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PHOTOS BY MIKE STEELY

Sgt. Sammy Davis speaks with guests at the Pearl Harbor Day ceremony at the EXPO Center. The room was filled with well-wishers, elected officials, the press and numerous veterans.

BOE approves charter school agreement

By Ken Leinart

The Knox County Schools (KCS) Board of Education passed the agreement with Knoxville Preparatory School Thursday night, Dec. 7, after a few "tweaks" in the document.

One such "tweak" brought some questions from District 4's Katherine Bike.

Bike thanked KCS Law Director Gary Dupler for getting a clause added so the charter school would be required to give 90 business days notice, "whether they're moving, or not, if that were to happen," Bike said.

But there was one section in the agreement where Bike requested

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Junior Commission applicants sought

By Mike Steely

Senior Writer
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Do you know a high school junior or senior who has an interest in how government works, how things are introduced and voted on, or what issues face our county now and in the future?

They may be interested in applying to the Knox County Commission's Junior Commission. The three-month program pairs students, one from

each district, with their district commissioner. Applications are being taken until December 20 and students may get more information online at www.knoxcounty.org/juniorcommission.

One student from each district will be selected the week of January 8. Students may apply through their district commissioner or one of the two at-large commissioners.

The Junior **Continue on page 4**

Pearl Harbor Day remembered at EXPO Center

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
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Pearl Harbor Day was remembered with a special luncheon Thursday at the EXPO Event Center. Not only was it well planned but the large assembly of veterans, families, public officials and supporters took the opportunity to meet the guest of honor, Sgt. Sammy Lee Davis.

Larry Sharp, president of the Veterans Appreciation Program, organized and emceed the event with the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 24. Sharp recognized special

guests and WWII veteran Bob Luttrell was presented a Quilt of Valor by Gwen Cole of the Clinch River Quilts of Valor.

The National Colors were presented by the Karns High School Junior ROTC and the Powell High School Singers entertained attendees by singing Christmas songs. An eagle named Challenger greeted guests as they arrived for the ceremony.

Vietnam War hero and Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Sammy Davis took questions from those attending. Davis recounted his Vietnam experience



Sgt. Sammy Davis (right) told of his Vietnam experiences at a Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance Thursday. He is pictured with Larry Sharp, a veteran who organized the event.

and noted that his injury, a result of saving his fellow soldiers, became part of the "Forrest Gump" movie. "You don't lose until

you quit trying," was the message repeated a few times as Davis spoke to the appreciative crowd.

2023 MAC and YAC FOOTBALL



Austin-East's Middle School-Age Conference Junior Varsity champions hoist the gold football after defeating Karns 21-18 in the finals this season at Faragut High. The Roadrunners are one of seven youth football team champions recognized in this week's Focus. Please see stories and pictures of the champs in Sports and Recreation, Section C.

Housing and TIF tax break on commission agenda

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
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When the Knox County Commission meets in work session this afternoon, it may discuss approving a tax break for a large housing development along Magnolia Avenue.

The Park City Redevelopment and Urban Renewal Plan, prepared by the city's Community Development Corporation, would develop 2724, 2730, 2736 and 2733 Magnolia Avenue in a large mixed-use project that includes 57 for-sale condominiums and eight

workforce rental apartment units.

The Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is for renovations and preservation of existing improvements and the proposal comes from the Knox County Finance Department.

The commission may also consider a land swap with Walker Enterprises LLC: Walker's 2.38-acre right-of-way could be exchanged for an unused 2.62-acre county property at Beverly Park. An agreement between the Industrial Development Board and the county may also include a land swap with Axle Logistics for \$1.4 million. The project, inside the city, will include a payback included in the 2025 Capital Improvement Plan. The Axle project has been postponed month to month since July.

Another TIF is on the agenda for a multi-use development, Prosperity Crossing, located off El

Camino Lane near Watt Road's intersection on Interstate 40/75.

The zoning agenda includes changes aimed at increasing the number of homes in the county. Properties along Byington Beaver Ridge Road may go from Low Density to Planned Residential. A site on Governor John Sevier may change from Agricultural to Planned Residential; a site on Verdon Drive may change from Agricultural to Low Density; and a site along Emory Road and Joe Daniel Road may also shift from Planned Residential.

Another property along Ball Road may go from Low Density to Planned Residential with up to three dwellings per acre and another agricultural-zoned property along Ball Camp Road may be rezoned from Agricultural to Planned Residential.

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\$77 Million To Not Coach Is Crazy

From a distance



By John J. Duncan Jr. duncanj@knoxfocus.com

A few months ago I wrote that I thought paying the Tennessee football coach \$9,000,000 a year (over \$24,400 a day) was ridiculous, and even in a way sinful.

I wrote that Coach Heupel seems like a nice man and he is a very good coach, but deep down inside probably even he knows he is not worth that much for coaching a sport. No one is.

Now, the sports world has gone even crazier. Texas A&M will now be paying their recently fired

coach, Jimbo Fisher, \$77 million to not coach.

This follows about three years ago Auburn paying a coach \$21.7 million to not coach, and then paying the next coach about \$15 million when they fired him.

When Former LSU coach Ed Orgeron found out in 2021 that he was going to be paid \$17 million to not coach, he said he told the Athletic Director, "When do you want me to leave, and what door do you want me to go out of?"

A very significant part of higher education, several hundred billion, is funded by state and federal taxes. Yet the major universities go to Congress and the state legislatures every year begging for more.

I know these payments come from money paid by very wealthy fanatical football fans. But if Congress and/or the state

legislatures don't take action, these payments will go even higher.

In my 30 years in Congress, I never voted for any tax increase because the federal government is so wasteful and inefficient. Also, socialist countries all over the world have proved that prices are lower, more jobs are created, and poor people are helped most when more money is kept in the private sector.

But there are exceptions to everything, and paying coaches many millions to not coach is going too far. A tax law could be written to get some of the money, even if much of it is deferred.

At a Congressional hearing on vaccines a few years ago, when I found out Sen. Joe Manchin's daughter was making almost \$20 million a year heading up a big drug company, I said,

"No one could really earn that much" in one year.

At the very least, state legislatures should stop making taxpayers pay for new buildings and the federal government should stop giving grants to colleges and universities that can get many millions contributed to pay coaches who are no longer coaching.

Thirteen months ago, I wrote another column about a bill that I said "may be one of the worst" that Congress has ever passed.

It was called the Camp Lejeune Justice Act, but should have been called the Unfair To Taxpayers Bill or the Lawyers Get Rich Quick Bill.

It has turned out to be even worse than I thought. I was in Washington a few weeks ago and read that there have now been over 17,000 claims filed under this law totaling \$3.3

trillion.

One Maryland personal injury law firm estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 claims might be filed.

Democrats seem to have no qualms about spending money we do not have. That is why we are \$33 trillion in debt.

All the Democrats voted for the bill along with a few, but unfortunately enough Republicans to pass it. I told Congressman Burchett I was disappointed he voted for it, and I hope he is sorry he did so.

Every bill that is introduced is given an apple pie and motherhood title. But if Congress passed every bill, the country would collapse.

This bill was supposedly for veterans, but the way it was written - to apply even to family members - most of the money will go to lawyers and even to people who never served one day

in the military.

Hopefully, most of these claims will not be paid, but the lowest cost estimate I have seen on this bill is several hundred billion.

As I wrote about this bill last year, any well-organized group could find scientists who "would say that practically everything we eat or drink is toxic and harmful. Similar lawsuits could probably be filed about the water at every military base or even in just about every city."

This Camp Lejeune bill shows once again that it is simply too easy to spend other people's money. And when sports announcers dress up to be on TV while people dress down to go to church, it shows that to many millions, football is more important than God.

Balance the Budget?

In Washington, balancing the budget is a game with the Republicans pretending that they want to cut spending while the Democrats act as if any cut will be devastating. The farce is repeated every year with the result of ever-increasing spending and deficits. Neither side is serious about fiscal responsibility. Balancing the budget is impossible in the short run. Given the political realities, the only solution is economic growth. However, burdensome regulations, measures that discourage small businesses and barriers to free trade hinder growth. Nevertheless, it is easier to grow the economy than for our politicians to cut spending or even cut the rate of growth in spending. The traditional



By Dr. Harold A. Black blackh@knoxfocus.com haroldblackphd.com

way of thinking is that a budget is balanced either by decreasing spending or increasing taxes or both. For our politicians cutting spending is virtually impossible leaving increasing taxes as their only choice. Yet increasing taxes will only make things worse. The increase in taxes necessary to balance the budget will slow down economic growth, crash the economy and slow down revenues to the government.

The budget is made up of two major components, nondiscretionary spending and discretionary spending. Federal nondiscretionary spending includes mainly social security, Medicare and federal retirement benefits. In the past fiscal year, nondiscretionary spending

was \$4.1 trillion. Discretionary spending was \$1.7 trillion. Tax revenues were \$4.9 trillion. The interest on the national debt was \$724 billion This leaves only \$76 billion to spend on everything else.

Of course, nondiscretionary spending is nondiscretionary because the government says it is. We all know that social security is considered sacrosanct and politicians are afraid to alter it. The same is true of Medicare. But the increase in both must either be corralled or the economy liberated to grow in order to achieve a sane fiscal policy. The economic literature offers evidence that increases in government spending lead to a reduction in private investment and economic growth. This is the classic "crowding out" effect. This is in contrast to where most politicians think that

government spending stimulates economic growth. Yet the evidence is otherwise. Research also shows that regulations create burdens that slow economic growth and that regulatory reform unleashes economic growth.

Reforming the tax code and eliminating regulatory burdens would stimulate the economy. The overly complicated US tax code creates over \$1 trillion in costs to the economy. Moreover, the cost of compliance to business has been estimated to be over \$2 trillion. The Federal Register which is a measure of an administration's regulatory actions increased by 80,756 in 2022. Much of these regulations are nonessential. It is just Big Brother looking over the shoulders of businesses. Burdensome regulations are especially a drag on small businesses that cannot afford the compliance experts of big businesses and small businesses are the growth engine of the economy.

Yet even for big business, the salaries and benefits of compliance personnel, accountants and attorneys are a net loss. Compliance does not add to the bottom line. I once had a minority banker tell me that the cost of complying with all the fair lending regulations had so adversely affected his bottom line that he was going to have to sell his bank to a large regional bank. In the past, small bankers have asked for regulatory relief but to no avail. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is not the friend of small financial institutions and in many cases, actively tries to put them out of business.

So I offer a few real solutions of my own.

1. Eliminate duplication in government.
2. Eliminate automatic escalators in nondiscretionary items.
3. Raise the full benefit age in social security to 70.
4. Privatize Medicare and Medicaid.
5. Privatize social security with a benefit floor

guaranteed by the federal government.

6. Eliminate the federal income tax and institute a flat income tax with no exemptions.
7. Limit the annual growth in the number of pages in the federal register.
8. Institute a sunset provision for all regulations by all federal agencies.
9. Mandate that regulatory burdens must be reduced by at least 5 percent per year.
10. Limit federal pay (including perks) to no more than 10 percent over the average pay for the same position in the private sector.
11. Eliminate the Departments of Education, Energy, Commerce, Interior, Agriculture, Labor and Transportation.
12. Eliminate all specified federal spending to the states and replace them with block grants.
13. Cap the federal budget to 20 percent of the previous year's GDP.



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It is a Crime to Possess Brass Knuckles

We have all seen the movie where the good guy is about to enter into an epic fist fight with the bad guy. As the two of them stare each other down, we watch the bad guy put on a set of brass knuckles so he can inflict maximum pain on the good guy.



By Jedidiah McKeehan jed@attorney-knoxville.com

Tennessee Code Annotated 39-17-1302 states: A person commits an offense who intentionally or knowingly possesses, manufactures, transports, repairs or sells: an explosive or an explosive weapon; a device principally designed, made or adapted

for delivering or shooting an explosive weapon; a machine gun; hoax device; knuckles; or any other implement for infliction of serious bodily injury or death that has no common law purpose.


The law goes on to list some exceptions when people can use and keep these items, but generally it is illegal to even own these items. To own brass knuckles is a Class A misdemeanor.

After reading this law, I am really interested to know what in the world qualifies as a hoax device.

Jedidiah McKeehan is an attorney practicing in Knox County and surrounding counties. He works in many areas, including family law, criminal, and personal injury. Visit attorney-knoxville.com for more information about this legal issue and other legal issues.

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Publisher's Positions



By Steve Hunley,
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Jane George: Another Lockstep Liberal

Jane George, a failed candidate for the Tennessee State Senate four years ago, has announced she's off and running for Congress. George is a Democrat and says at least where fiscal policy is concerned, she's "pretty moderate." That doesn't cover a big swath of territory and leaves open to question what her idea of "moderate" is exactly.

George will try to paint incumbent Tim Burchett as some kind of extremist while trying to position herself, at least visually, somewhere in the middle. George says she intends to try and appeal to moderate Republicans. Really? If Jane George managed to get herself elected to the U. S. House of Representatives, would she vote for a moderate Republican for speaker? No. George would surely vote for Hakeem Jeffries who is about as moderate as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

While it is certainly true

Republicans in the House have been flying off in every direction, it is also equally true that the Democrats have stuck together like they were bonded with Gorilla Glue. Moderates of any kind are conspicuously absent from the Democrat caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives.

House Democrats have a lot of folks like Jamaal Bowman, the guy who pulled the fire alarm to get out of the House Office Building, and Pramila Jayapal, who couldn't bring herself to say Hamas terrorists raping women and girls was vile and despicable. Democrats have gotten themselves into a bit of a bind since the rioting of the summer of 2020 and the season of the "mostly peaceful" riots that featured killings, burning and a whole lotta looting. There is a big element of the Democrat party who truly believe any means is justified. Some of those same folks are parading around streets carrying signs saying the horrors inflicted upon Israeli citizens are justified.

There is no politician in Tennessee's Second Congressional District who better understands kitchen table issues than Tim Burchett, a fact Jane George will learn sometime next year. While she rattles on about climate change and says little or nothing about the travesty inflicted upon the Israeli people, don't expect Jane George to talk about the cost of gas, which really matters to working people. How many working people can afford a Prius

even if the infrastructure was in place? Families are paying more in taxes and more for the cost of food and housing because of the policies of not Republicans, but rather Democrats. Families are spending about \$800 more per month because of the inflation spawned by Joe Biden's policy. That's just what we need in Congress right now, another rubber stamp for Joe Biden's failed agenda and Bidenomics. There are NO moderate Republicans who support Biden and his agenda. Those are called Democrats.

Mandate for EVs Would Stifle Competition

Democrats are waging a war on fossil fuels and have already made our country energy dependent on others when we had been independent four short years ago. But Democrats routinely engage in "gaslighting." In fact, it is a standard prop in their usual bag of tricks. Republicans in Congress are currently working to stop what amounts to an Electric Vehicle mandate. Democrats ignore the cost differential (they don't care) between gas-powered vehicles and EVs, nor do they care whether the necessary infrastructure is in place. John Bozzella, the CEO of the Alliance for Automotive

Innovation, recently stated, "Auto Innovators does not believe [the new standards proposed by congressional Democrats] can be met without substantially increasing the cost of

vehicles, reducing consumer choice, and disadvantaging major portions of the United States population."

In short, make a standard so stringent it becomes a de facto mandate. The Democrats also plan to raise the cost of gas-powered cars to make the price of EVs competitive.

Who benefits the most from EV mandates currently? CHINA, that's who. Biden says he will veto a bill that would kill the mandate. Of course, he would. How much money did his family get from the Chinese?

Antisemitic Hypocrites

"Many of the people who have expressed [antisemitic] statement in America aren't neo-Nazis, or card-carrying Klan members or Islamic extremists. They are in many cases people that most liberal Jewish Americans felt previously were their ideological fellow travelers. Not long ago, many of us marched together for Black and brown lives." So said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, finally, about the rampant antisemitism in our country today, coming from the American Left.

The hypocrisy of the Left has been readily apparent to most everybody who isn't a faithful viewer of Rachel Maddow and MSNBC. The very same people who celebrate "diversity" and preach "inclusion" are largely those who sound like state officials from Hitler's Germany.

Much of that antisemitism is centered on college

and university campuses in this country and several university presidents have been called before the House of Representatives. These doyens of higher education did nothing to make any objective observer conclude they were smart, much less prepared to discuss the topic of tolerating open antisemitism. The handful of university presidents gathered before Congresswoman Virginia Foxx's Education & Workforce Committee. They still seem to be trying to explain their way out of what they said at the time of the committee hearings. In her opening statement, Foxx said, "However, after the events of the past two months, it is clear that rabid antisemitism and the university are two ideas that cannot be cleaved from one another. We must be clear on the ideological dimension of this problem. For years, universities have stoked the flames of an ideology which goes by many names --- anti-racism, anti-colonialism, critical race theory, DEI, intersectionality, the list goes on." And so it does.

Foxx pinpointed the problem, telling the university presidents the "value system . . . centers the identity on immutable racial and sexual characteristics" and "present a delusion that the color of one's skin and expression of one's chromosomes sort society into classes of oppressed and oppressors."

Virginia Foxx neatly sorted through what American colleges and universities have

been filling the heads of students with for decades now. Foxx told the president of Harvard her university was "ground zero for antisemitism" following the brutal and vicious attack on Israeli citizens on October 7.

The presidents of Harvard, UPenn and MIT did little in their appearances to reassure anyone. Suddenly, these folks were talking about free speech, which has been denied conservatives on campuses for years.

Congresswoman Elise Stefanik pointed out that the answers by the presidents involving the slaughter of innocent civilians left a lot to be desired just from the standpoint of being a decent human being. Stefanik said the answers provided to the House Education Committee were nothing less than "moral depravity." Stefanik denounced the "pathetic" attempts by Liz Magill, president of the University of Pennsylvania, who waited 24 hours to try and clarify her failure to truly denounce the bestial attacks, finally saying it was "evil."

Or as Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana said recently, "Because they have been taught this, we now know that many of our young people believe in diversity, equity, inclusion and the right to kill Jews. They don't see the inconsistency in that, they don't see the irony in that."

New council member, city judge join re-elected city officials

By Mike Steely
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One new member and a new municipal judge will join the city on Saturday when the mayor, council and judge officials are sworn in in the main assembly room of the City-County Building.

The new municipal judge is Tyler Caviness, who defeated long-serving Judge John Rosson Jr.

Debbie Helsley will become the new Seat B at-large councilwoman.

She replaces Janet Tetterman who chose not to seek re-election.

Incumbents Mayor Indya Kincannon, District 5 Councilman Charles Thomas, and at-large council members Lynne Fugate and Amelia Parker will also take the oath of office.

Following the 10:30 a.m. swearing-in, the council will convene to elect the next vice mayor, Beer Board chair, and the Transportation Authority representative.

Punishment, MIL questioned during BOE public forum

By Ken Leinart

Jhanyah Holland, the mother of a 4-year-old pre-K student at West Haven Elementary School, had a few questions for the Knoxville School System (KCS) Board of Education Thursday night, Dec. 7, during the board's Open Forum segment.

Holland's discovery of her son's isolation in what has been described as "a closet" in his classroom in his class was the subject of an article in the city daily newspaper.

She told the board her 4-year-old was placed in a storage closet for "breaking pencils and crayons."

The incident was reported to have happened on Oct. 30. Holland had gone to the school for an awards ceremony where her son was supposed to be recognized for perfect attendance.

That is when Holland found her son in the closet/storage room in his classroom.

"Since then we have put a behavior plan in place for

him to receive positive reinforcement," she said.

The student has been put in a PAC room - a Personal Accountability Class - she said, but added that she had to withdraw her son from the school system to be evaluated by an outside source.

What Holland wanted, she said, was answers.

"Nobody can give me answers, nobody can tell me why he was placed (there), nobody can give me documentation, nobody can tell me how many times

he had been placed there," Holland said.

She said she had reached out to "multiple" people within KCS. She said she was contacted by an assistant superintendent and that she had received a report her son's actions were "attention-seeking" behavior, something not previously addressed.

She said she asked about the changed/new assessment and was told it was a "typo."

She said she hasn't heard

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BOE approves charter school agreement

Cont. from page 1

some clarification concerning the cost for special education and at what point the charter school assumes that responsibility.

A subsection, specific to special education, in the agreement before the board reads, "The charter school's responsibility begins once the student has an IEP (Individualized Education Plan)."

Bike said she had requested the agreement to read the charter school would be responsible once a student was suspected to be in need of student support and/or special education intervention.

Bike said she wanted to know "where the charter school financial obligation really does start."

Bike said the charter school was not in favor of

that change.

Jason Myers, Assistant Superintendent of Student Success with KCS, said once a student is suspected of having an educational disability, that student and their family fall under the protection of Section 504, a Civil Rights law (through the Americans with Disabilities Act - ADA) prohibiting discrimination based on disability whether that student is determined to need special education services or not.

"That's very different than receiving special education services," he said.

He added cost would not be encumbered until a student is positively identified as needing special education services.

He said, to his understanding, that is why the language in the agreement "is that way."

He said if a child is identified as needing special education services, the charter school would be obligated to pay for them.

Myers also said there is "no specific cost" if a student is put under Section 504.

The motion to approve the agreement was by Ninth District's Kristi Kristy and seconded by Fifth District's Susan Horn.

The motion passed by a 5-1-2 vote with District 8's Mike McMillan absent.

Dr. John Butler (District 1) and Bike passed on the vote.

Also before the board: Cheslea Price, an adoption attorney in Knoxville, was introduced to the board as Student Success Advisory Improvement Officer Thursday night. Price's hire was announced earlier in the week.

THREE RIVERS REPUBLICAN CLUB
2023 CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION
 Tuesday, December 12 | 6:00 p.m.

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M.C. Phil Campbell

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Bring unwrapped toys and come hungry!

Merry Christmas!

Animal Control back on city agenda

By Mike Steely
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The transfer of animal control to the Young-Williams Animal Center came before the Knoxville City Council two weeks ago and was postponed until the council's meeting Tuesday evening. The item is back on the agenda and, if passed, the animal center would take over city and county calls for animal

problems, relieving the police and sheriff's departments of those duties.

Police Chief Paul Noel said that police officers will still be available if requested. Janet Testerman, who is also a city council member, heads the non-profit YWAC and says their own unarmed control officers will be hired, trained and ready to assume responsibility for city or county animal calls if approved by

both the council and the Knox County Commission.

Young-Williams Animal Center would assume such duties on April 1. The ordinance on the city agenda is on its first reading for approval and a second reading is required although, if approved, an emergency reading Tuesday would finalize an agreement.

The city is again hiring two lobbyist firms to

represent it in Nashville. Cornerstone Government Affairs Inc. may be contracted for \$180,000 and Fred D. (Tony) Thompson Jr. may be signed for \$72,000.

A new fee schedule for the Department of Plans Review and Building Inspections for inspections, permits, renewals, plans review, licenses and appeals may be adopted.

The mayor may be approved to apply for a

\$300,000 grant for salaries, benefits, supplies, equipment and training for an Advocate for Overdose Families in a request from the police department.

The council may also approve zoning changes for properties on Delapp Drive and Sylvia Drive, increasing the allowed density of houses there. Zoning changes are also being requested for properties on Beech Street, Lonas Drive

and Robinson Road.

The late Larry G. Cox will be honored and two lots in Burlington may be purchased for \$700,000 for development of a new fire station in that community.

Four lots on Magnolia Avenue may get a tax break for renovation and the council may review remedial plans and fines for the sale of beer to minors in a request from the Beer Board.

Merit board asks commission to permit political activity

By Mike Steely
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The Knox County Sheriff's Office Employees' Merit System Board of Directors voted recently to ask the Knox County Commission to permit merit members to be publically politically active in all local campaigns except the sheriff's race.

Meeting in the merit system office in the Old Knox County Courthouse last month, the 7-member board voted 4-3 on the idea.

Two proponents of the motion were John Valliant Jr. and John Marshall, a member of the former merit council. Marshall said that while he agrees with many of the updates the county commissioners made to the board's rules and

regulations, he thinks the restrictions on board member political activity went too far.

Commissioner Larsen Jay, who spearheaded the reform and reorganization of the board, spoke to the meeting asking how a politically active merit board would benefit KCSO officers. He stressed that the county commission has the power to change the merit board rules.

Valliant disagreed, saying the commission does not have that authority. He cited free speech and Constitutional Rights. "We're not employees," he said.

Marshall said the very nature of the merit board is political. He noted that the commission revised its rules and now permits

KCSO employees to seek political office while employed. Merit board member Lindsey Willis said the perception of the officers appearing before the board is important and asked that the proposal meet "somewhere in the middle."

Marshall replied he has spoken to officers from different divisions and there is "no pushback" on what the merit board wants to do.

Merit board member Clarence Vaughn urged the board to stay apolitical so KCSO employees would have confidence in them and also urged some middle ground in the proposal.

The reworking of the group, changing it from a 3-member council to a 7-member board and updating its rules

and regulations, was the result of drama caused by previous merit council members being too political.

While board members may not publicly support a candidate for sheriff, they are permitted to attend political meetings and vote.

The split vote by the seven board members now goes to the county commission for a decision and is on the agenda for today's Work Session. The Knox County Commission will also consider amending the merit board rules to "allow a Right of Grievance for suspensions of any time length that result in a loss of pay" for KCSO employees.

Junior Commission applicants sought

Cont. from page 1
Commissioner Class of 2024 will attend commission meetings, workshops and other functions of the commission, learning about things important to a healthy republic and

functioning democracy. This is the second year of the youth civics program.

Interested parents or students may also contact Commissioner Larsen Jay at (865) 224-3735 or email larsen.jay@knoxcounty.org.

BOE public forum

Cont. from page 3
from anyone about the incident, and she wasn't sure who was aware of it.

Of her three minutes of time allowed for public comments, Holland used two of those minutes, saying she would use the last minute of her time to answer questions from any board member. She received none.

Also in the public forum part of the meeting, a KCS teacher with a son in the school system, rebuked concerns from the Mothers of Liberty organization voiced during the board's

November meeting.


Stacey Reece, who said she is a teacher in District 4 of Knox County, addressed the board and said she was "shocked" when a member of Mothers of Liberty had said there was a "very supportive board member," during the board's November meeting.

She said Mothers of Liberty had been identified as an "extremist group" by the Southern Poverty Law Center. She said Mothers of Liberty had "Consistently vilified and maligned public educators and public education legislation."




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The Doctor is in

a weekly column by
Dr. Jim Ferguson

A Changed Life

The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.
Pablo Picasso

I don't get out as much as I used to. All my life I was working or hurrying to get somewhere. And then I retired and discovered I was already there.

I love country music and one of my favorite artists is Alan Jackson. He has a song called "Chasin' That Neon Rainbow" and one of the memorable lyrics goes: "... just trying to be somebody, just wanna be heard and seen..." I can appreciate that pursuit of career, excellence and even notoriety. However, in a more recent song, "The Older I Get," Jackson sings of love, friends and getting older. That's where I am today. Tragically, Jackson is giving up his music career due to a genetic peripheral

neuropathy that has made performing impossible.

Most careers run their course. Mine did. I was blessed with a rewarding and successful career in medicine. But it was time to move on. I remain a committed Christian, a husband, a father and a grandfather. And now I have been repurposed as a writer. This will be the 839th column of "The Doctor is in," and I am blessed that I am able to "give it away."

Recently, I was "Home Alone" because Becky was helping an ailing friend. Since I'm no longer rushing to the hospital or my office, I'm at home more, but I have managed to stay out of Becky's hair. We have different gifts and responsibilities. Becky is more practical and makes our house a home. I'm more contemplative, but I also manage the garden, orchard and vineyard as

well as our yard, though we have no grass. I mowed grass all my life, so grass is banned from our home in the woods. Thankfully, in my new careers as a retiree and a writer, I have time for study, writing, and still get my chores done.

My education continues but in different directions. I'm not a chef like Mrs. Becky; I might lay claim to being a sous-chef. I can creditably peel potatoes and do other prep work for The Chef. And then, like the little girl from the old Shake & Bake commercial, I can proudly say, "I ha-lp'd." I also do the grilling and can cook simple things like a pot of beans with ham, carrots and celery. As a result, when Becky got home she was greeted with an aromafilled house, a crackling fire and a glass of wine.

Learning is a lifelong endeavor and my household education continues in retirement. I've learned to do laundry, clean toilets and refresh vegetables. I despise wilted lettuce and limp celery. But we Ferguson's are a frugal bunch, so I've learned to put limp veggies in a pitcher of water, and voila! Freshened veggies. It works just like watering flowers. And one more tip, husbands: putting a cut piece of fruit in a container with, for instance, fruitcake, etc.

will moisten the cake. I was never taught such things in medical school.

The regular college football season is over so I've started watching pro football. It's a different game than college, where you never know whether your team will "show up." I've been a Vol fan since I went to UT Knoxville and remember going to football games in 1969 as an undergraduate wearing a suit and tie! Today's collegiate fan garb is often...eye-catching, but pales in comparison to the regalia of professional football fans.

I don't have a favorite pro team since Peyton Manning retired. I do like Peyton's commercials, as well as Patrick Mahomes' of the Kansas City Chiefs. And the relationship of Taylor Swift and Kansas City tight end Travis Kelce has garnered extra attention for the Chiefs.

The colors of the Kansas City team are red and black, and fans often wear head-dresses and do the tomahawk chop just like Atlanta Braves baseball fans.

I've learned that the majority of the mainstream media, and especially sports media, are liberal activists. This was recently demonstrated when a sports "journalist" wrote a hit piece on a little boy at a Chiefs' game who was said

to be in blackface and wearing an Indian headdress. Actually, the boy's face was painted red on one half and black on the other. I won't mention the scurrilous writer's name (though it sounds like Karen), or the website that published his screed, along with a picture showing only the black side of the kid's face to justify their racist story.

And not only did they malign the kid, we found out he's Native American! Folk's, this is "cultural Marxism" on display and it's everywhere. We better wake up, recognize and say, "No!" to these anti-American leftists who promote class warfare in race, sexual matters, immigration, religion, abortion, the economy and I could go on. As Jesus said, "You will know them for the fruit they produce." Their fruit is hatred and divisive class warfare.

As the Marxist culture war in America continues, have you noticed the Democrat left's political "pivot?" Since they can't run on Bidenomics, the border disaster, energy policy, national security, crime, gender dysphoria, men in women's sports or the drug crisis, they have accelerated their denigration of President Trump to coincide with their "lawfare" (political warfare

using the courts). Actually, I much preferred Maganomics, a border wall, lower gas prices and so-called "mean" tweets.

Recently, Democrat politico James Carville, aka Skeletor, was on Bill Maher's show and continued the lie about President Trump's comments at Charlottesville. Thankfully David Rubin took Carville to the woodshed. But expect more lies about "dictators" and January 6 where President Trump actually told his followers to "march peacefully and patriotically" in protest of the corruption in the 2020 election. The guardrails of decency don't exist with leftists and cultural Marxists like antisemite Squad member Rep. Jayapal. Even Senator John Fetterman understands the crooks around him (Sen. Bob Menendez), and courageously spoke out on behalf of Hamas hostages. His mind is clearer than Biden's, AOC's Squad, Ivy League presidents or the feckless UN who can't speak against Hamas' sexual atrocities.

If the cultural Marxists have convinced you that President Trump must be locked up to save democracy, then you are indeed delusional, the fruit of hatred and are lost.

You may email Dr. Ferguson at fergusonj@knoxfocus.com

Wreaths honoring veterans to be placed Saturday, Dec. 16

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

More than 18,000 wreaths will be placed on the graves of military veterans in Knox County by volunteers on Saturday, December 16, thanks to donations from organizations and the public.

Wreaths Across America ceremonies and wreath placement at the graves of veterans in Knoxville National Cemetery on Tyson Street, the Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery on Lyon's View Pike and the East Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery on John Sevier Highway will honor the



men and women who served their nation.

Ceremonies begin at noon and the public is

invited to attend and help place the wreaths at the tombstones.

Catching Up With

Misty Williams

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

If you attend events honoring veterans you'll find her there, doing more than her part to salute living and deceased veterans. Misty Williams is involved with the Knoxville Wreaths Across America and many other veteran-related events.

The Knoxville Focus caught up with Misty recently and she responded to several questions for our readers.

How did you get involved with Wreaths Across America's Knoxville campaign?

My mom told me about Wreaths Across America at Knoxville National Cemetery back in 2013. I looked into it and thought it would be a great way to give back to those who have given so much to me and my family. Due to a circumstance with a previous member, I was in the right place at the right time and this (WAA) wonderful opportunity

just fell into my lap.

Please tell us about other veteran events you take part in.

Along with WAA, I am a board member of the United Veterans Council of East Tennessee. I was also instrumental in getting the Free Veterans Breakfast (established) in Knox County and Oliver Springs. I also support the welcome home celebrations with HonorAir Knoxville by carrying a flag and escorting veterans. I am a member of Bill Robinson Chapter 1078 Vietnam Veterans of America. I also play a small part in many other veteran events and organizations.

Tell us about your family.

I come from a family of four with one sister. I grew up in Halls Crossroads in North Knox County on a 13-acre small farm. I really enjoyed raising animals and playing softball and other

Continue on page 2

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It's time for a miracle

The minister talked about miracles today. Instead of staying with her as she explained, my mind wandered about what kind of miracles this world could use today. Several of them



By Joe Rector
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quickly came to mind, but only a few seemed most important for now. I'll call the miracle the four Ps.

The first P is "polarization." This country's citizens have by choice divided themselves into groups. It's always been a problem, but since the 2016 election, the separation into different groups has become a frightening thing. If the USA wants to continue to be "the shining beacon on

the hill" or "the last best hope on earth," then it is we, the present caretakers of this place who have to unite. The miracle of unity over polarization would bring an end to the problems we have in so many areas. The rest of the world would again have the symbol of freedom and democracy lighting the way.

The next P is "phones." This device is an essential tool for all parts of our lives. The problem is that cell phones have become too many people's world. At restaurants, concerts, schools and churches, those handheld devices are stuck squarely in the faces of users. Life outside

the confines of the screens doesn't exist. Entire families sit for a meal without uttering a word because each adult and child has a cell phone that transfixes their brains. A miracle that our world needs is disabling all cell phones except for set hours in the morning and evening. Presto! People sit together at meals and talk. Friends in the same room no longer text each other; they talk instead. Student grades might even improve if they have nothing to draw their attention away from the teacher.

The third P would be "politics." I am as bad as anyone about being sucked into the cable networks to hear the latest depressing news about the things our so-called

leaders are doing or failing to do. The fact that we supported a country that was defending its sovereignty and then pulled the plug on helping to finance the place so that it could obtain military equipment baffles me. Few, if any, bills are passed because all the time is taken in hearing both sides squabble over who is right. The miracle we need is to have only qualified people running for office. I don't necessarily mean lawyers or lifetime officeholders who've never held any other kind of job. I think that we could have this miracle by demanding that any person running for a federal office must be able to pass a rigid test on the Constitution. State candidates would have to pass a test on the state

and federal constitutions. Such a demand assures the voters that candidates have some knowledge about the government for which they are making decisions.

The last P is for "peace." Most of us are just too busy. We run about our business in an almost sprinting way. "Hurry" is the word that echoes in our minds and drives us to the point of exhaustion. We worry over things of which we have no control and too often try to micromanage fellow workers and our children. We don't live life but struggle through it. In the end, all that's left to show for our madness is broken-down bodies and worn-out minds. The miracle of peace would set us free from our worries.

The things in this life that truly matter would take center stage in our lives. Individuals have to work on finding their peace by living in a new way. The change will be hard, but the miracles that come will be worth the effort.

Christmas is upon us, and it's a time of excitement and wonder. It also is filled with expectations of what is possible and what might come. Pray for miracles in your lives and expect them to come. Know that they can change the lives of those who are willing to work to make them appear. Believe in miracles because they are right in front of you and only wait for you to reach for them. Your lives will never be the same.

Sliding... into Christmas!



By Ralphine Major
ralphine3@yahoo.com

What animal can hold a child's attention better than a mischievous, cunning penguin? Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, is such a penguin! The adorable, tuxedo-dressed animal can steal your heart. An entire series of books takes readers on adventures with Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, from Hawaii to the North Pole and from the Lone Star State to our beloved Great Smoky Mountains!

Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, books are suitable for all ages. They are great for baby showers. They are perfect for children learning to read. Even college students have been known to come to our book signings because they like penguins! And, ninety-year-olds are fascinated by the tongue-twisting name of the widdle penguin. Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, books emphasize kindness, caring, and sharing. While a trace of education is woven into the pages, these books can bring lots of smiles and laughter to little ones. If you do not know of a child who would enjoy Piddle Diddle books, consider purchasing



Art from one of Piddle Diddle the Widdle Penguin's adventures.

books for missions, underprivileged children, or for anyone who loves penguins! We regularly send shipments of books purchased by kindhearted donors throughout the year to sick and abused children. The series includes: "Piddle Diddle's Lost Hat" --- "Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, Goes to Hawaii" --- "Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, and the Texas Longhorns" --- "Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, and the Birthday Drone" --- and "Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, and the Synchronous Fireflies of the Great Smoky Mountains."

Books may be purchased

individually or, for even more fun reading, all five in a set! Add Piddle Diddle, the Widdle Penguin, books to your gift list and bring smiles and laughter to your favorite boy or girl! Visit www.jan-carol-publishing.com or call 423-926-9983 to order yours today. Autographed copies are available at ralphine3@yahoo.com or 865-679-2917.

Words of Faith found in Luke 2:7 (KJV): "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Catching Up With

Misty Williams

Cont. from page 1

sports. My family is what you would call a military family. Two great-grandfathers, both granddads, all of my uncles, and a few cousins have served in the armed forces. My dad is a combat Vietnam USMC veteran and that is why I put so much effort into what I give back. It is the least I can do and I'm trying to do my part.

What connects you to Knoxville/Knox County?

I was born in Knoxville, Tennessee at the University of Tennessee Medical Center. So, you could say I was a Vols fan from the start. I have lived in this area my whole life with my family and I think this is the most beautiful place to grow up and live. I am the eighth generation of my family to live in East Tennessee.

What are your other interests?

I enjoy going camping in the camper — anything and everything related to the Vols. I seek out big and small adventures. Some would say I have a Gypsy Soul for traveling the world. But, most importantly I enjoy spending time with my family and friends.

What is your occupation?

I work as a CNA at an Assisted Living PRN as well as being a full-time overnight resident care specialist at an Independent living facility.

How do you maintain such



Misty Williams is a familiar face at many area events honoring our military veterans.

an optimistic attitude?

I just try to live my best life and keep humble. I have a strong faith in my walk with Jesus. I make a point to find the lesson and the blessing in every situation that comes along.

Do you have a favorite memory about the Christmas Holidays?

My most memorable Christmas was when my youngest daughter was born on December 22,

2003. She was the best Christmas gift I have ever received. Another was when my Mamaw Bradshaw gave all of her grandchildren a handmade quilt with some homemade jelly and chowchow. My Mamaw, who lived to be the young age of 103, passed away this past August and this has made my memories with her even more special.

Safety City Celebrates Christmas

During "A Safety City Christmas," families are invited to bring their own bicycles, push scooters, battery-operated cars, doll buggies and more to see the display of Christmas lights around the miniature city.

Safety City is a project of the Knoxville Police Department and the objective of it is to teach children about vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle and fire safety.

It will be open from 4-8 p.m. on the following dates:

- Tuesday, Dec. 12
- Wednesday, Dec. 13
- Thursday, Dec. 14

These dates are subject to change due to weather and other conditions. There may also be a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus.

All are welcome to join in the holiday festivities.

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Raymond E. Willis of Indiana

Pages from the Past



By Ray Hill
rayhill865@gmail.com

Raymond Eugene Willis was literally born into the printing business. His father, Frank, had been a veteran of the Civil War and owned the Waterloo Press. The son of “a country editor” and one of six brothers and eight children, Raymond E. Willis spent his entire adult life as a country editor. By eleven years of age, Raymond Willis was setting type in his father’s press shop. While attending Wabash College, Ray Willis paid for his expenses by working in the college print shop. Willis prided himself on being able to personally operate every piece of equipment in his printing plant. Quite a few small-town newspaper publishers and editors made it to Congress and Raymond E. Willis was one of them. Perhaps one reason small-town editors and publishers so often found their way to the halls of Congress was because they were at the heart of the communities in which they lived. Those same small-town publishers and editors were deeply woven into the fabric of the life of the community itself.

Right after graduating from college, Willis gained an interest in the Angola Magnet. That newspaper was later merged with the Steuben Republican and the Steuben Printing Company of Angola, which was owned by Raymond Willis. The Steuben Printing Company printed the Angola Herald and the Steuben Republican; both were weekly newspapers. For years, Willis had been active in Indiana’s Republican Party. The first political post that Willis held was that of secretary to the Steuben County Republican Central Committee. That led to Raymond E. Willis being appointed postmaster of Angola from 1910-1911 under President William Howard Taft. During the First World War, Willis served as chairman of the Steuben County Defense in 1917. Like most small-town publishers, Raymond Willis was a joiner and was a long-time member of Rotary, eventually serving as the Indiana district governor. Willis was once president of the Indiana Republican Editorial Association and was a 32nd degree Mason.

Somewhat portly and jowly, Raymond E. Willis exemplified an individual at the heart of small-town Indiana. Belonging to a host of fraternal and professional organizations made Raymond Willis an appealing choice to seek public office. Willis also proved to be an able speaker and drew statewide notice for his oratorical efforts when he closed out a Masonic Convocation. “The world today is moving in a befogged social, moral and economic atmosphere,” Willis told his fellow Masons. “The bewilderment has affected music,

art, literature, finance, diplomatic relations and orderly concepts of government throughout the world.”

Indiana had been predominately Republican, but also had a strong Democratic Party and oftentimes became a battleground between the two political parties. Like much of the country, with the advent of the Great Depression, Indiana swung to the Democrats. Franklin D. Roosevelt had carried the Hoosier State in 1932 and swept in Paul V. McNutt as governor while Frederick Van Nuys beat James E. Watson, the incumbent and the majority leader of the United States Senate. McNutt, a handsome, silver-haired man with a tan, looked like the prototypical Hollywood ideal of a governor. Paul McNutt immediately set out to build a formidable political organization, which ruled Indiana for better than a decade. McNutt funded his machine by imposing a 2% assessment on all state jobs, which was used to fund political campaigns every other year. Indiana’s other GOP United States senator, Arthur Robinson, was defeated in 1934 by Sherman Minton and the state machine.

Paul McNutt, limited to a single four-year term by Indiana’s constitution, watched as his lieutenant governor, Clifford Townsend, was elected as chief executive to succeed him in 1936.

By 1938, Republicans were encouraged and highly anticipated beating Senator Frederick Van Nuys. A diminutive and bespectacled attorney, Van Nuys had profoundly upset the McNutt machine and the Townsend administration by his strong opposition to FDR’s plan to pack the U.S. Supreme Court in 1937. Governor Townsend practically read Van Nuys out of the party and at the time, nominations in Indiana were made by delegates to conventions rather than open primaries. Few doubted the state machine could easily deny Senator Van Nuys the Democratic nomination. The state organization underestimated the little senator who proved he too knew a little something about power politics. Senator Van Nuys opened his bid for renomination and reelection early and set out to identify 100,000 Hoosiers who backed him. Senator Van Nuys defiantly declared if his party denied him its nomination, he would run in the general election as an Independent. Former Governor Paul McNutt instantly knew if that were to happen, a Republican would surely win the general election. It made the GOP nomination for the United States Senate all the more valuable and several viable candidates emerged, including former



FROM THE AUTHOR'S PERSONAL COLLECTION

Autographed portrait of Senator Raymond E. Willis of Indiana.

Senator James E. Watson, who began the race as the favorite.

Indiana Democrats quickly fell into line behind Senator Van Nuys while Republicans fought over their own nomination for the U.S. Senate. On March 3, 1938, Raymond E. Willis released a statement officially declaring his candidacy for the Republican nomination for the United States Senate. “This decision was reached after careful consideration of the indorsement of many Republican editors and party workers from every section of the state,” Willis said in his announcement.

That same day, former Senator James E. “Sunny Jim” Watson made his own declaration of candidacy for the GOP senatorial nomination. “All my life I have been interested in sound government,” Watson’s announcement read. “My long experience in government should qualify me for further service in the solution of our present crucial problems.” Watson said he was motivated by “my desire to assist my party” to declare his candidacy. Jim Watson had first been elected to Congress in 1894 and was 73 years old when he made his candidacy official. Watson was more than a decade older than the 62-year-old Willis. The origin of Raymond Willis’s senatorial campaign began with a collection of northern Indiana editors and publishers, who urged him to run. The only other elective office Raymond Willis had ever sought was a seat in the Indiana state legislature. Willis won that election and retired after a single term.

Indiana Republicans gathered in convention in Indianapolis at the Fair Grounds Coliseum in late June of 1938 to select their nominee for the U.S. Senate. Willis led on the first and second ballots, but never acquired a majority against three other candidates, including former Senator Watson, until the third. The first ballot caused many delegates to hold their breath as Willis

had 444 votes to 442 for Jim Watson. It was on the third ballot that Raymond E. Willis began picking up steam and building to winning a majority of the assembled delegates. Willis sailed past the 881 votes necessary to win the Republican nomination for the U. S. Senate.

The victorious Willis mounted the platform as the delegates applauded him. “This has been one of the cleanest convention campaigns ever conducted,” Willis told the delegates. “I stand here in humility as the leader of a great party and I am confident we shall have victory in November.”

At the time of his nomination to the United States Senate, Raymond Willis set up the type to his own editorials in his newspaper. Willis’ candidacy received a boost with a pictorial in Life magazine, one of the most widely read magazines in the country at the time. Willis was a critic of Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s reciprocal trade agreements and delighted in holding up a pair of what he contended were a pair of shoddily made shoes, which were imported from overseas.

The contest between Senator Van Nuys and Raymond E. Willis was as close as could be; the incumbent only eked out a win by just over 5,000 votes out of almost 1.6 million ballots cast between the two major party candidates.

Willis was in a commanding position two years later when Indiana’s other seat in the United States Senate came before the voters. Raymond Willis entered the GOP state convention as a heavy favorite for the senatorial nomination. Once again, Indiana Republicans gathered at the Fair Grounds Coliseum in Indianapolis to choose their senatorial nominee. The Indianapolis Star described Willis as “a typical country editor, quiet, unassuming serious, with a wide knowledge of events” as well as a “world of information about government

and its functions.”

Once again, Raymond E. Willis faced a Democrat in the general election. Sherman “Shay” Minton was a formidable opponent, but unlike his senior colleague Frederick Van Nuys, Minton was a stalwart of FDR’s New Deal. Minton had stubbornly supported Roosevelt’s effort to pack the Supreme Court. Van Nuys’ opposition to the court-packing proposal had won him admirers amongst some Republicans and Independents. Indeed, when it appeared the Democratic machine in Indiana would deny Van Nuys’ renomination, some Republicans urged the senator to run as a Republican. Shay Minton’s reelection bid united Republicans solidly behind Raymond Willis who was aided in his own campaign by that of Wendell Willkie, a former Democrat who had won the GOP presidential nomination. The saving grace of Willkie’s campaign, at least for Willis, was the fact Willkie, although a resident of New York, was a native-born Hoosier. Home state pride helped to propel Wendell Willkie’s presidential bid in Indiana.

That boost was enough to help Raymond E. Willis beat Shay Minton in the general election. Minton would later be named to the U.S. Supreme Court by his one-time Senate colleague Harry Truman.

The 64-year-old Willis and his wheelchair-bound wife headed for Washington, D.C. As a member of the United States Senate and a Midwesterner, Raymond Willis was deeply suspicious of foreign entanglements and wary of America being drawn into the Second World War, which was already raging across the globe. Willis spoke over the radio against Lend Lease legislation proposed by the Roosevelt Administration.

Willis became the senior senator when his colleague Frederick Van Nuys died in his sleep on January 25, 1944. Senator Willis announced he would seek a second term in the United

States Senate in 1946. The senator faced a formidable opponent in William Ezra Jenner, a young attorney and veteran, who had been elected to serve a few months of the late Van Nuys’ term in a 1944 special election. The 70-year-old senator sent a letter announcing he would wage a “vigorous” campaign for the GOP nomination at the coming GOP convention. The senator already had one announced opponent, Congressman Charles LaFollette, when he made his declaration of candidacy in February of 1946. At the end of March, Bill Jenner made his own candidacy official. All three candidates for the Republican senatorial nomination opened headquarters at the Claypool Hotel in Indianapolis. The objections to Senator Willis by some Indiana Republicans were his age, as he was approaching 71, and his inherent conservatism. LaFollette was considered to be a very liberal Republican, while Jenner was thought to be somewhere in the middle.

The chief weakness of Senator Willis was his lack of support from the powerful GOP state organization, which was headed by Governor Ralph Gates. Jenner had been a former chairman of the Indiana Republican Party and was a favorite of many active Republicans. Young, handsome and aggressive, Bill Jenner provided a stark contrast to the aging country editor, who likely seemed outdated to many delegates to the GOP convention. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, Senator Raymond Willis withdrew his candidacy for renomination just before the balloting began. Jenner’s strength at the convention was shown by his winning 1,994 votes to a paltry 105 for Congressman LaFollette. Thirty delegates chose not to vote, all of whom had been pledged to Senator Willis.

Jenner hurried to Senator Willis’ room in the Claypool Hotel where the two were photographed shaking hands. The defeat sent Willis back to his newspaper.

On the night of March 21, 1956, Raymond Willis went for a walk after having had his dinner in downtown Angola around 6:30 p.m. Willis was walking when he suddenly felt ill and collapsed at the Hotel Hendry. Evidently, Willis insisted on being taken home, although someone had the good sense to summon a doctor who promptly sent the former senator to the hospital. At 8:30 p.m. that same night, Raymond E. Willis suffered another heart attack, which proved to be fatal.

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Top wrestling teams to compete in Halls/Seymour Showdown

By Ken Lay
 Two of the top area wrestling programs will take to the mats Thursday night as Seymour will grapple at Halls in the Halls/Seymour Showdown.
 It will be a busy night of competition for the Eagles and the Red Devils as the action begins at 6

p.m. at Halls High School. Wrestling will take place on two mats and opens with the elementary schools on one mat. The middle school teams will compete on the other mat.
 Following the elementary and middle school matches, at approximately 7:30 p.m., the high school girls

and high school dual meets will be contested.
 The boys high school match will feature the 2022-23 dual meet and traditional state champion Red Devils (who were reclassified to Class 2A this season) against the up-and-coming Eagles, who compete in Class A against

Clinton, Seymour, Anderson County and Gibbs.
 A wrestling event of this magnitude is nothing new for the Red Devils, who have traditionally competed with Maryville High in the same format.
 "We've done this for a few years against Maryville," Halls coach Shannon

Sayne said. "We're looking forward to competing with Seymour at all levels."
 "They'll be a powerhouse soon. They were a powerhouse when I first took over the program (at Halls) and then they had a time when their program dropped off a little. They've done a good job with their youth program

over the last several years and now, those wrestlers are in high school."
 The Lady Eagles have also become a force on the statewide scene.
 "Their girls team is really good," Sayne said.
 Admission to Thursday night's showcase meets are \$5.

OWEN TAYLOR

Not perfect, but maybe the best overall

By Steve Williams
 Owen Taylor is not perfect. He missed an extra-point kick this season.
 He may not be as good as those Colquitt punters, either.
 But when you combine the kick and punt skills, there may not be a better kicker / punter that has played high school football in Knox County.
 This year for sure there wasn't a better one across the Volunteer State and the Halls High senior was announced last week as the Tennessee Titans' Mr. Football Kicker of the Year.
 The award also required

having good academics and character. According to Halls Coach Brent Hughes, Owen checked off those boxes, too.
 "Owen was a tremendous player for us," said Hughes. "He is a terrific young man that has all the ability in the world. He was so important to our team and got us in so many better situations as it pertains to the game, I just can't say enough about his ability. More importantly, he is a great kid and will make a difference in this world and go on to be a great husband and father one day. I love him and it is



Continue on page 3

2023 MAC AND YAC FOOTBALL

Admirals rally to repeat as MAC champions

By Steve Williams
 Two sensational touchdown runs by Matthew Rogers lifted unbeaten Farragut to a fourth quarter come-from-behind 18-15 win over Austin-East in the Middle School-Age Conference 8th grade varsity championship game Oct. 25 at Farragut.
 The Admirals eliminated Halls 32-2 in the first round of the playoffs and Bearden 30-0 in the semifinals.
 The Farragut defense was not scored on in eight of its 10 games this year.
 Coach Roy Stone said he was "most proud" of the team for playing with poise and confidence throughout the season.
 "We grew together as one heartbeat," added Stone, who finished his third season as head coach of the Farragut varsity team.



Farragut Admirals MAC Varsity Champions

Stone pointed out this year's team had won back-to-back MAC championships, including last year's 7th grade junior varsity title.

"We had a really good coaching staff this year," said Stone. "Todd Hazelwood is our defensive coordinator and Robbie Jacobs is our offensive coordinator. I think they

both did a really good job."
 Farragut had seven coaches that did not have a player on the team.
 "This team is so talented that

all you have to do is get them playing with heart and desire and keep the fire stoked," said Stone.
 "They responded each practice and loved practicing, so it was no surprise to me the way we responded trailing in the championship game.
 "Some things you just can't coach; it's already in you and that was this team. It started with caring for each other and playing for your teammates."
 Logan Wright, who was injured in the first playoff game, came back in the championship game, despite being hobbled and not at full speed. "But he played with the heart of a lion," said Stone. "We would not have been in the championship game if not for him; he did so much for this team."
 Coach Stone also said the team always left the field each day giving God "our thanks."

2023 MAC AND YAC FOOTBALL

Black guides Halls to back-to-back titles

By Steve Williams

A double overtime 12-6 victory over Austin-East on Nov. 4 at Gibbs High gave Halls 8U Coach Dustin Black his second straight title in the Youth Athletic Conference.

"I had almost everybody back from 2022 (7U title team)," said Black. "Also, I gained a few more players that helped us. We had 27 kids on our team.

"I believe that having a veteran team is important," added Black. "These kids bought into what we are teaching to get them ready for high school football. They know what we expect and how we coach. These kids are special and great athletes."

Halls finished the season 11-0 in the league and 13-0 overall.

Brandon Moles (No. 20) and Luke Campbell (No. 15) led the team offensively and defensively, respectively. Coach Black added that Nolan Ownby (No. 25)



8U Champs Halls

made "the biggest stop of the game" on the last play to keep Austin-East from scoring in the second OT.

"I could go on and on about the proudest moment this season, but these kids came ready to defend their championship title," said Black.

"Finally, as a head coach I want these kids to be taught football but also life lessons. We don't just teach football 101; we teach life lessons 101.

BIG9U of Oak Ridge wins 7-0 in finals

Sean Miller's team was named "BIG9U" and was affiliated with the Boys & Girls Club of Oak Ridge. They won the YAC 9U championship with a 7-0 win over Halls.

"It was a complete team effort on both offense and defense," said Coach Miller. "Our score came on a 19-yard pass from Halls' 45-yard line, from QB Caleb

Malone to WR Braylon Knipp, who ran the rest of the way to the end zone."

BIG9U finished with a 10-1 overall record after going 7-1 in the regular

season. Its lone loss was a 13-6 decision against Fulton.

In the playoffs, the Oak Ridge team beat Hardin Valley 34-0 in the first round and Powell 12-6 in Round 2.

"I'm very proud, not only of the parents, coaches and team's accomplishments; but mainly for these young men's dedication, perseverance, resiliency, and the brotherhood they created," said Miller. "They prepared hard and played for each other through the good and tough times in the season."



9U Champs Oak Ridge



6U Flag Champs Roadrunners



UT Head Coach Josh Heupel with the Roadrunners after their first round playoff win over West in the MAC Junior Varsity division.

MAC (Middle-school Age Conference)	YAC Youth Athletic Conference
Alcoa	Alcoa
Austin-East	Austin-East
Bearden	Bearden
Central	Carter
Farragut	Central
Fulton	Farragut
Gibbs	Fulton
Halls	Gibbs
Hardin Valley	Halls
Karns	Hardin Valley
Powell	Karns
South-Doyle	Oak Ridge
West	Powell
	South-Doyle
	West

McAlister and assistants proud of Roadrunners' 6U Flag team

When you're coaching 4-year olds through 6-year olds in flag football, you need plenty of assistance.

It's no wonder Coach Anthony McAlister said: "First I want to thank my coaches Cory Anderson, Brandon Winton, and James Ward. They put a lot of time in to help make this season a success."

The Roadrunners went 8-0 during the regular season and 3-0 in the playoffs for an overall 11-0 record en route to the Youth Athletic Conference 6U Flag Football championship.

"We played one of the other Roadrunner teams and won 26-20 after a touchdown run by Kam Anderson as time expired!" said McAlister, who added that Tre Ward also helped lead the way in the finals.

"Keeping them focused and engaged with their attention spans was a challenge as well as finding ways to keep it fun while teaching them the game," added McAlister, who was a TSSAA Mr. Football (Class 3A) honoree in 2005, following his playing days as a linebacker at Austin-East High.

McAlister said he was most proud of his team

for "never backing down from a challenge and fighting through adversity. We were down at halftime three times this year and fought our way back. Other games we were missing key players and others stepped up!"

'7U RR #ElmStreetBoyz' take title

The 7U champion tackle team in YAC this season was a scary opponent and Coach Charlie McCaleb referred to his squad as the "7U RR #ElmStreetBoyz" after the movies "Friday the 13th" and "A Nightmare on Elm Street."

McCaleb's Roadrunners went 10-0 and defeated the Fulton Falcons 18-6 in the championship game. Tomekian Pennington Jr. led the way and had two of their three touchdowns.

McCaleb said his team had a target on its back and had to "grind all year to be 10-0. Our kids put in to be 10-0. We pushed our guys all year and they responded - it's what I'm most proud of!"

When asked what was the most "challenging part" about coaching the 7U age group, Charlie replied, laughing out loud: "To keep them focused during practice."



7U Champs Roadrunners

Maurice Smith came to the rescue in the fourth quarter to lead Austin-East's MAC Junior Varsity team to a 21-18 win over Karns in the championship game that was played at Farragut High.

Smith was warming up for the varsity game when JV coach Kris Kimbrough had him come back with the Roadrunners trailing by 11 points (18-7).

After playing the first

two quarters with the JV team, Smith was going to play four quarters in the varsity game under the MAC's "quarter rule" that allowed a 7th grader to play a total of six quarters.

Smith, a talented and physical quarterback and running back, threw a 45-yard touchdown pass to Marcos McCord that cut Karns' lead to 18-13 and then scored on a 60-yard run to put A-E

ahead 19-18. His two-point pass to JuJu Young completed the comeback.

Keyvon Booker was a key defensive player for Austin-East along with cornerbacks Kimani Smith and William Dickson and free safety Jamir Kimbrough.

Eli Wolfe, a 6th grader, was a "very physical" left tackle on offense and a tackle and end on defense, said Coach Kimbrough, who added

that Young was a talented DE.

The A-E coach was impressed with the Karns team and said he wouldn't be surprised if they are in the playoffs again next season.

As for his team, Kimbrough said he was most impressed with how "they overcame a shortage of players" this season.

Smith rescues A-E in MAC JV finals

A question for the ages

If you're a college football fan enamored with collecting all kinds of memorabilia, you never know when you'll find something special about your favorite team that catches your attention almost immediately.

By Tom Mattingly

Collectors are unique individuals who instinctively know when they find something that's worth adding to their "stuff."

Price is no object. Thrift stores and estate sales are ready sources of memorabilia. Dr. Andy Kozar, the early 1950s Vol fullback, spent a considerable amount of time making the rounds in search of books, jerseys, and other souvenirs many other fans might dismiss out of hand. He had a special collection unrivaled in this area.

Closer to home, there is a photo on my office wall of John Majors in either Life or Look magazine from the 1956 Georgia Tech game. The full-page story was titled "Unbeaten Giants." There's also a Dyer Gram from that game signed by John Majors and Buddy Cruze, two of the game's heroes.

One other significant piece of memorabilia is a June 2010 tribute I wrote for the Knoxville News Sentinel after Haywood Harris died. The title was "Memories of Vols legend, good man."

There's other similar "stuff" there, but you get the idea.

I also remember once talking with Jim Keller of Huntsville, Ala., who was a University of Alabama grad, Class of 1979, and Crimson Tide football zealot (and that's putting it mildly). What he found



An autographed orange and white football found in a north Florida thrift store

at a Goodwill store in Santa Rosa, Fla., was really too good to pass up. While vacationing in nearby Panama City, he and his wife, Beth, were taking a spin across the countryside when the store beckoned.

The store really didn't look like anything special, but a quick glance at one wall, behind a rack of clothes sitting on a little table, revealed an autographed football. It was complete with orange and white panels and appeared to be a keeper.

He recalled being ready to buy it immediately, but chose to take a closer look. After all, it's not likely that a significant piece of University of Tennessee football memorabilia would find a home in a thrift store in north Florida.

Looking carefully, Keller found the names "Condredge Holloway," "Ray Trail," and "Bill Battle" emblazoned on the ball, affixed with a ballpoint pen.

The football, autographed by Tennessee players and coaches before or during the 1972 season, had weathered the intervening years and probably any number of owners and locations where it might have been stored and/or displayed.

That piqued his curiosity. The total tab was \$3.99 (plus tax), so it was really too good a deal to pass up. For a brief moment, he had wondered if the whole deal was legitimate. He convinced himself it was, in fact, the real thing.

"There was no doubt it was

real," he did say. "Look at the signatures. It would have taken a lot of trouble to fake it. I would've gone crazy had it been an Alabama ball."

Keller wondered how and why the ball had ended up in a thrift store. That is a question for the ages.

The Vols were coming off a series of winning seasons starting in 1965, with big wins, national rankings, bowl games, and two SEC titles over that time frame.

They had defeated Penn State for the second time in as many years in the stadium's first night game. Vol defenders allowed only 100 points over the 12-game schedule, including back-to-back shutouts at Georgia (14-0) and at home against Ole Miss (17-0).

The season concluded with a 24-17 victory over LSU in the Astro-Bluebonnet Bowl, played at Houston's Astrodome. The crowd was nearly split equally in its loyalties and was involved in the game from start to finish.

Holloway, then a sophomore, had dazzled Vol partisans from season's start to finish. The team finished 10-2 and No. 8 nationally. Two close losses to Auburn (10-6) and Alabama (17-10) kept the season from being even more magical than it was.

Holloway and Eddie Brown were two of the main names among the nearly 40 players whose names were easily identifiable, while Battle and assistants Gary Wyant, Bob Davis, Ray Trail, Jim Wright, Lide Huggins, Tim Priest, Wayne Stiles, and Clifton Stewart were among the coaches.

Keller said he enjoyed rummaging through "stuff" at estate and antique sales. He was "fascinated" with his find, recalling that his college roommate had been from Clarksville.

"I had always respected Tennessee," he said. "They were always our biggest rival, sometimes even more than Auburn."

On Keller's trip, the highlight was an orange and white Tennessee autographed football found at a thrift store in the heart of north Florida. The pigskin caught Jim's attention, allowing him to make an important discovery. The experience of being a fan and a collector is definitely something special. Jim Keller can attest to how special it can be.

2023 MAC AND YAC FOOTBALL

'Stifling defense' leads Roadrunners to 10U title



10U Champs Roadrunners

Roadrunners Coach Mark Andrews put together a championship season in the YAC 10-under division this year, despite losing players he had in 2022.

"We lost seven to eight starters off of our previous team to (Powell) the defending champs in the YAC League at this particular age group and like nine to 10 players overall," said Andrews. "We had a total of 25 players this year. Nine of them were 9-year olds and four to five were first year players at 10-years old!"

Still, the Roadrunners posted a 10-0 record after defeating Farragut 25-0 in the championship game. They were led by a stifling

defense which only allowed one touchdown all season, including league play and the playoffs.

"What I was most proud of was how the less experienced players developed and how our leaders stayed the course and led the way," said Andrews. "They believed in one another and most importantly they believed in their selves."

Andrews' team didn't play in the Atlanta League this season due to joining YAC and playing league games on Saturdays.

Andrews also said his team didn't do any traveling this year due to a lack of experience with travel games.

OWEN TAYLOR

Continued from page 1

an honor to be his coach." The 5-10, 155-pound Taylor played soccer his first two years in high school and joined the football team halfway through his sophomore year, Hughes pointed out, so his experience as a kicker and punter is just budding. He added that Owen has a 4.0 GPA and does a lot of community service.

Taylor's statistics overall are as good as a punt that is downed at the 1-yard line.

Six out of nine of his inside kicks were recovered by the Red Devils. That's a surprisingly high rate of success.

Owen may have missed one PAT, but he was 10 for 10 in field goals.

His other regular season stats included a 45.1-yard average on 27 punts, with his longest being 63 yards.

Kicking-wise, 29 of his kickoffs

were touchbacks. His longest FG was 49 yards.

In addition to that one missed extra-point kick, he had one blocked, so he finished 40 for 42.

Counting PATs and FGs, he totaled 70 points.

"Owen had a special experience in Nashville," said Coach Hughes. "We all really didn't know what to think, didn't know if he was going to win, but it was all a first-class experience and he was just so excited to represent his team, school, community, and his family."

"He is still listening to several schools, but he wants to go to aviation school if possible," added Hughes. "He is going to have the opportunity to continue his career and I can't wait to see him take the next step as a football player."

Halls' Ian O'Connor received the TSSAA Mr. Kicker award in 2002 and went on to play at Marshall University.



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- HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL -

Falcons hold off Farragut at Jody Wright Arena

By Ken Lay

Despite seeing his team notch a double-digit victory over a formidable opponent and keep both its long winning streak and perfect record intact, long-time Fulton High School boys basketball coach Jody Wright was far from content.

"We're not playing nearly as well as we're playing right now," Wright said after the Falcons withstood a late comeback attempt from Farragut to nab a 64-54 victory over the Admirals Tuesday night at Jody Wright Arena. "We've got a lot of stuff that we need to clean up."

With the victory, Fulton, the defending Class 3A State Champion, improved to 7-0 on the season and won its 25th consecutive game.

But Wright was disappointed with his team's defense.

"Right now, we're relying on our scoring and that's a dangerous way to think," he said. "But let me say this, Farragut is a very good basketball team and Coach (J.P.) Burris has done a good job with them. They're athletic and they have good shooters. They're a heck of a basketball team."



Farragut's Tony Spadafora brings the ball into the frontcourt Tuesday night as Fulton's Derrick Smith defends in the Falcons 64-54 win at home at Jody Wright Arena.

"But we've got to get better defensively. We're relying on our ability to score."

Fulton opened the game with a surge and led 21-16 by the end of the first quarter, but the Admirals would hang around as the team slugged through an evenly matched second stanza, where both squads scored 12 points, and Fulton led 33-28 at halftime.

After the break, Fulton pulled away a bit and was able to create some separation between itself and the Admirals. The Falcons opened the 48-39 advantage it enjoyed heading into the fourth frame when

senior guard Taj Kimber buried a shot to end the quarter.

The Falcons opened the fourth quarter with a flourish as Kimber's bucket made it 50-39 and helped Fulton eventually open a 54-42 lead when Derrick Smith converted an old-fashioned three-point play with 5:30 to play.

The Falcons led 56-44 before Farragut, with a little help from Fulton, pulled to within 56-49 when Aiden VanAcker knocked down a shot with 2:30 remaining.

"We had too many turnovers late in the game," Wright said after his team defeated the Admirals

for the second time this season.

Fulton defeated the Admirals (3-5) in the RecruitMe Thanksgiving Classic at Farragut on Nov. 25.

On Tuesday, Fulton boasted a balanced offensive attack as post player Tyler Lee led the way with a game-high 20 points, knocking down a pair of 3-pointers. Kimber added 16 points, while Smith and Dexter Lewis finished with 12 points each.

Dom VanAcker and Berkley Naro scored 14 apiece for the Admirals and Aiden VanAcker had 13.

Lady Admirals notch big win at Fulton

By Ken Lay

Defense and rebounds were the key ingredients in a recipe that spelled victory for the Farragut High School girls basketball team Tuesday night.

It was a good thing for the Lady Admirals that their defense traveled and that they were able to crash the boards, and particularly crash the offensive glass.

"We did a good job on the offensive boards, but we certainly gave ourselves plenty of chances to get offensive rebounds," Farragut coach Jason Mayfield said after the Lady Admirals routed Fulton 52-25 Tuesday at Jody Wright Arena. "We've got to make shots. I looked at it and we shot 22 percent on our two-pointers."

"We shot 30 percent on our three-pointers and that's a little better, and I was surprised that it was actually that good. A lot of that had to do with Fulton because they're athletic and they're long, but we've got to make shots. We had 17 offensive rebounds and our rebounding was pretty

well spread out."

The Lady Admirals (5-3) endured their share of offensive struggles out of the gate but they still had enough firepower to hold a slim 9-6 edge at the end of the first quarter. They tripled their offensive production in the second stanza as they outscored the Lady Falcons 18-9 in the second frame.

Defensively, Farragut was particularly stingy in the second half as the Lady Admirals surrendered just 10 points after the break, and gave up just three points over the final eight minutes of the contest.

"We did a good job defensively," Mayfield said.

Despite their shooting woes, the Lady Admirals had three players post double figures in the scoring column. Jaci Neubert led the way with 14 points, while Annie Priest and Lilly Mullins added 10 points each.

K.J. McNealy had 12 rebounds for Farragut.

Long is looking forward to the challenge at Fulton

By Steve Williams

It wasn't a surprise to many to see Justin Long fill the head football coaching position at Fulton High School.

He went to high school at FHS, played for the Falcons and was a longtime assistant coach and then offensive coordinator at his alma mater.

Fulton announced Thursday that Long was the school's new head coach. The position opened when Jeff McMillan stepped down in November.

Long had left Fulton and taken the Grace Christian Academy head job in 2021.

Thursday was an emotional, yet exciting day for Long.

"I will be at Grace until Christmas break and will start at Fulton in January," said Long Friday. "I am excited to be at a program that has the history and tradition that Fulton has. Grace gave me my first opportunity as a Head Coach. I will always be thankful for that."

Long met with the GCA players first Thursday afternoon and then the Fulton squad just a little later.

He said leaving Grace Christian was very difficult and emotional. At Fulton,

he said the challenge ahead was exciting.

Fulton's program has slipped since Rob Black resigned after the 2021 season. The Falcons were 4-7 in 2022 and 2-9 this past season, and haven't gone beyond the second round in the playoffs since 2016.

Long played on Fulton's first state championship team in 2003. He was on the Falcons' coaching staff when they won state titles in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

In Long's three seasons at GCA, the Eagles were 1-8 in 2021, 4-7 in 2022 and 3-7 this fall.

Fulton Executive Principal Seth Smith said: "The future of Fulton football is in great hands with Justin Long taking over our program. As a former player and coach, he understands the significance of being the head coach at Fulton. I am beyond thrilled that Justin is coming home and I'm looking forward to the impact he will have on the school and community."

Said Fulton AD Jody Wright: "Justin is a high character man who has always represented our school and community well."



Justin Long, when he was on the Fulton coaching staff earlier in his career, will be going back to his alma mater as the Falcons' 14th head coach in school history.

The College Football Playoff Committee Failed

By Mark Nagi

Last week the College Football Playoff Committee picked the four teams that will take part in the playoff. 13-0 Big Ten champion Michigan and 13-0 Pac 12 champion Washington were no brainers. 12-1 Texas won the Big 12 and got in as well.

It came down to a choice between 13-0 ACC champion and 12-1 SEC champion Alabama. Never in the ten-year history of the CFB playoff had an undefeated Power 5 conference champion been left out.

Until now. The committee in their infinite wisdom chose to put the Crimson Tide in the playoff and keep the Seminoles from having a chance at playing for a national championship.

As expected, the outrage machine on the television and radio talk shows.

Twitter was its typical dumpster fire. Arguments back and forth constantly.

Florida State lost their quarterback, Jordan Travis, to injury a couple of weeks ago. Since then, they have gone 3-0 with wins at rival Florida and over Louisville in the ACC title game. The Seminoles offense was down to a third-string QB for the win over the Cardinals.

The committee, for some reason, considers key injuries when picking playoff teams. They chose to ignore how the injury to Travis didn't stop the Seminoles from winning. The FSU defense is legit, with NFL talent all over the place. But the injury to Travis gave the committee just enough of an excuse to keep Florida State out and promote the SEC champions.

FSU as good today as they were before the Travis

injury? Of course not. Does this mean that they can't beat any of the other teams in the playoffs? Of course not.

And there's the biggest problem with this entire thing. You can have any opinion you want on the topic, but the truth is that the committee chose to favor what they think might happen in some hypothetical, make-believe matchup over what they have seen with their own eyes.

I saw Florida State do everything they have been asked to do. They've won every game. They went 2-0 against SEC teams (LSU, Florida) and 3-0 against ranked opponents. I also saw Alabama struggle against mediocre opponents like South Florida, Texas A&M and Arkansas, and needed a miracle (and awful defense) to escape 6-6 Auburn with a win — the

same Auburn team that got smoked the previous week against New Mexico State.

But the committee chose to ignore all those facts and concentrate on Alabama's win in the SEC title game against Georgia.

Last year the committee did everything they could to get Alabama into the playoff. They ranked them ahead of Tennessee, despite the facts that Tennessee beat Alabama, that Tennessee beat the same LSU team that beat Alabama, and the fact that Tennessee's strength of schedule was better.

Instead, the committee centered their choice on the season-ending injury to Vols quarterback Hendon Hooker, ignoring how backup Joe Milton fared as his replacement. Alabama finished ranked fifth, with Tennessee sixth.

The CFB playoff

committee says that they are trying to get the "best" four teams in the playoff. That's fine and good to say, but what constitutes "best?" It is a continually moving term for them, and something they've never really done in the past. They are now basically saying that they'll go with the team that would be favored in a pretend meeting.

That's fine... but aren't we forgetting that you actually have to play the game? Upsets happen all the time. Washington was a huge underdog but beat Oregon. Alabama was the underdog and beat Georgia. If this is the way they are picking teams, then why are they even playing the games? Just let the folks in the big, shiny buildings in the Nevada desert tell us which team they think would win and go from there.

Another part of this

equation (and there are many) involves Alabama. If the situation was reversed, and Alabama's quarterback was hurt before the SEC title game, there is no chance that the Crimson Tide would be left out of the playoff. None.

The influence that Alabama head coach Nick Saban has over the sport should not be discounted. The committee chose to keep him happy.

I'll accept that this was a tough call for the committee, and next year the decisions won't be as tough thanks to the expansion of the playoff to 12 teams.

But in the final year of this deeply flawed four-team system, the committee gave us a deeply flawed decision.

I feel terrible for the Florida State kids because the adults in the room got it wrong.