deemed pointless, potentially defamatory or in poor taste. Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc.

Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.*

Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.

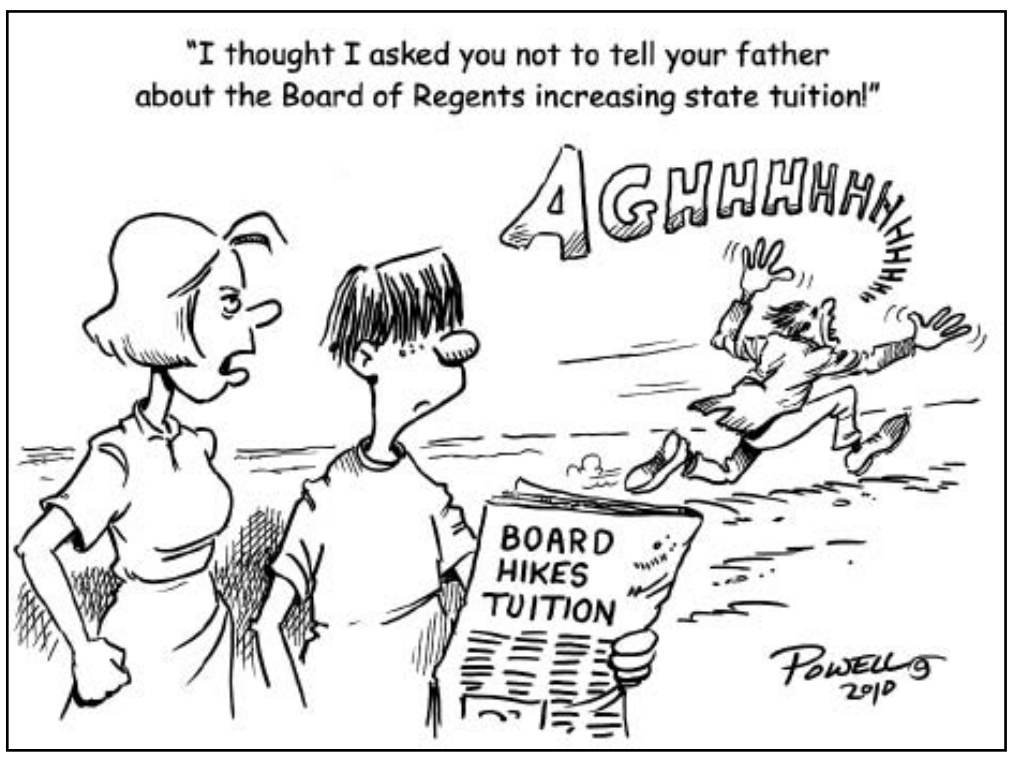


"IT'S ON MY MIND.."

Danny H. Parris

Follow Thou Me

My wife and I are among thousands of parents and grandparents who are excited about graduation. We have two granddaughters graduating: one from high school and the other from college. Scores of our sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters will be listening with keen ears to hear their name called to step forward and receive that cherished diploma. Some of these students will go on to higher schools of learning. Others will go into the work market. Some will marry and begin families. The question to be considered is not altogether what I am going to do, but will what I do make any difference in our world of life and living? I am convinced that our creator of the heavens and the earth, the One who holds all things together has a definite plan for each of His children. To live a productive and promising life you need to find God's will. You will discover His will as you read His word, pray and walk in His light. The Bible reveals God's will for every life. The Bible instructs us to "study to show ourselves approved unto God" (II Timothy 2:15). The Bible instructs us to work hard (II Thessalonians 3:10). A young soldier asked his commanding officer where his foxhole was. The commanding officer said, "You are standing on it." "All you need to do is throw out the dirt." Too many people in our world are looking for a ready-made future, a ready-made church, etc. I have known pastors and staff members who were always "looking for a good situation" to step into. They were looking for a place to serve where someone else had already done the hard work. My advice to young graduates is not to expect to begin at the top. The only occupations I know where you start at the top are well-diggers and grave diggers. When you find God's will, be obedient to follow God's will. Some people are so interested in what others do, they never do anything themselves. I have found this to be true with some churches. Some churches are so interested in the fads and fashions of other churches that they neglect to minister where God has placed them. You remember Peter looked at John and asked Jesus, "What shall this man do?" Jesus saith unto him. "If I will that he tarry till I come what is that to you?" "Follow thou me" (John 21:21-22). Don't be so obsessed with what others are doing that you neglect to follow God's will. When you find God's will, follow God's will and finish God's will. It is important to begin well, but it is equally as important to finish well. One of the saddest statements that can ever fall from our lips is to look back and say, "What might have been!" "What might have been if I had chosen God's will for my vocation? My companion? My career." What if we have worked at our marriage, rather than dissolving it? What if I had not made that hasty decision to have sex? To try drugs? To take that first drink? My prayer for all graduates everywhere is that you will find God's will, follow God's will and Finish God's will. My prayer is that when you near the end of life's journey you will not be saying, "what if?" But you will be listening for the "Well done", from your Lord and Master!



Community Calendar

Towns County Water Board Meeting 3rd Monday of each month at 6 p.m. in the TC Water Office Building.

Mountain Community Seniors meet the second Thursday of each month at the Senior Center in Hiawassee at 2 p.m.

Towns County Democratic Party meets the 2nd Thursday of every month. Please call Kim Bailey at 706-994-2727 or 706-896-6747 for details.

Towns County Republican Party meets the 1st Tuesday of each month from 5 p.m.-6 p.m. Dinner at Daniels Steak House, 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. meeting, 896-7281.

Towns County Planning Commission is held the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Courthouse.

Towns County Commissioners meeting is the 3rd Thursday at 5:30 p.m. in the courthouse.

School Board Meeting, 2nd Monday each month at 7 p.m. in the auditorium.

Hiawassee City Council 1st Tuesday of month 4 p.m., at City Hall.

Young Harris City Council, 1st Tuesday of month at 7 p.m., Young Harris City Hall.

The Hiwassee River Valley Kennel Club meetings are held at 7 p.m. the 1st Monday of each month at Brother's Restaurant on Hwy 64 in Murphy, NC. Call President Kit Miracle: 706-492-5253 or Peggy Moorman: 828-835-1082.

The Unicoy Masonic Lodge #259 meets on the 2nd Monday of the month at 7:30 p.m.

Stephens Lodge #414 F & AM meets the 1st Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM in Young Harris.

Board of Voter Registrars meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 4:30 p.m., Courthouse.

Towns County Board of Elections holds its monthly meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 4 p.m. at the Elections Office (Old Rock Jail).

Towns County Historical Society meets the 2nd Monday of each month at the Senior Center in Hiawassee at 5 p.m. Annual dues $15, PO Box 1182, Hiawassee, GA 706-896-1060, www.townshistory.org

Bridge Players intermediate level meets at 12:45 p.m. on Mondays & Fridays at the Towns County Health Dept. Call Eden at 706-896-6921.

Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild, Inc (MRACG) meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at ArtWorks Artisan Centre, located at 308 Big Sky Drive (behind the Holiday Inn), Hiawassee. Refreshments at 6 p.m. & the meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. Contact us by calling 706-896-0932, mtnregartscraftsguild.org. mtnregartscraftsguild@hotmail.com.

VFW Post #7807 Fish Fry will be 2nd and 4th Friday of the month, 4:30-7 p.m., $9 a plate, all you can eat.

Mountain Computer User Group meets the 2nd Monday of each month at the Goolsby Center at YHC. Q & A at 6 p.m., meeting at 7 p.m.

FPL Retirees Breakfast will meet the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the Hole in the Wall Restaurant on the square in Blairsville at 9 a.m.

Chattahoochee-Nantahala Chapter, Trout Unlimited meets 2nd Thursday of each month at Cadence Bank in Blairsville. 5 p.m. Fly Tying - 7 p.m. General Meeting. Everyone welcome. www.ngatu692.com.

Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) meets the 3rd Monday of each month at various area restaurants. For information call John Quinlan at 706-896-2430 or visit www.moaa.org/chapter/blueridge-mountains.

Alcoholics Anonymous: 24 hour phone line 828-837-4440.

Mothers of Preschoolers meets on the third Thursday of each month at First Baptist Church of Blairsville from 6 - 8 p.m. Call the church office at 706-745-2469 for more information.

Chatuge Regional Hospital Auxiliary on the 3rd Monday of each month, except the months of July, October and December, in the hospital cafeteria at 1:30 p.m.

Old Fashioned Square Dance Lessons each Mon. in Hiawassee, GA, 6 p.m. at the Senior Center (2 blocks south of the town square, beside the Courthouse) Hiawassee, GA 706-896-1060

Mountain Magic Table Tennis Club meets 6 p.m. Thursdays at Pine Log Baptist Church Fellowship Hall in Brasstown. Ping Pong players welcome. Call Lee (828) 389-0924.

Mended Hearts Support Group meets the 2nd Monday of each month at Chatuge Regional Hospital Cafeteria from 5:30-7 PM. For information contact 706-994-6988.

We do Family Oral History of all of our residents. If you have not had your family history recorded ad would like to do so, Please call the Towns County Historical Society at 706-896-1060.