

The Georgia merry-go-round

Gov. Sonny Perdue seemed to be having such a good time with his budget veto pen last week, sticking it in the eye of the House leadership and several other groups not on especially friendly terms with His Excellency.

Smiling from ear to ear, Perdue whacked charter school funds, approved hefty sums for bass fishing, blotted out cash for mental health activities and handed out more raises for teachers. He also performed a great good deed: He signed Sen. Jeff Chapman's bill to protect Jekyll Island from ruin. It was whoopee time for Perdue. He looked so happy that he obviously didn't hear the thunder just over the next hill.

Georgia is headed for a multibillion-dollar prison crisis. We are running out of

bed space for bad guys. The Georgia inmate population is expanding at a high-speed clip — from 18,500 in 1987 to 37,000 in 1997 to 54,227 as of last week. And we have stopped building prisons. Thanks to Georgia's overall population increase, illegal drug trafficking and the state's rigid "two strikes" law, no end to the growth is in sight.

Local sheriffs complain that they must sometimes house state inmates in local jails for months or even years, because state corrections facilities are too crowded. Whether Georgia solves the problem is not an option. Experts say the federal courts could take charge of the prisons if something is not done soon. It has happened before.

In the 1970s, federal Judge Anthony A. Alaimo of

Shipp's Georgia



Bill Shipp

Brunswick was so shocked at the state of affairs at Reidsville State Prison that he put the U.S. courts in charge of the entire prison system, a supervision that ended only in the 1990s.

More recently, Atlanta federal Judge Marvin Shoob took over the supervision of the Fulton County jail because of overcrowding and other sorry conditions.

In California, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger hammered out a compromise plan in late April, persuading lawmakers to approve \$8 billion for construction of 53,000 new inmate beds

and to move 8,000 convicts to other states. Nobody seems happy with that plan, adopted under pressure from both state and federal courts to reduce overcrowding or face letting the lockups slide into receivership.

Georgia may soon confront a similar choice, yet there may be a better and less costly way to avoid the full impact of the calamity — deal with the "revolving door" recidivism.

LaGrange businessman Charles D. Hudson was appointed to the Board of Corrections by Gov. Joe Harris in the 1980s and has been reappointed by every governor since. As chairman of the board in early 2006, he named a special committee headed by Madison attorney Rob Jones to study Georgia's recidivism.

The rate of recidivism is defined as how many of those released are arrested and convicted again and who are back into state prisons within three years. That figure was at 27 percent in 2006 — meaning that more than one in four offenders is back in state jails within 36 months.

Corrections Commissioner James E. Donald says that 70 percent of the recidivists are either using drugs, selling drugs or committing a crime in some kind of drug/alcohol stupor. Donald, who retired from the Army as a major general after 33 years of service, believes that instituting drug treatment programs can slow the return rate.

Echoing Donald's concerns, the board's Hudson adds that the recidivism could be cut with more

treatment within corrections and continued on the outside. "It's going to take funding," he says, "but imagine if we could cut that 27 percent by even 10 percent. It would more than pay for itself."

Of course, a drug treatment program might be just the beginning. Georgia could still be required to take additional dramatic and expensive steps on a California scale to bring the problem under control. According to a 2004 Corrections survey, the Peach State's merry-go-round prisons are one of the state's major growth industries. Only Texas and California rank ahead of us in adding more inmates each year.

Hal Gulliver, an Atlanta attorney and former editor of the Atlanta Constitution, contributed to this column.

Jack Murtha's friends with money

Democrats controlling the House of Representatives demonstrated this month the hollowness of their claim that they have ended the corruption of 12 Republican years. Rep. John Murtha quietly slipped into the Intelligence authorization bill two earmarks costing taxpayers \$5.5 million. The beneficiary was a contractor headquartered in Murtha's hometown of Johnstown, Pa., whose executives have been generous political contributors to the powerful 17-term congressman.

This scandalous conduct would be unknown except

for reforms by the new Democratic majority. But the remodeled system is not sufficiently transparent to expose in a timely manner machinations of Murtha and fellow earmarkers to his colleagues, much less to the public. It took Republican Rep. Jeff Flake of Arizona, the leading House earmark-buster, to discover the truth.

Jack Murtha, the maestro of imposing personal preferences on the appropriations process, looks increasingly like an embarrassment to Congress and the Democratic Party. But there is no Democratic will to

Other Voices



Robert Novak

curb Murtha, one of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's closest associates. Nor are Republicans eager for a crackdown endangering their own earmarks.

On May 10, as the Intelligence bill neared passage, Flake took the floor of the House to relate how Capitol Hill works. Told there were no earmarks attached to the bill, a skeptic

Flake sought the measure's classified annex but was sent on a wild goose chase for earmarks — first to the clerk of the House and then to the parliamentarian. When he finally found 26 earmarks, it was five hours after the deadline to submit amendments to the bill. Flake requested a secret session of the House on Intelligence earmarks, but got no support from either party.

Five days later, in a letter to House Republican Leader John Boehner, Flake revealed (without describing them) Murtha's two earmarks for the Johnstown-

based Concurrent Technologies. One provides \$2.5 million for the Mobile Missile Monitoring and Detection program. The other supplies \$3 million for the Joint Intelligence Training & Education with Advanced Distributed Learning Technological Phase 2.

Murtha's earmark re-

quests attest (as required by the new reforms) that "neither I nor my spouse had any financial interest" in either project.

What he did not attest was that officers and employees of Concurrent Technologies contributed \$56,475 to Murtha from the 2000 election cycle to the

See **NOVAK** on page 11

Rehabilitation Center expands

10 YEARS AGO

June 12, 1997

TERRY AND Deborah Willis announce the birth of their daughter, Taylor Gay Willis, born May 25, 1997. Taylor weighed 9 pounds 6 ounces and was 20 inches long.

MARJORIE Mueller was named the Pilot Club sweetheart of the year at a banquet held in her honor.

THE Rehabilitation Center of Early Memorial Hospital recently expanded to accommodate more patients.

DONALD Garrett brought an over-sized fig by the News office last week. The fig measured 2 3/4 inches in diameter and was 2 1/2 inches high.

VALEDICTORIAN Jason Peace encouraged the Class of 1997 to practice patience during their lifetime of learning at commencement exercises Saturday morning.

25 YEARS AGO

June 10, 1982

THE PETER Early Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution honored nine students at the recent Honors Day at Early County Middle School. Receiving awards were Kristin Peters, Val Davis, Tim Sheffield, Priscilla Graham, Judy King, Andy Smith, Kristi Gilbert, Kathy Walters and Cody King.

MRS. Cynthia Wright and Mrs. Priscilla Davis received their masters degree in elementary education Friday, June 4, 1982, from Troy State University in Dothan.

JODY GLASS, 10-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Glass, was selected to receive the Good Citizenship Medal at Early County Elementary School. Mrs. Sterling Jones, regent of the Peter Early Chapter, DAR and JAC chairman, presented the medal to Jody.

BUDDY JENKINS of Blakely won first place in the Pro Modified class at the Big A Raceway in

From our Files

News from the past

Abbeville Saturday night.

50 YEARS AGO

June 13, 1957

THE 5 & 10 CENT store of Clary's located on the courthouse square has been sold to an Ohio man, it was disclosed this week. The purchaser is M.H. Rupe, of Canal Fulton, Ohio.

THE REV. W.H. Ansley has been returned to the pastorate of the Blakely Methodist Church for another year.

IF THE NEWS isn't up to par today, it is because Our Chief, Editor Fleming is absent because of illness. It is not believed that his illness is serious, but under the advice of his physician he must remain at home for several days. It is hoped that he will soon be back at his post, but in the meantime, we ask your kind indulgence, until his return.

Unless you are a newspaper man, you don't realize the difficulty in getting out a paper when you are a man short — especially when that man is the Main Man.

MR. AND MRS. Wayne Lindsey, of Wilson, N.C., are visiting relatives here for a few days.

MR. AND MRS. Charles Garrett announce the birth of a daughter, Barbara Jane, Saturday, June 8, at Baxley Clinic. Mrs. Garrett is the former Regina White.

TOMMY JORDAN, son of Mr. and Mrs. J.T. Jordan, received his diploma at G.S.G. Americus at commencement exercises this past week.

CADET M-SGT. Henry C. Haddock II, son of Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Haddock of Damascus, was awarded a certificate of exemplary conduct during the school year 1956-57 at the commencement exercises of Gordon Military College, Barnesville, the past week.

THE WEDDING of Miss Patsy Bostwick, of Arlington, to James Wesley Griffen, of Jacksonville, will

take place at the Arlington Methodist Church June 15 at 12 o'clock. Miss Bostwick is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W.E. Bostwick.

75 YEARS AGO

June 9, 1932

A REVIVAL meeting is in progress at Blakely Baptist Church, with the Rev. O.M. Seigler of Americus as guest speaker.

MR. AND MRS. Alton Weaver announce the birth of a daughter, Clarice Ann, of Friday, June 3.

MR. AND MRS. E.S. Boyett announce the birth of a son on Sunday, June 5, Frasier Hospital, Dothan.

ROBERT PUCKETT, Bernard Daniels and Lawrence Rambo are at home from the University of Georgia for the summer holidays.

100 YEARS AGO

June 13, 1907

MRS. W.E. Hayes gave a reception last Monday in honor of the graduating class of the Blakely Institute.

MISSSES VERNE and Allen Cook and Master Willie C. Cook are visiting their grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. R.K. Beauchamp, in Carrabelle, Fla.

MISS DEVOTIE Hobbs has returned from an extended visit to Gaffney, S.C.

BLAKELY took two straight from Arlington the past week, winning the first 11-4 and the second 2-0.

MASTER Claude Howell celebrated his birthday Tuesday with a party for his boy friends.

MRS. C.T. Alexander and children, Marguerite and Lynwood, are visiting from Moultrie.

MR. M.M. Smith and family left last week on a fishing trip to the Dead Lakes.

MR. JOHN H. Williams is at home from Emory University for the summer.

125 YEARS AGO

June 8, 1882

GARIBALDI, the noted

Italian patriot, is dead.

WE UNDERSTAND that the town pump is not in working order. It should be repaired at once.

THE MOST fashionably dressed young man at the picnic on Saturday last wore that stylish paper collar which is for sale by Smith and James.

COL. E.C. Bower has removed to his new office between the stores of J.M. and R.W. Wade and Smith and James.

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