

Another election on the way for Georgia voters

About 40 percent of registered voters in Camden County cast ballots in Tuesday's presidential preference primary, which involved Georgia and several other states.

We typically enjoy a higher voter turnout like this for the presidential race and this year perhaps generated even more interest than usual. We applaud those who took time from their day on Tuesday or went to the polls during early voting to exercise their right and live up to an important civic duty.

But there is another critical election just around the corner that is arguably even more critical to our daily lives.

Monday marks the beginning of the qualifying period for the May 24 general primary election. Here is what's at stake:

- Partisan county posts: sheriff, board of commissioners districts 1,3 and 5, clerk of Superior Court, tax commissioner, coroner and surveyor.

- Nonpartisan county posts: board of education posts 1, 3 and 5, probate judge and chief magistrate.

- Partisan state races: district attorney, public service commissioner, state representative District 174, state representative District 180 and state senator District 3.

- Nonpartisan state races: appeals court judge, Superior Court judge and Supreme Court justice.

- Partisan federal offices: U.S. senator and U.S. representative District 1.

The nonpartisan races will be decided in the primary, while partisan races will advance to the November general election, which also decides the presidential race.

While the president is an important individual to the nation, the elected officials listed above are a critical part of making and applying the law of the land.

And here is the important part — the more local the race, the more meaningful each vote becomes. There have been several local races that have been decided by just a handful of votes.

We need good leadership at all levels of government and we need our citizens to step up and be part of that process. Our hope is that local voters will place as much importance on the May 24 primary as they did Tuesday's presidential primary race.

As a famous politician once said, "All politics is local."



"Thanks to all you candidates for taking time to listen to us Southern voters, and...uh..."

Action inside, outside St. Marys

Last week elected officials and civic leaders from Camden County participated in the annual fly-in to Atlanta and met with state and assembly leadership to present recommendations and requests for either funding or key legislation that will benefit the citizens of Camden in the short or long term.

Once again I made the case for the importance, or rather the necessity, that the state includes in its transportation financing plans the complete redesign of its most important entry to the state, exit 1. The current congestion and antiquated and inadequate interchange design and capacity have created a driving hazard for residents and visitors alike.

First and foremost, this must be recognized as a safety issue. Anyone who uses that exit or travels Haddock Road by the Pilot station recognizes the dangers created by an exit that was not designed to handle major truck traffic.

Secondly, an improved exit 1 would significantly improve the opportunity for economic enhancement for the area, especially in transportation logistics.

And third, the exit is just at the Georgia border entry and should be the state's first "Welcome to Georgia" opportunity to attract visitors leaving Florida to stop and spend time and money in Georgia. A completely revamped Exit 1 is vital to increasing tourism in Georgia and economic development



John Morrissey

Guest columnist

in Camden County and St. Marys.

I recognize this is a long-term project, but I know from experience with the various state departments and state leadership that if we do not continue to present the benefits to the state as well as to Camden, we will get lost in the shuffle or be preempted by louder voices.

I am committed to continue making a sound and positive argument to get the state's attention. However, I am not willing to just sit by and wait for the best solution. We are in the process of implementing an interim "safety solution." It is far from ideal, but it will provide temporary relief.

With a commitment of \$45,000 from the city of St. Marys and \$105,000 from the state, we will be able to create an interim design to improve the turning radii for the large trucks as they enter and depart Haddock Road. It will also create a safer pedestrian access and provide additional safety for motorists. I am hopeful construction on

this project will begin early next year.

The interim solution is just that, interim. The importance of a complete re-design of exit 1 as Georgia's primary welcome center is vital to the economic growth of Georgia's tourist industry and Camden's business growth.

While exit 1 is a long-term initiative, there are a few more immediate subjects I want to highlight. Last Thursday night was the second planning commission public hearing for the request from the Port of St. Marys LLC to change the zoning for the former mill site. The mill site is in the hands of a trustee to sell in order to settle outstanding liens and claims. The applicant is requesting a zoning change prior to making a final offer to purchase the property.

Dozens of residents spoke at two separate public hearings and both those speaking for and against the request delivered thoughtful and heartfelt messages. The planning commission will continue to accept written comments from residents until Monday, March 7, before meeting in a special session Monday, March 14, to deliberate and reach its decision on the zoning request. I encourage those who have not yet submitted public comment to do so before the March 7 deadline. Information on how to comment can be found on the city's website, www.stmarysga.gov.

On a celebratory note,

this Saturday, March 5, at 11 a.m. will be the dedication of the history walk downtown along the waterfront in front of the Oak Grove Cemetery.

This project highlights the history of St. Marys with informational interpretive panels and comfortable seating areas and is the result of the city working with residents to create and finance this latest addition to our tourist attractions. We are deeply grateful to the many sponsors who contributed to help make this project a reality. The walk is also a great place to bring visiting friends and relatives for a look at the city's colorful and interesting past. Please join us for the short dedication and ribbon cutting and be one of the first to take the walk.

Balancing important issues, delivery of day-to-day services and initiating city enhancements while keeping our finger on Atlanta and Washington, D.C., decisions that affect our fine city and its residents is a challenge I take seriously. I recognize that actions taken beyond our city limits can have both short- and long-term implications for our citizens just as those decisions we make right here at home do.

I always welcome your feedback, but I would be especially interested to hear about your thoughts or concerns about exit 1. Just drop me an email note.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We can have a lovely city and an industrial park

Dear Editor,

I am in favor of rezoning of the mill site to industrial use. We need to get that eyesore cleaned up and invest in future jobs for our area. Our city council has the option to vote no for a special use permit. We have a checks and balance system in place to deny anything that is not good for St. Marys. Isn't that the reason we have a city council?

There are laws enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency and Georgia Department of Natural Resources to protect our marshes and beautiful rivers. I am an environmentalist at heart and live on Dark Entry

Creek. I love the marsh and want to keep it healthy. I believe one has to get a permit to dredge a river or build a dock. I did when we built our dock.

I do not, for the life of me, understand why we cannot encourage tourism and still have an industrial park. A buffer zone, so that the industrial park is basically hidden from the road, is possible. Other cities have successfully "beautified" an industrial area with lovely stone walls, berms and plantings. We need the jobs and wages of industry to support business in downtown St. Marys. Our quaint town will look like a ghost town if businesses continue to fail because customers do not have the income to spend for dining or an evening out on the town. Not too many tourists will want to visit an

area that is economically depressed.

I firmly believe the planning commission and the city council can enforce EPA and DNR regulations, keeping our city healthy and attractive to tourists. If we finally get that technical college, let's keep the graduates employed in St. Marys. We can proudly show off our beautiful city with stores bustling with people.

St. Marys will wither without industries to support and sustain it. Residential taxes cannot continue to support the services demanded by our city's citizens. We need help from industry while we continue to promote tourism.

We can work together to continue to have a vibrant and lovely city.

Reeeny Adams
St. Marys

Send comments about zoning to city by Monday

Dear Editor,

Feb. 25's planning commission meeting was even more well-attended than the previous week's, with over 100 citizens, city officials and others present. During the Feb. 18 meeting, the public comments were overwhelmingly opposed to the rezoning of the Gilman paper mill site for the purposes of creating the Port of St. Marys industrial barge port. On the 25th, the notable majority spoke in favor of rezoning the property.

Taking into account both the spoken and submitted comments, it would appear

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