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Dr. George Gowder with friends and family during his Chapel Dedication at Union General Hospital. The chapel was dedicated to Dr. Gowder on Oct. 2, 2014, in recognition of his incalculable contributions to Union County and the hospital over the years.

doctor" in that he saw inpatients at the hospital, delivered hundreds of babies, saw patients in the emergency room, took care of nursing home patients, had a busy office practice and still made house calls, often sacrificing precious time with his family. He will be fondly remembered by many people in this surrounding area as a physician who truly loved and was dedicated to his patients.

"I had pericarditis, and he cured me of that," said lifelong Union County resident Bud Akins. "And my grandmother was 80 years old and she was dying. We took her to Dr. Gowder, and I told him, I said, Dr. Gowder, do something for my grandmother, she's not ready to go yet. He got her well, and she lived another 10 years."

Akins remembers loading up and heading to Atlanta Braves baseball games

in Dr. Gowder's RV, and the two would also ride motorcycles together.

"That man is just like a father to everybody in this county - not just a doctor, but a father," said Akins.

Dr. George loved to travel, ride motorcycles, and spend time with his family. He was a master at telling jokes and stories, and he always had one to fit the occasion. He was a committed Christian who loved his Lord, reading his Bible, and spending many hours at his computer listening to Dr. Adrian Rogers' sermons. He attended the House of Prayer Church.

Dr. George is survived by his seven children, daughter and son-in-law, Anne and Phil Patton; daughter, Lou Harkins; son and daughter-in-law, Dr. David and Lita Gowder; son and daughter-in-law, Dr. Mike and Gail Gowder, all of

Blairsville; daughter and son-in-law, Amy and Joel Huggins of Nashville, Tennessee; son and daughter-in-law, Rev. Bill and Becky Gowder of Friendsville, Tennessee, and daughter and son-in-law, Becky and Stephen Gooch, also of Blairsville; sister, Virginia Sloan, of Gainesville, as well as 23 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were held Saturday, Jan. 14, at the House of Prayer Church in Blairsville, with Rev. Bill Gowder and Rev. Stacy Dyer officiating. A eulogy was given by Dr. David Gowder. Music was provided by Bryan Sosensky and Lita Gowder. His grandsons served as pallbearers.

He was buried at the House of Prayer cemetery next to his beloved wife of 51 years, Martha Gowder.

Sales Tax...continued from Page 1A

percent increase in such cases from 2015.

This is not something that is just occurring in the big cities. In the last two months alone there have been nine officers shot in Georgia and five of them were killed. Georgia ended 2016 ranking 4th in the nation in line-of-duty deaths.

Even more unusual this year are the occurrences of officers being ambushed simply because they are law enforcement officers. Of the 65 killed by gunmen last year, 21 of the officers were ambushed.

"This is the first time in my career that I can ever remember officers being shot as they sat in their cars or fired upon when they arrived on the scene of a bogus call," Sills said. "This is genuinely unprecedented in our history, and everyone in our profession is on edge and worried as never before."

As a sheriff, the single biggest difficulty is the inability to hire and retain qualified officers. This is a systemic problem throughout Georgia law enforcement.

It's difficult for local departments to keep their very best officers because most always leave local law enforcement agencies after a few years and go on to better pay and benefits with state and federal agencies.

The Georgia Sheriffs' Association did a survey last November with 76 of the 159 sheriffs reporting that they had lost more than 500 of their deputies to state law enforcement agencies over the last 10 years.

Those figures came from less than half of the sheriffs and didn't include the number of officers who left city agencies for state jobs.

City and county law enforcement agencies have truly become nothing more than the training grounds for Georgia's state law enforcement agencies.

The constant cost associated with this turnover and training can hardly be quantified, and it is patently unfair for the local taxpayers to repeatedly foot this bill, Sheriff Sills said.

"Our plight of hiring and retaining personnel was exponentially exacerbated last September when Gov. Nathan Deal announced that all state law enforcement personnel would be receiving a 20 percent increase in pay," Sills said. "Let me be very clear here, I absolutely support those officers getting a raise and think they deserve it. On the other hand, if the state officers deserve a 20 percent increase, local city and county officers deserve the same increase if not more."

With these new increases in pay, a Georgia State Patrol officer after completing his or her basic training now makes \$46,422 per year. There are three pay levels of "Trooper" that go up to \$61,825 per year before even being promoted to the rank of corporal.

The average compensation of a Georgia deputy sheriff after completing basic training is only \$29,900 per year.

"These state officers are being paid by the taxpayers, and we need to be able to explain

to your local law enforcement officers just why they are worth so much less," Sills said. "These state agencies are support agencies, and virtually all of them close their offices at 5 p.m. every day, and very few of them regularly work on weekends, holidays, or nights. The dangers of the job and such disparities in pay have led to the crisis situation local law enforcement agencies find themselves in today."

Sheriff Mason agreed that local agencies simply have no way to compete with the state and federal agencies.

With that in mind, the Georgia Sheriffs' Association is going to be seeking the enactment of legislation this year which will mandate that any full-time, certified peace officer be paid at least the beginning salary of a Georgia State Patrol officer.

Critics of this effort are likely to shout loudly that this is simply a local matter and shouldn't be addressed with a state law. Sheriffs will first counter that by saying that even though local taxpayers are the ones who foot the bill for officers' salaries, it's state law that mandates the minimum salary for all sheriffs in Georgia.

"Many years ago, our General Assembly recognized that our local school systems had a similar problem acquiring and retaining qualified teachers," Sills said. "To cure that problem they enacted legislation that mandated a statewide minimum pay scale, insurance, and retirement system commensurate with education and experience for all of our local educators. Had those laws not been passed, the disparities in education from one county to another would be profound today."

Sheriff Sills said that surely the deputies and city officers, the men and women who go headlong into harm's way every day, deserve to be treated similarly as Georgia's teachers have been.

"The pay increases we are proposing will need some sort of tax increase for funding, and we believe it to be blatantly unfair to place the burden of it on the property-owning taxpayer," Sills said. "I certainly don't enjoy paying taxes, and all law enforcement officers pay taxes just like you do."

"We believe the only way funding for the increases we are proposing can be equitably accomplished is through an additional penny sales tax, which would be solely dedicated and restricted to fund only local city and county law enforcement officers' salaries and benefits."

Getting started in 2017 at Georgia General Assembly

By: Sen. Steve Gooch (R - Dahlonega)

On January 9, we reconvened for the first session of the 154th Georgia General Assembly. This year promises to be very busy and offers endless opportunities. I am honored to represent you in the Senate and motivated to serve you at the Capitol in 2017.

I continue to serve as Vice-Chair of the Transportation Committee and will serve this year as Secretary of the Appropriations Committee. Additionally, I will serve on the Finance and Regulated Industries and Utilities Committees and as Ex-Officio on the Rules Committee. My election as Majority Whip by the Senate Majority remains and I will work hard to keep caucus members informed and educated about legislation. I am

humbled to serve in this role and will take it very seriously. It is very important that the Senate Majority Caucus fully knows and understands how certain pieces of legislation will affect Georgians.

Governor Nathan Deal confidently set his agenda in the State of the State Address during a joint session held on Wednesday, January 11. He took us down memory lane and reminded us that when he entered office in 2011 businesses were going bankrupt, homes were being foreclosed upon and jobs were being lost, the unemployment rate was 10.4 percent, and the states rainy day fund was extremely low at \$116 million. In his address, his update on the state's economic and financial progress shows how far we have come. The unemployment rate

has dropped to 5.3 percent, the states rainy day fund has increased to approximately 2.033 billion, and new records in trade, film production and tourism have been set.

Gov. Deal's announcement in September 2016 to increase state-level law enforcement pay by 20 percent has led to more trooper applications than any other year. Along with law enforcement pay raises, Gov. Deal addressed his new proposal to increase the pay by 19 percent for DFCS caseworkers. Gov. Deal wants to ensure a competitive salary for those who fill vital roles and wants to retain the best possible candidates to look after our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

Healthcare is another priority Gov. Deal addressed. He will work with members

of the legislature to enhance Medicaid and State Health Benefit Plan for treatments of those diagnosed with autism up to the age of 21. Gov. Deal also proposed his new budget of \$2.5 million dollars which will cover the full child population of Medicaid and Peachcare for those children with behavioral and mental health issues.

Overall, we have a busy session ahead of us as we push Majority Caucus priorities to fruition and work on the Governor's proposals to make our state outstanding.

Thank you to all of my constituents for your involvement and constant care for the 51st District of Georgia. You inspire me to continue fighting for our great state and the "American Dream". Please call or email me with



any questions, comments or concerns you have and I look forward to hearing from you.
Sen. Steve Gooch serves as Majority Whip of the Senate Majority Caucus. He represents the 51st Senate District which includes Dawson, Fannin, Gilmer, Lumpkin, Union and White counties and portions of Forsyth and Pickens counties. He may be reached at 404.656.9221 or via email at steve.gooch@senate.ga.gov.

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