

North Georgia News

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Commissioner Paris supports House Bill 173

By Charles Duncan
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Lamar Paris

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris has adopted a resolution in support of House Bill 173 which allows Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax Revenues to be used for maintenance and operation of facilities formerly or currently built with SPLOST funds and borrowing of funds from SPLOST on a short-term basis.

costs would be required to be included in the SPLOST ballot language. Presently, SPLOST funds can only be utilized for new equipment purchases and construction while no provisions are available to maintain and repair facilities constructed by SPLOST funds.

lution to make it public that Union County Government is in full support of this change in the SPLOST law," Commissioner Paris said. In other business, Commissioner Paris approved a three-year contract with Mauldin & Jenkins, Certified Public Accountants, LLC to conduct the annual audit for Union County. The actual written contract is pending review, he said. "There were three bids, Walker and Assoc. \$34,910, RL Jennings & Assoc., \$38,000 and Mauldin & Jenkins at \$37,000. Although Mauldin & Jenkins were the second lowest bidder, we felt that their size, experience and references were superior," he said. "I want to publicly thank R. L. Jennings for accurately and successfully completing our audit for the past several years," he said. "We were not

dissatisfied with their work product, but they were simply unable to produce the product in a timely manner. "Our audit has been late for the past two years and we would receive a penalty should that happen this year," he said. "They simply seemed to have more work than they could complete, but we very much appreciate their past work with and for the county." Commissioner Paris also approved a master equipment lease-purchase agreement between Ford Motor Credit and Union County for eight 2011 Crown Victoria Police cars for the Union County Sheriff's Office. at a cost of \$215,200. There will be three annual lease payments of \$75,235.01 each, Paris said. "These vehicles may

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Early vote for ESPLOST is now under way

By Charles Duncan
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Early voting for the March 19th special election for an extension of the current Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is underway in Union County. Early voting began Monday to extend the sales tax. If approved, the local sales tax would remain at 7 percent. Union County Registrar Diana Nichols said early voting is from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday through March 15th. "We won't be voting on Saturdays this time, that's only for federal elections," she said. "We've already had one voter today." Ballots will be cast at

the Registrar's Office at the Union County Courthouse. The special election will be held March 19th and is the only item on the ballot, Nichols said. Under the sales tax extension, the school system projects to collect \$21 million for acquiring, constructing and equipping new school system facilities, including classroom additions, an agricultural sciences center, a field house and a multi-use auditorium, according to the legal advice submitted for publication to the *North Georgia News*. The ESPLOST would be for a period of five years. The funds also would include adding to, renovating, repairing, improving, and equipping existing school

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ESPLOST Committee hosts information session for voters; answer questions

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer



ESPLOST Committee member Jim Williams gives a breakdown of why a sales tax extension is necessary for the school system. Photo/Todd Forrest

Jim Williams and County Agent Mickey Cummings presented their case for an extension of the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, coming up for a vote on March 19th. The two made the argument for continuing the penny sales tax to a group of mostly Athletic and Band booster members at the Union County High School Cafeteria last week. Williams and Cummings were asked by ESPLOST supporters in November if they would be interested in serving on the ESPLOST Committee. "I told them I would," Cummings said. "We came together for a meeting and someone asked me why I was interested in this since I didn't have kids in the school system anymore. "I told them that my kids had already benefited from the best school system in the state," he said. "Now I want it to remain the best school system in the state." When Cummings finished, he turned the floor over

to Williams who began by giving some background information on the ESPLOST. According to Williams, years ago the Georgia Legislature would allocate funds to the local school systems for capital expenditures. "That worked well until the early to mid-90s," Williams said. "When Georgia began experiencing an explosive growth, \$200 million dollars a

Paris backs ESPLOST extension

By Charles Duncan
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris told those attending last week's Commission meeting at the Union County Courthouse that he will support an extension of the 1-cent Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax on the March 19th ballot. "The Education SPLOST that the Union County School System will have on the ballot in March has and will continue to be an issue in the local paper and in the public," he said. "No one will ever agree with all the school projects they fund with our ESPLOST dollars any more than they will ever agree with me on all the projects I fund with our SPLOST."

Paris told those attending that our Democracy was designed for the public to vote on the elected representatives of the people and for those elected officials to represent the voters. "It is not designed for everyone that does not agree with everything, to be able to get their way," he said. "I have been told by some very smart people for me to keep my nose out of this election because the county will have a SPLOST election next year and will need the support of the people." Paris said voting 'yes' to ESPLOST is as simple as 'ABC.' "I am speaking up tonight to make a simple common sense statement," he said. "I am a property owner. Me and my family pay thousands of dollars each year in proper-

ty taxes. I know if the school ESPLOST fails this year or the county SPLOST were to fail next year, my property taxes will go up significantly and so will yours." Another point, Paris said the county's tourism industry contributes mightily toward the ESPLOST. "Why would we vote against a school ESPLOST or county SPLOST, knowing that those who simply pass through our county and visit, work or shop here will pay for roughly 35 percent of the taxes for us. Why would we want to give that up?" He said if voters don't agree with the manner the funds are spent, the ballot box is the place to remedy the dispute. "Now if you do not

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Butler: 'God sent Woody Gap a STAR'

By Charles Duncan
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U.S. Rep. Doug Collins, R-9th District, presents Haley Aponte with recognition from Washington celebrating her as Woody Gap's STAR Student. Photo/Charles Duncan

Haley Elise Aponte gives her STAR Teacher Gary Butler ample credit for her success as a student at Woody Gap School. "I've had Mr. Butler as a homeroom teacher the past four years," she told a crowd of almost 150 people at the Annual Blairsville/Union County Chamber of Commerce's STAR Student/Teacher Luncheon at the Union County Community Center sponsored by Modern Woodmen Fraternity. "I've always liked him as a person," she said. "I chose him as my STAR Teacher because he has been an inspiration to me. I've never met a person so engaged and willing to help out a other people. "He has encouraged me in my Christian Walk by example and by word of mouth," she said. Aponte grew up in the Lumpkin County School System. By the time she arrived at Woody Gap School, she felt she was behind her new classmates, and her grades reflected that. However, in time, the now Woody Gap senior, began to catch up. Smaller class sizes at Woody Gap allowed her to have more one-on-one

time with her instructors. Soon, she was an 'A' student. Butler was Haley Elise Aponte's biggest fan. "I remember one conversation where he told me never to give up being the way I am," she said. "Little did he know that at that point in my life, I was very down on myself and my faith. "Those words brightened my day and every time I started having those feelings again, I remembered what he said and it inspired me to do better," she said. "Also, he's done an incredible job helping my senior class get ready, especially with the yearbook," she said. "I'm proud to be Woody Gap School's STAR Student, and Gary Butler is one of the main reasons I'm talking with you today." See Aponte, Page 3A

STAR Teacher an example for Romano

By Charles Duncan
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Nic Romano

STAR teachers don't mean to upstage their STAR students, but, sometimes it just happens. Brett Chatham showed why Nic Romano chose him as his STAR Teacher when he lit up a crowd of almost 150 people at the Union County Community Center where the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce honored the community's best and its brightest. The affable and unflappable Chatham kept the crowd at ease as he ad-libbed a speech he didn't write. Accompanied by the 2012 STAR Teacher Amy Payne, the other half of Union County's Mock Trial coaching team, Chatham made up his speech as he went along. Chatham told the crowd that he asked Payne to accom-

pany him to the event because his wife was unable to attend. "That's because we (Chatham and his wife) haven't met yet," he said, sparking uproars of laughter from the crowd. He continued with his side-splitting monologue, making quick fun of his cohort on Mock Trial, Payne.

"When we arrived (he and Payne), we were approached by a lady that knew Amy was the STAR Teacher last year," he said. "She asked Amy if I was her STAR Student this year." Chatham quickly corrected the lady, telling her that, no, he wasn't the STAR Student, he was the STAR Teacher. For Romano, his STAR Teacher had him rolling in the aisles as well. The senior, possibly headed to Stanford University, said Chatham has long inspired him. "I had him as a Civics teacher as a freshman," Romano said. "I have to be honest, I had no idea I could learn what I did in that class. We read some of those George Orwell books, 1984. "He taught me a lot about questioning, questioning situations and striving for

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Rep. Collins ready for battle in D.C.

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U.S. Rep. Doug Collins

U.S. Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA) says he believes his 9th Congressional District constituents won't have to worry about challenges to the Second Amendment any time soon. With a national push to come up with a certain measure of gun control following incidents that include a shooting at Newtown, Conn.'s Sandy Hook Elementary and the shooting of a school bus driver and kidnapping of a 5-year-old child from that bus in Alabama, Rep. Collins knows there's a looming

battle on Capitol Hill. "I'm firmly against what's happening in Wash-

ington with gun control," said Rep. Collins, who represents Union County in U.S. House of Representatives. "It's got to come through the Judiciary Committee, which I'm a part of, and I don't foresee anything coming of that." He'll be ready to take the House Floor when it does come up for a vote. Immigration is another hot topic in Washington, DC, said Rep. Collins, a Gainesville Republican. "I think we'll see something on immigration before the August recess," he said. "We're hopeful that we'll see something worked out. Above

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