



News: metronews@ajc.com | Delivery: ajc.com/customer-care or 404-522-4141 | Coverage from the Gold Dome @ AJC.com/politics

AJC TOP STORY: CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

AJC EXCLUSIVE

Outings for errands unmask wide divide



Bill Torpy
Only In The AJC

As I hurried to a news conference in connection with the case of Ahmaud Arbery, the black man killed near Brunswick, I had a quick concern: The face mask I kept in the console of my car was gone.

I briefly considered turning around to drive home and get another one, but there was no time. As I rolled up, I saw the suspect's attorneys and the masked media scrum squeezed into a narrow slice of space atop a hill next to an office. I did not dare head up the steps to join them. I did not want

to tower above WSB radio's Veronica Waters, snorting whatever germs I had all over my colleagues.

I didn't want to be *that guy*. So I stood back from the pack and heard most of the conference – and later picked up a tape of the proceedings from Veronica.

I rarely wear a mask when heading outside into the open spaces. But during this coronavirus pandemic, it's considered good form to wear one inside public places, such as a store.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says a regular face mask doesn't protect you as much as it does other people. You're doing it for others. It's a solid example of having a sense of community – as in not being communicable.

To mask or not to mask has become a political flashpoint, even for the presidential campaign, as a black-masked Joe Biden laid a wreath at

Torpy continued on B9

STATE BUDGET

GBI furloughs worry senators

Budget plans would force troopers, agents to take 24 days off without pay.

By James Salzer
jsalzer@ajc.com

Georgia senators expressed concern Wednesday over budget plans that would force state troopers and GBI agents to take nearly five weeks off without pay in the coming year.

The GBI and Department of Public Safety – like much of state government – are personnel-heavy. So there was no way for agency leaders to develop required plans to cut spending without eliminating jobs or furloughing staffers. For GBI staffers and state troopers, agency proposals would require up to 24 furlough days in fiscal 2021, which begins July 1.

"It was a very difficult decision," DPS Commissioner Gary Vowell told a Sen-

ate budget subcommittee. "We're counting nickels and dimes and looked everywhere we can and been as innovative as we can without laying people off."

"I am open for recommendations, but with 14% (in cuts), I don't see any other way."

Sen. John Albers, R-Roswell, the chairman of the subcommittee, told Vowell: "I certainly have grave concerns about the 24 furlough days. You were undermanned before this all started."

Sen. Tyler Harper, R-Ocilla, a member of the subcommittee, told the DPS commissioner, "We want to do what we can to make sure you have the resources to do your job on a daily basis."

The hearing Wednesday came a day after Senate subcommittees began reviewing budget proposals for the upcoming year. The 2020 session was suspended in March because of the coronavirus pandemic, and lawmakers will

Budget continued on B9

WEATHER



The clean team tackles 101 Marietta Street

South Beach Glass window washers work on the 36-story 101 Marietta Street building Wednesday in downtown Atlanta as clouds obscure the Westin Peachtree Plaza. Channel 2 Action News meteorologist Eboni Deon said today's rain chance is 60%. By Friday, Atlanta could see highs in the low 80s. A cold front is expected to move through Friday, bringing some early showers. Behind the front, Deon said, dry air and sun returns for the weekend. JOHN SPINK / JSPINK@AJC.COM



For the latest weather forecasts, watch Channel 2 Action News.

AJC LOCAL IN-DEPTH ENVIRONMENT

EPA leader talks to farmers

Andrew Wheeler will also meet with regional employees in 2-day visit.

By Nedra Rhone
nrhone@ajc.com

The head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency is touring metro Atlanta this week, meeting with local farmers and visiting area sites that have received federal grants for cleanup and redevelopment.

Administrator Andrew Wheeler will also meet with the agency's regional employees to emphasize their role in supporting communities and helping those communities understand the EPA's role, he said.

"When EPA steps in and we help a community, we can make a real difference in people's lives," said Wheeler in an interview with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Wheeler's two-day visit – his first outside of the nation's capital since the onset of the pandemic – began Wednesday with a stop at Southern Belle Farm in McDonough, where he spoke about efforts the EPA is making to support farmers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers nationwide have taken a hit as disruptions in the food supply chain have made it difficult to get products to market. The EPA has helped by aiding cattle farmers in managing food waste, Wheeler said. The agency has also continued its review of hotly debated

AJC LOCAL IN-DEPTH 2020 ELECTIONS

Cobb chairman faces GOP primary challengers

Tax increase in 2018, coronavirus concerns are driving forces in the June 9 election.

By Meris Lutz
mlutz@ajc.com

Four years after he ousted his predecessor in a Republican primary runoff, Cobb Commission Chairman Mike Boyce is facing his own party rebellion with two conservative challengers going

into the June 9 election. Retired businessman Larry Savage and retired police officer Ricci Mason are both running for the party nomination against the incumbent chair, who successfully championed a tax increase in 2018 that lost him some support from the base, according to

Jason Shepherd, chairman of the Cobb County Republican Party. "There's a lot of frustration with Chairman Boyce," Shepherd said. But, he added, the vast majority of Republican voters are not the party activists who are the chairman's loudest critics.

"Under Chairman Boyce, property taxes have gone up, but so have services," Shepherd said. "The average voter may see it as necessary costs for overall

improvement in services for the county."

The primary could go to a runoff if none of the three candidates captures 50 percent of the vote. The eventual nominee will face Democrat Lisa Cupid, currently the South Cobb commissioner, in a county that has become increasingly competitive for her party. In 2016, Hillary Clinton won

Cobb continued on B8

EPA continued on B8