

Trailers: Contribute to accidents

Continued from 1A
reflective tape, either. Melancon had looked right through it, seeing only the truck pulling it.

When Melancon went to court over the incident in 2003, he pleaded not guilty to avoid conviction for causing an accident by following too closely.

He told the judge that the trailer was unsafe and hard to see. The judge dismissed Melancon's ticket, but required him to go to driving school.

From that day forward, Melancon has been leading a campaign against utility trailers that has already changed legislation in his state of Virginia. Now, his focus is on a national level.

"I discovered that these trailers are out there causing problems in places across the country," he said.

Glynn County is one of the places that caught Melancon's

eye. On Jan. 17, a homemade trailer broke away from a pick up truck and crossed the center line of the F.J. Torras Causeway, striking a black Chevrolet S-10 Blazer driven by Karen Simpson. Simpson, 48, an employee at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, was thrown from her vehicle and killed. The driver of the truck, Joel Dixon, 23, has charges against him pending.

Simpson's death is one of 1,000 deaths related to allegedly unsafe trailers in the United States, Melancon said.

"Most of the trailers you see on the road don't have tail-lights, or - if they do - the lights aren't working correctly," he said. "Also, many trailer owners don't even know the proper way to hitch them to their vehicles."

Melancon has spent over

\$20,000 the past three years on a lobbyist and on published materials. He has 50 books that he plans to send to senators across the country. Each book is filled with news clippings detailing fatal accidents in every state.

He has also posted video footage of fatal wrecks on YouTube.com for all the world to see.

And he keeps a camera in his car at all times to take pictures of unsafe trailers on the road. He now has over 2,000 photographs in stock.

Glynn County Police Capt. Jim Kelly said all trailers are inspected in Georgia when the owners get them titled.

"The inspectors look to see that the trailer has a VIN (vehicle identification number) plate, safety chains (to secure a trailer to a towing vehicle if a trailer hitch fails), and working brake lights and turn signals,"

he said.

The trailer that hit Simpson's vehicle on the F.J. Torras Causeway had safety chains, but they weren't attached, Kelly said.

"Also, the truck had an undersize ball for the trailer it was pulling," he said. "The truck's ball was 1 7/8-inches, and the trailer was made to pull a 2-inch ball."

Simpson's death does not stand alone in the state. The most recent statistics compiled by the Georgia Department of Transportation's Safety Unit show that there were 3,089 automobile accidents involving trailers in 2005.

Of these crashes, there were 1,357 injuries and 13 fatalities.

Melancon said he believes that the majority of these wrecks could have been prevented had the trailers been required by law to adhere to mandatory safety guidelines.

City: Pool debated

Continued from 1A

community forward for the next 100 years or you blow it back another 50 years."

But Thompson is not alone in his reluctance. Commissioners James Brooks and Cornell Harvey also voiced anxiety about the agreement.

"I opposed this from day one and I still oppose it," Brooks said.

Harvey said he is reluctant about the merger and will take into full account recent comments made by an outside consultant, whose final report became available this week.

"I think the operational agreement has some flaws in it, and I do believe if we take a little time to look at it, some of these things could be worked out," Harvey said.

Commissioners Mark Spaulding and Jonathan Williams, both city-appointed members of the Joint Water Sewer Commission, said they are in favor of the merger.

"I think if we were to take a vote up or down, I have a very distinct feeling it would up voted down and I think that

would be a shame," said Spaulding, offering the suggestion to hold a workshop to flesh out some of the other commissioners' concerns.

No set date was determined for the proposed workshop.

In other business, the commission received an update on the Howard Coffin Park pool, which members learned two weeks ago from Finance Director Martha Hendley is running \$250,000 over budget.

But Parks and Recreation Director Reggie Jackson said Tuesday that Hendley was unclear about the total budget figure for the pool project.

She said it was \$1.5 million while Jackson said it is \$2.5 million.

Commissioner Spaulding, who launched his own investigation into the pool budget since the last report, said several change orders should have been approved by the commission.

"I think what the situation has pointed out is that we haven't handled this thing very well at all," he said.

The pool is still scheduled to open to the public in May.

Bush: Dems, activists decry actions

Continued from 1A

heard anyone criticize him, and rightly so.

"Gen. Petraeus supports (the president's) plan, and now the same Senate that voted unanimously to confirm Gen. Petraeus is going to vote on whether they agree with the plan he supports and that they confirmed him to execute."

Kingston fought a losing battle in the House, where the resolution passed.

"If the troops in Baghdad watched what Congress was doing ... they would be outraged," Kingston said.

"Fortunately for us in the free world, they do not sit around and watch C-SPAN and what silly politicians do. They live in a real world where there are real bullets.

"The resolution (that) passed ... on the other hand, is not real. It is a political whip check designed for press releases and base politics."

Democrats and peace activists in Brunswick say Isakson, Chambliss and Kingston are out of step with the nation.

"We stand solidly with the Democratic majority in the

House and Senate and 70 percent of the American public who oppose the escalation," said Jim Norris, chair of the Glynn County Democratic Party. "Isakson, Chambliss and Kingston do not speak for us."

Nor do they speak for Glynn Peace, says Robert G. Randall II, who heads up the Brunswick-based group.

"Our congressional representatives ask us to give President Bush's latest troop increase a chance to work," Randall said. "There are several problems with this. First,

there is no evidence that it will work."

Second, Randall said, "What they are really saying to our military is that their lives are worth less than trying one last time to rescue a foolish and failed policy of a president who has lied to us constantly and been consistently wrong."

• **Great Britain plans new timetable for Iraq withdrawal, 7A**

• **More bombs explode in Iraq, 7A**

Vote: Other states consider moving up '08 primaries

Continued from 1A

cuses, followed by the New Hampshire primary. Then candidates head to South Carolina, which has a split primary, with Democrats on Jan. 29 and Republicans on Feb. 2.

The political landscape then gets a bit fuzzier.

Alabama is considering moving its primary up to Feb. 2 — a Saturday — to stand out from the increasingly crowded lineup of states that are eyeing Feb. 5. And Florida lawmakers are hoping to move the presidential primary to either seven days after New Hampshire's or Feb. 5, whichever comes first.

The proposal, introduced by state Rep. Austin Scott, also makes a key change in election law aimed at reducing the

number of runoffs.

Current law sends an election into a runoff if none of the candidates earns more than 50 percent of the vote. The House proposal would lower the bar to 45 percent.

"Runoffs are expensive to local governments and generally the results are already known," he said.

The most prominent statewide general election runoff in Georgia was the 1992 U.S. Senate race between Republican Paul Coverdell and Democrat Wyche Fowler. Fowler led the vote tally in the general election but fell short of 50 percent as Libertarian Jim Hudson drew nearly 70,000 votes. Coverdell went on to win the runoff.

The then-ruling Democrats

passed legislation after the election setting the threshold for avoiding a general election runoff at 45 percent.

After Republicans took con-

trol of the Legislature in 2004, they changed the law again to require candidates to earn more than 50 percent of the vote to avoid a runoff.



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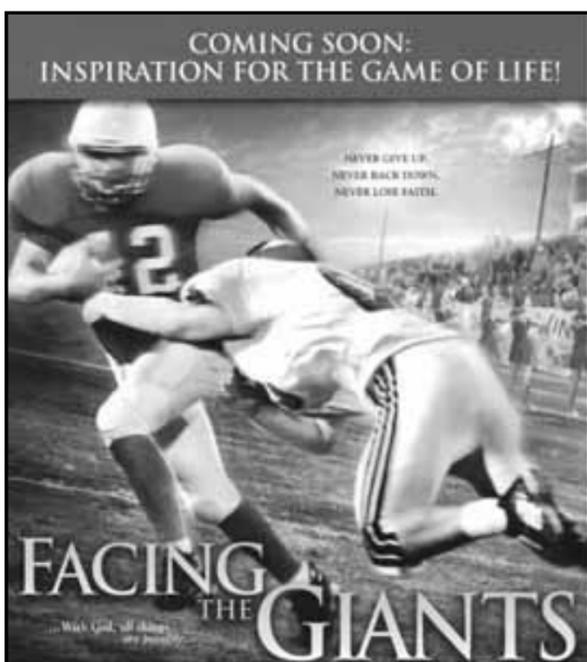
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