

# Opinions

## Everybody has one No to Charter Schools

I don't have a problem with the creation of high-quality charter schools for Georgia's students.

However, I have a problem with taking away home rule and deciding how our local tax dollars should be spent.

If an amendment on the Nov. 6 ballot passes related to Charter Schools, you can toss home rule out the window as it relates to our local Board of Education.

With that thought in mind, on election day, I'm voting for what is best for all of Georgia's students. I am opposing the constitutional amendment that will be on the Nov. 6 ballot.

I fully support Georgia School Superintendent Dr. John Barge on this issue.

Dr. Barge says that until all of our public school students are in school for a full 180-day school year, until essential services like student transportation and student support can return to effective levels, and until teachers regain jobs with full pay for a full school year, we should not redirect one more dollar away from Georgia's local school districts, much less an additional \$430 million in state funds.

That's what it would cost to add seven new state charter schools per year over the next five years - the annual average of the Charter Commission that would be revived if the amendment passes.

If you vote yes, you support the creation of a new and costly state bureaucracy that takes away local control of Georgia's schools and unnecessarily duplicates the good work already being done by local districts, the Georgia Department of Education and state Board of Education.

What's more, this constitutional amendment would direct taxpayer dollars into the pockets of out-of-state, for profit charter school companies whose schools perform no better than traditional public schools and locally approved charter schools. In some cases, they perform worse.

According to state campaign disclosures, all the money backing the amendment comes from out-of-state sources, about \$500,000.

Those who opposed the amendment have raised \$81,000, and only have \$5,000 left in the banks, after expenses.

I trust our local school districts will continue to do their important work, which includes approving only high quality charter schools for Georgia's students.

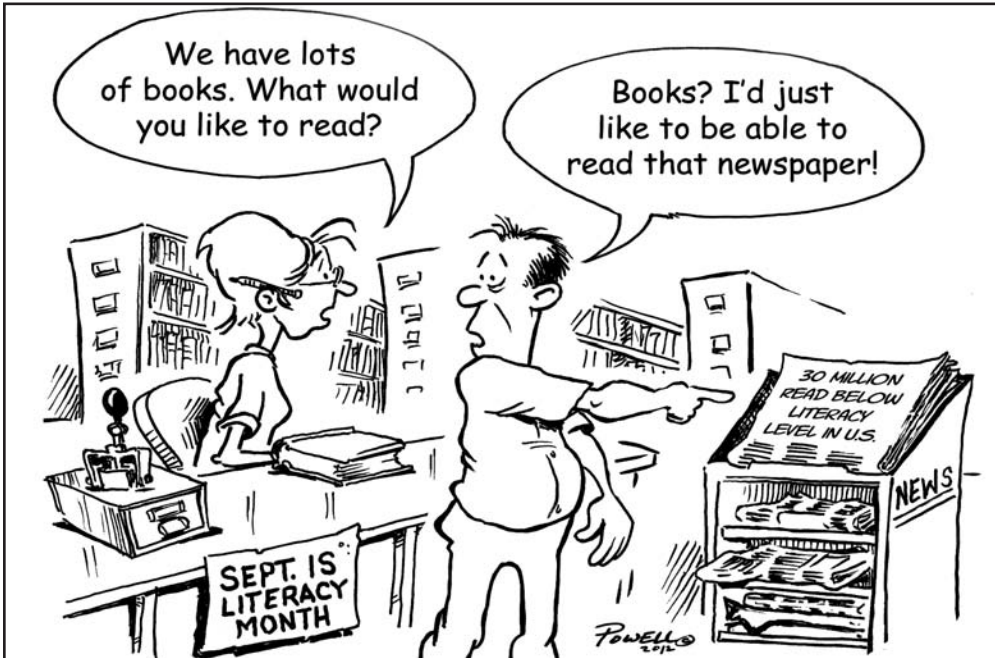
The Mountain Education Center is a primary example of a high quality charter school.

This, is the way that it should be. If you're tired of red tape and bureaucracy being created to waste your hard-earned tax dollars, vote no to the Charter Schools amendment on the Nov. 6 General Election ballot.

The state already gives away \$5 million of your tax dollars annually to South Georgia schools. Don't let them rip you off again.



Charles Duncan  
Straight Shooting



### Casting A Shadow

You can certainly tell that it is fall of the year by looking at God's landscape. All of the trees, bushes, flowers and grass are changing garments. God's fall fashion show gets better with each passing year. Spring is spectacular, summer is a sight and winter is wonderful but I like fall best of all!

Another sure sign that it is fall is revealed by shadows. In our den we have a large window that faces east. During the spring time, as the wife and I have our morning coffee and devotions, we have to close the curtains. As the sun comes up it shines directly into our den and we cannot see to read. But now the sun does not rise in front of our den, in fact, you have to go to the window and look south to see the east. This phenomenon is caused by the rotation of the earth on its axis around the sun. Really, the sun hasn't gone anywhere but the earth has.

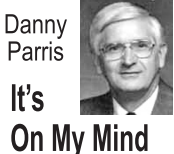
When you think about it no two days are exactly alike. Because of the earth's rotation the shadows cast by the sun are different each day. The change is so minute you don't notice it, until there is a large variation in shadows.

What is true of the earth, the sun and shadows is also true of life. Shadows are cast because light hits an object. The change that takes place in the shadow is caused by the position of the object. When the object changes position the light casts the shadow differently.

Our world and our lives cast shadows in relation to the position we are with The Son. In my short sojourn of life I have seen a lot of changes spiritually in our nation. Most of these changes have taken place so subtly that they have gone unnoticed for years. But suddenly in our generation we feel the full impact of accumulated change. God, The Son, has not changed.

James, the half-brother of Jesus said, "All good things come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Job said, "For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow" (Job 8:9). We are constantly changing but God changes not.

See Parris, page 5A



Danny Parris  
It's On My Mind

### Unheeded Warning

My father and mother were still teenagers and were headed for a picnic when they stopped at a house at the top of Newburg Mountain to pick up some friends. As they were packing their picnics in their car they heard a crash on the road coming up the mountain. Dad and his friend rushed down the road to find a car had veered off the road and hit a tree. Quickly the boys ran back to the house and called the Franklin County Sheriff's Office in Russellville, Alabama.

In 55 minutes a Sheriff's car and ambulance showed up at the scene. The pair was late because they had made a wrong turn and drove toward Spruce Pine. The driver of the ambulance was a cocky sort of fellow and was embarrassed by the mistake. By the time the emergency personnel arrived at the scene a crowd of onlookers were at the car crash. They watched as the victim was loaded into the ambulance. The Deputy asked my Daddy about the quickest way back to Russellville. Dad said, "Go down the mountain and turn left onto Highway 72. But, be careful of the horse shoe curve while driving down the mountain".

The ambulance driver laughed and said, "Boy, we are professional drivers and we don't need you to tell us how to drive". The ambulance left first and soon the group heard another crash. They all ran to the horse shoe curve and saw the ambulance had left the road and hit a tree. The original victim broke his other leg and the ambulance driver broke his arm, a collar bone and his nose. The unheeded warning hurt cost the man a little more than his pride.

Spending the summers with my grandparents meant working in their garden. My grandmother always had a big garden. But, one of the plants she grew in her garden that I learned to admire was the Dahlia. We planted Dahlias and many other bulbs that day and later in June we were amazed at the beauty of my grandmother's garden. She had every color and shape of flower imaginable in her garden. But, planting the Dahlias was just half of the work. We also fertilized, watered, staked and weeded the garden to make it beautiful.

See Cummings, page 5A



Mickey Cummings  
Around The Farm

### Working after Retirement

When working for yourself in a small business, disciplined saving for retirement is an option you have to make for your financial independence. Some retirees may feel the need to return to the workforce for the financial reasons while others feel the need to continue the quest to be a productive useful force in society. As you consider your financial future, you should be aware of the following information from money.usnews.com, bankrate.com, foxbusiness.com and ssa.gov/estimator/.

From age 21 to 70.5, there are ten important ages or points in one's life for retirement planning. Starting at age 21, employees can first join a 401(k) plan. If you can start saving this early, it will make a tremendous difference in your ability for financial wealth. At age 50 you can defer paying income taxes on more of your retirement savings in a 401 (K) or IRA. Contribution limits for 401 (k) and others are more than younger people can deposit in these accounts. Also limits are increased by \$1000 per year into your Roth or traditional IRA. Starting at age 55, retirees who leave employment during the calendar year they turn 55 or later can take 401 (k), but not IRA, withdrawals without having to pay the 10% early withdrawal penalty. Then at age 59.5, the 10 percent early withdrawal penalty on IRA withdrawals ends. You are not required to take distributions from your IRA until after you reach age 70.5. When you reach the age of 62, you become eligible for Social Security benefits. However, your payouts may be significantly reduced if you begin this early. Your Medicare eligibility begins at age 65. The initial enrollment period begins 3 months before you reach age 65 and ends three months after your birthday. It is a good idea to sign up early because Medicare Part B premiums increase annually. Baby boomers born between 1943 and 1954 qualify for the full amount of Social Security they have earned at age 66. Once you reach your full retirement age, you will also be able to work and claim Social Security payments at the same time without having any of your payment withheld. At age 67, the Social Security full retirement begins for workers born in 1960 or later. If you wait on your Social Security payments until age 70, they will continue to grow by 8% per year. Advisors say if longevity runs in your family to postpone it up to age 70. At age 70.5, it is a requirement to start your 401 (k) and IRA withdrawals. If you don't draw the correct amount, your will be required

See Garner, page 5A



Joe Garner  
BUCC  
Blairsville - Union County Chamber of Commerce

### Miscellaneous Q&A

**Q. We have noticed the flags on county buildings were at half-staff several times lately. How does the county determine when to lower the flags?**

A. We usually receive notification from the Governor's Office or the White House when flags are to be lowered. This information is forwarded to all the counties through ACCG (Association of County Commissioners). We are also fortunate that we have a local person who keeps us informed. Of course the flags were lowered for Sept. 11th and before that they were lowered for the death of Neil Armstrong, Astronaut. This week they were lowered for the death of Christopher Stevens, Ambassador to Libya.

**Q. We heard that you were going to shut down all the Churches in the county because you were going to take away all the tax deductions. Is this true?**

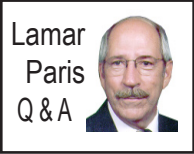
A. Obviously, this is not true. First, the tax deductions that anyone receives for charitable giving to a church comes from the IRS and not the county. Second, the last thing we want to do is to shut down any churches in Union County. Our churches and their congregations are the backbone of this community. The charitable work, mission work, and spiritual uplifting given to our county is part of what makes us one of the best counties in the state. It is very interesting how misinformation like this gets started. However, as I have said, in an election year you are likely to hear most anything.

**Q. I heard that it is unsafe to swim in Lake Nottely because flesh eating bacteria has been found in the lake. Is this true?**

A. NO, this is not true either. I contacted the Hiawassee River Watershed Coalition Director Callie Moore to ask if they had heard this question, but they had not. This organization is responsible for doing much of the water quality testing in our entire watershed. A host of volunteers perform this duty on an ongoing basis. They assured me that the water quality in both Lake Nottely and Lake Chatuge was very good. However, they also informed me that TVA has recently taken the funding away from them to do the testing, so most future water quality testing will have to come from donations from the public. To learn more about the HRWC, please contact them at (828) 837-5414 or visit their Web site at hrwc.net.

**Q. How common are these types of flesh eating bacteria that were recently**

See Paris, page 5A



Lamar Paris  
Q & A

# Letters To the Editor

### Flag etiquette

**Dear Editor,**  
I copied the following off of a government Web site pertaining to Flag etiquette: The flag should be displayed on or near the main building of public institutions, schools during school days, and polling places on election days. For the last two elections the American flag was not on display at the Dooley Polling District in Union County. I have requested (via e-mail) to the Union County Fire Department that the rope be replaced so that we can display the flag at the General Election in November. I never received a reply and the rope has not been replaced. I certainly hope that someone in authority in the County government can see that this situation is corrected.  
**Russ Eberle**

### Shoot straight

**Dear Editor,**  
I have read letter after letter that appear weekly in the North Georgia News, wherein the writer either twists the facts, or tells outright lies. Some of the misinformation could be dismissed as ignorance of the facts on the part of the writer, but since so much of what they claim is totally without foundation, and is so clearly designed to deceive, it must have been placed there by persons with their own agenda. As long as the facts are presented, no matter what stand the person takes, debate is possible, but if what is written is untrue and/or purposefully misleading, meaningful debate is not possible. It has been my experience that it is simply impossible to deal with a lie.  
**Robert I. Honea**

### Losing interest

**Dear Editor,**  
I saw the local GOP billboard with the big words, Losing Hope? After thinking about that for a minute, I realized that I was losing hope. I have lost hope that the local GOP effectively vets their candidates for office. One candidate thought he could lower taxes as Tax Commissioner and another wants to run the county like a business without understanding a balance sheet. How would you ever run a county like a business if you don't understand balance sheets? And then you see the local GOP'ers standing around complaining about high taxes and yet do absolutely nothing about the \$5.19 million hemorrhage from our school system budget. Why don't they educate the candidates they sponsor for office. Why don't they tackle the issue of keeping that school tax money in our county? They certainly don't give anyone a good reason to vote for them.  
**Jim Fitzgerald**

### Get Involved

**Dear Editor,**  
Twenty-five years ago, I moved to the Union County area in order to spend time with my mother who suffered from a terminal illness. I was welcomed to the area wholeheartedly by the wonderful people of Union County, as were my parents. I saw Christian love worked out first hand in the neighbors who reached out to strangers by cooking, offering to sit with my mother while my father went to the store and in a thousand other ways. For years, it was on my heart that I should be serving those in the community who might need assistance and the Lord opened the door for me to do so after giving me the opportunity to complete nursing school.

See King, page 5A

### Watch your clippings

**Dear Editor,**  
To all residents of Union County and Blairsville. Do you know how unattractive it is when you cut your grass and leave the clippings on the street? Whether you live in a subdivision that has three or 30 homes, or on a Main Street, it makes your area look like you don't care about your community. Not only does it look bad, but it is also a danger to drivers. When grass becomes, wet it becomes slippery when driving over it, therefore becoming a hazard to others. Even when it dries the underneath is still wet. So let's let the people that come to visit our wonderful mountain town know how much we love living here by keeping our roads not only safe, but beautiful.  
**Kathy Malone**

### Rape is Rape

**Dear Editor,**  
Those of us who work with victims of sexual assault were stunned and dismayed to read Congressman Akins comments about rape. Not only does he not believe victims of "legitimate rape" can get pregnant, he equates the "morning after" pill to the abortion pill, RU-486. I am the sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) in Fannin and Pickens County. Knowing if one congressman voices these myths, there are many others who believe this as well. As an educator on sexual violence, I believe this is a teachable moment.  
**See Sullivan, page 5A**

### Vote no to Charter School amendment

**Dear Editor,**  
The Georgia Federation of Teachers proudly stand in support of the Georgia PTA in opposition to the proposed constitutional amendment. This amendment would take more money directly from public schools and undermine local governance from school districts to another unaccountable and state appointed bureaucracy! As PTA members, teachers and parents, we cannot support any measure that would  
**See Turner, page 5A**

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