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also wanted to build a new terminal.

"The overall goal was to bring in new prospects from Georgia Economic Development," Sen. Gooch said. "They fly prospects in from all over the state. To have a good airport, you have to have a good approach and a long runway to get jets in and out."

With a new terminal, complete with a meeting room, city and county leaders, as well as chamber of commerce leaders, could fly prospects into Union County, meet with them at the airport and lay the groundwork for new industry locating within the county.

"When this terminal is

complete, the city and county will be able to bring prospects in here and acquaint them with the area and possibly bring new industry into the community," Sen. Gooch said. "This will be a small regional airport to be used for economic development for the entire region."

"Funding for transportation has been a challenge all over the nation, not just here in Georgia," Sen. Gooch said. "Last year when we passed House Bill 170, the Transportation Investment Act, we were able to put more money into DOT projects like this."

"I'm now the chairman of the Appropriations Committee on Transportation and was basically able to appro-

priate the funds for this project this past year," Sen. Gooch said. "We put \$600,000 in the budget for the Blairsville Terminal."

"The total is \$1.4 million for the projects," Sen. Gooch said. "We're proud to help our communities in Georgia. But, my goal is to do everything I can for my district. I work well with the city and the county and continue to look forward to that relationship."

The City will open the bids for the terminal project on May 19, and go to the Georgia Department of Transportation with a contract on May 24, Mayor Conley said.

"We'll have a called City Council meeting to ap-



Lamar Paris

prove that contract," Mayor Conley said. "As soon as DOT gets the contract back to

us and gives us the go ahead, then we'll give the one who gets the bid the go ahead to move forward with the project.

"I'm thinking 90 days for build out on this project," Mayor Conley said. "There are a lot of factors involved once we review the bids."

"A lot of factors will be addressed at the pre-bid meeting that takes place here at the airport on May 12," Mayor Conley said. "We've got three local contractors interested in this project."

Sen. Gooch said having local contractors also means keeping the money local.

"That's our goal too," Sen. Gooch said. "This work can stay local and the city

won't have to bring in a big general contractor from Atlanta. It's possible they can hire someone local for this project."

"We don't do this job for the money, but, I really enjoy helping out," Sen. Gooch said. "I was a sole commissioner in Lumpkin County before I became a State Senator. Lamar Paris (Union County Sole Commissioner) and I have become close friends over the years and we work well together."

"Anytime I can help Union County and the City of Blairsville, I work hard to try to help my constituents," Sen. Gooch said. "It's an honor to serve."

Clinton...from Page 1A

by Independent candidate for Towns County Sheriff, Linda Curtis.

Curtis alleged that Sheriff Clinton filed a false affidavit when he qualified for sheriff. She proved that Sheriff Clinton was convicted in 1987 in Union County for misdemeanor theft by receiving stolen property. She spent 19 hours researching convictions in the Union County Clerk of Courts Office, she said.

"Did we lose here today?" she asked. "No, we won here today because the people of Towns County will now know that their elected Sheriff has a previously undisclosed criminal record."

According to Union County Superior Court records, Christopher Michael Clinton was arrested by Union County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Ronnie Duncan in September 1987 for buying a 9mm Smith & Wesson handgun from Mark Lenwood Droze, knowing that the gun had been stolen from Alexander's Store, in Union County.

The arrest took place in the former Hardee's parking lot in Blairsville, now the location of Burger King, court records show.

The Elections Board left Sheriff Clinton on the ballot based on an exemption allowed by the state, "the above required qualifications shown above in (D), (E), (F), (H), (I), and (J) shall be deemed to have been met by any person who is currently serving as a duly qualified and elected Sheriff of one of the several counties of this state."

The most important part of the affidavit that was signed is subsection (F), "I have not been convicted of a felony offense or any offense involving moral turpitude contrary to the laws of this state, any other state, or the United States; provided, however, that a plea of nolo contendere to a felony offense or any offense involving moral turpitude contrary to the laws of this state shall have the same effect as a plea of guilty, thereby disqualifying such a person from holding the office of Sheriff."

Sheriff Clinton said the crime he pleaded guilty to is not a crime of moral turpitude.

"I have never lied," Sheriff Clinton said. "I've had my fingerprints done at the direction of the probate judge every time I've run for sheriff. I've never lied. I was a teenager once 30 years ago. I got me some traffic tickets; I even got arrested one time. That is not a felony or crime of moral turpitude. They (Elections Board) know that, and they didn't say it because they wanted off the hook. And this thing is going to drag out through the primary."

"She (Linda Curtis) has nothing to run on, and so it's real interesting to me, that this thing comes up on the Friday before early voting begins," Sheriff Clinton said. "And now, rather than say what they (Elections Board) should have said in there, they tiptoed around it and said, 'Well, yeah, the sheriff's qualified, but we'll kick it to the district attorney about this other, whether he lied or not.' Well, if I'm qualified, then I didn't lie. That was getting off the hook, and I'm offended at that."

"That being said, this whole dog and pony show has been set up to cast a doubt over the sheriff through the primary," Sheriff Clinton said.

In a statement from Sheriff Clinton's legal counsel, Stewart, Melvin, and Frost, a Gainesville-based law firm, the claim that Sheriff Clinton is not qualified to hold the office of sheriff because as a teenager 30 years ago he pled guilty and was convicted of a misdemeanor theft by taking/ receiving stolen property offense, does not amount to a valid challenge to his current candidacy.

"It is simply a mean-



Towns County Board of Elections Co-Chair Mark Dehler, left, explains that any criminal questions must be answered by the district attorney, regarding allegations of false swearing by Sheriff Clinton. Photo/ Shawn Jarrard

spirited political effort to discredit a man who has served Towns County honorably and with integrity for the last 8 years and more," according to the statement.

"In 2007 when he first sought the office of sheriff and qualified as a candidate, the fingerprint criminal record check supervised by the Probate Judge disclosed the conviction, and the judge did not consider such misdemeanor to be a "crime involving moral turpitude" that would disqualify Clinton from holding the office of sheriff."

"Sheriff Clinton has NEVER denied the conviction. He has never had another conviction – felony or misdemeanor -- in the ensuing thirty years."

"That his political opponents attempt to label theft by receiving stolen property an offense involving moral turpitude – more than eight

years after Sheriff Clinton first qualified for office and 30 years after his guilty plea – begs the question.

"The FACTS are that in 2007 Clinton was vetted by the Probate Court and others, and was found qualified under Georgia law to serve as sheriff. In the two subsequent election cycles, Clinton signed the requisite Affidavit for Sheriff swearing that he was qualified under Georgia law as the incumbent sheriff to hold the office for another term. By signing the Affidavit for Sheriff each time he ran, Clinton did not swear he had never been convicted of a felony or other offense involving moral turpitude; what he swore to was that he was qualified to hold the public office he sought: Sheriff of Towns County."

"His qualifications were determined back in 2007 and nothing since 2007 has disqualified him to serve."