

# News from under the Gold Dome

It's been a busy time at the Capitol! Friday was crossover day and we were in session until late in the night. It's known as "Crossover Day" because it's the last day of the legislative session that a bill can pass out of one chamber, crossover to the other chamber (House or Senate) and still be eligible for final passage and on the way to the Governor's desk.

I appreciated my colleagues helping me pass SB 458, a good consumer protection bill that I've been carrying this session. It provides professional licensure for home inspectors by requiring minimum requirements and continuing education. We want to make sure Georgians can trust their home inspection reports when they are buying their home.

One of the greatest threats to the American Dream today is the rising cost of housing. Across Georgia, families are finding it harder than ever to purchase a home. In Metro Atlanta alone, institutional investors now own roughly one-quarter of all rental properties. Large corporations are buying up single-family homes at a rapid pace, leaving hardworking Georgians competing with Wall Street firms just to purchase a place to live.

The consequences are real. The average age of someone entering a 30-year mortgage has climbed to 41 years old. That means many Georgians will struggle to retire at 65. It also means couples are delaying starting families or considering leaving our state in search of more affordable housing. If we are serious about making Georgia more affordable,

## County

(Continued from Page 1) voted to approve \$10,000 for Clinch County's contribution to the marketing. McCullough stated that the hope is to launch the campaign by May 31.

In other action from the meeting, the commissioners:

- Reappointed Jeff Brown, Brent James, and Jason Bell to the Clinch Development Authority.

- Approved the purchase of a K-9 through the adopt a K-9 Cop Grant. The grant is \$7,500, the dog itself will be \$15,000. The board approved for the Sheriff's department to use funds from their capital outlay to pay the additional \$7,500 for the dog, and to replace that money with funds gained from asset forfeitures from the district attorney's office. Deputy Josh Collins will enter training for handling the K-9, which will have no additional cost for the endeavor.

- Approved a bid of \$600 per month from 413 Lawn Care LLC for grounds maintenance services.

- Approved requesting proposals for Emergency Medical Services in the county, adding a stipulation that a paramedic be required for all ambulance calls, a stipulation not in the contract with Gold Star, the current service. Their contract with the county expires on August 9.

- Approved the county grounds by the Clinch Senior Center for the Timberland Jubilee to be held on April 4.

we must address this issue head-on.

Senate Bill 463 takes an important step in that direction. This legislation would prevent large corporations from owning more than 500 single-family residential properties in Georgia and would prohibit foreign companies from owning single-family residential rental homes altogether. The goal is simple: ensure that the homes in our communities remain available to Georgia families, not large investment firms. Homeownership is a cornerstone of the American Dream, and we cannot allow Wall Street to push hardworking families out of the housing market.

We are also working to make it easier to build new homes across our state. Senate Bills 437 and 447, both of which have passed the Senate and now move to the House, will streamline the homebuilding process and improve transparency for families looking to build.

Senate Bill 437 shortens construction review timelines and allows certified private companies to conduct certain building, plumbing, and electrical inspections. These inspections are an important part of ensuring safe construction, but unnecessary delays can drive up costs for future homeowners. By making the process more efficient, we can help bring more housing to the market and make homeownership more attainable.

Senate Bill 447 increases transparency between local governments and future homeowners by requiring clear and timely explanations when building permits are denied. Families considering where to build their homes deserve straightforward answers, and this legislation helps ensure Georgia remains a welcoming place for those looking to put down roots.

Protecting the Ameri-

can Dream also means protecting the land that makes Georgia such a special place to live. Senate Bill 478 strengthens our commitment to conservation by increasing the share of funding dedicated to the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund. These additional resources will help preserve our waterways, forests and wildlife through 2039, ensuring future generations can enjoy the natural beauty that defines our state while supporting tourism and economic growth.

We had a big win this session in our effort to stand up against anti-semitism with the passage of Senate Bill 523. This legislation requires public schools and post-secondary institutions to treat antisemitism the same way they treat other forms of religious discrimination. Unfortunately, we've seen antisemitic incidents occur in K-12 schools and on college campuses across Georgia. With this bill, we're making it clear that hatred and intimidation have no place in our classrooms, and we're standing up for our Jewish students.

I was also proud to pass two bills that support folks who serve our communities every day. Senate Bill 209 allows certain employees who would normally be part of the Public School Employees Retirement System to join the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia. This change means school employees, such as cafeteria workers, custodians, and bus drivers, could retire under the same system as educators and receive salary-based retirement benefits rather than flat-rate benefits. The men and women who keep our schools running are the backbone of our education system, and they deserve fair retirement benefits after years of hard work.

Another measure, Senate Bill 489, will help

support the retirement system for our probate judges. This bill allows the Board of Commissioners of the Judges of the Probate Courts Retirement Fund of Georgia to set monthly dues for its members and adjust certain fees, such as those on marriage licenses and civil filings, to keep the fund running strong. Probate judges serve families during some of the most important moments in life, and this legislation helps make sure they're properly supported when their years of service come to an end.

I'm also grateful to my colleagues who unanimously supported SR 800, my bill creating a Joint House and Senate study committee on the generational sustainability of family farms in Georgia. These study committees are important because we hold meetings across the state and bring in experts in policy as well hear testimony from our fellow Georgians. It's been my experience that some of the best policy ideas come from the people I represent. As a farmer myself I know how tough the Ag economy is. Georgia farmers experienced about \$800 million in profit loss in 2025. Farm production costs have exceeded farm revenue 11 of the past 14 years. We now have a \$50 billion dollar Ag trade deficit in 2025. Tractor prices increased 21% from 2020 to 2023. Studies have shown that 42% of Georgia farmers have contemplated suicide in the past year. Less than 45% of agricultural borrowers were profitable in 2025 with no expectation of improvement in 2026. I was a kid in the 80's during the farm economy crisis and that experience of seeing what my dad and uncle went through is seared in my memory. My dear friends, House Ag Chairman Robert Dickey and Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper, will

## Russ Goodman

STATE SENATOR



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be helping me head this effort. So much of what affects farmers comes from the federal level, but our aim is to make sure we do everything we can as a state to help our farm families survive the current Ag economy.

The family farm is a promise we make to those who came before us and it's a covenant we must keep for those coming ahead of us. This study committee is aimed at ensuring that we as a state do everything we can to help our farm families keep that covenant for the next generation of farmers.

I enjoyed having my friend Lee Lancaster's son, Nathan, page with me last week. Nathan had the opportunity to read the bills, and I'd ask him what he thought about the legislation. Lee wrote the most comprehensive book I've ever read on the Georgia Farmers Strike in the late 70's so it was pretty cool when a bill was being debated on the floor addressing protestors blocking roads. I had the opportunity to ask a question prompted by Nathan telling my colleagues that it came from my Senate page while Nathan was sitting at my desk wanting to know if the legislation would prohibit tractorcades. Nathan was beaming when the Senator in the well said, "Good ques-

tion Nathan, we have a special carve out in the bill just for tractorcades if they ever come back."

Ms. Karleigh Rose Floyd from Willacoochee was also my page for the day-and she was one of the best pages I've ever had. She is a 7th grader, wants to be an attorney one day, and was studying each piece of legislation like there was about to be a final exam. She definitely brought a little extra ray of sunshine to the Senate chamber.

Last week was also Qualifying Week. It was my honor to Qualify to serve you, the folks of State Senate District 8. I am committed to continuously working on improving opportunities for our families in our district and the state. Thank you for allowing me to represent you!

We'll be back to work in Atlanta on Monday as we march on to April 2nd the last day of our legislative session. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

*Sen. Russ Goodman represents Senate District 8 which includes Atkinson, Clinch, Echols, Lanier, Lowndes and Pierce Counties and a large portion of Ware County. He may be reached at 404.656.7454 or at russ.goodman@senate.ga.gov*

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## UGA Blueberry Field Day

Hosted by the UGA Blueberry Breeding Program and UGA Berrien County Extension Office

**Date: March 27, 2026**

**Time: 11:00 am to 3:00 pm**

**Location: UGA Alapaha Blueberry Research Farm, Alapaha Georgia (<https://goo.gl/maps/yC54vkyALCqP8waS9>; about 2.7 miles south of Alapaha on US Hwy 129)**

**After farm visit, we will serve lunch at the UGA Berrien County Extension office followed by an educational session.**

Presenter	Title
Dr. Luan Oliveira	Precision Agriculture Blueberry Trials.
Dr. Jonathan Oliver	Blueberry Disease Management
Dr. Angelos Deltsidis	Postharvest management of Georgia blueberries
Dr. Ashfaq Sial	Monitoring and management of insect pests in blueberries
Federica Rossi	From Light to Fruit: How Selective Pruning Affects Blueberry Yield and Quality
Natalia Espinoza	Optimizing fertilizer use: How do fertilization practices impact soil health and blueberry nutrition?
Sindoora Nalajala	Breeding Better Blueberries: Expanding diversity through hybridization

- **Any trouble finding the farm please contact Benjamin Reeves at 229-445-5962**
- **Pesticide credit hours will be available**
- **In the event of inclement weather, the program will be promptly rescheduled**