

Opinions

Hydrant Inspections

One of the many non-emergency tasks performed each year by the firefighters of Union County Fire Department is fire hydrant inspections and basic maintenance. Currently, there are over 1,100 fire hydrants in Union County and the number continues to grow.

Union County Fire Department must inspect each hydrant to ensure that it is in good working order and that the department will have water in the event of a fire. Inspecting fire hydrants is also one of the many tasks that we must perform to maintain our Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating of 4/4Y.

Firefighters locate each hydrant and record the GPS location. They then take the caps off and grease them so that they are easier to take off in an emergency. The hydrant is opened or turned-on to ensure that there is water on the system and that the hydrant is in working order; they are not flushed.

Hydrant inspections begin in the late spring and goes on throughout the summer until completed. You may see firefighters in various marked vehicles on the side of the road or in your neighborhood performing these inspections. Please be aware of the move-over law if you see fire vehicles with flashing lights on to ensure the safety of the firefighters checking these hydrants.

One thing that homeowners can do to help with this process is to take the time to look at the hydrants on your property. Fire hydrants that are covered with weeds and brush are not visible or easily accessible in an emergency. If a hydrant is on your property, please take the time to cut the grass and trim around these hydrants to make them more visible and accessible. Make sure that these hydrants are not blocked by gates, retaining walls, vehicles, landscaping or shrubbery.

Remember these hydrants are there to protect you and your neighbors and anything that slows down the process of finding and/or accessing these water sources can seriously affect the outcome of a fire. If you locate a hydrant that looks damaged or is leaking, contact your water department or Union County Fire Department.

Fire hydrant inspections are a very important part of the

See *Dyer, page 5A*

Family Members...

Family Members in Warfare

Depression affects everyone in the family. Those who are victimized by the depressed member may feel confused and bewildered by thoughts and behavior of the depressed one. Because those who are not depressed are at their wit's end, their anger and frustration can dominate the household environment. What can start out as an enjoyable evening can end up like the Gunfight at the O. K. Corral. The atmosphere can grow antagonistic and even vicious over trivial matters.

All ages can be involved, and due to the embarrassment surrounding the illness, some keep it top secret from their mates or their parents. To the family members, when one of the members has become clinically depressed, life itself is intensified, each family member believing that he or she is to blame for what is happening in the family circle.

See *Ashurst, page 5A*

Letters to the Editor

Budget Reconciliation Bill

Dear Editor,

What does the Federal Budget Reconciliation Bill really mean for America? The first thing to understand is this budget bill will add a minimum of \$2.4 trillion to our federal budget. How could this be true?

If the Administration has spent the last five months cutting away at programs – grants for medical research including child cancer research, veterans services, public safety programs, mental health support for police and many more, and also firing many employees at FEMA, the Department of Education, Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services, the National Parks Services and the list goes on, where are the savings being spent?

See *Shirkey, page 5A*

The Full Story

Dear Editor,

Free speech is the oxygen of a civilized nation. The recent letter blaming Georgia's rural hospital closures on our state politicians' refusal to expand Medicaid is a good example of why open debate matters and why we must hold each other accountable for telling the full story, not just the parts that support one narrative.

I fully support the writer's right to express this view. That's what free speech is for. However, if we're going to "look at the facts, not the headlines," as he suggests, let's be sure we include all the facts, especially those that complicate the issue.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government implemented emergency mea-

See *Ripma, page 5A*

Time to Speak Up

Dear Editor and Fellow North Georgians,

As of March 1, 2025, portions of the Chat-tahoochee-Oconee National Forests have been targeted for timber reduction as part of Trump's recent Executive Order (E.O.) 14225 titled "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production." Our region is part of a nationwide directive to increase logging on federal lands. Exact acreage has not yet been identified.

Aligning with this Order, in April 2025, the U.S. Department of Agriculture initiated the Secretary's Memorandum 1078-006 "Increasing Timber Production and Designating an Emergency Situation on National Forest System Lands," and in May 2025, the Forest Service put out the National Active Forest Management Strategy.

See *Spierings-Michael page 5A*

Everybody has one...

An Awakening

On a Saturday in May, over seven thousand people were baptized at an event called Baptize California at Huntington Beach. Skeptics might dismiss it, but what if it is evidence of the latest spiritual awakening?

I say "latest" because it has happened before in America.

In the 1700's an awakening happened with the fervent preaching of Jonathan Edwards. The 1800's awakenings are associated with Charles Finney and D.L. Moody. The 1960's awakening is known as the Jesus Movement. During these awakenings, formerly cold responses to Jesus became hot-hearted conviction resulting in baptisms, church growth, and societal change.

How and when God ordains an awakening is a mystery. What would it look like if a spiritual awakening occurred today? In the first place it would reflect what Jesus meant when he said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

If enough people became baptized followers of Jesus, statistics would show it. In fact, recent polling results could be an early indicator. Pew's latest Religious Landscape Study reports that since 2019, more Americans are identifying as Christian. Barna reports that U.S. adults who have made meaningful personal commitments to Jesus increased from 54% to 66% of the population since 2021, "the clearest indication of meaningful spiritual renewal in the U.S."

Another indicator is what is happening on college campuses. Beginning in 2023, events at Auburn University and others resulted in hundreds of spontaneous baptisms. One of the speakers, Pastor Jonathan Pakluda, said they "went slow to confirm that they were believers." Baptism is the believer's public profession of faith, not a substitute for it. It is the outward sign of an inward change. The organizers of these campus events encourage baptized students to connect with a local church community.

Baptize California had a similar approach. They carefully explained the gospel, invited people to believe, baptized those

See *Fowler, page 5A*

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



From Your Commissioner

With all this rain we have had lately, we are seeing some erosion and muddy situations. When I see a site being graded in the county, two questions come to mind... 1. Is someone building a new home, shop or business? 2. What kind of erosion & sediment issues will we face?

There is a Union County Government Ordinance that states that as a property owner, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are doing everything humanly possible to keep erosion and sedimentation from leaving your property.

Did you know that a building permit must be issued prior to starting a grading project?

Some minor projects may be allowable without a permit, but in these cases, property owners should contact the Building & Development Office to get prior approval. Violation of the ordinance can accrue hefty fines.

Personnel with Building & Development can help you understand what is required to contain and slow down the flow of sediment that comes from a grading project.

In many cases, you may be required by the state to have an approved Erosion & Sedimentation Control Plan prior to commencement of the project.

You also may need a permit for the removal of trees in a designated Mountain Protection area. All streams, creeks, tributaries and Lake Nottely have buffers and possibly designated flood zones in which land disturbing activities are prohibited.

Please help us to keep our county beautiful by protecting our waterways and mountains. The Union County Building & Development office is happy to answer any questions that you have: 706-439-6107.

Some statistics for the month of May, 2025: There were 16 building permits issued for personal residences and 4 issued for spec homes. There were 7 permits issued for Land Disturbance. A total of 1,311 inspections were conducted.

Union County Commissioner

Harold Collins



Chamber 2025

Last week at the Commissioner's meeting, there was an update on all-things County, which included cutting grass on the roadbeds. We are fortunate to live in an area where most people take pride in the community and appreciate the hard work by our road department, keeping the roads clean, safe and looking good. When spring and summer arrive, that includes keeping the grass cut. When people throw trash out their car windows, it not only looks bad, but it costs the road department time and money, which could be spent in other areas. If you enjoy walking in your area, or know others that do, please help keep our roads free of trash and encourage others to help keep our community clean.

The fireworks display and the Appalachian Festival are just around the corner. The fireworks show is free to all, but the Chamber is selling raffle tickets and tee shirts to help defer the cost. Be sure to purchase your tickets to win!

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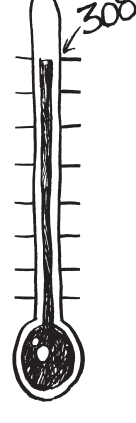
Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe

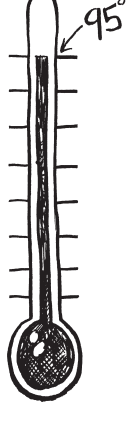


Measuring how hot it is in...

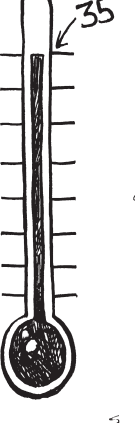
KELVIN



FAHRENHEIT



CELSIUS



KFC



Letters to the Editor

No "Kings" Day

Dear Editor,

Hello my Friends and Neighbors of Union County. There's something that happened on June 14 I'd like to speak with y'all about and, sadly, it's not The Birthday of The Army of The United States. Our Liberal friends held some protests. You may have heard. They called it "No Kings Day." Would you know what I find IRONIC about that? Here we go.

If you haven't noticed lately, President Trump has been trying to keep one of his campaign promises by deporting Illegal Immigrants. Weird, huh? An American President actually doing something he'd said he'd do while he was campaigning for the job. Who would have thought that would ever happen? Liberals and Democrats have taken to the other side of that issue and are demanding that no Illegal Immigrant should be deported, and that includes those that are criminals. Why would they do that? Here's why. Liberals and Democrats have seen their support by minority groups in the U.S. start to fall drastically. That's due to policies they've enacted that have backfired on them. In other words, the Democratic Party is losing a major part of its voting base. By the best estimates we have, the Biden/Harris Administration let in around 10 million-

See *Rains, page 5A*

What About North Georgia?

Dear Editor,

I want to thank North Georgia News for again bringing me the wisdom of Andrew Clyde. This week it was the lawlessness of radical liberals in Los Angeles. In the past he's warned me about leftist taking away our guns, our barbecue grills and our ability to keep our kids straight. The last time I had this kind of conservative warrior fighting for me was Lester Maddox. In fact Clyde got his idea for the AR-15 on his campaign poster from Lester who made the pick handle his weapon of choice for thumping lefties.

Now, I'm pretty conservative but I just wonder if my fellow District 9 voters really want this kind of representation in Washington. Clyde claims to be working for me but I never hear anything from him about North Georgia.

I'm a retired guy and this year Clyde voted against the Social Security Fairness Act. This was a bipartisan bill that allowed firefighters, police and teachers to collect full Social Security benefits. This was a bill introduced by a republican and even Marjorie voted for it.

I've got medical issues and Clyde voted against HR 5378 that would lower drug costs and

See *Neps, page 5A*

Old Myths I Have Heard

When I was a little boy I caught a toad and played with it all one morning while my grandparents were chopping weeds in the cotton field. My grandmother came over to the wagon and tractor where I was playing. When she seen me with the toad she let out a groan. I was told to let go of that toad and wash my hands.

She soon had me convinced that in the next few days I would wake up with warts all over my hands. She told me we would have to go visit Uncle MC Howard who was known for being able to remove warts from people by using magical words.

I worried about them warts all that night and into the morning. Once again we went to the fields to work. I was told not to play with any toads. As I sat under the wagon with nothing to do I noticed a toad nearby. My grandmother's words were still ringing in my ears as I looked at my hands. There were still no warts present. However, I figured since toads caused warts I'd be better off without toads. So, I squished that toad under my foot. By the time my grandparents rested for lunch I had killed four of those wart-causing toads. I thought they would be proud. But, instead my grandmother was quite upset. She told me it was a sure thing their cow would go dry. She went on to explain that if a person killed a toad intentionally the family's milk cow would dry up and produce no milk.

I spent the whole summer with my grandparents. I checked my hands each morning, and 49 years later I still do not have warts. Also, our cow never went dry that summer. But, there was some sound reasoning behind what she told me about the toad and many other things in life. The reason she did not want me playing with toads is that one of the defense mechanisms of the toad is to urinate on the offending person's hands. I am sure this process causes problems for a little boy whose hands are constantly rubbing their eyes and scratching their nose. What about the myth concerning the cow drying up? Well, it is just wrong to mistreat any animal. So, my grandmother was trying to show me there are consequences for my actions.

Later that summer I met some cousins from Chicago. My Papa's youngest sister, Inez, and her husband Uncle John came to see the family and I met Johnny who was about 22 at the time. He told me about a time he had visited our family when he was about my age. He spent a few days with his Uncle Coon and Aunt Glenna, my Grandparents.

One morning he and his brother Harold went with my Dad and Uncle Bud to milk the

See *Cummings, page 5A*

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Fire Ants

Fire ants are very common throughout Georgia. Thankfully, we don't have as many in the mountains as they do south of us. However, once you experience a fire ant bite, you won't ever forget it. Another problem with fire ants is that you rarely get just one bite. Fire ants were first reported in Georgia in the 1950s. They've been found all the way from North Carolina to Texas, and down to Florida. Let's talk about fire ants and things that you can do to control them so that they don't take over your lawn or pasture.

If you can manage to get an up-close look without being bitten and stung, you'll see that fire ants have two nodes between their abdomen at the end of their body and the thorax in the middle of their body. Fire ants generally like to stay in open grassy areas.

Fire ants are most active when temperatures are between 70 and 85. In the fall fire ants are active because they are foraging for food. This makes fall the best time to treat them. Treatment during the spring and summer is also possible, but effective population control will be less likely. When it's really hot during the summer time fire ants will burrow deeper into the ground, making them more difficult to treat. Treatments in the summer are best done in the morning or evening when it's cooler.

Using a bait will be the most effective way of controlling fire ants. Amdro is the main ant bait that is used for fire ants. Broadcast the bait in a circle around each mound. It's important to know that Amdro is not labelled for use in vegetable gardens. It has to be used in scenarios where the plants growing there are not going to be eaten, like your lawn. If a few mounds remain after seven to ten days, a follow up application of Orthene will be effective against those problematic mounds. Take a long stick and quickly put a hole in the center of the mound. Then fill the hole with insecticide to eliminate those mounds. When applying pesticides always make sure to read and follow the label.

I have also seen people using orange oil mixed with soap and other ingredients. This treatment is effective because it eats away the ant's skin. However, it will also kill any other insects, grubs, or worms that are in its path. It could also strip away the outer layer of any roots that it meets.

There are not many biological controls for fire ants in the United States because they are an invasive species. Fire ants are native to South America and have many natural enemies there. Researchers have to be very careful about

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UGA extension - Union County

Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



North Georgia News

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cow. Papa had put up a young steer to fatten and our yankee cousins were told they could milk this cow. The boys asked how that was done and were told to place some sweet feed into the feed bunk. Meanwhile a bucket was to be held under the animal while its tail was to be pumped up and down like one would when pumping water from the well.

Johnny described how he held the bucket under the steer while his brother Harold tried to pump the its tail. The younger cousins must’ve been a very comical sight to their two older cousins. That young steer was bawling and the two older boys were laughing loud enough to get the attention of their Daddy. Papa walked toward the barn stopping to watch the spectacle for a minute. I can just imagine the thoughts running through

his mind when he asked the two younger boys what they were doing?

Harold was the first to respond and explained that last night all of us were talking when I was asked where we got our milk since we didn’t live on a farm. He explained to his cousins that we go to a store to get our milk. “Then Paul told me that you guys get your milk from a cow.” Johnny spoke up and asked how that happened and Bud told us that we could help to get the milk this morning. He further explained, “So we have been out here trying to get this cow to stand still while we pumped its tail. We must not be doing something right because we still do not have any milk.”

As I listened to their story I wanted to tell them that one of them must’ve killed a toad.

Neps... continued from Page 4A

provide more transparency for pricing. He also voted against “The Affordable Insulin Now Act.”

He just recently voted against the Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act. This bipartisan bill covered a host of issues dealing with substance abuse and recovery programs that helped medical staff and first responders deal with a problem that has affected so many people in our community.

And with all his talk on protecting Georgians, just last month he voted against a bill that passed the House with bipartisan support that allows a

President to impose sanctions on certain foreign persons, including Georgian government officials, who are undermining Georgia’s security or stability. Go figure that vote?

Truth is, Clyde, like his godfather Lester Maddox, is the last guy to work for the common good of his constituents. I know a lot of my friends like him because of the gun stuff, but maybe next time The North Georgia News can ask him to do a column about what bipartisan legislation he has introduced that specifically benefits us folks in North Georgia. The gun range doesn’t count.

Dave Neps

Spierings-Michael...continued from Page 4A

The “Fix Our Forests Act” HR 471 (which has already passed the U.S. House) would facilitate Trump’s E.O. pushing for increased logging with the goal of addressing “wildfire risk.”

Some concerns: exclusions that bypass public processes under the National Environmental Policy Act; undermining the Endangered Species Act; minimizing hunting and fishing organizations’ comment and involvement; habitat reduction that will affect vital watersheds, storage of carbon, mature old-growth forests, hunting, fishing, all types of recreation and tourism.

How this directive unfolds in our area has not yet been fully identified.

It is my belief that our Forest Service officials have dedicated their professional lives to the protection and preservation of this vital land. If you take the time to read Trump’s executive order, the language directing this movement calls the situation an “Emergency.” This type of strategy along with the very wide swath of targeted federal lands appears to be roping our good Forest Service into a lose-lose situation.

I urge anyone who has love, use and respect for our local forests to pay attention and speak up. Is this what you voted for? If it isn’t, your congressional representative is only a phone call or letter away.

Julie Spierings-Michael

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sure that expanded Medicaid access and paused eligibility checks. These changes were intended to be temporary and help many people during the crisis, not a permanent policy. Now, years later, we’re simply returning to the original rules and eligibility standards that were in place before the pandemic.

That’s not cruelty. It’s sanity.

Medicaid is a critical safety net, but it was never meant to be a blanket program for able-bodied adults who could otherwise access affordable options or work-based plans. When eligibility rules are ignored or endlessly relaxed, any federally sponsored program becomes unsustainable, inefficient, and vulnerable to abuse. Recent audits of Medicaid have revealed that many individuals remain on the rolls years after they are no longer eligible. That’s not compassion; that’s mismanagement!

And as for rural hospi-

tals: yes, most are under strain. But blaming that entirely on Medicaid policy oversimplifies a complex issue. Hospital closures are also tied to declining rural populations, rising costs, staffing shortages, and outdated systems. Pouring more tax dollars into Medicaid expansion won’t fix those root problems, but it does mask them.

Instead of demanding endless government expansion, we should be calling for targeted reform: to protect the truly vulnerable, root out inefficiencies, and make Medicaid stronger – not bigger – and intelligently managed for the long term.

In the end, let’s have a real debate, not just an echo chamber of headlines. We owe it to our nation, our state, and the truth. And, don’t be so quick to blame local politicians, just because they happen to support the current administration’s policies.

John Ripma

Shirkey... continued from Page 4A

The current budget bill being considered by the Senate, which was already passed by the House of Representatives (although a number of the House members admitted they had not actually read the entire 1,000-page bill), has so much in it that makes no sense, or will hurt many Americans.

Do you want to pay \$175 billion to have a Gold Dome Defense System to protect us, but cut Healthcare and Food to Americans? Keep in mind the Pentagon has not passed an audit in seven years.

Do you want an Artificial Intelligence regulation that would place a moratorium on state enforcement of any laws or regulations related to AI models or systems for 10 years? How does this relate to approving a budget?

Do you want reductions and cuts that economists have confirmed will hurt families, seniors, people with disabilities and rural communities – resulting in some rural hospitals closing?

Do you want the tax cuts that are proposed – where nearly 60% of these cuts will go to households making \$217,000 or more? Other economists predict those making over

\$460,000 or more will receive about one-third of the benefits.

I tried to find out from U.S. Congress members what cuts they are making to their budget, and no one could provide that. Our House of Representatives receive an allocation of approximately \$1.45 million annually for staff salaries, office expenses, travel and food – does that seem reasonable? Not to me.

Call your Congress Representatives with questions, since I believe this bill is so big, because some are hoping not many will read it.

Kristie Shirkey

Ashurst...

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The home-sweet-home becomes a war zone. Being around the depressed person becomes exhausting, and all members are more irritable than usual. The depressed person becomes isolated and can feel like a burden to the rest of the family. Sometimes family members tend to be somewhere else when the depressed person is present. This hurts the depressed individual beyond words.

Rains.. continued from Page 4A

plus Illegal Immigrants. Add to that another one million-plus “Gotaways.” If Liberals and Democrats had their way, each and every one of those people would be granted immediate U.S. citizenship with all the rights and privileges that entails. Now, who do you think those new “Instant Citizens” would vote for in future elections? The Political Party that got them their “Instant Citizenship?” Or the Political Party that actively tried to deport them and uphold the rule of law? Of course, we all know the answer. They’d vote Democrat. Remember, Kamala Harris only lost to Trump by around 2.5 million votes. Imagine what at least five million new and motivated Democratic Party voters would do? For the foreseeable future the entire political demographic of the United States would be completely changed. No one would be able to defeat any Democrat politician. That would effectively make those politicians “Kings.” So when you hear Liberals and Democrats proudly saying their new motto, “No Kings,” what they’re really saying is “No Kings but OUR KINGS.”

On another note to all Liberals and Democrats. I’ve been reading your OP/EDs critical of the President and his policies. I would in no way want to try to stop you from voicing your opinions. That being said, all I can say to y’all is this. After the last 4-plus years of y’all and y’all’s preferred media channels and sites lying to us EVERY DAY about the cognitive and overall health of Joe Biden, his “fitness” as President, what’s really been going on in the country and at the borders, we don’t really care what you have to say anymore. Perhaps, if y’all hadn’t been lying to us the entire time, that might be different, but we both know you were lying. Just today before I wrote this there was an OP/ED in the paper. The writer said they didn’t care if you’re an “R” or a “D.” The writer sounded like an Independent, but all that writer did in their OP/ED was rail against President Trump’s policies and those of Republicans. It seems that Liberals

Fowler...

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who did, and connected them to a community of believers. Pastor Mark Francey said that about 500 local churches and 30 local pastors participated in the event. “Churches are working together in unprecedented ways around Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples and baptize the nation,” he said. “A spiritual awakening has begun in California, one that will sweep from the beaches to the neighborhoods of America, and to the nations of the world.”

The heart of the believer leaps at the thought of someone receiving Christ and living the faithful, repentant life. For the unbeliever, reports of spiritual awakening in America are meaningless unless it touches you personally. Think about it. Has Someone been calling you to wake up? “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

Williams...

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introducing a natural predator, because the effects of that introduced species are unknown on our ecosystem.

If you have any questions about fire ants and fire ant control, contact your County Extension Office or send me an email at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Chamber...

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over \$3,000 worth of prizes or get this year’s T-shirt before they are gone. Help continue the tradition of Fireworks in the Park. The winning ticket will be drawn on July 4th just before the Fireworks. Thank you for all you do to keep Life Better in Blairsville.

Dyer...

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job of firefighting. Union County Fire Department places a great deal of man-hours and effort into the inspection and maintenance of each hydrant. With your help, we will be able to locate and utilize the hydrants in a fire emergency.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

and Democrats can’t even admit to themselves that they’re actually Liberals and Democrats. They sound like they’re in the middle while they only attack one side’s policies. If y’all Liberals and Democrats would stop doing one thing, you’d find yourselves a lot better off. What’s that one thing? Stop lying.

Claude Rains Jr.