

# Opinions

Everybody has one...

## Volunteer Firefighter Application

Union County Fire Department is opening the application period for volunteer firefighters. The application period opens May 1st and will close June 15th. UCFD will accept applications all throughout the year, however; the department will process the applications after the close of the application period. Then the work begins to review, interview, and accept volunteers.

Why would anyone want to become a volunteer firefighter? Ask a firefighter about their job or about volunteering in the department and most will say that it is the greatest service in the world. The structure, comradery, the sense of belonging, and environment associated with the fire department is so unique and rewarding that you almost have to live it to be able to describe it. As a firefighter, you learn unusual skills, see uncommon events, and are an active participant in resolving incidents.

Firefighting is a very unique and demanding job. And when I say "job" I am not talking about only career firefighters but volunteers as well. Fires, jobs, incidents, calls... however you want to describe them, they are the same for all firefighters, career or volunteer. A fire does not know or care if you are career or volunteer. Our department depends on each and every firefighter to do their part to resolve these incidents.

I have always believed that people become firefighters because they have certain characteristics that enable them to do the job. A firefighter is a person who loves three things: 1) to learn new skills and knowledge; 2) to be challenged; and 3) to help people. They are problem solvers, risk takers, and will go out of their way to help people that they do not even know.

Those are the types of people we are seeking. We, as a combination department having both career and volunteer firefighters, are always looking for more members. We are looking for motivated people who are willing to learn, love a challenge, and are willing to help their fellow citizens. The department currently has 63 volunteer firefighters. We want to grow that number to 100.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter, we want you to sign up and join our family. Candidates can pick up an application at the Headquarters station located at 507 Shoe Factory

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**Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief**

David Dyer



## Sweet Aroma

Ed Tuttle was a graphic designer for a large manufacturer. He was also a follower of Christ. Ed befriended the new guy, Eric, at work. That turned out to be providential.

Eric was underemployed as a proofreader. His elite Yale education prepared him for loftier things. It was during those student years that he formulated his own philosophy of the meaning of the universe. He used a frozen lake metaphor. The ice on the surface was the conscious mind, and the water below was the collective unconscious. To him, the goal of all religions is to drill through the ice to whatever might exist below.

His new work colleague Ed had a more specific worldview. As part of their growing friendship, he challenged Eric. "You should pray that God would reveal Himself to you." At first Eric thought the idea was as weird as Ed. But sometimes while jogging Eric would pray, "God I'm trapped in my own mind. I need a sign."

One day Eric's uncle had a stroke. When Ed heard the news, he invited Eric to pray about it in a private space in the office. Eric agreed. Praying to a specific God for a specific reason was new. Later at his uncle's funeral, Eric eagerly agreed to read a Psalm. "Something was engaged for the first time," he said.

Then came the dream. He was ice fishing. The dazzling sunlight reflected from the white snow and frozen lake into the deep blue sky. A fish lifted his head from the water. Eric picked it up and saw it was a living fish made of gold. At that moment in the dream, he knew God was speaking in "the secret vocabulary of my heart." The golden fish was the embodiment of the "ichthus," the early church's fish symbol of Jesus. God used Eric's own frozen lake metaphor to reveal Jesus, God the Son, in a transcendent way. The next day at work, he shared the dream with Ed. "What do you think it means?" Ed asked. "It means," Eric paused, "I have accepted Jesus."

Eric went on to become a seasoned author and thinker. On his forum, "Socrates in the City," he hosts conversations with modern thought leaders. You may have heard of Eric Metaxas, but probably not Ed Tuttle, a true friend who shared the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God. Now you know the rest of the

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**All Things New**

Wayne Fowler



## From Your Commissioner

Concerns about the Union County Development Authority have been expressed across various mediums. Do we plan to reinstate the Development Authority? What are the details? These are my thoughts.

Yes, I do plan to reinstate the Development Authority, and we are looking at reinstating it possibly by May 15. The current plan is for the board to be more diverse than it was previously and for it to be made of nine members from across different sectors of the community.

My goals currently for this board are to focus mainly on potential manufacturing industry that could bring skill-based careers to Union County along with higher wage jobs.

I have no plans at all to do anything that will negatively impact tourism. I realize that tourism is basically the bread and butter of our community. Sales tax is the fairest form of tax, and if we can do something to increase sales and sales tax, I am all for that.

I also want a good working relationship with the City of Blairsville and the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The DDA seems to be the main marketing and promotion engine for businesses within the city limits while working in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce.

Now, I know I decreased the funding to the Chamber of Commerce. This should not have been a surprise to anyone as this was something I talked about on the campaign trail. Mr. Rowe was aware and has been nothing but cordial and accommodating. We have had multiple conversations. I am not even saying this is how the funding will remain, but this time period allows for an evaluation of their procedures and spending.

Me and Mr. Rowe will remain in contact through this year, and if funding becomes a problem for the Chamber in the future, then we will sit down and have conversations related to this. I also would have no problem sitting down with the entire Chamber Board at that time if it is necessary.

**Union County Commissioner**

Harold Collins



## The Journey ...

The Journey to Your True Self

Have you ever felt that gentle but persistent tug in your heart, pulling you toward something greater? That whisper suggesting there's more to life than what meets the eye? If so, you're walking a path that was blazed thousands of years ago by one of history's most courageous souls.

**Echos from Sinai**  
"Torah for Everyone"  
Rabbi Jonathan Hamburger



Picture this: a young man named Abraham, working in his father's successful business in ancient Mesopotamia. By all accounts, he had it made. His father's idol shop was prosperous, his future secure, his path clearly laid out before him. Much like many of us today, with our steady jobs, comfortable homes, and well-planned futures.

But Abraham had a problem that might sound familiar – something didn't feel right. While crafting those idols, while following the customs of his time, while doing everything so

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## Chamber 2025

Last week we had an opportunity to attend the GACCE conference where we met with other chambers from across the State. This is always a good week to explore what other chambers are doing, how the economy is responding, and what the forecast is for the future. I think the main takeaway from this conference is there is no other community like Blairsville-Union County.

While there may be other communities whose economy is based on a combination of manufacturing and tourism, we have a unique mix as a number of businesses count on tourism for their livelihood. Several businesses receive more than 50% of their income from customers from outside of Union County. The Chamber will continue to promote tourism to keep our local economy strong and thriving.

Congratulations to the Union County School System on the completion of the new Elementary School ahead of schedule, under budget

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**Blairsville - Union County Chamber President**

Steve Rowe



## Letters to the Editor

### Shooting the Messenger

Dear Editor,

It's always refreshing to be accused of partisan motives by those who treat any mention of constitutional values as a personal attack. I recently wrote in defense of bedrock principles like the rule of law, separation of powers, and individual liberties – you know, the quaint ideas our Founders scribbled down back when they were still inventing America. Apparently, this is now code for "radical leftism."

Let me clarify for the record: I never mentioned political parties, political figures, or ideological labels in my previous letter. I simply reference things like the Constitution – that dusty little pamphlet that used to mean something. But somehow, pointing out violations of civil rights or economic self-sabotage is taken as a declaration of war by people who otherwise love to wrap themselves in the flag and the First Amendment

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### Sinister

Dear Editor,

I am a retired elementary school librarian. I taught all day about the wonder of libraries and reading. If you love Bigfoot, you can go anywhere in the USA and Bigfoot books will be in 001. Skateboarding will always be in 796, all thanks to Dewey. My library was filled with kids and teachers. It was wonderfully chaotic.

About eight years ago, the school system in Gwinnett was recommending librarians put up a wall of cubicles and fill them with empty toilet rolls, tape and straws. This was for STEM. Students were supposed to build stuff with them. Newsletters were sent home. Parents dutifully walked into school with black trash bags filled with trash. FOR THE LIBRARY. I announced my retirement.

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### Georgia Farmstead Relief Act

To the Georgia House Ag Committee:

I was so looking forward to coming to the Capitol and appearing before the House Agriculture Committee to offer my support of HB 228, The Georgia Farmstead Relief Act.

As a decades long Grade A dairy goat farmer and licensed dairy product producer, I strongly support the common sense and food safety approach this bill exemplifies. It is modeled after the standards established for small dairy farmsteads in North Carolina.

My farm and cheese plant are located in Union county, 15 miles from both the North Carolina and Tennessee borders. Cheesemak-

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## Left's True Colors

As evidenced through the recent news cycle, liberals continue to prioritize illegal aliens over the American people.

Contrary to Democrat politicians and the left-wing media's claims, Kilmar Abrego Garcia is not a "Maryland man"; he's an illegal alien and MS-13 gang member from El Salvador. In 2019, two courts, both an immigration court and an appellate immigration court, ruled that he was a member of MS-13 and in our country illegally. Additionally, there was a deportation order for him dating back to 2019.

Therefore, Kilmar Abrego Garcia was deported to El Salvador several weeks ago.

In response, Democrat politicians and the left-wing media have been up in arms to bring this illegal alien – who is currently being detained in his home country – back to the United States.

From erroneously referring to him as a "Maryland man" to pushing the false claim that he was wrongly deported, the Left has attempted to portray Kilmar Abrego Garcia as a victim in desperate need of being rescued. They've even gone so far as to hold rallies featuring his tearful wife begging for his return – yet conveniently leaving out court documents and police reports exposing Abrego Garcia as a violent domestic abuser. In one filing, his wife wrote: "At this point, I am afraid to be close to him. I have multiple photos/videos of how violent he can be and all the bruises he left me."

As you may know, the Trump Administration is currently battling against returning Kilmar Abrego Garcia in court. Both a federal court and the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the Administration to "facilitate" his release and return to the U.S. for deportation proceedings. Yet Attorney General Pam Bondi has confirmed his return is up to El Salvador. Moreover, the Supreme Court's ruling made it clear that no district court has the power to compel the foreign policy of the United States.

Democrat politicians are now flying to El Salvador to demand for this criminal illegal alien to be brought back to America. Imagine how many American lives could have been saved over the past four years if Democrats cared as much about U.S. citizens as they do criminal illegal aliens.

Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat Senator from Maryland, even took a taxpayer-funded flight to meet with Abrego Garcia. Keep in mind, Senator Van Hollen failed to properly acknowledge the murder of Rachel Morin, one of his

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**United States Congressman Representative Andrew Clyde**



## The Scoundrel

The names of the participants in the following story are original. When I was a boy there were very few turkeys in North Georgia. Then things changed for the better and turkeys were stocked all over North Georgia. Turkeys came quite common at places like the Cohuttas, Blue Ridge, Chestatee, Coopers Creek and many other Wildlife Management Areas. And all of my friends wanted to be able to take a turkey. One particular friend wanted to take one so bad that he studied turkey hunting. He studied it more than he studied math or any other subject.

Patrick read a book written by a great turkey hunter which said that using a gillie suit would help the hunter to conceal himself from the turkeys. So, he went to an Army Surplus store and purchased one. These are camouflaged, netted suits used by snipers in the military. So, he began using the gillie suit while he chased gobblers all over the hills of North Georgia. But, he still had problems taking a turkey because he was young and inexperienced. So, he hit upon a plan.

The young man took some corn from his Dad's corn crib and found a place where turkeys had been roosting. He poured the corn on the ground under the trees. Then he seated himself against a tree with a big log lying on the ground next to the tree. He would strike his slate turkey call every 15-20 minutes, and after an hour or so he noticed the bushes moving and heard leaves crunching as if an animal were walking toward him. As the hunter peered through the bushes he saw a man's head and then his whole body and then another man was with him. It was easy to recognize the men. They were the local Game Wardens. Everyone knew that Mr. Burnette was a fair, but, tough man, and the young boy also knew he was in trouble.

So, he laid himself down next to the log and covered himself with leaves. He listened as the Game Wardens came closer and closer. Soon he could hear each and every word the wardens spoke. Patrick said, "They walked so close I could have reached out and grabbed either of their feet." Despite looking for 20 minutes the wardens never saw my friend. Finally, the wardens sat down on the log and rested. The unknown warden spoke first and said, "Looks like he just baited the area and I think we must have scared him off." Mr. Burnette said, "Nope, the little scoundrel is close by because, I can feel it in my bones." Eventually, the wardens left, and so did my friend. This incident scared Patrick straight, and he never baited turkeys or any other

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**Around The Farm**

Mickey Cummings



## Pollinator Gardening

Let's talk about pollinator gardening, and some of the things to include in a good pollinator garden.

Pollinators play a very important role in our food production and ecology. When we think about pollinators we often think of honeybees and butterflies. They are very important for pollination, but the truth is that there are also tons of other critters that are important pollinators. Bats, hummingbirds, native bees, wasps, moths, and more all play an important role in pollination. Since we have such a diverse group of pollinators, it's important that we have a diverse habitat in our pollinator garden for them.

Most pollinator plants like full sun. Full sun is at least 8 hours of sun each day during the summer. If you don't have full sun in your spot then the plants that you choose will need to reflect that. Many pollinators like to spend some time basking in the sun with some protection from the wind. A soil test is also a good idea before starting a pollinator garden to see if you need to add any lime or fertilizer to the soil. A well-drained soil is also ideal.

Native plants are the best choice for your pollinator garden. They tend to be better adapted to our soils and our native pollinators. It's important to have a diversity of plants in your pollinator garden. Different flower shapes, flower colors, plant size, and plant shape are all important. It's important to have a diversity of plants so that you have blooms for Spring, Summer, and Fall.

There are a ton of different plants that you could put in a pollinator garden, so I can't mention them all here. It is important to make sure that the plants you choose are well suited to your site for sunlight, water drainage, and USDA zone. Here are some plants that I would recommend.

Some good spring blooming plants are wild indigo, Bee balm, lyre leaf sage, bearded tongue, tulip poplar, serviceberry, sweetshrub, eastern redbud, fringe tree, Carolina silverbell and bottlebrush buckeye. Many of these plants are more trees and shrubs. As I mentioned earlier you want a diversity of plant size too.

Summer blooming plants are easier to find that spring blooming. Cosmos, blackeyed Susan, coneflowers, coreopsis, St. John's wort, sweet pepperbush, milkweed, yarrow, passionflower, mountain mint, and sourwood. This list has a mixture of perennial and annual. Many pollinator plants are able to reseed themselves. For some, if you give them a little help dispersing the seed, they do even better.

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**UGA Extension**

Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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## Cummings...continued from Page 4A

game again. The next September a bunch of the boys were helping Mr. Burnette haul hay. He knew Patrick loved to deer hunt, and while they were resting he asked the young man, "I reckon you are looking forward to getting into the woods to hunt." With a grin he said, "Yes sir. This little Scoundrel loves to hunt. I bet you can just feel that in your bones, Mr. Bur-

nette." The old warden asked, "Was that you, and where were you at that day?" The boy recounted the story, telling where he hid and what the two Game Wardens discussed. He also told Burnette not to worry, "I'll never hunt illegally again." Mr. Burnette smiled to himself. He had a tremendous and positive impact on Patrick and many other young men in Union County.

## Clyde... continued from Page 4A

actual constituents who was brutally murdered by an illegal alien in Maryland during the Biden-Harris Administration. Unconscionable is an understatement. So, after repeatedly begging to meet with this MS-13 gang member, Senator Van Hollen was granted his wish – falling right into Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's trap. Following the release of photos of their meeting, Bukele proudly proclaimed, "Now that he's been confirmed healthy, he gets the honor of staying in El

Salvador's custody." Good! This criminal illegal alien has no place in our country. I commend President Trump and President Bukele's work to deport and detain illegals like Kilmar Abrego Garcia in facilities in El Salvador. Bottom line, when Democrats show their true colors – believe them. In stark contrast, my conservative colleagues and I will continue working to support President Trump in putting the American people first and deporting illegal aliens from our communities.

## Barry.. continued from Page 4A

ers from North Carolina began coming to our Georgia farmers market about a year ago and shared with me the standards that North Carolina has enacted to relieve the small dairy farmers producing cheese and butter of the over-regulatory standards required of Grade A dairy product manufacturers. Cheese & butter are not Grade A dairy products, so North Carolina does not grade or regulate them as such. Enacting the Georgia Farmstead Relief Act would benefit the state of Georgia by: Enabling small dairy farms to become licensed and inspected facilities instead of producing dairy products and selling them "off the grid," which is happening in greater and greater numbers and may soon become a new health issue – but an avoidable one. Making a source of local healthy, wholesome, and nutrient dense cheese available to the public at large through local wineries, restaurants, and farmers markets as well as providing a positive revenue stream for small dairy farmers. Increased health benefits available to consumers as small-batch cheese makers can pasteurize at lower temperatures producing cheeses that are high in complex proteins, Vit A, Vit C and have retained all the beneficial milk cultures while at the same time are free from brucellosis, TB, bird flu and the like.

Saving taxpayers money by reducing the cost of inspections and milk and product testing – not by eliminating those requirements, but by simplifying and restructuring the way they are conducted and collected. I have years of experience, and years of watching the deterioration in the Georgia dairy goat industry; while other neighboring states have initiated regulations that are more practical and less suffocating without compromising food safety – Georgia just keeps digging a deeper hole. I am truly disappointed that this side, the farmer's side, of the Georgia Farmstead Relief Act was not given a public hearing in the People's House. There was a private hearing given, the result of which was the end of HB 228 before it ever got the chance it deserves, not to mention the tactics of intimidation and disrespect used to discourage its supporters from bringing it forward. Please feel free to contact me as I am sure this is not the end of an effort to support the small dairy farmers of Georgia through this type of legislation; open discussion is what is needed here and what I thought this process would allow but did not. Sincerely, **Pamela Barry** The Cheeseplant at Hidden Creek Farm, Blairsville, GA

## Campbell...continued from Page 4A

At the same time, the school system was also embracing Common Core math, an indecipherable and complex way to do simple math. What is 43 minus 13? You can do that in your head, but your student had to fill an entire page of rows and rows of ciphers to come up with the answer. Then it occurred to me: They don't want library-loving avid readers! Reading scores have been declining steadily over the past decade. They don't want kids to visualize easy math. Our politicians and

government decision makers were doing what they were told by something sinister. What else do they have planned in Georgia? Well, poison makers may be given a pass. It's already too late to get proper restitution if you are killed or injured. They may be planning to surveil your kids. Your medical records have already been shared with other agencies. Honestly, your Bill of Rights is being erased by our elected "Republicans" right now. It IS sinister. **Lisa Campbell**

## Berkman...continued from Page 4A

ment – as long as nobody else tries to use it. What's fascinating is how loudly some folks object when you hold up a mirror. They rush to deny what no one accused them of, as though they recognize themselves or their idols in the critique. One might even wonder if the outrage stems from conscience rather than accusation. But of course, it's much easier to shoot the messenger than to question the message. And when all else fails, there's the ever-reliable tactic of whataboutism – the rhetorical equivalent of throwing sand in the eyes during a debate. I make a point about preserving constitutional rights, and suddenly I'm grilled about some unrelated event, ideology, or person I've never defended. It's as if the inability to refute my point demands a desperate pivot: "Well, what about...?"

What's most amusing is that these critics have no idea where I've stood on any of those issues. But why bother with facts or context when you can just deflect with the precision of a blindfolded archer? So here's to the new patriotism: where loyalty means blind defense, values are only sacred when convenient, and every call to accountability is met with cries of persecution. If defending our constitutional democracy makes me suspect, then I can only assume that suspect behavior has become the norm. If asking that we live up to our founding ideals makes me a suspect, then perhaps the real scandal is how far we've drifted from those ideals – like a ship that's cut anchor and insists the lighthouse is the problem. Sincerely, **Michael S Berkman**

## Hambourger... continued from Page 4A

ciety expected of him, he felt a deeper truth stirring in his soul. He knew, with unshakeable certainty, that there was only one true G-d, and that knowledge changed everything. Think about what that meant in his world. Imagine telling your family today that you're going to completely change your life because of a profound spiritual revelation. Now multiply that difficulty by a thousand. Abraham wasn't just choosing a different path – he was challenging the very foundations of his society's beliefs. The pivotal moment came when G-d spoke to Abraham, telling him to "Go forth to yourself, from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house." These weren't just travel directions. Each phrase carried a deeper meaning that resonates powerfully in our modern lives. "Your land" represented Abraham's natural inclinations and comfort zone – much like our own habits and routines that keep us safely anchored to the familiar. "Your birthplace" meant the influence of society and culture – think of today's peer pressure, social media expectations, and cultural norms that shape our choices. "Your father's house" pointed to the need to examine, with profound respect and wisdom, which family traditions truly serve our spiritual growth while honoring the eternal values our parents instilled in us.

in his father's shop, we might be skilled at handling these idols, maybe even building our lives around them. But deep down, we might feel that same stirring he felt, that same certainty that we're meant for something more. The beauty of Abraham's story is that when he finally took that leap of faith, when he stepped beyond all those limitations, he didn't just find a new land – he found his true self. He discovered that authentic connection with G-d that transformed him from a merchant's son into the father of many nations. This is the profound truth that Abraham's journey teaches us: Sometimes, finding yourself means leaving behind what you thought you were. It means having the courage to question not just what you do, but who you've been told you are. It means being willing to step away from the familiar idols of our time – whether they're carved from stone like Abraham's, or built from our modern preoccupations with status and security. The call that Abraham heard continues to resonate in our own spiritual journeys today. As we walk our

G-d was asking Abraham to transcend all of these limitations, not just physically but spiritually. And here's where it gets particularly relevant for us: The command wasn't just to "go forth" but to "go forth to yourself." This subtle but crucial detail suggests that our true self – our authentic purpose – often lies beyond the boundaries of our comfort zone. Consider how this applies to our lives today. We're surrounded by modern idols – success, status, security, social approval. Like Abraham

paths of faith, we're invited to look ever deeper, to discover new dimensions of meaning in our relationship with G-d. Like Abraham, we're all on this sacred journey of "going forth to yourself" – finding new depths in our traditions, uncovering fresh insights

in ancient wisdom, and discovering the divine spark that has always been within. *Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. You can reach him at y@tasteoforah.org.*

Williams... continued from Page 4A Fall blooming plants are very important as pollinators try to store up that last bit of energy before the frost comes. Goldenrod, asters, joe-pye weed, and ironweed are all some important fall bloomers. Goldenrod, joe-pye weed, and ironweed have beautiful blooms and are often seen along the roadside. These have the misfortune that they are thought of as weeds by some people, but really, they are great pollinator plants. One challenge with native pollinator plants can be finding seed to plant. Work with other plant lover neighbors to see if they have plants that you like and if they would be willing to share seed with you. Also check out local plant sales, including the Master Gardener plant sale on May 24 at the Union County Farmers Marke. If you have questions about a pollinator garden contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

## Williams... continued from Page 4A

Fowler... continued from Page 4A story. Do love, joy, kindness, and faithfulness sweeten your relationships and conversations with what really matters? "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:14-15).

## Dyer... continued from Page 4A

Road or can download an application from the Union County Government website. Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

## Chamber... continued from Page 4A

and with no debt. The School System did a great job with the design for today's students and for future expansion if needed. Thanks to ESPLOST, a portion of this project was funded by visitors to Union County. Thanks to our Chamber Members, Ambassadors and Board members who help make life better in Blairsville.

## Chamber... continued from Page 4A

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