

Georgia Politics...from Page 1A



L-R: State Sen. John Wilkinson, student Samantha Church, State Sen. Steve Gooch, Crissy Figg of Towns 4-H, Towns Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and student Gabriel Moody.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

in that same day.
 “So, we’ve all had to sort of get to know each other, just like your first day of school – you’ve got to go in and figure out who your classmates are and who your teachers are.”

And when it came to the first legislative session in the two-year 2019-2020 regular session cycle, Gooch said it was a good year for Georgia politics.

“We didn’t pass as many bills this year as we have in the past, and that’s a good thing, in my opinion. I think less is better,” Gooch said. “We were very careful on a lot of the legislation that we passed, and some of it we didn’t pass will carry over to next year.”

Gooch said the General Assembly passed “good, conservative legislation” earlier this year, and he credited Gov. Kemp for his leadership during and after the 2018 election.

“Gov. Kemp led on a lot of those key issues,” Gooch said. “He talked about them in his campaign last year, and he didn’t back away from them in the General Election, and he didn’t back away from them after he was sworn in.”

“He kept his word, and he made the promises and he kept them. And support from the Republican-controlled House and the Senate made it a lot easier for him to be able to do that.”

The District 51 senator said that the bill he was most proud of was the Heartbeat Bill, which passed the General Assembly in 2019 and was signed by Kemp earlier this year.

As previously reported, the Heartbeat Bill prohibits abortion beyond any point that a fetal heartbeat is detected by a doctor, which usually

occurs around six weeks of pregnancy.

Under current law, abortions can be performed up to 20 weeks of pregnancy, and the same exceptions will apply under the new law, namely for health of the mother, as well as in cases where it is medically determined that a baby cannot survive outside the womb, and in the event of incest and/or rape.

Barring a successful legal challenge, the Heartbeat Bill is set to become law on Jan. 1, 2020.

Gooch touched on the passing of several other bills in the meeting, including the medical marijuana bill allowing for regulated cultivation of the plant for use by patients on the Low THC Oil Registry, and his own broadband legislation that clears the path for electric membership corporations to provide high-speed internet in underserved rural areas.

Switching gears, Gooch urged those present to whip up the public vote for conservative candidates and causes between now and the 2020 General Election.

“We’ve lost ground,” Gooch said of the Georgia General Assembly. “In the last two to four years, we’ve lost some Republican districts, and mostly in the urban areas around Atlanta.”

Added Gooch, “We’re at 35 Republicans (in the Senate). We have to have 29 votes to pass a bill. If we get down to 29 or 30, and we have an important piece of legislation on the floor, if one or two of those senators are out sick or at a funeral, have to leave town for a wedding, we would lose that vote.”

Gooch said it was important to keep a Republican majority for several reasons,

including for the political reapportionment process that will occur after the 2020 census is taken, and to continue championing conservatism around the state.

Another topic broached by Gooch that evening was Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger’s recent decision regarding the purchase of new voting machines to be used in every county in next year’s big election cycle.

The machines will feature a printed paper ballot that can be verified by voters before being electronically scanned.

Sen. Gooch spoke favorably of the new machines that will constitute a \$100 million investment by the state when all is said and done, which is actually a savings over the \$150 million that was previously budgeted to replace the old machines.

During his remarks, Sen. John Wilkinson concurred with Gooch’s talking points, adding what he felt were laudable conservative accomplishments at the state level.

“We’re a state that has a balanced budget, \$2.5 billion in the reserve fund, and a AAA bond rating,” Wilkinson said. “And also, (Sen. Gooch) talked about exemptions for our senior citizens – 90% of our citizens over the age of 65 do not pay any state income tax.”

Wilkinson also boasted on the state’s status as “the top state in America to do business for the past six years,” saying that a lot of that success has stemmed from excellent educational systems in Georgia that continue to produce a well-trained workforce.

The Aug. 15 Towns County GOP meeting was led by local GOP Chair Betsy Young, who welcomed many

special guests.

These guests included students Gabriel Moody, 12, of Eastgate Life Academy, who offered a speech on gratitude for God, America and freedom, and he led the Pledge of Allegiance; and Summer Rahn, 15, of Towns County High, who sang the national anthem and entertained those present with country music hits.

Samantha Church, 17, who attends home school and is dual enrolled at North Georgia Technical College and Young Harris College, introduced Sen. Gooch in the meeting.

Crissy Figg of Towns County 4-H spoke on the various benefits of the 4-H program, including project achievement, which fosters kids’ interests in specialized subjects and promotes public speaking skills.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw led the meeting off with an invocation. He also delivered highly positive remarks about the local economy, and he thanked everyone for coming

at the end.

Rebecca Yardley, chairperson of Georgia’s 9th District Republican Party,

also attended that evening and offered her take on the importance of campaigning for conservative causes.

Transfer Station...from Page 1A

Renovations will feature a new modular scale house where people pull up to weigh and pay, plus the pouring of a new concrete “tipping floor” in the covered area where haulers dump their large loads of trash.

The current floor is cracked and filled with holes, and the new floor will result

in a much cleaner and nicer experience for customers, as the floor will be easier to “blade off,” or scrape clean.

After the renovations, everything will be in the same place as people are used to.

“It’s just an upgrade,” said Advanced Disposal Site Manager Bobby Bright, who oversees the Transfer Stations

in Gilmer, Fannin and Union counties. “We’ve already redone the scales. It’s got a new scale system now. We’ve been doing this in phases, and this is the last phase.”

Advanced Disposal hopes to finish the renovations in a couple of weeks, though it could take longer to complete the project.

DDA...from Page 1A

out would be the first step on this project,” Nelson said. “So, moving it, and then getting the parking lot in shape – put gravel in it, then possibly a base coat of paving on it during his construction.”

The dirt will be used to fill and shape the land that will contain the new parking lot, the plane of which Nelson said couldn’t be made completely level but could at least be made consistent “to get the drainage going off the side and be able to handle water properly.”

Cockerham is working diligently behind the scenes to get his project ready for construction, Nelson said.

Moving forward, the DDA will be in talks with Engineering Management, Inc. for upcoming site work on the paved parking lot and proposed public bathroom area downtown.

Also in the meeting, the DDA Board decided to table the deeding of parcels D and E of the Haralson Property to the city until after the downtown parking lot has been completed.

As previously reported, the Blairsville City Council voted unanimously to transfer land parcels D and E from the DDA to the city in a joint City Council/DDA meeting on July 9.

Parcel D is the 2.04-acre area currently containing the downtown gravel parking lot, and parcel E is a 0.263-acre greenspace behind City Hall.

The DDA purchased the Haralson Property about seven



DDA Board Members Daniel Davenport and Judy Jolley in their Aug. 12 regular meeting.

Photo by Mark Smith

years ago using loan money, after which the city paid off the loan to prevent further interest from accruing.

However, this caused the DDA to owe a debt the city of about \$1.9 million initially, which the DDA has been paying down over time as it sells off pieces of the Haralson Property to developers.

To date, the DDA has sold two Haralson Property parcels for a total of \$949,000: the Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen parcel on Georgia 515, and the parcel facing Foodland on Pat Haralson Memorial Drive that will hold the Cockerham Building.

In light of the DDA’s remaining debt to the city, the council decided on July 9 to exercise its financial accountability over the DDA to transfer parcels D and E to the city.

When finalized, the transfer will result in a \$650,000 reduction in debt owed to the city, with a remaining debt balance of \$300,000.

And following the expected Arby’s parcel sale, the DDA will be able to pay off the remainder of its debt to the city with plenty left over for

future development.

Also in the July 9 joint meeting, the council made decisions regarding the five unsold Haralson Property parcels A through E, voting 3-2 to take the remaining undeveloped Haralson Property parcels off the market, with the exception of parcel B that is under contract with Arby’s.

So, going forward, the DDA will be holding on to parcels A and C as undesignated land for future development purposes, including potential greenspace and parking, and only the projects currently on the table will be developed.

These include the Cockerham Building, the downtown parking lot area, Popeyes and potentially Arby’s.

Parcel A features a 1.13-acre greenspace behind the new Blairsville Police Department that was once combined with the 0.9-acre Arby’s parcel before the entire lot was subdivided about a year ago.

Parcel C is the 0.8-acre lot across from Cook’s Country Kitchen on Pat Haralson Memorial Drive, which the city hopes to expand into parking eventually.