

Paris ...continued from Page 4A

students. Why would we not want to continue to support the progress of our school system?

Q. If the Education SPLOST passes does that mean that our school system has to sell bonds to finance construction costs of projects?

A. No. That decision will be made when it is decided which projects will be completed first. However, the bond option is always part of the referendum to speed up project completion. While I hear some people saying they want the school board to prioritize the projects prior to the election, it is really not practical. It all depends on sales tax collections. If the economy improves and sales taxes exceed estimates, then the priorities could change. If a certain priority is given prior to the election, the school board is stuck with it.

Q. Why would the school want to borrow money through use of a bond?

A. A few years ago when construction prices were constantly increasing yearly, it was best to borrow the money at the start of the ESPLOST and then have the projects completed and ready for student use. The amount of money paid in interest on the bonds was usually much less than the inflation rate and cost of construction over the five year period, so it simply made sense.

The same is true today but for different reasons. Now, with interest rates so low, the school will probably be able to borrow some of the funds up front, with an interest rate well under 2 percent and possibly near or under 1 percent. With the low cost of interest, needed projects could be completed in the first couple of years instead of waiting the full five years to collect all the revenue. It is also very likely that interest and inflation will begin to increase prior to another five years, and the school will be so much ahead financially.

Q. I do not like the ESPLOST because it gives the school system some discretionary money to spend and in these tight times, we do not need to waste any money. Why are we having an election on ESPLOST anyway?

A. The SPLOST sales tax system was set up years

ago to allow improvements to counties and school systems by giving them the opportunity to afford projects that we use to only dream about. I remember when the first school was built with SPLOST funds in Union County and it was just unbelievable that our small county was going to be able to have new facilities to match many large metro areas.

Q. You said in the newspaper last week that you would vote for the ESPLOST. Why?

A. There really are several reasons, but the most important to me is that as a property taxpayer, why would I want to vote to increase my property taxes, when a sales tax is paid by everyone? Those who visit, shop, rent, and sightsee, will all help pay the sales tax which will help keep our property taxes lower. All the burden of operating our school system will not fall just to the property owners, but everyone that makes a purchase in Union County will help pay to educate our children. Seems pretty simple and fair to me.

Q. I thought the ESPLOST sales tax could not be used to operate our schools but was only for capital improvements? Why will defeating the tax cause property taxes to increase?

A. Look at some of the ESPLOST projects. School buses (property tax money), security improvements (property tax money) new classrooms (property tax money), technology upgrades (property tax money), heat and air system upgrades (property tax money). So if we can pay for all of these projects with sales tax dollars and it is something we will have to purchase anyway, why not let everyone help pay for it and not just the property owners. Property taxes are all due right before Christmas along with insurance, Christmas gifts and bad weather. Sales tax is paid just a little at a time throughout the year and in most cases it does not create the same financial burden. Yes, it is still a tax, but it is a very FAIR tax and the reason that it is so popular for so many people who want to replace income tax with sales tax.

Q. Does the school system have anything to do with

jobs in our county or the future of our county?

A. You bet it does. The education system is one of the first things that industry or commercial developers look at in a community. They know that if you have a great education system, it will be easy to get people to move to the area and easier to find a good educated work force that can easily be trained. It means jobs for our future.

Q. How will great facilities help us attract new industry and jobs?

A. Most parents have a student involved in some type of extra curricular activity. Whether it is sports, clubs, chorus, band, cheerleading, plays, or many others, we should all want our kids to have the best we can provide for them. Facilities alone do not make a great student, but it can be the difference in influencing kids to try and be a part of something very special in a nice facility. If you were a business owner and you are considering moving your business to a new town, then not only a top quality education is important, but top notch facilities also are critical.

Q. Do other counties become jealous of our facilities?

A. How many times have you been to another stadium, county, school, or college, and said, "I wish we had one of those in our town."

Well, there are still some of those facilities that we do not have. It makes me proud when I hear folks say, "I wish we had a park like Union County's Meeks Park, or I wish we had school facilities like Union County."

What makes me especially proud is when they say, "How can Union County and the School system have such low tax rates, yet such outstanding facilities." It comes from management and leadership. When your county and school property tax rate is ranked sixth lowest in the entire state of Georgia out of 159 counties, I think we should be proud and willing to continue to support our children through voting yes for ESPLOST.

Q. Are we in competition with our neighbors in attracting industry and jobs to Union County?

A. You better believe we are and we better have every advantage possible. Prior to the downturn in the economy, there were enough people moving to the mountains and looking for places to locate business so that everyone was busy. But now it is a new world and new set of circumstances. If we want to attract, we have to be attractive. It is that simple. We do not want to waste money, but we also need to prepare for our future.

Q. I do not agree with all the projects that are on the ballot so why don't I just vote against all of them?

A. That is certainly your choice, but do you really want to throw the baby out with the bath water? Do you want to vote against the sales tax knowing that any future improvements and necessary purchases for the school system will have to be paid for with property tax increases? Why would we want to let that happen just because we do not agree with every single project? So we vote against ESPLOST and then cause our property taxes to increase. Just how smart is that?

Q. Why, for example, would we want to waste tax money on a multi purpose/fine arts auditorium?

A. What are we telling our kids and their parents when we vote against an ESPLOST and supporting programs that we can afford and that will only improve our education system?

The multi-purpose/fine arts auditorium, classroom space for band, chorus and possibly drama will be included. It would be a place to showcase the leadership of our students

through various presentations. Currently approximately 1/3 of students in grades 6-12 are enrolled in band or chorus. Also the opportunities this type of facility will offer our community will be amazing. Fannin County uses their Fine Arts Auditorium about 240 days in the year with many of those events being for the entire community, from public forums, popular music concerts, charity auctions and many more. My opinion is that this facility would really compliment our Community Center and both will play a large role in attracting new business and jobs to our community, not to mention the positive impact for our students.

Q. I think the school wasted money on the new football stadium and putting AstroTurf on the field instead of keeping teachers off furlough days. Why was that done?

A. Your thought process may be good, but it is simply wrong. First, ESPLOST funds CAN NOT be used to pay teachers. Instead of spending millions of dollars on a new football stadium, the school board instead chose to upgrade the current stadium. It probably saved a couple of million dollars and now we have something to be extremely proud of. If you have not been to the football stadium, you are missing a treat and probably one of the most beautiful stadiums in Georgia for its size. What else can we ask from our school officials?

Q. What do you think about one of the local political parties deciding to come out against the ESPLOST and our children?

A. This ESPLOST should have absolutely NOTHING to do with politics. It is one of the most baffling things I have seen in our county in the many years since we started to come out of the dark ages. Why any "group" would want to come out against our students and teachers is a puzzle to me and an embarrassment to our county. Why don't we just kick our school family in the gut because they have all worked so hard to have one of the highest graded school systems in the state and now this group is simply going to vote against our students, teachers and administration. It makes no sense to me.

We elected our school board representatives to handle the policy for our school system and working with staff, to determine the projects to be accomplished with ESPLOST. Since they were duly elected, we should let them do their job. Have I always agreed with the school system? Certainly not. I also have not always agreed with their ESPLOST choices. But when I have been to a girls' softball game, it makes me very proud to see our new softball stadium and I am just as proud of our football stadium as I am our new schools and classrooms. We are very lucky and blessed in Union County.

Even though you may not have any kids in school, everyone benefits from a well educated society.

We should all be very proud of our education system here in the mountains, including North Georgia Technical College and Young Harris College, and be willing to support them to the extent possible and reasonable.

Turner

...continued from Page 4A

to former State Rep. Carlton Colwell, but he could not remember any details. I am assuming that this was originally under different funding and later got transferred to SPLOST.

I am at your service in helping resolve this issue for the preservation of Woody Gap School and community.

**Janie Turner
Retired teacher**

Parris ...continued from Page 4A

sin, death and hell. His spirit has brought a new and living way to all of those who will allow Him to breathe His life into them. There are a lot of windbags in our generation who are blowing in a different direction from God. Some are pretty blustery and a lot of folks are blown about by every wind of doctrine. Elijah found out that God was not in every wind, no matter if it could break the rocks in pieces (1 Kings 19:11). Vast numbers of our generation refuse to make decisions until they see which

way the wind is blowing (Ecc. 11:4). They want to see the latest poll or see what their favorite group is saying before they speak. We don't need to catch the spirit of the age; we need to catch God's spirit. My prayer for my fellow ministers and myself is that we may have God breathe upon us and through us. As we gather Sunday, I pray that we could hear in our congregations "the sound as of a rushing mighty wind" (Acts 2:2). God help me not to be a windbag, but help me to be a prophet!

Mitchell ...continued from Page 4A

importance of ecclesiastical systems.

Protestantism focused on the centrality of the individual Soul in its relationship to The Creator.

That emphasis on the Individual and on his or her personal search for The Creator was the foundation of Capitalism which, like Protestantism, is all about the Individual and what he or she makes of life.

The phrase, "separation of church and state" came from a letter which Jefferson wrote to the Danbury, Conn. Baptists. It was an affirmation of Jefferson's absolute opposition to a State church at the same time that it was confirmation of his belief in the responsibility of each individual to determine the degree

of his or her own financial success and the depth of his or her relationship with The Creator.

That phrase has been taken out of context and twisted beyond Jefferson's original message. The First Amendment is crystal-line: The Congress "shall make no law" endorsing or establishing a particular religion.

What the States do with their observances, what individuals do with their belief, is not given to Congress - or to the courts - to regulate.

That is the foundation - and intent - of the First Amendment.

That is the long and the short of it.

**George Mitchell
Blairsville**

Adams ... continued from Page 4A

"In case a man strikes any soul [Hebrew, nephesh] of mankind fatally, he should be put to death without fail. And the fatal striker of the soul [Hebrew, nephesh] of a domestic animal should make compensation for it, soul for soul." (Notice that the same Hebrew word for soul is applied to both mankind and animals.)

Our property joined the Allen's and I knew Mercy personally. She had a beautiful soul and I came to care for her as if she were a friend. Her senseless torture and murder sickens me still, and I pray that Justice will be served to her murderers. I also pray that these killers come to fully realize what they did to a helpless innocent soul and that they are plagued with that guilt and feel the hurt they caused all the days of their lives.

I too wish this kind of evil did not exist in our peaceful little community just as I wish it did not exist at all, but the sad fact is that it does exist and it needs to be exposed and addressed for what it is. What about the poor dog who was shot and killed last week while walking with its owner on a trail in the woods? How many times have we read a similar story

in our newspaper? There are people in our community who will shoot any dog or cat that comes onto their property for no other purpose than to take a life. Someone shot and killed two of my neighbors registered Angus cows while they were grazing in his pasture. An abandoned dog walked up on the front porch of another friend's neighbor's house with his tail wagging, probably hoping for a handout or some attention, but instead the neighbor shot the dog in its face and killed him. Someone else threw a box of five puppies out of a car traveling at high speed, three of which died or were ran over by traffic. My friend who witnessed this horror was able to rescue two of the puppies and gave them a home. She is one of our local heroes who help make Blairsville the wonderful place it is, but the perpetrators of these crimes went scot-free. I beg everyone reading this letter to please speak up and report these atrocities to our Animal Control officers who now have the authority to arrest these people. Then maybe we can go back to reading good news in our local paper.
**John Q. Adams III
Blairsville**