

# Opinions

## Everybody has one...

### Slowpoke

If you've driven toward Atlanta on Georgia 515, and, you just happened to notice that everyone is driving in the left-hand passing lane, you're not alone.

Georgia passed its Slowpoke Law three years ago. It says if cars start stacking up behind you, then you must move out of the left-hand lane or get a ticket. That's even if you're running at the speed limit.

From stricter laws to public service campaigns and pleading electronic road signs, many states have a message for the drivers backing up the passing lanes of the nation's busy highways - get the heck out of the way.

Thomas Wallace of Blairsville says few things infuriate drivers more than a car or truck in a highway's passing lane that isn't keeping up with the flow of traffic.

Most states already have slowpoke laws urging that the left lane is for passing or turning left, not for cruising. Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, Nevada and Oklahoma are among states with new laws increasing fines and stepping up enforcement.

Others are taking a more subtle approach. Missouri urges drivers to move over with funny signs. Michigan troopers use traffic stops as an educational experience for drivers.

Some experts believe that driving too slow in the passing lane is at least as dangerous as driving too fast because people trapped from behind get frustrated and make dangerous maneuvers, creating anger and accidents.

Wallace says clogged up passing lanes are one of the leading causes of road rage incidents on our state's roadways.

Some states have launched the *Southpaw Initiative*, in which violators are pulled over and educated by troopers on the left lane law and how driving slowly in it disrupts traffic flow. Most of those stopped are let off with a warning.

In Missouri, those huge electronic road signs exhibit humor when trying to prevent slowpoke drivers. "Camp in the Ozarks, not the left lane."

Wallace has had an 18x16 magnetic sign on the back of his truck for about three years. The sign directs folks to stay out

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#### Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



### Profound Words

In his 90s and with a weak heart, he was not long for this world. His carefully chosen words reflected a thoughtful life well-lived. I enjoyed regular chats with him, especially the simplicity and wisdom of his words one particular afternoon.

He was college-educated in the 1930s, and had served his community as a land surveyor and an educator. He was a church leader and teacher, a family man, a man of God. My visits began as pastoral care, but I soon realized the benefit to me of probing his wisdom with questions about life. One day, he preempted my questions with one of his own.

"Do you know the most profound words a person can utter?" I didn't waste time with a guess. He raised an steady index finger and pointed somewhere between my face and the sky. He paused for effect. "Thank you, Lord!"

"Why do you say that?" I queried, anxious for him to proceed. His explanation was just as simple. "Because at once, you acknowledge your need and God's provision."

At the risk of detracting from the simplicity of the thought, let's unpack it. It is common to thank God for the basics of life. Faith, family and friends top the list along with sustenance, strength, and shelter. The Christian worldview though, has capacity for gratitude far beyond the basic needs and good things in life.

Everyone born into this world can expect things to go sideways. Life in a fallen world is like that. Yet we are challenged, "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes. 5:18). This is not some Pollyannish formula to pretend things aren't bad. When they are, we are tempted to respond with fear, anger, or anxiety. In those times, we are most aware of our need.

But the world is not as chaotic as you might think. God's will for you is to prevent discomfort and suffering from having the final word, as He provides for your good "in all things" (Rom. 8:28). When you acknowledge the perspective of the Eternal that you are loved and destined for eternity, giving thanks to Him in

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#### All Things New

Wayne Fowler



### Commissioner's Questions

This weeks Q & A is about the county budget and to give you some general information about the budget. The budget numbers discussed below are 2017 numbers as we will not complete the 2018 budget until the middle of December.

#### Q. What is the budget of Union County?

A. The budget is divided into two parts. The first is the operation budget which is the one that is funded with your property tax dollars. Our 2017 operation budget is \$15,468,886. The other budget is our Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) budget. This money is collected exclusively from sales tax on products that you purchase in Union County. Those funds are primarily used for roads/bridges and projects.

#### Q. Where does the money come from to pay our general operation budget?

A. As I said above, it comes from property tax collections. However, property tax collections only amounted to \$8,488,530 last year, which is not even enough to cover payroll. So generally about 50 percent of our operation budget comes from property taxes and the other 50 percent from fines and fees.

#### Q. If property tax collections pay less than half of our operation budget, how do we get enough money to pay for the operations?

A. Your elected officials and their staffs all work very hard at collecting fees and fines. While none of them collect enough to operate their offices, it all goes into the revenue of the county. Even the Recreation fees add a significant amount to the budget, but certainly not enough to cover their cost of operation.

#### Q. Can you give us a breakdown of the 2017 budget expenses?

A. Approximately 46 percent (\$7,158,407) of the budget expense is Public Safety. From there, 26 percent (\$3,948,420) is General and Administrative, 6 percent (\$985,681) County Services, 8 percent (\$1,179,585) is Court systems and the Commissioner's office is 3 percent (\$491,584). The remaining balance comes from several other offices.

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#### Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



### Anti-Drug Coalition

#### Why young people smoke pot

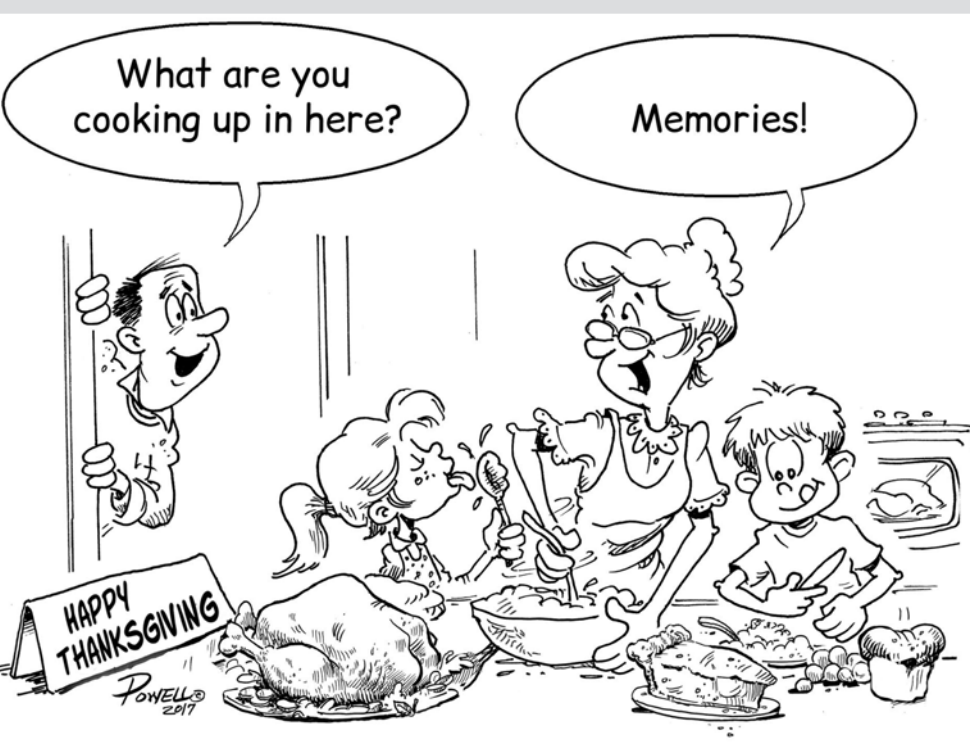
Young people start using marijuana for many reasons. Curiosity, peer pressure, and the desire to fit in with friends are common ones. Those who have already begun to smoke cigarettes or use alcohol—or both—are at increased risk for marijuana use as well.

People who have untreated mental health disorders (such as depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, or ADHD) or who have experienced trauma are at increased risk of using marijuana and other drugs at an early age, according to a study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

For some, drug use begins as a means of coping with anxiety, anger, depression, boredom, and other unpleasant feelings. But, in fact, being high can be a way of simply avoiding the problems and challenges of growing up.

Research also suggests that family members' use of alcohol and drugs plays a strong role in whether a young person starts using drugs. Parents, grandparents, and older siblings are models that children follow. Indeed, all aspects of a teen's environment—home, school,

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### Thanksgiving Cooking

Thanksgiving is the time of year for giving thanks, visiting family and friends, and of course, eating that amazing Thanksgiving dinner. Unfortunately, it is also a peak day for home cooking fires. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, the average number of home fires on Thanksgiving Day is normally double the average number of fires in homes all other days. With this in mind, Union County Fire Department would like provide you with some cooking safety tips for this Thanksgiving holiday.

If you are going to be slaving away in the kitchen to make that perfect meal, here are a few things to keep in mind. First, stay in the kitchen when you are cooking. The entire family may be in the house and things will be busy but do not get distracted from your cooking. Watch what you are cooking and set timers. The last thing that you want is a smoke alarm as a timer.

Make your kitchen area safe by keeping things that may burn away from the stove. Items such as plastics, boxes, and other flammable materials can catch fire if left near the stove. Be prepared by having pan lids available to smother fires. Wear short sleeves and do not reach over cooking areas. Have a fire extinguisher available.

If you are really adventurous and are going to use a turkey fryer, here are a few things that you should remember. Turkey fryers can easily tip over spilling hot oil across a large area. Use your turkey fryer only outdoors on a sturdy, level surface away from things that can burn. Make sure to have a "kid and pet-free zone" around your turkey fryer to protect against burn injuries.

An overfilled cooking pot will cause oil to spill over when the turkey is placed inside. Determine the correct amount of oil needed by first placing the turkey in the pot with water. A partially frozen turkey will cause hot oil to splatter. Make sure your turkey is completely thawed before you fry it. Turkey fryers can easily overheat and start a fire. Check the temperature often with a cooking thermometer so the oil won't overheat. The pot, lid and handles of a turkey fryer can get dangerously hot and cause burn injuries. Use long cooking gloves that protect hands and arms when you handle these items.

These safety tips are just a few things to keep in mind when you are cooking for your family and friends. We want everyone to enjoy this holiday season and to be safe. Taking a few extra precautions when cooking will reduce the risk of fire and enable everyone to have a safe

See Chief, page 5A

#### Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



#### Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



### The Understanding

Paul was of a slight build and had been quite sickly as a small child. He developed Scarlet Fever when he was little resulting in a heart condition causing him to miss out on many things. When the other kids were out rambling around in the woods he was spending time indoors until he got better and grew out of his condition. So, he was small and unable to enjoy sports until the family moved to Chicago when he was in the 7th grade. While there he began a love affair with baseball and basketball that has endured to this day. The family moved back to their Alabama farm when he entered the 10th grade. That is when he met his distant cousin.

Everyone literally looked up to "Momma." He was taller and bigger than anyone else in school. The relationship between these two boys was quite rocky in the beginning.

Momma looked at his smaller cousin as frail and way down the pecking order in the scheme of things. I guess he must of thought the smaller boy needs to know who is boss.

Anyway, the very first day of class he hit himself in the side of the head with a blackboard eraser and accused Paul of throwing it at him. Miss Underwood looked at the bigger Momma Cummings and then looked at the frailer "Paul." Immediately she said, "Junior Cummings, your daddy tried that same trick on me 22 years ago. Now, you sit down and straighten up or you'll catch it from me." Paul thought to himself, "Whew that was close. But, I am going to have to deal with this big kid."

Two days later the boys were in physical education running timed races. The bigger boy accidentally tripped his smaller cousin and in this case the word accidentally is used in a very questionable manner. When he hit the ground his bigger cousin let out a big laugh and began to ridicule him. Do you know what it is like for a 125-pound boy to take a swing at a 6 feet 2 inch, 220-pound behemoth? Let's just say the smaller one did not fare well. By the time the Coach had separated the two boys the smaller one looked like he'd run into a saw mill. Both boys were sent to the locker room to shower. Paul was a good runner and ran while Momma took his bows in front of the cheering class of boys. He was out of the shower when his nemesis and the Coach appeared. They received a good tongue lashing. And after the Coach left, Momma said, "You need to understand I am the top dog of all the boys in our class and you better not ever swing at me again." He then drew back his hand and knocked his smaller cousin to the floor.

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### Letters to the Editor

#### Are we being hypocritical?

Dear Editor,

We are all outraged at the Russian government and/or businesses meddling with an American presidential campaign, and rightly so.

I feel a bit sheepish, however, when I remember that several members of President Obama's election campaign staff went to Israel to work specifically against Benjamin Netanyahu in his election campaign.

Even more so when I remember that President Obama, himself, went to England and spoke at a rally exhorting the British voters to vote to stay in the European Union. Are we not being hypocritical?

Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

Carol McKechnie

#### Thankful

Dear Editor,

As we fast approach Thanksgiving Day what comes to your mind that you are thankful for?

Is it because you are blessed to live in America where God has blessed us indeed. Are you thankful for your family and friends, perhaps even your church family?

Though our nation has many problems we are still blessed of God to live in a place where we are free to think for ourselves and not under some dictatorship that tells the people how they should live.

I, for one give thanks for my wife who is my biggest supporter and my best friend for life. I am thankful for our community that cares for one another and how blessed of God we are to have folks like our first responders, EMTs, great hospital staffers, firefighters and volunteers, our super police department, sheriff's office, city and county workers and Mayor Conley, and Commissioner Paris, and all of our fine County employees and elected officials.

I also want to be thankful of our awesome military troops and veterans and families who sacrifice their time, energy and giving of themselves for the freedoms we are so blessed to possess.

We have also many faithful churches in our community who reach out to those in need.

In this season of Thanksgiving may we all take time out to be thankful for God's precious gift of eternal life, for those who choose His free gift of salvation.

What are you especially thankful for?

Amen  
Frank F. Combs

### Firewood Pests

With the frost on my car this morning, the main thing on my mind is getting home and starting a nice warm fire. However, whether you get your firewood from a local source, or your own backyard, it could be a host to any number of invasive insects.

For this reason, Georgia and many other states regulate the transport of firewood to prevent the spread of these pests. Before you go on that winter camping trip or bring your firewood to another location, make sure you are aware of the regulations and potential risks this can pose.

It is always best to use locally harvested firewood. After the storm damage from Irma, I don't think any of us will have any trouble finding wood from downed trees in our county. Though the term "local" seems a little vague, a good rule of thumb is to keep firewood within a 50 mile radius of its origin, or within county lines when possible. Currently, Georgia has several quarantine zones for pests, as do other states. It is illegal to move firewood into or out of these zones, so think twice before loading up your camper with wood even if you don't see holes or sawdust on it.

The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is one of the insects that we are trying to prevent from being spread throughout the state. This small, iridescent green beetle may look beautiful, but it can devastate our hardwood forests. Most of our native wood-feeding beetles only attack trees weakened by drought or injury. However, these beetles are threatening because they infest actively growing, healthy trees. As the beetles burrow through the trunks, they leave "D" shaped holes, something that is characteristic of only this species. There is currently a widespread detection program to keep track of EAB infestations, and in 2016, Union and Rabun Counties were added to the list of infested counties. However, in 2017, there were no new counties added, meaning the spread of the insect had slowed.

There are also monitoring programs in place for insects that may pose a threat to our forests but have not yet been detected in Georgia. The siren woodwasp is an invasive wasp that lays its eggs in the trunks of pine trees. Along with the egg, it also injects a fungus, which the larva eats. However, this fungus infects the tree and prevents nutrients and water from flowing adequately through the tissue. This eventually leads to the death of the tree. The gypsy moth is a widespread problem in the Northeastern United States. These insects were originally imported to be farmed for silk, but they quickly infested

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#### UGA Extension From the Ground Up

Melissa Mattee



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