

GORDON Gazette

Weekend, February 20, 2021

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Calhoun-Gordon County's #1 Source for News

Mayor, City officials mourn loss of former City of Calhoun administrator Eddie Peterson

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Many in the Calhoun community, especially in the City government, are mourning the loss of former City administrator Eddie Peterson, who retired from his position last year. He died at his residence Tuesday, Feb. 16. He was 70.

Peterson was hired by then Mayor John Meadows in the early 90's as assistant administrator. He moved into the administrator role after

Cathy Harrison retired from the position.

"He followed in Cathy's footsteps of good financial management of the city," said Mayor Jimmy Palmer. "I think we reap those benefits today with the low mileage rate and the success we have as a city. He worked with each department head in general government, trying to strengthen that department, and was very successful in strengthening those departments, not only for today, but for the future."

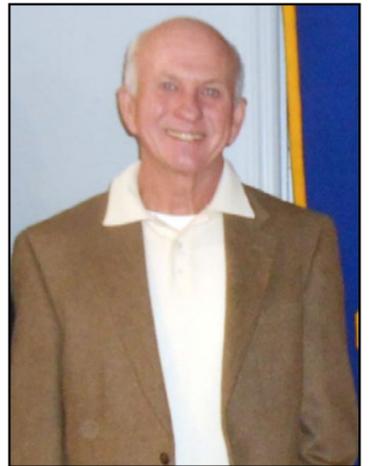
Palmer also said that Peterson was a major part of working with the County on SPLOST projects, which was beneficial for both the City and County.

"He benefitted not only the City, but also the tax payer," said Palmer.

"I worked with him for a number of years, and he was certainly more than a coworker, he was a friend and will certainly be missed by myself and the City. It's a sad day," said Palmer.

Current City administrator

Paul Worley, who took Peterson's position after his retirement, said "Eddie will be missed by many of us at the City of Calhoun. Eddie worked for the City for almost 30 years and he had a positive impacted on a lot of people over the years. I was fortunate to work with Eddie for almost 10 years. I learned a lot from him and would truly not be in the position that I am today without his help



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PUBLIC ALERT: Sheriff warns of telephone scams as tax season approaches

GCSO

Gordon County Sheriff Mitch Ralston says that, as tax season approaches, telephone scammers are redoubling their efforts to deceive and swindle innocent people. These thieves, often located in foreign countries, have been operating similar schemes for years, but well meaning people still fall prey at times. These calls often appear as Unknown Numbers, or more recently as "ghosted" or "spoofed" calls which appear on cellular phones as legitimate numbers.

Some common forms of telephone scams include: Threatening calls from the IRS; Threatening calls from a court (as in a missed court date or jury duty); Fake charity appeals; Credit card debts; Family members in peril; Bank fraud calls; Free or discounted vacations; and Computer tech support.

The callers will often request personal information such as a date-of-birth, social security number, and financial account numbers. Sometimes, the scammers will ask a victim to obtain funds through 'Green Dot' or other forms of gift

cards, or ask for computer passwords.

NEVER PROVIDE PERSONAL INFORMATION TO ANY UNKNOWN PERSON !!!

These flim-flams can cost innocent people thousands and thousands of dollars when accounts are hacked, and since the schemes originate overseas, there is often nothing that authorities here can do once the damage has been inflicted.

When a suspicious call is received, it is always best to just hang up.



Rep. Barton serving as Vice Chair of House Motor Vehicles Committee; appointed to six committees this session

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State Rep. Matt Barton (R-Calhoun, District 5) has a lot

of work ahead of him this legislative session, being named Vice Chairman of the House Motor Vehicles Committee and being assigned to five other committees; he will serve as a member on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Resources, Health & Human Services, Industry and Labor, Small Business and

Transportation committees.

The House Motor Vehicles Committee oversees issues concerning driver's licenses, motor carrier laws and Georgia's Uniform Rules of the Road. It also deals with laws pertaining to motor vehicle tags, their titles and registration.

"It is an honor to start my second legislative term as

the vice chairman of the committee that oversees legislation that helps keeps our roadways safe for citizens," said Rep. Barton. "With a boom in population growth, it is even more important to make sure that our laws regarding vehicle ownership and operation are kept up to date, and I am excited and eager to serve my constituents, and all Georgians, in

this capacity." The main focus of the Appropriations committee is the writing of the state's amended and general fiscal year budgets for Georgia's state agencies and departments. The committee also hears legislation that has considerable impact on the state revenue



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GEORGIA HEALTH NEWS: Bill to allow visitors in hospitals, nursing homes is pared down, but still sparks emotional debate.

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 @gazettegordon

Gordon Central, Sonoraville high schools to stay on hybrid schedule as cases lower at school system; Community numbers rise

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Gordon County Schools on Friday, Feb. 19 announced that Gordon Central High School and Sonoraville High School would stay on a hybrid learning schedule at least through the first week of March after consulting with community leaders and school officials concerning COVID.

Gordon County Schools was on winter break through Wednesday of this week and only had two days of instruction, but active COVID-19 cases among all of their schools were down to 8 active cases in numbers reported on Friday, Feb. 19. Last week, GCS had 29 active

cases reported. This is the first week in more than a month that the school system reported less than 26 active cases, which was the number of active cases in the school system in October 2020 when the system first used the hybrid schedule for their high schools. That schedule remained in place until after the Thanksgiving holiday.

The decision for the hybrid instruction isn't necessarily based on the active case number, but the quarantine numbers that go along with exposure to the students with active cases. As the active case number rises, the quarantine number rises.

This week, there are a total of 2 staff members (down 4 from last week)

and 6 students (down 17 from last week) that are considered active cases of COVID-19 at the system.

The student breakdown of current active COVID19 cases at the school system is: 2 students at Ashworth Middle School, 1 student at Belwood Elementary, 1 student at Fairmount Elementary, 1 student at Gordon Central and 1 student at Sonoraville High School with active COVID cases

Among staff with current active cases of COVID, Gordon County Schools reported 1 staff member at Belwood Elementary and 1 staff member at Sonoraville High School.



community leaders and high school administrators concerning additional safeguards for preventing the spread of COVID-19, Gordon County Schools has made the decision to continue the hybrid schedule for their high schools, Gordon Central and Sonoraville, through

March 5. The schedule for in-person instruction will be Mondays and Tuesdays for students whose last names begin with the letters A-K and Thursdays and Fridays for students with last names beginning L-Z,"

See COVID, page 7A

Second Front

Harbin Clinic announces 'Coffee with Cardiologists,' a hearthealth virtual event

HARBIN CLINIC

Calhoun, GA – Harbin Clinic is excited to launch a special virtual event, Coffee with Cardiologists, in honor of February's Heart Month, on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021 at 8 a.m.

Coffee with Cardiologists is a virtual Q&A with six Harbin Clinic cardiologists representing Rome, Cartersville and Calhoun. During the event, cardiovascular experts will discuss prioritization of heart health as it relates to maintaining overall wellness, easy and effective lifestyle changes to optimize heart function, and how strong vascular health plays a significant role in the fight against COVID-19.

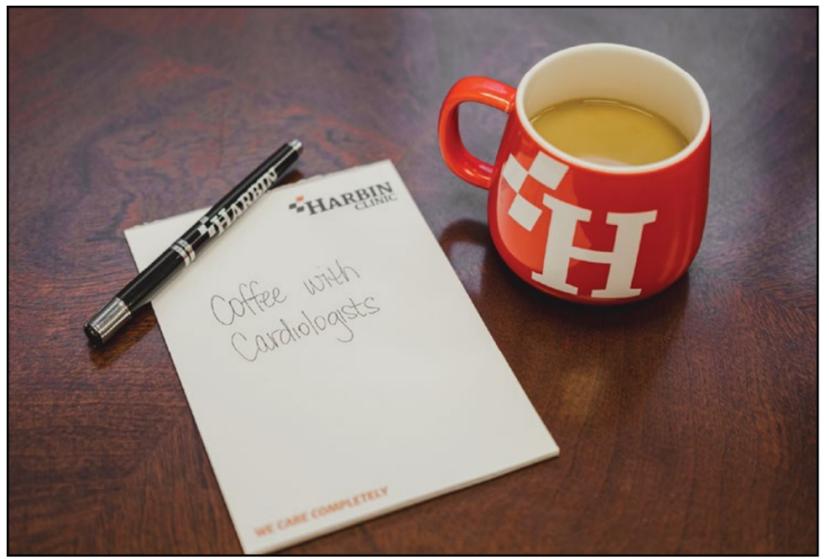
Epidemiologists and cardiologists realized early in the pandemic that those with cardiovascular disease are more than twice as likely to experience severe forms of COVID19. While death rates from COVID-19 begin to decline in Northwest Georgia, cardiovascular disease remains a major predictor of hospitalizations and poorer outcomes.

Pre-existing heart conditions, such as damaged heart muscles or blocked arteries, weaken the body's ability to fight off severe illnesses. A patient with a weakened heart is more likely to experience fever, low oxygen levels, unstable blood pressures, and blood clotting, which can complicate a COVID-19 diagnosis.

Those who register are encouraged to submit a question they would like the physicians to address. Coffee with Cardiologists is hosted in partnership with the Cartersville-Bartow Chamber of Commerce, the Gordon County Chamber of Commerce, and the Rome Floyd Chamber of Commerce. Those who attend the virtual event are invited to visit their local Chamber of Commerce for a free cup of outdoor, socially distanced coffee from Java Joy.

To learn more and register for the virtual event, visit events.harbinclinic.com.

About Harbin Clinic Harbin Clinic is Georgia's largest physician-owned, multi-specialty clinic with



more than 250 providers across more than 40 specialties in 21 locations throughout Northwest Georgia. Since 1870, the Harbin family has practiced medicine in

the region, founding the Harbin Hospital in 1908 in Rome, Georgia. That hospital grew into the present Harbin Clinic, which cares for thousands of patients

each day. Harbin Clinic Cares Completely. For more information, visit www.harbinclinic.com.

Renowned Georgia attorney Bobby Lee Cook dies

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Summerville defense attorney Bobby Lee Cook, 96, who has practiced law since the 1940's and was believed to be the inspiration of the main character Ben Matlock on the television series "Matlock," has died, according to a social media post by his grandson, Sutton Connelly.

Cook was internationally known for being a brilliant legal mind who combined his talents with a folksy, southern demeanor. He's

represented clients from rural Southerners to international businessmen and corporations.

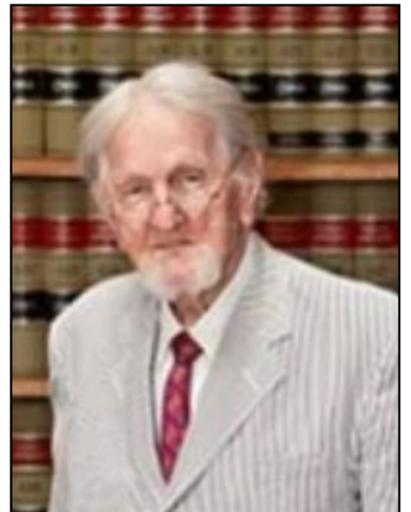
Cook was born in 1925 in the small town of Lyerly, Ga.. He attended Vanderbilt University Law School in Nashville. He practiced law in Summerville with the Cook & Connelly law firm.

A popular defense attorney, Cook is estimated to have won 80 percent of his murder trials. In 1988, he represented former Auburn University All-American Bobby Hoppe, who was charged with murder in a 1957

shooting. Jurors deadlocked 10-2 for acquittal and the case was never retried. He also defended Savannah's Jim Williams in 1989 during his first of four trials in the 1981 shooting death of Danny Hansford, the case being the inspiration for the bestselling book "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil" by John Berendt. Williams was convicted of the murder and sentenced to life in prison, although appealed, posting a \$200,000 bond. Cook later received, anonymously, a copy of the police report showing the

arresting officer contradicted himself, and the verdict was overturned. A new trial was ordered.

Other notable cases include representing Wayne Williams, who appealed against his 1982 conviction for the murder of two black youths in what was known as the Atlanta Child Murders, and he defended Tennessee banker C.H. Butcher Jr., who faced 25 counts of fraud. Butcher was acquitted on all counts.



COMING NEXT WEEK

HERITAGE 2021

THE BEST OF GORDON COUNTY'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

ROOTED IN GORDON COUNTY

GORDON Gazette

WE'VE GOT JOBS!

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

GENERAL LABOR: \$15/hr, will do deep cleaning of warehouse-prep work for moving into the warehouse. Removing light fixtures, moving out old shelves, machines, and putting in new. -2-3 week job. For the right people could go temp to perm. 3 openings

MACHINE OPERATOR: 5pm – 3am (machine operating-extrusion/TMO experience)-2 OPENINGS-\$14/hr starting

MACHINE OPERATOR: 7pm – 7am (creeling, TMO/EXTRUSION-doffing experience) – 1 OPENING-\$14/hr starting

ORDER PICKER: \$12/hr, day shift, must send profiles to client and will interview, wants previous experience order picking and able to drive lift.

CUSTODIAN: \$11.09/HR, will do deep cleaning, and some cleaning after events/games to ensure facility stays clean and covid free for all students/faculty/guests 3:30pm to 8:30pm M-F & full time 12:30pm to 8:30pm & hours 11am to 7pm. 3 Positions Open

TIRE HANDLER: \$13 & UP BASED ON JOB/SHIFT-12hr swing shift days—7am-7:30pm, 2nd & 3rd—Tire Handlers 3pm-11:30pm/ 11:00pm-7:30am

INDUSTRIAL BINDING: (sewing machine) candidates that have sewing machine experience we will pay them \$14.25 per hour. They must have previous sewing experience. 2nd shift- and work Monday – Thursday 5pm to 3:30am & 6:30AM TO 4:30PM

513 Lovers Lane Road S.E., Calhoun, GA
706.383.8234
 Equal Opportunity Employer

Obituaries

February 20, 2021

Dewayne Aldridge

Mr. Samuel "Dewayne" Aldridge, 50, of Calhoun, died Thursday, Feb. 18, 2021 in AdventHealth Gordon following three weeks of declining health.

Dewayne was born in Rome on Feb. 19, 1970, son of Wayne Aldridge and the late Linda Payne Aldridge. In addition to his mother, he was preceded in death by father-in-law and mother-in-law, Donald and Linda Pierce and brother-in-law, Ron Gill.

Dewayne loved his family dearly; he was a wonderful husband to Karen and daddy to Alyssa, Kimberly, Aurora and Pierce. Coached their ball teams and attended all the father-daughter dances. He enjoyed restoring and customizing Hot Wheels and had sold and shipped them world-wide. He was a graduate of Gordon Central High School and was employed by Mannington as a Hyster operator for 26 years and was of the Christian faith.

Survivors include his wife, Karen Lynn Pierce Aldridge, to whom he was married for 28 years; three daughters, Alyssa Aldridge, Kimberly Aldridge, Aurora Keeney; one son, Pierce Aldridge; father, Wayne Aldridge; sister, Janice Aldridge Gill; nephews and nieces, Michael and Nicole Davis, Harley and Shannon Gill, Deyonna Denton, Ron Gill, Wendy Martin, Shawn Denton; several great-nieces, nephews; special family, Larry and Veronica Bramblett

Funeral services for Samuel Dewayne Aldridge will be conducted Sunday at 3 p.m. from the chapel of Max Brannon & Sons Funeral Home with Rev. Wesley Hunt and Rev. Eddie Brannon officiating. Interment will follow in Chandler Cemetery. Pallbearers serving will include Michael Davis, Harley Gill, Shawn Denton, Melvin Kimbrell, Travis Graham, William Williamson, Larry Bramblett and Justin Goforth; honorary pallbearers will include Briley Williams, Cian Davis, Nathan Stinson, Jonathan Bynum, Matt Bynum and Cody Bynum.

The family will receive friends at the funeral home Saturday evening between the hours of 5:00 and 8:00 PM.

Due to COVID-19 mandated guidelines, there is limited seating in our chapel and the funeral service will be recorded and posted to our website, www.maxbrannonandsons.com after the service

It is requested that masks be worn at all times in the funeral home and social distancing guidelines be observed.

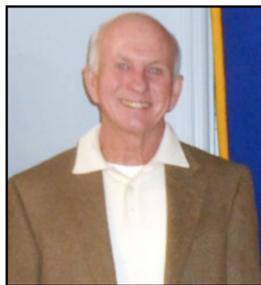
The Brannon family and staff are honored to serve the Aldridge family.



Eddie Peterson

Franklin Eddie Peterson, 70, died at his home on Tuesday, February 16, 2021.

Eddie was born on June 5, 1950 in Marietta, GA to Luther (Pete) and Pauline Seabolt Peterson. He moved with his family to Calhoun, GA at the age of ten, where he lived for the



remainder of his life. He graduated from Calhoun High School and earned degrees from West Georgia College and Georgia State University.

Eddie was preceded in death by his grandparents on both sides; his mother, Pauline Peterson; his father, Pete Peterson; and his brother, Billy Peterson. Eddie was married to Judy Peterson for 37 years. He is survived by his daughter, Sally Peterson Wyatt, and son-in-law, Josh Wyatt; and his nephew, Zach Hutchinson.

Eddie dedicated his career to public service for Gordon County and the City of Calhoun. He loved cycling, golfing, whitewater kayaking, running, and playing the guitar.

In lieu of flowers, the family prefers donations to be made in Eddie's memory and honor to one of the following organizations:

1. Girls on the Run: <https://www.girlsontherun.org/support-us/>
2. Momentum Bike Clubs: <http://www.momentumbikeclubs.org/giving/>
3. St. Timothy's Episcopal Church

Due to COVID-19, the family will be holding a private, outdoor memorial service on Saturday, February 20th at 1:00 PM. All those who wish to attend virtually may use the Zoom link that follows.

Invitation to join the virtual memorial service via Zoom

Topic: Celebrating Eddie Peterson

Time: Feb 20, 2021 01:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/72801290097?pwd=dWVuSXV4OWhZN1dJTWVLSHdNZik5QT09>

Meeting ID: 728 0129 0097

Passcode: z9JeRX

You may leave the family online condolences at www.thomasfuneralhomecalhoun.com

Thomas Funeral Home has proudly been entrusted with the care of Franklin Eddie Peterson.



Josephine "Jo" Serritt

Josephine "Jo" Serritt, 70, of Fairmount went to be with her Lord on Wednesday, February 17, 2021 surrounded by her loving family.

Jo was born in Gilmer County, Georgia on May 18, 1950, daughter of the late Hershel and Mary Jane Bramblett Thompson. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by sisters, Ruth McCarter, Jewel Dalton and her husband Vernon, Roseline Thompson; brothers, Dewey Thompson, Van Thompson, brother-in-law, Dee Cook. Prior to her retirement, she was a pharmacy technician for CVS and was a member of New Hope Baptist Church.

Jo loved to travel, meet new friends, spend time with family, shopping, spending time at her home away from home - Maggie Valley, North Carolina, she loved to make people laugh and help in any



way possible, she loved her husband of 49 years of marriage, she had a special love for her kids and grandkids.

Survivors include her husband, Marvin Serritt to whom she was married for 49 years, daughter, Dana Thurman; son, Dwayne Serritt and his wife Casey, grandchildren, Jayla Thurman, Bryson Thurman and Clayton Serritt; sister, Barbara Cook; brother, Troy Thompson; special friends, Joann White, Paulette Green, Debbie Wyatt, Judy Oliver, Katie Thurman and Patsy Parker. A host of nieces, nephews and other relatives also survive.

A service to celebrate the life of Josephine "Jo" (Thompson) Serritt was conducted Friday, Feb. 19 at 2 p.m. from New Hope Baptist Church with Rev. Dwight Scott and Rev. Chris Stanley officiating. Interment will follow in Pleasant Grove (Ryo) Baptist Church. Pallbearers serving included Bryson Thurman, Alex Hitchcock, Dr. Eric Turner, Timmy Childers, Chris Coleman and Keith Baker. Honorary pallbearers serving will include; Joann and Friends Travel Group, Andy Thurman, Max Thurman, Andrew Baker, Charles Mitchell and Scotty Thompson.

The family received friends at the funeral home on Thursday, Feb. 18 between the hours of 5:00 and 8:00 p.m.

Due to COVID-19, masks are required and social distancing guidelines are to be observed.

The Brannon family and staff are honored to serve the Serritt family.



Terry "Squirrel" Stanley

Terry "Squirrel" Clayton Stanley, 56, of Calhoun, died Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. He was born in Gordon County on May 21, 1963 to the late Temple "Red" Stanley and Doris West Stanley. He was preceded in death by his wife Vickie Stanley.

Terry was a well-liked man by many.

He is survived by his children, Sheldon (Heather) Medders, Amanda Medders, Tyler Stanley; siblings, Joyce Spooner and Steve (Teresa) Stanley; grandchildren, Righley Medders, Braxton Medders, Zaedyn Medders, Joseph Weller and Waylon Stanley.

To honor his wishes, Terry's body was cremated. The family will have a memorial service on Saturday, Feb. 20, 2021 at Belmont Baptist Church at 4 p.m.

Instead of flowers, the family asks that donations be made at www.maxbrannonandsons.com to help with cremation expenses.

The Brannon family and staff are honored to serve the family of Terry Clayton Stanley.



Help for the Hurting

-The Life Choice Hospice Bereavement Support Group will be meeting the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

The support group is open to anyone in the community who would like to attend. The office and support group are located at 189 Professional Court, Suite 300, Calhoun. For information, contact Jennifer at 706-602-9001.

-The Northwest Georgia Parkinson Disease Association, Inc., is offering a monthly support group for persons living with Parkinson Disease, their caregivers, family and friends. The support group will meet at Gordon Hospital; Conference Room A. For any questions about the support group and future meetings, call James Trussell at 706-235- 3164 or 706-346-5678.

-Families Anonymous is a 12-step program, for those concerned about drug abuse and behavior problems of a relative or friend. Completely anonymous, non professional, and non religious. No dues, no fees. Not connected with any hospital or agency. Located on Red Bud Road in plaza below Fitness First, next to Calhoun Counseling Center (Dr. Bledsoe's office). Meeting every Thursday 7 - 8 p.m. Call 770-548-7849 for more information.

-Bondage Breakers- Breaking the chains of addiction one soul at a time. Every Thursday night at 7 p.m. at Crane Eater Community Church, located at 3168 Red Bud Rd Calhoun, GA 30701.

-The Georgia Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association is sponsoring a monthly support group at Morning Pointe Assisted Living, 660 Jolly Road, on the third Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. For more information or directions, call Mary Braden at 770-548-4683 or Karen Parrott at 706-346-5220. For more information about dementia and Alzheimer's disease, call 800-272-3900 or visit www.alz.org/georgia.

-Special Care Plus, a free one-on-one consultation program, offers education and information to primary caregivers of persons with dementia.

Any primary caregiver who is caring for a loved one with dementia in the home is eligible to receive this program. To learn more about the Special Care Plus program, call 800-272-3900.

-Want to make a difference in the community? Tapestry Hospice is seeking volunteers to provide companionship to our patients, read books, make crafts, garden, light house cleaning, administrative work, etc. If you're interested contact Megan at megan.guthrie@tapestryhospice.com

-The Alzheimer's Association's Caring Closet was created to help offset the high cost of incontinent products and give the families support they often desperately need. If you would like to visit the nearest Closet, call the chapter office to receive a flier with locations and hours. Morning Pointe in Calhoun has a Caring Closet; call Mary Braden at 706-629-0777.

-Community volunteers are needed at Countryside Hospice Care, where the mission is to promote comfort and dignity at the end of life. The agency covers 26 Northwest Georgia counties between three offices in LaFayette, Rome, and Newnan. If you would like to participate in this rewarding program, call 706-638-7651 or 1-800-660-7381.

-Discovering Hope, an autism support group for Northwest Georgia, meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at Friendship Baptist Church, Rocky Face. For more information, call Connie Post at 706-673-7765 or www.discoveringhope.us.

-Caring Connection is a telephone support group especially for caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer's who cannot leave their homes because of care

responsibilities. This support group is as close as the phone. Call 706-275-0819 or 1-800-272-3900 and ask to be enrolled in Caring Connection.

-Grief Recovery Group for those who have lost loved ones and friends, receive support and guidance with the Four Tasks of Grieving. Cost is Free. Second Wednesday of each month at 1 p.m. at Harris Radiation Therapy Center at Gordon Hospital. For more information or to RSVP, please call 706.879.5850.

-The Compassionate Friends of Dalton and N.W. Georgia is part of a worldwide effort that has helped many families cope with the loss of a child and to honor our children's memory. The Compassionate Friends meets on the third Thursday of each month from 7 to 9 p.m. at Evangelical Methodist Church (in the "Gathering Place" building), 1035 Abutment Road, Dalton (on the hill behind the old Lowe's off Walnut Avenue). For more information, call Dawn at 706-277-3312 or 706-264-4458 or e-mail dawnsisson@msn.com.

-SING (Surviving Infidelity Necessary to your Growth) has formed here. If you are experiencing difficulty in marriage and are looking for ways to survive, then you should come and be part of these meetings designed to help, encourage, and solve issues in a marriage that can lead to a promising future ahead for the entire family. For more information, call Iroka Moore at 706-629-2880.

-United Hospice is seeking volunteers who can help others through companionship, reading, sharing, and other small tasks. Give the gift of caring and enjoy the privilege of sharing in your local area. Call Dan Hogan at 706-602-9546 or 800-867-7976.

-Looking for a 12-step meeting for men and women? At "Road to Recovery," recognizing Jesus Christ as our higher

power, they take the 12 steps and compare how they are taken from scripture and how to apply them to our lives to experience true freedom from the bondages of addiction. The meetings are free and open to the public at World Harvest Church locations in Cherokee and Gordon counties. For more information, call 706-602-1919. The Calhoun church is located at 2335 Red Bud Road. The meetings here are every Monday and Thursday at 7 p.m.

-A 12-step-meeting for Overeaters Anonymous is held at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 901 W. Emory St, Dalton on Thursdays at 6 p.m. Call Nan at 706-695-9008 or Stephanie at 706-847-8125 for more information.

-Caring for a loved one who is suffering from late-stage cancer is certainly one of life's hardest experiences. But you do not have to go through this alone. The Harris Radiation Therapy Center at Gordon Hospital provides a place for you to meet each month with others who understand what you are going through during this difficult time. Strength for Caring, a support group for caregivers of patients with advanced stages of cancer meets on the second Tuesday of each month from 2-3 p.m. at the Harris Radiation Therapy Center at Gordon Hospital, 1035 Red Bud Road. For more information, please call 706-879-5853.

-Dealing with a cancer diagnosis is difficult for everyone involved - the patient and their loved ones. But you are not alone. The Harris Radiation Therapy Center at Gordon Hospital, 1035 Red Bud Road, hosts a Support Group for cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers on the third Wednesday of each month from noon until 1 p.m. Lunch is served. For more information and to RSVP, please call 706-879-5853. We offer a hand to hold and an ear to listen as you go through this difficult time.

Governor Kemp rolls out “Faith Protection Act” legislation

Office of Governor Brian Kemp

Atlanta, GA – Governor Brian P. Kemp on Thursday announced his administration’s introduction of the “Faith Protection Act,” which would ensure the emergency powers of any governor of Georgia are not used to “specifically limit the practice of any religion.”

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, people of all faiths across America were told by state governments how, where, when, or even if they could worship at all. Not in Georgia. We chose to work alongside congregations across our state to ensure they practiced their faith safely and in accordance with public health guidance,” said Governor Kemp.

“The Faith Protection Act will ensure the

emergency powers of any governor of Georgia in the years to come are not used to limit the God-given right to worship. In Georgia, we never shuttered churches, synagogues, or other places of worship because we value faith, family, and freedom. With the Faith Protection Act signed into law, Georgia will be a sanctuary state for people of faith.”

Carr joins coalition urging Biden to arrest, remove unlawful immigrants convicted of sex crimes

Office of Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr

This week, Attorney General Chris Carr, pictured, joined a coalition of 18 state attorneys general in urging President Biden, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Acting Director Johnson to reverse the Biden Administration’s last-minute cancellation of Operation Talon. Operation Talon is a nationwide ICE operation that focuses on removing illegally present convicted sex offenders from the United States.

“Canceling this important initiative makes no sense. It will only embolden sexual predators who seek to enter the United States illegally and exacerbate issues of sexual assault and trafficking in immigrant communities,” said Attorney General Chris Carr. “In Georgia, we are working hard every

day to prosecute those who seek to commit these atrocities, and we stand with this coalition to demand that President Biden reverse this misguided decision and instead adopt an aggressive enforcement policy against those that have been convicted of sex crimes and are here illegally.”

The letter states, “According to data collected by Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, during the period from October 2014 to May 2018, ICE arrested 19,752 illegal aliens with criminal convictions for whom the most serious prior conviction was a conviction for a sex-related offense.”

Protesting the cancellation of Operation Talon, the letter says, “The cancellation of this program effectively broadcasts to the world that the United States is now a sanctuary jurisdiction for sexual predators. This message creates a perverse incentive for foreign sexual predators to seek to enter the

United States illegally and assault more victims, both in the process of unlawful migration and after they arrive. It will also broadcast the message to other criminal aliens who have committed less heinous offenses that any kind of robust enforcement against them is extremely unlikely.”

The letter closes with, “We urge you to immediately reinstate Operation Talon, adopt an aggressive enforcement policy against illegal aliens convicted of sex crimes, and send a message to sexual predators that they are not welcome in the United States of America.”

In addition to Georgia, state attorneys general from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia also signed on to the letter.

Georgia Senate panel hears sports betting pitch

by Dave Williams
Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA – Legalizing sports betting could divert an estimated \$4.8 billion a year Georgians now spend wagering on games illegally, tax it, and put a portion of the proceeds toward education, supporters said Thursday.

The state Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee held a hearing on legislation that would legalize online sports betting in Georgia under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Lottery Corp.

“Over 2 million [Georgians] are doing it now,” said Sen. Jeff Mullis, R-Chickamauga, chief sponsor of Senate Bill 142. “Do you know who’s in control of it? The bookies.”

Mullis’ bill is similar to sports betting legislation before the Georgia House of Representatives.

Both measures would put the state Lottery Commission in charge of licensing at least six operators such as FanDuel or DraftKings to run online sports books in Georgia. The companies would pay annual licensing fees of \$900,000.

But the bills also feature some key differences. While the licensed operators would pay a tax of 14% of their adjusted gross revenues toward

Georgia’s HOPE Scholarships and pre-kindergarten programs, the Senate version calls for a tax of 10%.

The House bill would limit bettors to using debit cards, a provision intended to keep potential problem gamblers from getting in their over their heads.

The Senate measure, however, would allow both debit cards and credit cards.

Josh Mackey, an Atlanta-based lobbyist representing FanDuel and DraftKings, said illegal offshore sportsbooks typically allow customers to use credit cards to place bets. Not allowing credit cards when placing bets legally under a new Georgia law would act as a disincentive, he said.

“We’re trying to get people to move away from [illegal bets] to legalized betting,” he said.

Sen. Lindsey Tippins, R-Marietta, a member of the committee, said legalizing sports betting would divert revenue away from the lottery.

“[Sports betting] does not return the state nearly the amount of money the lottery does,” he said. “I think we need to take that into consideration.”

But Mullis said most people who play the lottery don’t engage in sports betting.

“It doesn’t take away from the lottery,” he said. “It’s extra money.”

The bill’s opponents argued sports betting cannot

be legalized in Georgia without a constitutional amendment.

Virginia Galloway, regional field director of the Duluth-based Faith and Freedom Coalition, cited a 2016 opinion from the Georgia attorney general’s office to that effect.

But Robert Highsmith, a lawyer representing the Atlanta Hawks, said the state Constitution only expressly prohibits casino gambling. Sports betting only requires the legislature to pass a statute authorizing the Georgia Lottery Corp. to add sports betting to its current operations, he said.

Going the constitutional route also would delay sports betting because it would have to go on next year’s statewide ballot for Georgia voters to decide, Highsmith argued.

“It would be cleaner and eliminate that debate,” Highsmith acknowledged. “But if we do that, it would be at least 2023 before it could be effective.”

Committee Chairman Bill Cowsert, R-Athens, suggested that Mullis prepare a constitutional amendment to introduce next week in case lawmakers decide it’s necessary.

Mullis said he has one ready to go.

COVID-19 vaccine mass sites to open in Georgia with website for appointments

by Beau Evans
Capitol Beat News Service

Georgia officials have launched a new website to pre-register for COVID-19 vaccine appointments and are poised to open four mass vaccination sites in different parts of the state, Gov. Brian Kemp announced Thursday.

The governor’s update came as more than 1.6 million vaccines have been given to eligible Georgians so far, including roughly 500,000 second doses, according to state Department of Public Health data.

The new website, myvaccinegeorgia.com, allows Georgians to pre-register for a vaccine appointment even if they do not yet qualify under the governor’s eligibility criteria. They will be notified once they qualify and scheduled for an appointment.

Kemp said on Thursday he is not yet ready to expand who is eligible in Georgia for the vaccine beyond health-care workers, nursing home residents and staff, first responders and people age 65 and older – but that he may do so in the next couple of weeks.

The four mass vaccination sites in metro Atlanta, Clarkesville, Macon and Albany will open Monday and initially administer around 22,000 vaccines per week between them, Kemp said. Those sites can gear up quickly to handle more doses once the federal government allocates more weekly shipments, he added.

“These four sites will serve as the first step in a vaccination effort that we hope will dramatically ramp up in the coming months,” Kemp said at a news conference at the state Capitol.

Georgia is currently receiving shipments of 198,000 vaccine doses per week, up from 120,000 doses the state had been getting in recent weeks. While officials have made a dent in vaccinating people, Kemp stressed demand for shots still lags far behind the state’s current and foreseeable supply.

The supply limits have kept Kemp from adding Georgia school teachers and other staff to the list of vaccine-eligible people, despite loud cries from many teachers particularly in metro Atlanta who have pressed the governor to move them up the line.

On Thursday, Kemp detailed results from a survey he said the state Department of Education recently conducted showing less than half of about 171,000 responding teachers and school staff would take the vaccine. The governor said the survey will influence when he opens vaccines up for teachers.

“It certainly will factor into our decision,” Kemp said. “But it also shows that demand there was not as much as people thought.”

Dr. Kathleen Toomey, the state’s public-health commissioner, said staff in some hospitals and nursing homes outside of metro Atlanta – as well as many Georgians from predominantly Black and Latino communities – are still reluctant or unwilling to take the vaccine.

“This is not a case of vaccine access,” Toomey said Thursday. “It’s a case of vaccine hesitancy.”

She added state officials are “doing everything we can” to work with local leaders, churches and other groups to boost vaccine acceptance rates in under-served areas, while eyeing Georgia teachers for vaccines “soon”.

In the meantime, pre-registering for vaccines now will help state officials overseeing the mass-vaccination sites more easily ramp up distribution once larger dose shipments

arrive, said Georgia Homeland Security Director Chris Stallings.

“We can make a significant dent in the list of [eligible] people who need support,” Stallings said.

The four mass-vaccination sites will be open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the following locations:

Delta Flight Museum: 1220 Woolman Place SW, Hapeville, GA 30354

Habersham County Fairgrounds: 4235 Toccoa Highway, Clarkesville, GA 30523

Macon Farmers Market: 2055 Eisenhower Parkway, Macon, GA 31206

Albany branch of the Georgia Forestry Commission: 2910 Newton Road, Albany, GA 31701

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Education

Georgia resubmits testing waiver request

GEORGIA DOE

State School Superintendent Richard Woods announced today that the Department of Education has resubmitted test waiver requests, saying the middle of a global pandemic is no time for high-stakes testing.

“Only three months from now, Georgia’s schools will start closing out the 2020-21 school year. The close of the second semester also brings about federally required standardized testing. But the middle of a global pandemic is no time for high-stakes tests – especially high-stakes tests that must be administered in person. That’s why today, Governor Brian Kemp and I resubmitted Georgia’s request for a waiver of standardized testing and accountability requirements to the U.S. Department of Education,” said Woods.

“Like other states, Georgia’s testing and accountability systems were developed and designed to measure the effectiveness of traditional instruction in a traditional learning environment. This unprecedented school year has been anything but traditional, and experts know tests cannot be completely redesigned and revamped overnight.

“Additionally, test security concerns mean students must take standardized tests in-person – even those who are medically fragile and for all families who have opted for virtual instruction,” continued Woods. “We have worked to provide flexibility that allows for the safe administration of tests, and to reduce student consequences so that

students who simply cannot report to an in-person school building are not penalized, but school districts are placed in a difficult position due to the federal requirement that standardized tests be administered to all students.

“Despite these common-sense realities, there are those who cling to compliance. Proponents of high-stakes testing and heavy-handed accountability point to the need to identify student learning loss. Learning loss is a real and pressing concern, and a long-term challenge we will need to aggressively tackle as a state and nation. Contrary to the rhetoric that learning loss is not being addressed, our educators are capable of, and have been, identifying learning gaps without subjecting students to the risks and stresses of administering high-stakes, end-of-year tests.

“Formative tools give teachers the flexibility to administer assessments when it makes sense instructionally and use the results only to support student learning. To ensure school districts had the resources to identify learning loss, the Georgia Department of Education provided a formative assessment aligned to Georgia Milestones to every district in the state at no cost. A recent survey of Georgia school districts shows 93% are using formative assessments this school year to pinpoint learning loss, and at least 88% plan to add back instructional time through summer learning opportunities, before- and after-school programs, and/or an extended 2021-22 school year. GaDOE plans to develop a grant opportunity to support these locally-led efforts,

and our school improvement team is working directly with underperforming schools to ensure supports are in place to address learning loss.

“Supporters of pandemic-era high-stakes testing also point to the need to know how different instructional models – in-person, hybrid, and virtual – are working. The reality is that high-students and educators are still in the middle of a pandemic, and the instructional models being provided do not fit neatly into boxes. With rolling quarantines, connectivity issues, and varying case counts, no two districts or schools are the same. Do we need to know what works best for students? Absolutely – but those eager to start researching a crisis the rest of us are still experiencing need a reality check.

“Giving high-stakes tests solely for the sake of data collection shows the continued disconnect between those desiring to establish a narrative about public education and the reality of the students, educators and families who are forced to endure the impact of these decisions. This is not a grand lab experiment; this is a global crisis happening right now. Those students and teachers, along with parents and school leaders, are doing everything they can to keep teaching and learning going – is this really the time to pull out the measuring stick? Furthermore, it is quite ironic that the U.S. Department of Education decided not to administer its own national test, NAEP.

“Though we must abide by the federal requirement to test, as long as it stands, we will continue to call out those who champion compliance and ignore the crisis at hand. That’s

what we did when then-Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos directed states to continue testing this school year. We gave school leaders the flexibility to use other factors to make promotion and retention decisions for students; extended flexibility on the “when” and “how” of administering tests; and reduced the testing weight for high-school students to .01%, protecting them from damaging consequences to their GPAs, class ranks, and access to scholarships and postsecondary opportunities.

“As a uniquely taxing school year approaches its end, parents, teachers, and school leaders should be able to focus on safety, well-being, and delivering the highest quality of instruction. Since the restart of school, I have been in classrooms listening to those on the frontlines and walking the hallways talking to students and school leaders. I have seen firsthand the work that has gone into making education work during this pandemic – and amid that, the last thing we should be requiring is high-stakes testing.

“Since March, traditional educational structures like how we deliver instruction and meals have radically changed. Can’t our leaders at the federal level adapt, as those at the local level have, to meet this moment?”

“The need to pause high-stakes testing and data collection is clear – and supported by 96 percent of Georgians. This new administration has a moral obligation to extend full testing and accountability waivers for the current school year. I implore them to put the adult issues aside and do what is best for students,” said Woods.

GNTC Foundation looking for alumni to serve on advisory board

GNTC

The Georgia Northwestern Technical College (GNTC) Foundation is establishing an Alumni Advisory Board to allow graduates the chance to provide feedback and make an impact on the college.

Alumni are former students who have completed any certificate, diploma or degree program at GNTC.

GNTC Alumni Advisory Board Members will serve a two-year term and attend an annual meeting. This meeting will provide board members an opportunity to offer feedback and GNTC President Dr. Heidi Popham will give updates on the college.

“GNTC alumni are such an important part of who we are and they are true ambassadors for us in the community,” said Popham “We are forming this advisory board in order to connect with alumni and hear their thoughts and ideas as Georgia Northwestern Technical College continues



to move forward.”

Interested individuals should contact Laretta Hannon, director of Institutional Advancement at 706.295.6273 or lhannon@gntc.edu.

Georgia Northwestern Technical College provides quality workforce education to the citizens of Northwest Georgia. Students have the opportunity to earn an associate degree, diploma, or a certificate in business, health, industrial, or public service career paths. This past year, 11,820 people benefited

from GNTC’s credit and noncredit programs. GNTC has an annual credit enrollment of 8,591 students and an additional enrollment of 3,229 people through adult education, continuing education, business and industry training and Georgia Quick Start. For more information about GNTC, visit us at www.GNTC.edu. GNTC is a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia and an Equal Opportunity Institution.

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GEORGIA HEALTH NEWS: Bill to allow visitors in hospitals, nursing homes is pared down, but still sparks emotional debate

ANDY MILLER,
Georgia Health News

A Georgia House committee held a passionate debate Thursday over a pared-down bill to allow people to visit patients in hospitals and long-term care facilities during a public health emergency.

The nation is currently in the midst of such an emergency — the COVID-19 pandemic.

The original version of the “Right to Visit” legislation, House Bill 290, would have prevented these facilities from getting or renewing their licenses if they maintained a policy to keep visitors away from patients during a “declared public health emergency.”

The new version, as outlined by Rep. Ed Setzler (R-Acworth), would put more limits on those visits. The changes were made after intense lobbying from the health care industry.

Instead of the more wide-open proposal, the revised bill would allow a patient’s “legal representative” to visit for a minimum of an hour a day, provided that this visitor meets the facility’s conditions. The representative would be someone designated by the patient to help make informed decisions on medical care, Setzler told

the House Human Relations and Aging Committee.

He acknowledged that “there will be people who will be mad at me” for altering the proposed legislation to place more limits on visits.

Long-term care visitation has been restricted by Gov. Brian Kemp’s executive order and under federal guidelines. These limits on visits were imposed early in the COVID pandemic, as nursing homes and other long-term care facilities endured a horrific disease toll.

More than 4,000 Georgia residents of these homes have died — about one-third of the state’s confirmed deaths from COVID-19.

But now, with nursing home residents getting vaccinations, the state’s long-term care ombudsmen have urged Kemp to ease his rules and allow an “essential visitor” — typically a family member — to come into the building to see a loved one.

With long waits to see their family members, patients “are just withering away,” Melanie McNeil, the state’s chief long-term care ombudsman, told GHN recently.

The House panel is scheduled to vote on the

measure next week. “This could well be one of the most important measures” of the Georgia Assembly session, said the committee chairman, Rep. Jesse Petrea (R-Savannah).

The bill also would allow an “essential caregiver,” typically a relative, to visit a patient in a nursing home or other long-term care facility, but not a hospital.

The Georgia Health Care Association (GHCA), which represents long-term care providers, expressed reservations about the updated legislation.

“While we are supportive of the bill sponsor’s intent to allow for additional visitation and bring together residents and families, the new version of HB 290 still includes provisions that would put centers in jeopardy of being non-compliant with federal regulations,” said Devon Barill, a spokeswoman for GHCA. “We appreciate the opportunity Chairmen Setzler and Petrea have afforded us to contribute to the debate. We will continue to work with the committee to resolve any conflicts between state and federal regulations.”

Members of the committee pointed out the potential impact that such visitations would have on



hospitals and infection control efforts. Rep. Mary Robichaux (D-Roswell) asked whether a hospital would be violating the proposed law if it were to prohibit a visit to an ICU that contains COVID patients.

But Rep. Danny Mathis (R-Cochran) spoke of the anguish that families feel over not seeing their loved ones. “We have a moral obligation for these folks to be with their loved ones,” he said.

The legal representation rule, if passed, would help Gail Manter of Hartwell see her husband, Tom, in person at the nursing home where he lives. “Everybody’s willing to do what we need to do to get

in,” she said.

Tom has Parkinson’s disease, and has been in the facility for two years. Gail used to visit him daily, but since the pandemic began early last year, those regular trips have ended.

“It’s just criminal not to let us see our loved one,” she said Thursday.

“If we need to buy PPE, we’ll buy PPE,” she added, referring to the protective garb that health care workers wear to limit the spread of infections. She said that if the bill passed, she would qualify as both a legal representative and an essential caregiver.

If Setzler’s bill becomes law, it will go into effect July 1.

The original measure

would have required hospitals and long-term care facilities to allow patients to have two visitors for up to two hours per day.

The blocking of family visits has had a negative effect across the board, Setzler said recently. “This has put extraordinary stress on families, this has put extraordinary stress on our sickest, most vulnerable citizens, and this has actually put tremendous stress on nurses and health care workers who benefit from the presence of family members at their patients’ bedsides supporting the medical care they provide.”

Andy Miller is the Owner/Editor of Georgia Health News.

Weekly Schedule: Free Public Health COVID-19 Testing in Northwest Georgia

Monday February 22	Tuesday February 23	Wednesday February 24	Thursday February 25	Friday February 26
Paulding	Gordon	Dade Floyd	Walker	no testing



TEST SITES

- ❑ Dade: 71 Case Avenue, Suite H-100, Trenton, GA
- ❑ Floyd: Rome Fair Grounds, 1400 Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd., Rome, GA
- ❑ Gordon: Senior Center, 150 Cambridge Court, Calhoun, GA
- ❑ Paulding: Paulding Meadows, 472 Paulding Meadows Dr., Dallas, GA
- ❑ Walker: Mount Zion Baptist Church, 289 Dunwoody Road, LaFayette, GA

HOURS

- 9 a.m. to noon and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- 9 a.m. to noon and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

All test sites drive-up, no appointment needed.

Test sites may delay opening due to weather concerns. Delays will be posted at nwgapublichealth.org and county health department Facebook pages.

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PETERSON

From page 1A

and guidance. Eddie's family will be in our thoughts and prayers." According to Palmer, Peterson was also a major help with Downtown Development grants, which

helped finance many of the beautification projects around the City. "Eddie was a major part of this community. For many years he was committed to his job and serving the citizens of Calhoun and Gordon County," said Downtown Development Director Suzanne Roberts. "He was an intelligent, kind, loyal man with a quick wit and dry sense of humor. He will be deeply

missed by his close friends and family. " Peterson was born June 5, 1950 in Marietta, son of the late Luther Peterson and Pauline Seabolt Peterson. He is survived by his daughter, Dr. Sally Peterson Wyatt and her husband Dr. Josh Wyatt of Greenville, S.C. Funeral arrangements are incomplete and will be announced later. Funeral will be handled by Thomas Funeral Home of Calhoun

BARTON

From page 1A

or expenditures. The subcommittee of Appropriations that Barton will serve on is Human Resources, working on budgets for veteran services, behavioral health, human services and Office of Child Advocacy. The Health & Human Services committee is responsible for legislation that affects the conditions of safety regulations and social services for the citizens of Georgia. This Committee also addresses the legal

areas surrounding medical professionals as well as medicinal provisions. The Industry and Labor committee deals with the issues surrounding labor and management relations. It also has jurisdiction on matters dealing with Worker's Compensation and Georgia's Worker's Compensation Board. The Small Business Development committee is charged with drafting legislation that will enable the state's small businesses to flourish and create more jobs. The Transportation committee handles legislation dealing with Georgia's Department of Transportation

and their operations. The committee also deals with legislation regarding Georgia's roads and infrastructure. The House Committee on Assignments, chaired by House Speaker David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge), is charged with making all House committee assignments for the members of the Georgia House of Representatives. For a complete list of all House committee assignments, please click here. Representative Matt Barton represents the citizens of District 5, which includes portions of Gordon and Murray counties. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 2019.

COVID

From page 1A

said the system in a statement on Friday. Classes at the Gordon County high schools are tentatively scheduled to resume to full-time in-person instruction on March 8. Gordon County Schools' reporting is slightly different than the City school system. Gordon County Schools' weekly numbers, reported each Friday afternoon, show the new cases of COVID-19 for the week, plus any previous cases that are still active. You can find those numbers on their website at <https://www.gcbe.org/domain/5112> Calhoun City Schools reported new cases of COVID-19 this week were pretty flat, at 9 new cases, up 2 new cases from last week. There were 5 new cases among students (1 at Calhoun Primary, 1 at Calhoun Elementary, 1 at Calhoun Middle and 2 at Calhoun High), and 4 new cases among staff members (1 at Calhoun Primary, 1 at Calhoun Elementary, 1 at Calhoun Middle and 1 at Calhoun High). Calhoun City Schools post the new case numbers

each Friday afternoon, and includes the previous week's numbers separately on their website at <https://www.calhounschools.org/summer-resources/ccsd-covid-19-case-status-reportnew-page> Both school systems have adopted strict cleaning procedures and are following the health and safety guidelines set forth by the CDC concerning social distancing. Students and staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who have recently had close contact with a person with COVID-19 at either school system cannot return to school until they meet the Department of Public Health's Return to School Guidance After COVID-19 Illness or Exposure. Numbers of new COVID19 cases skyrocketed again in Calhoun-Gordon County, with 254 new cases reported in the community since last Saturday, and 2 additional deaths contributed to the virus reported this week. Last week, 167 new cases were reported in the community. At press time Saturday morning, Feb. 20, 2021, Gordon County has had 5,791 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began -up 254 cases since the same time last week. COVID-19 related deaths now stand at 87, up 2 deaths from last week. The Department of Public Health also reports 8

probable deaths from COVID. There have been 281 hospitalizations in Gordon County due to COVID-19 since March, up 13 hospitalizations since last week. The COVID-19 statistics for Gordon's neighboring counties since the beginning of the pandemic as of Saturday morning are: -Bartow County...9,856 cases, 176 deaths, 14 probable deaths and 697 hospitalizations; -Floyd County... 9,106 cases, 158 deaths, 31 probable deaths and 763 hospitalizations; -Whitfield County...14,013 cases, 199 deaths, 10 probable deaths and 682 hospitalizations. The State of Georgia has now topped 800,000 cases, reporting 800,959 cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began, with 14,530 deaths, 2,080 probable deaths and 54,434 hospitalizations. County EMA Director Courtney Taylor reminds the public to continue to wash hands often, cover your cough and practice social distancing. For further information and numbers such as demographics for Georgia and totals all counties please visit: <https://dph.georgia.gov/>

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