

TELEVISION STATION WSB-TV / ATLANTA
QUARTERLY LISTING OF LOCAL PROGRAMS REFLECTING CONCERNS
AND/OR NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY
JULY 1, 2011 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2011

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QUARTERLY ISSUES / PROGRAMS LIST

- EDUCATION / YOUTH
 - ECONOMY
 - IMMIGRATION
- TRAFFIC / TRANSPORTATION
- LAW ENFORCEMENT & CRIMINAL JUSTICE
 - POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- COMMUNITY/NEIGHBORHOODS

The Atlanta Public Schools Cheating Scandal

Date: 07/06/11 5am

duration 1:30

Carol Sbarge

In an 800 page report, investigators say the cheating scandal within the Atlanta Public School system dates back to 2001. It said 140 teachers and 38 principals erased and changed answers on CRCT and helped thousands of students cheat by standing over them and pointing to the right answer. It happened at 44 of the 56 schools investigated. With close to a week on the job, the APS interim superintendent is upset. As our producers read through hundreds of pages in the report. Investigators concluded that former Superintendent Dr. Beverly Hall and her top managers knew or should have known about the cheating. We went to her home, but no one answered the door. Also in the report, the General Counsel for the school system admitted to investigators they isolated Dr. Hall from the rank and file so she could deny knowing anything about the cheating scandal. Last week attorneys delivered boxes of documents and evidence to the governor's office. And when Governor Nathan Deal released the state's findings he said the report was troubling. Deal: "Testing and results and targets being reached became more important than actual learning on the part of the children." Today school leaders are calling for swift action, and those teachers and administrators who came clean with investigators about the cheating scandal may soon be out of jobs.

Date: 07/06/11 7am

duration :35

Fred Blankenship

Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed issued a statement about the cheating scandal report. He says it's "a dark day for the Atlanta Public School System" and that the report "confirms our worst fears." City council members we spoke with say the focus has to be on the future, and the students. CT Martin: "This is regrettable that it's a reflection on the students, and the many good teachers that we have in the Atlanta public school system." And Atlanta City Council member Michael Julian Bond blames former school superintendent Dr. Beverly Hall.

Date: 07/07/11 5pm

duration 1:31

Lori Geary

Tim Callahan: "We're offering whatever legal advice they may need." The Georgia Association of Educators is offering up legal advice for the teachers caught up in the cheating scandal in terms of possible criminal charges and revocation of their teaching licenses. Callahan: "In some cases it's going to be to counsel them into another profession. There just won't be any way to save their job." I talked by phone to special investigator Mike Bowers who confirmed to me if teachers told the truth they were immune from criminal prosecution but not from going in front of the professional standards commission. Douglas County District Attorney David McDade, who is one of the prosecutor's deciding on possible criminal charges, told me it could be a while before a decision. The GBI who helped in the investigation has 120 volumes, each an inch thick, of interviews they conducted. More than likely, the DA's will present their cases to the Grand Jury, who will decide on indictments. Callahan: "There's a bright yellow line when it comes to cheating and you can't cross that line no matter how much stress or pressure you feel." Callahan says APS must restore the public's confidence by cleaning house from top to bottom. "The people that knew about this, condoned it, led it, pressured for it, they all gotta go." Through an attorney, former superintendent Beverly Hall denied knowing about the widespread cheating. Callahan: "It just stretches belief. Either she know or she should have known. You cannot be captain of the ship and not know what's going on below deck. You have to know. It seems part of the culture was hers.

Date: 07/10/11 8am

duration 1:13

Erin Coleman

At Finch Elementary, teachers say Principal Linda Paden threatened them with lines like "Wal-Mart's hiring." At Fain Elementary where Marcus Stallworth was the principal, a teacher stated if their test scores were too low, Principal Marcus Stallworth "ordered the teacher to crawl under the table in front of all the

other faculty." Multiple teachers compared Atlanta Public Schools to the Mafia. One teacher said, "The APS is run like the mob;" another said "APS is like an organized crime family, because APS has a way of making things disappear. As reports mounted about widespread cheating, as the Georgia Bureau of investigation raided schools and took documents, teachers were pressured to cover up the cheating. At Dunbar Elementary: A teacher said testing coordinator Lera Middlebrooks threatened teachers: "If they told investigators what happened, she could place a lien on their house or get them at their car". Middlebrooks has denied any knowledge of cheating. At East Lake Elementary, where Gwendolyn Benton was principal, the investigation found she threatened teachers that she would sue them out the A-_-if they--quote-- "slandered" her to the GBI. And teachers weren't the only ones threatened. According to the report, at Dobbs Elementary: a teacher "threatened students by telling them they would have to repeat the fourth grade if they ever told of the cheating."

Date: 07/13/11 12pm

duration 1:30

Amanda Cook

The buses were rolling; parents and kids were hand in hand. It was the first day back to school at Boyd Elementary, and we found parents who had no idea the former principal had just been implicated in the cheating scandal. Omarris Callahan, parent: "I just saw her, like two days ago. Wow!" Harold Smith, parent: "She was a well liked person." And of course with this news, some parents wondered about their child's test scores. "She exceeded over the test scores, and no I'm wondering if she is one of those who erased [answers]?" With a lot riding on her shoulders, Keisha Gibbons started today as the new principal. "I'm shocked. I don't even know what to say. We were never even informed about this principal. I didn't think my daughter's school was part of it." APS says it sent out auto-calls to parents, and we found APS is also using Twitter to get the word out. We saw it was live tweeting all morning from these elementary schools, even immediately commenting on my morning reports from Boyd. We also found Boyd Elementary set up a Twitter account today, and within an hour had released a letter on here from the new principal. Just for safe measure, an APS Executive Director stopped by to double check that everything was going smoothly today.

Date: 07/13/11 4pm

duration 2:11

Jovita Moore

Institutionalized cheating on the CRCTs in Atlanta's Public Schools triggered an investigation that revealed cheating was condoned by teachers at times even forced by principals and administrators, and occurred in schools where kids needed the most help and support from their educators. Ralston: "I think that for individuals to put their own advancement or however you want to describe that ahead of giving a quality education to the young people here in the city of Atlanta is absolutely unbelievable." But the scandal that rocked the city could have ripple effects felt well beyond the classroom, and into the business community. Local leaders fear the repercussions of the scandal. Sam Williams: "We've had companies that were interested in moving here that say, 'explain this to us.'" Sam Williams of the Metro Atlanta Chamber says that the growth of Atlanta's business community could be threatened by the scandal as companies might be resistant to moving to Atlanta, but not everyone is running from these schools. One civic organization – The Annie E. Casey Foundation – has not given up on Atlanta schools despite the controversy. Gail Hayes: "The reason we're investing in this set of neighborhoods is because these are the kids that need and deserve the most attention." Hayes, the director of the Atlanta Civic site, says the foundation has partnered with APS since 2005 and established its site in the Mechanicsville neighborhood. Building an early learning center attached to Dunbar Elementary – one of the schools investigated for cheating. With a lack of confidence in standardized tests, Hayes says they've implemented their own form of testing to ensure there's no more cheating. Hayes: "At the beginning of the school year we're doing baseline assessments *butt to*: then throughout the year we're doing bench marketing testing to see how they're doing, so that we really know how kids are doing." Testing at Dunbar Elementary starts for the first time this fall. Hayes: "The conversation that we need to be having as a city is a conversation about how do we make sure that our kids are going to be successful in school and that we're launching successful adults, really the future of Atlanta depends on this."

Date: 07/14/11 5pm

duration 1:20

Lori Geary

Eads: "Atlanta Public Schools, probably given the atmosphere in the nation, probably just a tiny, tiny tip of the iceberg." We found the man who was first in the nation to develop a cheating analysis for standardized tests. Dr. Jerry Eads just left Georgia's Professional Standards Commission and says the APS cheating scandal may be a sign of what's to come. Eads: "It's not the test and it's not the people. It's the policy that caused this." Eads says that policy of tying test scores to teacher and administrator pay or punishment leads to too much temptation. He tells me he was not surprised by the numbers in Atlanta's cheating scandal – that 178 teachers and administrators are caught up in it, according to the state report. Eads helped in the state's testing analysis of APS and says it's very difficult to catch smart people cheating. Eads: "What people at APS did, frankly, wasn't very smart. If they had a clue what they were doing, we probably still wouldn't have caught them. Part of it is you don't change all the answers so kids get 100%, change it just so he passes." Eads says the problem may only get worse as Georgia embarks on "Race to the Top" Twenty-six school systems will divide hundreds of millions of federal dollars, but to get it, they'll have to implement merit pay for teachers. Eads: "Any time you take a measure and you put high stakes to it, you will corrupt the measure, period."

Date: 08/29/11 11pm

duration :39

Mark Winne

There are new developments tonight in the Atlanta Public School system cheating scandal. APS has received a second grand jury subpoena. The district provided a copy to us. It's asking for computers and hard drives issued to or used by former Superintendent Beverly Hall, her deputy Kathy Augustine and about two dozen others. Late today, the school board took action that could make it easier for the grand jury to get some material. Erroll Davis: "I believe it suggests that the board understands that it must provide the information necessary to bring this matter to closure and is willing quite frankly to take the risk" Two weeks ago, we broke the news of another grand jury subpoena to Atlanta schools.

Date: 09/08/11 12pm

duration :36

Fred Blankenship

Educators implicated in the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal could soon learn their punishments. The commission that licenses teachers, principals and administrators is now investigating. The case will focus on more than 100 people. Some could learn their fate from the state within the next month. Penalties can range from a simple reprimand to revocation of a teaching certificate. Walker: "We expect another 70 to 90 cases to come in next month. But not all of APS cases were submitted this month. We have to have individual complaints on each educator."

Parent Expresses Concern Over Lesson on Islam

Date: 09/23/11 4pm

duration :34

Monica Pearson

Cobb County is considering dropping some lesson materials for students after a parent complained it's slanted toward the Muslim faith. Parent Hal Medlin: "Islam liberated women over 1,400 years ago. I dispute that. I really do." Hal Medlin showed us materials his 7th grade daughter brought home from Campbell Middle School to promote discussion on school dress policy. A Muslim woman states the virtues of wearing a burka and says there's nothing wrong with her future husband having multiple wives. A Cobb spokesman says they are reviewing the material to see if it can be presented in a more balanced way or no longer use it.

Date: 09/28/11 11pm

duration :27

Tom Regan

A publisher of a homework lesson that sparked controversy has asked police to investigate death threats against her. Last week, a parent complained the assignment at Cobb Middle School promoted Islam. The publisher said it was taken out of contest. She then started getting death threats in online blogs. Lisa Holland, Roswell police: "They are telling her there is going to be a blood bath. She's taking it seriously." Police have opened an investigation and assigned extra security to the woman's home.

Educational Neglect Cases Could Mean DeKalb Parents In Jail

Date: 07/18/11 5pm

duration 2:35

Mark Winne

What may look like an average day in court in DeKalb County is anything but. Parent after parent facing a judge. Their crime – educational neglect. State law says parents can face penalties including jail time if their child has more than 5 unexcused absences. Sherry Boston, DeKalb County Solicitor General: “Putting parents in jail is the last resort.” Boston says her department makes several attempts to reach out to parents. When they don’t respond to letters, phone calls or visits from social workers, she says she has no choice. Some of the parents arrested have children with 40 or more unexcused absences. Boston: “I don’t want to see any child not have an opportunity in life because their parent chooses not to take them to school.” Georgia is now one of several states that has laws forcing parents to be responsible with the threat of arrest. Parents in California also face misdemeanor charges for too many unexcused absences. In Alaska, mothers and fathers are fined. Tim Callahan: “You can’t legislate being a good parent.” Callahan, with the Professional Association of Georgia Educators says putting parents in jail may go too far. And says in many cases, teachers may need to play the role of parent. Callahan: “Some of our students who are in most need of teacher affection, teacher support are those who don’t get it at home and so teachers sometimes have to be almost a parent to some of the students.” At Ivy Prep in Gwinnett County, a successful student requires an involved parent. And administrators mean just that – parents must sign a contract. So do the teachers. Ivy Prep’s Nina Gilbert: “Our parents are the heartbeat of our school because if they don’t commit to getting their girl here and making sure she’s prepared and ready to learn when she gets here, then we wouldn’t be successful as a school and our girls wouldn’t be as successful as they are.” Ivy Prep expands to its first 9th grade class this year – traditionally the time when moms and dads can lose contact with their teen. Therese Aleman, whose daughter will be a freshman, says the key is finding balance. Aleman: “I think parents struggle with ‘how do I stay involved and how do I help them, but also how do I not over-architect for them because at some point we have to let them go.’” Principal Nina Gilbert says it’s a model that’s working. In the most recent testing, her students were in the 90th percentile in math, science, social studies and language arts. Gilbert: “We have to have the commitment from our parents that if we say that your scholar needs additional academic support, it is expected that she is going to remain here until 5 o’clock to get that.”

New Charter School Opens Against Odds

Date: 08/31/11 4pm

duration 1:28

Amanda Cook

“I am going to college.” A roomful of young girls yelling “I am going to college.” It brought tears to the eyes of the school leaders, and it was symbolic of exactly why the staff here worked non-stop to get Ivy Preparatory Academy at Kirkwood up and running in only 30 days. “We’re really excited about today. Excited about our scholars. We’ve been working really hard training our teachers.” As we got a tour of the school and its classrooms, it was explained when the previous charter school here – Peachtree Hope – very recently lost its charter, the headmistress at Ivy Prep was ready to go with the application it was fast-tracked, but still only approved on August 1st. “So 30 days later, August 31, we’re opening strong.” Today, three weeks later than other schools, Ivy Prep Kirkwood for K-6 is finally having its first day of school. All of the students were ready. There weren’t any crying kindergartners or things of that nature. And we saw that in both in the separate boys academy side and the girls academy side – 440 students in all – none were aware of any controversy over charter schools. Just that they were finally starting school today. Learning to be the leaders of tomorrow. While we were on our tour, that sign was being up. Many here say that while the previous charter school here failed, they have no doubt that this charter school is here to stay.

Alleged Tea Party Group Warns of Islamic Fundamentalist School

Date: 08/10/11 11:00pm

duration :36

John Bachman

A troubling controversy tonight over a proposed local school. People in the Windward neighborhood got a letter they say promotes hate. It warns that radical Islamic fundamentalists are trying to open a school near their homes. Although a school is not named, many believe the letter is directed at the Fulton County charter school Amana Academy, which teaches Arabic to its students. Fiona Bagley: "How inflammatory can you get. It's a shame, it's terrible and whoever wrote this should be ashamed of themselves." The author of the letter claims to be the Milton County Tea Party Patriots. But Georgia Tea Party leaders say there is no such organization.

Parents Question Practice of "Class Leveling"

Date: 09/15/11 5pm

duration 1:15

Richard Elliot

Victor Hogan picked up his son from Centennial Place Elementary school, and I asked him about this leveling controversy. He told me he likes his son's teacher and hopes APS doesn't move her. Hogan: "Hopefully not. I mean, so far it's been like really good, so hopefully it will not affect - hopefully they will not pull my kids teacher." APS Spokesman Keith Bromery: "Leveling is a normal thing that happens at all school districts." Bromery agreed to talk to me about this leveling controversy, and admitted the process is taking a lot longer this year than in years past, and part of that is due to fallout from the cheating scandal. The district needed to replace the heads of two major departments: curriculum and human resources – two major players in the leveling process. Add to that the district's desire to re-examine how it handles its student-teacher ratios, and you get a delay. Bromery: "So they're still kind of looking at it and it's going to be totally rolled out by early October, but it's taking slightly longer than normal now because of the leadership transition we're going with. Verdallia Turner: "No excuses. Only thing we can say is no excuses." Parents aren't the only ones rattled by this leveling delay. Atlanta Teachers Federation President Verdallia Turner says she wants a lot more information about which teachers could be moved - and why – information she claims she's just not getting from APS. Turner: "They're trying to do a catch-up, but we can't do a catch-up with the children. The children are there, they have to learn and we need all the support we can get."

Cobb School Board Transparency Questioned

Date: 07/28/11 11pm

duration 1:15 Tony Thomas

Board member David Banks: "There is a very dark cloud over this school system and this school board. There's no sunshine coming in!" Banks and a group of Cobb County parents believe four members of the seven member board have been making decisions in secret – emailing using personal emails and sharing information only among themselves and a select group of citizens. Board member Lynda Eagle: "I think it could impact the entire board and put the district in jeopardy." The uproar started with an open records request by Mike Sansone. He's upset the way the board handled the school calendar controversy. Sansone: "Originally I suspected board business was being conducted in private email accounts." He believes hundreds of emails have proven open records and open meeting laws have been broken. And then there is this. Among the emails, a list of everyone who's posted opposition on a Facebook page to the school calendar issue. Gerald Williams is named on what he calls a black list. Williams: "I'm worried [and] upset and disgusted that this was done." The names, positions and salaries of district employees are highlighted. Some people fear it's a retaliation list – board chair Alison Bartlett says no way. Bartlett: "Should people be worried about this list and why it was compiled? Oh my gosh no!"

Military Foreclosures

Date: 07/12/11 6pm

duration 1:34

Scott McFarland

He was six months into a year-long tour of duty in Iraq. When Army Captain Ken Gonzalez said he got a call from his bank, he'd been foreclosed upon. Gonzalez has a wife and four kids. Gonzalez: "Here I am in the middle of combat, just trying to make it...to have to be stressed with your family being potentially thrown out. It stacks up against you." Gonzalez blamed a banking error and says, after a nightmarish few months, he saved his house. But a panel of military organization told a congressional panel today, there's been a surge in military foreclosures, more than 1,000 a month this year according to new reports. Particularly among reservists, who are called to duty, struggle to keep their civilian jobs back home, in a soft economy. Bill Nelson tells us donations from his charity, USA Cares, has saved at least 106 Georgia soldiers from foreclosure recently. Our review of new foreclosure figures shows Georgia was hammered by home seizures in May. And it's believed the communities surrounding Fort Stewart were hit hardest. Nelson: "It's been a long war, and it's a bad economy. Those two things mitigate against keeping your home in some cases." US Senate leaders say banks are also pulling the trigger too quickly on home foreclosures of US service members, and violating federal rules which require court orders, and longer wait periods before banks can seize home of soldiers overseas. The US Treasury Department has sent warning letters to 25 mortgage banks, to stop doing so.

Foreclosures Continue to Plague metro Atlanta

Date: 08/18/11 5pm

duration 1:37

Richard Elliot

This is just one of thousands of foreclosures, as you can see, in the metro Atlanta area. Experts are warning that a lot more are coming, and they say governments need to be ready when that next wave hits. Jessie Campbell showed me the neighborhood he's lived in for eight years – a neighborhood he says is now saturated with foreclosures. Campbell: "Oh, it's reduced home values like for instance, when I moved here, I paid \$145,000 for this house. Now, I'm lucky if I even get \$80,000 for it." Campbell isn't alone. Foreclosures have hammered metro Atlanta – especially inside the so-called "ring of death" areas around downtown where the housing market may never fully recover. And local governments are already bracing for the next wave – when the banks solve their robo-signing controversy. Tonza Clark: So we're all just bracing ourselves to when the banks are ready to dump those foreclosures, then we'll see another influx of foreclosures." That's one reason the Westside Homebuilders Association held this meeting Thursday, so governments, builders, and realtors can put their heads together to lessen the impact on neighborhoods – an impact they say is coming. Chris Collier: "We're not halfway through it yet. There's still plenty of foreclosures ahead of us unfortunately." They talked about ways to stabilize at-risk neighborhoods, and creative financing methods to get people into foreclosed homes. Jessie Campbell hopes they can do something, so he can sell his home – something he told me he can't do right now. Campbell: "No, you can't. I was thinking about it, but can't do it right now because you're not going to get the value out of it any more because you've lost 50% of the value." Now, while this meeting focused on the west metro area like this one in Douglasville, other government officials tell me they can learn from this as well.

High Temps Strain Economy

Date: 07/13/11 4pm

duration 1:20

David Chandley

Bill Brown: "We pull anywhere from about 8-10 thousand dollars a month power." It costs a lot to make ice, especially with scorching temperatures. That's what Bill Brown tells me. He should know. For 32 years his Arctic Ice company in College Park has churned out 100 tons a day. Chandley: "Would people be surprised how much power it takes to make ice?" Brown: "Yes, and this is one of the complaints with

all of our customers – ‘why is the ice the price it is, it’s nothing but water’ – yeah, but you do not understand what it goes through to turn it into ice.” Arctic Ice is just one of Georgia Power’s 2.4 million customers. In summers past, rising temps brought higher demand. Not this year.” Lynn Wallace: “We are actually well below our peak.” In fact, Wallace, of Georgia Power shows me how this week’s usage is actually below their June numbers, and shares the reason. Wallace: “Demand is really down in the industrial sector, so that is a huge piece of the demand that we see on our system, so that is part of it. The other part is customers, I believe, because of the economy, are actually conserving.” Less money spent on power is good news for iceman Brown. “Oh yes, people buy more ice, absolutely.”

State Revenue Up Despite Flagging Economy

Date: 07/16/11 7am duration :23 Linda Stouffer

Despite the still sluggish economy, Georgia collected *more* tax revenue than expected so far this year. Records show Georgia’s tax collections for each of the first six months of this year are above those same months in 2010. The state collected \$1.1 billion dollars in taxes for the fiscal year that ended June 30th. Governor Deal wants to use the additional revenue to replenish the state’s rainy day fund.

Georgia Jobless Rate Improves, But Still Troubling

Date: 07/21/11 6pm duration 1:10 Jeff Dore

Darren Wages, construction worker: “I used to be in telemarketing, and that just tanked.” Darren Wages knows all about the bad economy and unemployment. Wages: “I been unemployed about a good five years.” Georgia’s labor department says Georgia’s unemployment rate continues to be worse than the national rate. In June, it was a seasonally adjusted 9.9%. Since May, that’s up from 9.8%. But since this time last year, it’s down from and even 10%. Darren Wages was fortunate to find a job in construction, which added 2,900 Georgia jobs. Wages: “They went over, they checked us out, and they hired us on the spot. They needed help.” Schools seasonally lay off custodians and cafeteria workers in the summer, and when all those colleges graduate students, they swell the ranks of unemployed til they get that first job. Georgia’s Labor Commissioner, Mark Butler, says Darren Wages landed in the industry which Butler believes will lead us into a sustained recovery. Wages: “This is perfect. It helps the family, puts food on the table.”

Date: 09/15/11 6pm duration :36 Jovita Moore

Georgia’s unemployment numbers are up again. New jobless numbers for August show the unemployment rate rose to 10.2%. That’s the highest in six months. Fifty-five hundred new job seekers pushed up the rate. But state officials still say the outlook is positive. Mark Butler: “We’ve talked to a lot of manufacturers across the state a lot of employers and a lot of them are hiring right now but they’re saying the same thing exact thing that you just said, they’re having a hard time finding people with the skill sets that they need.” Georgia Labor Commissioner Mark Butler also told us manufacturing jobs are important to the health of the state’s economy.

Georgia Braces for Funding Crisis If National Debt Ceiling Issue Not Resolved

Date: 07/28/11 5pm duration 1:28 Lori Geary

Brian Robinson: “We’re getting ready for whatever scenario hits Georgia.” As the clock ticks on the debt showdown in Washington, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal isn’t taking chances. He sent out letters to all state agency heads, telling them to prioritize funding if there is a disruption in federal funds. Robinson: “We shoot for keeping state government running as normal so that nobody would notice the difference for about two weeks. After that, we would be faced with some really difficult decisions.” The state fronts the bills for programs like Medicaid and Peachcare, then gets reimbursed from the Federal government.

Federal funds make up almost 30% of the state budget. Robinson: "The federal government has a huge presence in Georgia." State agencies may not be the only ones feeling a pinch – federal employees make up a huge part of the Georgia work force at places including the CDC, military installations, the federal reserve and Hartsfield Jackson International airport. Robinson: "It's an important part of our economy, so yes, we could be affected greatly if there was a downturn in the amount of money coming in." Robinson tells me a government shutdown would be much worse than a US default, because the money would stop. If there's no deal by next week, the money slows. Robinson: "If there's a slowdown in federal monies coming to the states, the White House will determine how they prioritize federal spending. The Governor's goal is that Georgians do not notice any disruption in service that they've come to expect from the state of Georgia on Wednesday morning, regardless of what happens in Washington."

Changes in Hope Scholarship Rules Bring Financial Concerns

Date: 08/17/11 5pm

duration 1:20

Lori Geary

GSU student Kellie Tuck: "I just feel really robbed and just shafted in this." Kellie Tuck showed me her transcripts. You can see she's on the dean's list with an almost 3.6 GPA and this summer she qualified for the Hope Scholarship. But Tuck is 36 years old and now after new rule changes that took effect July 1st, too old for the scholarship starting fall semester. Tuck: "I hate to say it but it does look like a case of age discrimination to me. If you did this in a company, you would have a lawsuit." Under the old rules, because Tuck graduated high school in 1992, she had to go to college for 30 credit hours and get a 3.0 grade point average to qualify for Hope. Tuck: "If I had known there was a deadline, I might have been able to do something." But lawmakers changed the new scholarship rules back in March, too late for Tuck and others in her same situation to increase their credit hours and qualify for Hope before that summer deadline. Tuck: "This is the economy where people are losing their jobs like I did and want to go back to college to better themselves and we're being slapped in the face and told no. Is my education not worth as much as a younger student?" Apparently not. I talked to the president of the student finance commission. Tim Connell told me by phone the cuts were inevitable because the program was running out of money. The fact remains some students who once qualified for the scholarship no longer do. Tuck: "It's not fair and I understand that they have to make cuts, I understand that, but at what level?"

Date: 08/22/11 4pm

duration 1:33

Carol Sbarge

We are Georgia Democrats. They are calling it a "Hope and Unity" rally. Democrats gathered outside the state capital with a message for lawmakers meeting inside during this special session. They are unhappy about cuts made during the last session to the Hope Scholarship. R.J. Hadley: "Education has proven to be a path out of poverty, and they have cut that pathway." Some at the rally say there should have been an income cap on those eligible for the Hope Scholarship. Louis Elrod: "In the Republican caucus it was like income cap was a dirty word. They could have protected the scholarship for those who needed it the most -- students who came from lower and middle income families. Supporters of the cuts in Hope said they had no choice because otherwise it could run out of money. Those at the rally also expressed their opposition to Georgia's new immigration law. They argue in the end it hurts the economy. Miguel Camacho: "You know farmers rely in immigrant workers to pick their crops. It's very important. It's very needed." As Georgia lawmakers focus on redistricting, these Democrats want to send the message out that they are not happy with decisions being made at the Capital. They want the immigration law overturned and more funding for the Hope Scholarship.

DeKalb Homeowners Question Property Tax Bills

Date: 07/11/11 4pm

duration 1:26

Carol Sbarge

Like many counties, DeKalb has seen a drop in property tax revenue – particularly in the southern part of the county where foreclosures have been high – the CEO is proposing a 4.35 millage rate increase. The CEO says the millage rate increase, depending on where you live in DeKalb County, would range anywhere from 7% to 17%. But DeKalb County Commissioner Elaine Boyle disagrees. She says that the

homes that haven't changed in value in this economy means their owners will pay a much higher percentage increase – around 47%. Boyer: "It's just the value. It's how it is going to be multiplied out. It's just the value they're going to be hammered." Boyer says the CEO is averaging at 17% which she says is a very different number than for a homeowner with a \$200,000 dollar home. Ellis was not available for an interview but says the percentages have been accurately advertised to homeowners. I asked Georgia State finance professor Michael Smith whose numbers are right. Smith: "Based on the assumptions that the two different elected officials are making, they could both be technically accurate, but we know that some of the substantial part of the value is in the northern part of the county."

Some Homeowners Want Higher Tax Assessments

From WSBTV.com

Updated: 9:57 p.m. Thursday, July 14, 2011 | Posted: 9:24 p.m. Thursday, July 14, 2011

People are asking for an increase in their home assessments, and it's something the chief appraiser for DeKalb County has never seen. They are part of more than 11,000 homeowners in DeKalb County who filed an appeal in 2011. That's about 5 percent of those who received notices this year. Most people are fighting to lower their assessments in hopes of paying lower taxes. But Calvin Hicks, the chief appraiser for DeKalb County, said he's getting a lot of calls from homeowners looking to do the opposite. Hicks said most people who want a higher assessment are doing it for sentimental reasons. Hicks said, "They do not like the idea of all of that equity just evaporating. It gives them a sense of security to think that their properties are worth the time and effort that they placed into them." Whatever their reasons, Hicks is worried those homeowners looking for higher assessments may not realize that would also mean higher taxes. "If we actually grant what these people want, increase their value back up, then they get a tax bill that shows an increase. Are they gonna come back to us and say, 'Wait a minute, I didn't want my taxes to go up. I just wanted the value to go back up,'" said Hicks. But taxes are going up. DeKalb County Commissioners raised the millage rate by 26 percent on Tuesday. That's why homeowners like Matte Martorano are appealing to lower their assessments. "They always need money. I don't think they need it," Martorano said. Martorano feels pretty good about his chances of getting a reduced appraisal. "Next-door neighbor's was lower than mine, far lower. So I figured I should be able to get mine down," Martorano said. Hicks said he looks at the overall picture when deciding appraisals. "When you have a volume of distressed properties placed on the market sufficiently, they can control the market. If you're a neighborhood and you have one distressed sale, chances are it's not gonna have an impact of sales in that area. If you're in a neighborhood where virtually every property on the market is a distressed property, it's gonna impact the market activity there," said Hicks. He said that with so many distressed neighborhoods in DeKalb County, especially in the southern areas, more taxes are needed. Hicks said foreclosures in areas like Lithonia mean fewer people paying fewer taxes. He said a turnaround won't be quick. "Do you want to live in a neighborhood where you drive down the street and you're looking at all these dilapidated houses? No. Or the ones that have been vandalized? Or the grass is up 2 feet tall? No, you don't," Hicks said. With that in mind, some homeowners said they'd rather see taxes go up than services go down. Joel Gould owns a home in Decatur. He said, "We're lucky here in Decatur. The school systems are great; all of the public services are tremendous. I know that people are certainly willing to pay for that." But plenty of people don't want to pay too much, and that has Hicks working hard. The tax assessor's office is so backlogged that they're still working on last year's appeals.

Possible Area Post Office Closures

Date: 07/26/11 4pm

duration 1:07

Richard Belcher

For more than two decades, Richard Benton has picked up and dropped off his mail at the West End post office in southwest Atlanta. It's one of six Atlanta area post offices, and one of more than 40 state-wide that face the possibility of its doors closing for good. Benton: "They're efficient here. we get in and get out, no waiting in line unless you come on a Saturday morning." The post office says it's studying the closures and the impact it would have on its employees and the people it serves. Nationwide, more than 3,600 branches face the possibility of closing – after the post office posted a \$8.5 billion dollar net loss during the last fiscal year. Benton: "I know it's going to hurt this neighborhood. I hope it don't.. I hope they don't close it." The post office says it's targeting branches that have little foot traffic and weak sales. We stopped by the Lakewood station post office here along Jonesboro Road. This is one of the post offices named and slated to potentially close. It's about noon and if you look around, the parking lot is virtually empty. And while the post office studies the possible closures, Richard has a message that he wants signed, sealed and delivered. Benton: "I just keep praying that they don't close it down."

Immigrant Activist Threatened

Date: 07/22/11 6pm

duration 1:36

Manuel Bojorquez

This is where Rich Pellegrino says his daughter found their dog, dead on the front porch. They believe this was no accident. The two-year-old yorkie, named Chucky, had quickly become part of Rich Pellegrino's family. He leads the Cobb Immigrant Alliance, and says his daughter found Chucky dead the day after they participated in a march against the state's new immigration law, earlier this month. Pellegrino: "She saw the dog laying here with his head at this angle – laid out – almost perfectly." A possible accident maybe? He first thought someone hit him with a car and then laid him on the front step, but an officer who took a report noted the dog appeared to have trauma to the back of the head. Police are investigating; a vet examined the dog's body. Pellegrino: "The veterinarian said it could not be an accident, or anything like that – the dog was hit with a blunt instrument on the head." What makes him think it could be a message about his protest of Georgia's Immigration Law is that he's received threats before. He says in 2009, a package arrived at his home. Pellegrino: "It had a picture of me hanging, with Cobb Immigrant Alliance, and of course, the Cobb hazmat team came out." He says it contained a substance later deemed not hazardous. As for the dog, Pellegrino: "My gut says that its one of these extremist hate groups. I really feel sorry for them, that they're so desperate – they have to do this – take a poor innocent dog's life." In the police report, officers said they would increase patrols in the neighborhood. Cobb County police say this remains under investigation.

New Immigration Law Protested

Date: 07/08/11 6pm

duration :20

Justin Farmer

Here in Georgia, some civil rights leaders and immigration groups have scheduled a demonstration tomorrow at noon. Last Saturday, roughly 15,000 people jammed the streets around Georgia's capitol to oppose Georgia House Bill 87. The bill penalizes people who use false ID's to get jobs and government officials who fail to enforce the immigration law.

Date: 07/09/11 11pm

duration :39

Erin Coleman

Civil rights activists, union leaders, and Georgia lawmakers joined protesters at the state capitol today as they rallied against the state's new immigration law. Among the notable speakers, the Reverend Al Sharpton. It's the second straight rally since the new immigration law went into effect in Georgia. Today's speakers called for lawmakers to find what they call real solutions to the problems facing Georgia. Sharpton: "This is not a Latino problem, it's an American problem. You're not going to divide us; you're not gonna split us up. Some of us talk different languages, but we are all one nation." The law requires most employers to verify the immigration status of new employees.

Obama Administration Willing to Review Area Deportation Cases

Date: 08/19/11 6pm

duration 1:37

Manuel Bojorquez

In heavily immigrant areas, like here along Buford Highway, the announcement was good news, but others disagree. Phil Kent: "It's mass amnesty. It is stunning." Phil Kent of Americans for Immigration Control calls the change a step in the wrong direction, a totally different tone from Eva Cardenas of the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights. Cardenas: "This just reaffirms what we're hoping Obama and the administration will continue to do." She was part of this rally on Tuesday, pressing the administration to change the so-called secure communities program, arguing that while it aimed to deport illegal immigrants convicted of violent crimes, it was sweeping away with others with no criminal record and

separating families. Today, they learned that the Obama administration will review 300,000 deportation cases, and my grant relief to those who are not considered a threat to public safety. Eva Cardenas: "I think it brings some kind of relief to family members who are currently faced with this horrendous decision of leaving family behind or actually being forced to leave their families." Kent: "But what about relief to those her legally?" Not only does he believe this kind of change needs congressional approval, he argues against a provision that could give those whose deportation cases are dismissed a work permit. Kent: "That's potentially 300,000 people that you'd be giving work permits to compete with Americans looking for jobs." Both sides are keeping a close eye on the policy change, in this continuing debate of illegal immigration. And given that we're heading into a Presidential election year, some wonder if the announcement is just politics.

Make-up of Immigration Law Compliance Board Questioned

Date: 09/09/11 6am duration :38 Carol Sbarge

There is controversy about the board members chosen to make sure Georgia's immigration law is followed. Critics are upset the seven men appointed do *not* include any minorities. The Anti Defamation League is asking the Governor to remove Phil Kent. In a letter, the ADL says "Mr Kent's fixation with maintaining white culture is deeply disturbing and his resort to fear-mongering about undocumented residents is equally abhorrent." Kent: "It's not surprising that the ADL would be opposed to me. It would be opposed to the compliance panel. In fact, they've been opposed to the whole law." The governor's office sent us a statement that says the board's purpose is to encourage compliance.

Date: 09/09/11 12pm duration :37 Carol Sbarge

There is opposition to at least one of the board members chosen to make sure Georgia's immigration law is followed. Critics are upset there are *no* minorities among the seven men appointed. The Anti Defamation League wants the Governor to remove Phil Kent. In a letter, the ADL says, "Mr Kent's fixation with maintaining white culture is deeply disturbing and his resort to fear-mongering about undocumented residents is equally abhorrent." Kent: "There's nothing hateful or anything like that, and I'm actually in favor of an America that assimilates our legal citizens." The Governor's office sent us a statement that says the board's purpose is to encourage compliance.

Date: 09/27/11 4:30am duration :20 Carol Sbarge

Georgia's new immigration enforcement review board is set to hold its first meeting Thursday, amid controversy. Civil rights groups want Governor Nathan Deal to reconsider his appointment of Phil Kent. Kent is the national spokesman for "Americans for Immigration Control." The Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League say AIC is a hate group.

Date: 09/27/11 4pm duration :34 Monica Pearson

Today, a group delivered a petition to the state capitol, demanding the removal of Phil Kent from the Georgia Immigration Enforcement Review board. Stacey Abrams: "And it is our grave concern that Phil Kent has clearly and very loudly espoused beliefs that are not consistent with the goals and the intent of the state of Georgia. The Anti-Defamation League says Kent talks about preserving white culture and the dangers of undocumented immigrants. The board will review complaints about Georgia's immigration law, and sanction those who violate it. Kent has told us his critics just do *not* want the law enforced.

Farmers Fear Impact of Tougher Immigration Laws

Date: 07/16/11 6am duration :22 Linda Stouffer

Farmers across Georgia are paying for a study to find out the real impact of the new immigration law. We traveled to South Georgia last month to talk with a farmer who said he lost tens of thousands of dollars

because of a labor shortage. He said the state's new law scared away the migrant Hispanic workers who harvest the fields. The study will help determine the amount of farmers' losses.

Date: 09/20/11 6pm

duration :19

Jovita Moore

Farmers in Georgia have expressed similar concerns about our state's tough new immigration law. We went to a farm in Lowndes County in June. Farmer Jason Tyrone told us he lost about \$40,000 dollars in cucumbers because of too few workers to pick them. He wants the government to expand and modify a federal guest worker program to help farmers.

Opponents of Immigration Law Critical of Lack of Federal Involvement

Date: 08/03/11 5pm

duration 1:20

Lori Geary

"It certainly wouldn't hurt us to have the federal government on our side." Attorney Charles Kuck is on the team fighting Georgia's new immigration law. His colleagues in Arizona and now Alabama have help from the Obama administration, which filed suit in those states to block similar laws. Kuck: "I think it's fascinating that he's there in Alabama and he was in Arizona but he's not here in Georgia." Supporters of the new law say the feds should stay out of the fight. The author of Georgia's law says he wrote more than a dozen drafts to try to make sure it would hold up in court. Ramsey: "We worked very very hard and diligently to make sure the provisions were drafted with that in mind every step of the way to make sure it was ultimately going to pass muster in the courts." But a federal judge struck down two major provisions – one penalizes people who transport or harbor illegals; the other authorizes police to verify the status of certain suspects. Obama: "I think it is a mistake for states to try to do this piecemeal." In an interview at the White House, President Obama told our Justin Farmer Georgia's law is a mistake. The Justice Department says it is considering suing Georgia for trying to tackle immigration, but so far it has taken no action. Kuck says the decision may be political if the President's team believes he has a chance of winning Georgia next year. Kuck: "Does anybody really think that President Obama is going to win Alabama in the next Presidential election? So there's really no risk for him to go into that state."

Residents Fear Results of Small Airport Expansion

Date: 09/14/11 5am

duration :27

Fred Blankenship

A Roswell man wants his city council to intervene in the controversy over a proposed airport expansion. Creed Crutchfield says travelers cut across Holcomb Bridge East to Lawrenceville to catch a plane at Briscoe Field. He says that traffic will get worse if the airport is privatized. Crutchfield: "Roswell can say: if you're gonna impact our traffic pattern that badly, who's gonna take up and pay for the funding to take care of the roadway to your airport?" But supporters say those concerns are premature.

Date: 09/14/11 12pm

duration :28

Fred Blankenship

A north Fulton county homeowner is asking the Roswell city council to intervene in plans to expand Gwinnett's Briscoe Field. If plans go forward to add mid-sized commercial flights at Briscoe, Creed Crutchfield says it will add traffic on Holcomb Bridge Road – and in the sky. Crutchfield: "Sitting right here on this porch, we'll have aircraft coming right across this house once every 20 minutes, maybe even once every 7 1/2 minutes, according to their own data." Supporters say Creed's concerns are premature.

Proposed Transportation Tax Sparks Controversy

Date: 07/09/11 4pm

duration 2:32

Justin Farmer

Congested highways, daily gridlock – yet mass transit doesn't go far outside the city of Atlanta. Mayor Kasim Reed: "We had a huge conversation about traffic in our state. We ended up getting the most forward-thinking transportation bill in modern Georgia's history." It's the transportation investment act passed by the legislature this year. Mayor Reed says the 1¢ sales tax is crucial for Atlanta's next phase of prosperity. "Traffic is the number 1 argument our competitors use against us." The penny tax would fund improvements for transit. From light rail to more expressway lanes, new engineering for bottle-neck areas, even pedestrian and bike paths. Right now, local leaders are working on a list of proposed projects, including: enhancing the Atlanta Beltline; widening on Windy Hill Road in Cobb County; and major improvements to Buford Highway in Gwinnett near Sugarloaf Parkway. The list is from the ten county area of metro Atlanta. Those counties represent about four million people and those are probably the ones more stuck in congestion. They have more frustration than anybody else. Long is working with a roundtable of 21 local leaders – Mayors representing each county as well as each county chairman. The final list will be ready in October hoping to win support from voters, and create some \$7 billion dollars to move the whole metro area forward. Todd: "The person who doesn't really use the transportation network, that doesn't drive a car - guess what? If they buy food - it gets here on the network." Other proposals on the list are mass transit from Perimeter to Doraville in DeKalb; the widening of Windward Parkway in North Fulton; and restoring bus service in Clayton County. Sixty-three percent of the people who live in metro Atlanta work in some other county than where their home is. That means if you live in Cobb County, you're voting for improvements there as well as the area you work in every day. Dr. Scott: "We need to make this one a real home run for all of us." And what hangs in the balance? Our economic viability? Scott: "Oh absolutely." Other proposals from Cherokee to Henry include improvements on Ga 140 and Bells Ferry Road. Widening McDonough Road to Tara Blvd. Area leaders want the public's input before submitting the final list. And while negotiations will be tough, they say failure is not an option. Reed: "If we don't pass it, then we have really made a decision about what direction we want to go. We've decided that we want to be smaller and that we want to enter a period of decline. And that's really what this is about."

Date: 07/29/11 5pm

duration 2:30

Justin Farmer

If you think you don't know much about the proposal for the 1¢ Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for transportation. Paul Bennecke: "You'll know a lot more soon enough. That's because a huge, multi-million dollar campaign – much like a political campaign – already has started. Bennecke: "The 'candidate' is the project list that folks will be able to look at 8 months before the election." Meet Paul Bennecke – a consultant hired by local citizens and private businesses who want to see the tax passed by voters next year. "This will create thousands of jobs. the economic impact is great. 3 times what the Olympics were for the city of Atlanta." A roundtable will present a final list in October of about \$7 billion dollars in transportation projects. Then residents in ten metro Atlanta counties vote on it next July. Between now and then, we'll be reminded of it often. Bennecke: "We'll have to use tv, cable, radio, mail, phones, a large grass roots effort going door to door, phone banks, post card writing, a lot of interactive ways with social media - Facebook and Twitter. No taxpayer money is being used for the campaign. Mayor Kasim Reed: "We are going to raise the money from the corporate community, from the philanthropic community." And those groups already created two organizations – one specifically to educate voters, another to specifically advocate for votes. Same Williams: "This is gonna be a tough sell, this is not the time for people who want to say yes, I wanna pay another penny of sales tax. we're really going to have to convince people that this is the right thing to do." There are already plenty of people who aren't convinced. Debbie Dooley: "In this economy, no one wants their taxes raised. even if it's a cent -- that's still a difference. it's a matter of principle." Dooley says the Georgia Tea Party Patriots agree metro Atlanta has a huge transportation problem but there are other options to fix it, and they're suggesting several: like tax breaks for corporations who let workers tele-commute, smart red lights to improve traffic flow, and even more toll roads. The group quietly is organizing its own marketing campaign against the SPLOST – using Facebook, Twitter and radio ads. Dooley" We're taking our message to the people. we're going to educate the people. I will match power of the people any day to millions and millions of dollars spent on marketing campaign by the proponents." Those arguing *for* the SPLOST say they're ready for the battle. A campaign always envisions an opposition, so we will be prepared once that happens.

6PP I-20 TRANSIT DEK PKG

Date: 08/05/11 6pm

duration 1:20

John Bachman

MARTA already rolls through north DeKalb, and the Clifton Road extension is one of 7 projects regional leaders picked this week -- if the transportation penny sales tax passes, but some people in South DeKalb say a key project is missing: a proposed \$1 billion dollar rail line from Atlanta down I-20 to South Dekalb Mall and out to Stonecrest Mall. DeKalb Commissioner Lee May: "In the southern part of DeKalb county, we have no rail stops at all." Resident Tyrone Ivey: "I think that's a rip-off. I really do." All DeKalb residents already pay a penny sales tax for MARTA. Next summer they'll be asked to pay another penny. May: "The southern residents of DeKalb County would be in position to pay 2 pennies in sales taxes...and seeing no direct benefit from transportation investment act at all." Commissioner May says there is a large block of voters in south DeKalb and it will be hard to pass that extra penny sales tax without some money going toward the east I-20 corridor. "We're looking at 400,000 people in DeKalb county that will be left out of the process completely. That's a big voting bloc." May says a rail line will ease congestion and enhance development. "We need at least 400 to 500 million dollars to be something voters can vote for...something I can support."

Date: 08/25/11 4pm

duration 1:00 Lori Geary

Republican leaders could not work out a deal amongst themselves when it came to moving the date of the transportation sales tax vote. Supporters of the tax hoped a change to the November election would boost the measure's chances of winning voter approval. But the Tea Party weighed in saying if you change one tax referendum, you have to change them all. Governor Deal, who was in support of changing the date, said Republicans in the House and Senate were too far apart. Gov Deal: "I just don't

think it was worth wasting anymore time on that issue. if there's a reason to revisit that in january, that can be done but as of right now, that's not on my agenda items." Speaker: "I think there was some honest differences between the senate and the house and i always think it was a big reach to have it on there." I did reach out to the campaign consultant for the metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, which supports the tax. Paul Bennecke says regardless of whether it's July or November, he's confident metro Atlantans will vote "yes" to reduce traffic and create jobs.

Date: 09/23/11 6pm duration :46 Justin Farmer

A poll addressed the 1¢ per dollar sales tax for the 10-county region of metro Atlanta. Fifty-one percent of respondents said they'd vote in favor of the sales tax if the vote were today. Two thirds of the respondents said Atlanta's traffic is undermining the region's quality of life. Ninety-one percent said transportation problems were important to address. On how to spend the money – 57% said they are in favor of spending just over half the 6 billion on mass transit. The strongest support to approve the tax comes from Fulton, DeKalb and Clayton counties. In Gwinnett and Cobb county, only 48% support the tax. Two-thirds of respondents admitted they need more information.

Flagging Economy Eases Traffic Congestion

Date: 09/27/11 5pm duration :22 Monica Pearson

A new report shows a silver lining to the bad economy – metro Atlanta's traffic congestion has eased a bit. The "Urban Mobility" report ranks metro Atlanta 13th in the US . It found the average driver here wasted 43 hours in traffic last year. This is the fifth year in a row metro roads were less clogged. The reports co-author says the economy is probably the main reason for the decline.

HOT Lanes on Interstate

Date: 07/19/11 5pm duration 1:00 Jeff Dore

Commuters know there just aren't enough lanes on I-75 and 575 to handle all the cars all the time. The state plans to partner with contractors to build toll lanes next to I-75 from 285 to Sixes Road on I-575. Today, Governor Deal, the head of Georgia's DOT and Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed announced the federal government is loaning the state \$270 million dollars to get the project going. Mayor Reed: "Having an opportunity to move forward – a project that will make travel to and from the suburbs easier and more convenient." The good news for Georgia taxpayers, they don't have to repay that loan. The bad news for the commuters who use it – they do. The private contractors who build the road will pay it back by collecting tolls from drivers who use the lanes to get past clogged-up traffic. Drivers have some wildly differing opinions on that.

Date: 09/30/11 12pm duration 1:22 Fred Blankenship

Mayor Kasim Reed: "Relief on I-85 starts today." Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed was one of many today announcing his pride and excitement over the long-awaited launch of the new high occupancy toll lanes, or HOT lanes in I-85. They allow drivers with a Peach Pass to use the HOV lanes to bypass traffic. The more traffic, the higher the toll to use the lanes. Reed: "I can't state enough how vital this project is. Not just for the city of Atlanta, but for the entire region. Hundreds of millions will be saved because we'll use what we have more effectively." Between 7-9pm tonight, these signs that now say "test" will convert to reading "HOV Plus 2 only." And then, the new toll rates will be put up between 11:50 and midnight tonight. This is a new concept. The Georgia Department of Transportation expects confusion. So the call center will be open all weekend in an effort to prepare for Monday's first big commute with these new lanes. "We do expect people to have to get used to this thing. So it will take folks 2-3 weeks, possibly a month." But the bottom line, G-DOT says the technology behind the Peach Pass is sophisticated. But for commuters... "It's really simple. Just go online, get your peach pass, put it in your car, choose your lane, and go."

Cobb Transportation Announcement

Date: 07/19/11 6pm

duration 1:18

Jeff Dore

All too often, Moyah Grant gets in her car, and plunges into the traffic on I-75. She and her mom love the plan to build two new lanes. Grant: "That would help a lot, wouldn't it?" So they liked Governor Deal's announcement of Federal help to fund the mega-project, which is estimated to have a cost in the \$1 billion dollar range. He said the federal government will load Georgia \$270 million dollars to get the job going. Atlanta's mayor helped make the successful pitch for the money in Washington. Mayor Reed: "It's gonna generate jobs and it's gonna get families to and from the city and work at the end of the day." The lanes will be reversible, running next to I-75, from 285, up to 575 then up to Sixes Road. The state and private builders will do the project together. And that federal loan? Vance Smith, Ga DOT Commissioner: "The payback on this loan will be made by the developers." And they get the money by charging a toll. It's a lot of federal money loaned to the state, to be paid back by the contracts by getting money from you, the commuter. Driver Asha Hardy: "Pay!! That's crazy!" Some drivers hate that. Hardy: "I'd rather wait in traffic than have to pay." Some don't. Grant: "It'd be worth it. Year, rush hour."

17th St Bridge Fencing Breaks Apart

Date: 08/15/11 4:30am duration 1:00 Darryn Moore

Workers made a lot of progress overnight dismantling the fencing. Their goal, to remove all of it before the rush hour traffic got underway. Overnight crews used a large crane to take apart the last of the metal fencing on the 17th street bridge. Huge chunks of metal and aluminum ripped away from the barrier wall early Sunday morning and fell onto the downtown connector. No one traveling on the expressway was hurt. Crews shut down a couple of southbound lanes of the connector to remove the fencing from the roadway. Today GDOT investigators will inspect the fencing to find out why it came apart.

Proposal to Revert Some One-Way Streets to Two-Way

Date: 09/13/11 4pm

duration 1:57

Richard Elliot

You know, West Peachtree has been a one-way street for a very long time now, but if this new proposal went through, it would go back to being a two-way street and a lot of businesses I spoke with are all for it. Traffic zooms north of Piedmont, a little too fast for some business owner's tastes. They'd like to see cars slow down and enjoy the view – of their businesses. And some think changing Piedmont back to a two-way street – for the first time since the early '80s – might do just that. Philip Rafshoon: "Well, I think it's a great idea." Rafshoon owns Outwrite Books at Piedmont and 10th. He's been here a long time, and has heard this kind of proposal before. While he's skeptical anything will actually happen, he sure would like it to. Any study will show that a two-way street is better for a walking neighborhood and better for businesses that work there. It's a tough economy. Every little bit helps, and I think this would be a big bit. Slowing down traffic might also make other midtown one-ways, including West Peachtree, Juniper, and Spring safer for pedestrians like Tasha Waklatsi, who worries about fast traffic. Waklatsi: "From a walking standpoint, I'd feel more comfortable if the cars did slow down a bit. Cars wouldn't have that ability to change lanes like they're on a highway." But other pedestrians don't think anything will slow down traffic. Ogbona Okpara: "But you're just not sure that two-way traffic would actually slow it down. I don't think so. I think you'd have a Nascar type thing in two directions." City and community leaders both tell me this proposal is just in the planning stages, and that a lot of studies have to be done to see if it's even workable. Philip Rafshoon hopes it is. Rafshoon: "It's kinda one of those I'd believe it when I see it, but I think if enough people get involved and step up and say hey, we want to make this happen, I think it can become reality." I did contact a member of the Atlanta City council. They said so far, this has not come up on their official radar, but they also said they'd be happy to consider it if it is proposed in midtown Atlanta.

Light Rail in DeKalb Proposed

Date: 07/15/11 6pm

duration 1:45

Erin Coleman

Right now we're on Arnold Avenue. The line would run behind all of the homes you see here. The people who live here are excited about another transportation option; not so excited about not knowing what it'll look like. Brian Lapes: "The neighborhood is very scared that there will be the high-rail MARTA coming through and taking up a lot of space." Space *and* part of Brian Lape's back yard. His property backs up to a CSX rail line. And MARTA wants to use the area adjacent to CSX for a new line. It would connect the Lindbergh station with the CDC and Emory University area. "I think that would be great. I'm sure they would love it especially. If they could thin out some of the traffic that goes up through Briarcliff that would be great." This community just isn't sure what it means for them. Right now, MARTA is considering light rail and heavy rail. A line that runs about ground or – the best case scenario – "going underground so it wouldn't be a land acquisition. The people who live on Arnold Ave, they're talking about taking pieces of their land. It's going to come up to their back doors, which is pretty difficult to bear." "There's going to be some trade offs. We have to figure out what's going to be the best win-win and best balance of the cost with the community preference." The project will cost around \$1 billion dollars and MARTA planners *hope* it'll be included in next years special vote on a transportation tax. "It would mean a lot to the community, because it would take trips off the road. We have preliminary estimates up to 20 thousand riders or boardings a day." "There are so many unknowns. Our neighborhood is very reasonable. We want to work with them, but they don't seem to have all the data pulled together so we can really understand." MARTA makes its final recommendation in September. There are two more public meetings before then, and the people here say they will be there.

Fulton Jail Overcrowding

Date: 09/14/11 6pm

duration 1:36

Justin Farmer

"As far as I'm concerned that's the agony of it, working my way through the political games." Jail monitor Calvin Lightfoot says he doesn't think Thursday's planned meeting with the city of Atlanta and Fulton County leaders will solve the Fulton County jail's overcrowding problem. Thousands of inmates who first arrive at the intake area have been forced to sleep on mattresses on the floor. Crutchfield: "Oh I know it's not safe. How would you like to be in a situation like that where you're a brand new inmate coming in on a traffic charge, and some guy that's committed some heinous crime is laying right beside you." Federal Judge Marvin Shoob is overseeing the jail after a federal lawsuit, and had ordered county leaders to buy the Atlanta city jail, but city leaders doubled their asking price. County commissioners have already voted not to buy it Thursday the monitor and the judge will confirm that, then ask an important question. "If not the jail, then what? More beds does not solve the problem." Fulton Commissioner Robb Pitts says he doesn't think the county needs to buy an existing jail, or build a new one. "A large percentage of our inmates either have mental problems substance abuse problems or are homeless, not violent felons, therefore do not need to be in our jail in the first place." Lightfoot agrees and thinks the county should re-purpose the old Jefferson Street jail with treatment and re-entry programs. Judge Shoob also raised the idea of keeping Atlanta police from bringing arrestees to the Fulton County jail. Since the city jail has empty beds, but city leaders killed the deal. "I don't like people who mislead me."

Date: 09/14/11 11pm

duration :26

Justin Farmer

The Fulton County manager confirms he **will** attend tomorrow's scheduled meeting with a federal judge regarding overcrowding at the Fulton County Jail. The meeting will bring Fulton County and Atlanta city leaders to the table to discuss solutions to the overcrowding issue. A federal judge ordered county leaders to buy the Atlanta city jail, but city leaders doubled their asking price. Fulton County commissioners voted not to buy the jail.

Date: 09/17/11 12pm

duration :23

Fred Blankenship

A federal judge says the sale of Atlanta's jail is "off the table," as Fulton County struggles to reduce overcrowding at its lockup. A closed-door meeting yesterday ended with no agreement. Judge Marvin Schoob is ordering improvements at the Fulton County jail. The focus now shifts to leasing bed space, or building a new jail space. That last option could cost taxpayers \$150 million dollars of more.

Date: 09/19/11 11pm

duration :25

Justin Farmer

Tonight, a US District Court Judge ordered Fulton County to give him progress reports on what they are doing to solve their jail overcrowding problem. Last week, the judge called off the sale of the Atlanta City Jail to the county – after a price agreement couldn't be reached. Since the county has looked to other facilities to rent beds and space for prisoners. Fulton County must file their first report on November 1st.

Allegations Against APD Officers of Improper Conduct

Date: 07/08/11 6pm

duration 1:30

Mark Winne

The internal investigation deals with an apparent traffic stop near Fulton and Windsor Streets last year, but it may not stop the controversy. Grossman: "I think it begins the controversy." Bullman(?): "We will absolutely be filing suit in the Venegas and Kidd matter and we believe unequivocally (sic) that we can show that there's a pattern and practice." Records suggest Shawn Venegas, for instance, reported Officer

Cayenne Mayes placed his hands down his pants and felt around his privates; and that Officer Dion Meredith did similarly. Documents indicate both officers denied it, and that Brian Kidd alleged Officer Travis Britt unbuckled the belt on Kidd's pants, and his pants fell to the ground. Documents indicate Britt denied that. Bullman: "The only thing that we're shocked about is the fact that they actually sustained some of these." Documents indicate the complaint against Meredith was not sustained on one "conformance to directive" issue. APD says he got a written reprimand. International Brotherhood of Police Officers, according to one of its officials, maintains all three officers did nothing wrong. Bottom line: in several areas, the records suggest the statements by the officers and the other side are in "significant contradiction." Grossman: "They decided not to rule one way or the other on the really important things, which is what 'not sustained' means.

Execution of Troy Davis

Date: 09/16/11 11pm duration 1:19 Eric Phillips

Thousands of Troy Davis supporters marched from Woodruff Park down Auburn Avenue to Ebenezer Baptist Church in northeast Atlanta. Marcher 1: "It could be any of us." Marcher 2: "I've been supporting his cause for a number of years now and I'm just convinced that he's innocent or at the very least deserves another trial." Marcher 3: "we out here marching its for a good cause." The interfaith service at Ebenezer included a picture of Troy Davis at the front of the sanctuary and a number of speakers. The Reverend Al Sharpton insisted that the board of pardons and parole has every reason to grant Davis clemency on Monday. Sharpton: "What is there to review? Seven witnesses have recanted." Davis was convicted of killing an off-duty Savannah police officer 22 years ago. Three other times he was scheduled to be executed and it didn't happen. Supporters believe this time it's the ultimate fight for Davis' life. Vincent Fort: "All you have to be for is justice. All you have to be for is fairness." Dick Gregory: "Give me an army that's willing to die and I'll destroy an army that's willing to kill."

Date: 09/19/11 5am duration 1:00 Carol Sbarge

This is the last picture of Mark taken before he was killed. Killed 22 years ago, by this man, Troy David, outside a Savannah bus station, where Mark McPhail, an off-duty police officer was working security. For Anneliese MacPhail, it all comes down to today's hearing. "They think I'm after blood. I'm not. I'm after justice – my son was killed." This is the fourth and last time the Davis case will go before a clemency appeal. He's set to die by lethal injection on Wednesday. Thousands have protested and signed petitions, including those who spent the night in anticipation of today's hearing. Protestor Carter Thomas: "When seven of the nine eyewitnesses have recanted, and said they were coerced by police, I just don't see how the case stands up to him being in prison, let alone executed." But the MacPhails say Davis supporters always leave out a couple of key points. "Like you shot somebody else twice in the face. The casings are the same. Why did you run?"

Date: 09/22/11 4:30am duration 1:17 Tony Thomas

Hundreds of protestors and riot police grew eerily quiet as a few hundred yards away, the execution of Troy Davis was underway. Witness Jon Lewis: "Basically it went very quietly." Those who witnessed the execution, including WSB radio's Jon Lewis say the 42-year-old convicted cop killer maintained his innocence until the very end. Lewis: "He said he was not personally responsible for what happened that night. That he did not have a gun." Strapped to the gurney, witnesses say Davis spoke directly to victim Mark MacPhail's family. He said I did not personally kill your son or father or brother. I am innocent.' The controversial execution of Troy Davis was delayed for more than four hours as the US Supreme court took a final look at the case. Davis died for the 1989 killing of the Savannah police officer. Through the evening, the Davis family huddled with supporters, waiting and praying. The family left without comment, but defense lawyers lashed out. Attorney Thomas Ruffin: "This night the state of Georgia legally lynched a brave, a good, and an innocent man." Some members of the MacPhail family witnessed the execution but made no comments afterwards. Just before he was killed, Davis also told those watching to dig deeper into the case and find out what really happened.

State Legislators At Odds Over Redistricting Plans

Date: 08/22/11 6pm duration :21 Justin Farmer

The process has had some controversy. Democrats called the state house and senate maps racially unfair. And members of both the Tea Party and the Democrats say the newly drawn districts pit some of their incumbents against each other. Republican House speaker David Ralston countered saying this was the most open and transparent redistricting process in the state's history.

Taxpayer Expenditure for Area Parade Questioned

Date: 08/24/11 6pm duration :40 Justin Farmer

Cobb County police will help close off streets for a popular parade next month. That's despite an internal memo saying the cost to taxpayers is too high. The "East Cobber" parade has attracted thousands of marchers and spectators each year. It also required county transportation workers and police officers to put in overtime to close the road and control the crowds. A memo puts the cost at more than \$13,000 dollars for the privately-run event. County officials say they will look at these costs in the future.

State License Plate Project Stirs Religious Controversy

Date: 07/15/11 12pm duration 1:03 Fred Blankenship

Florida only has its sunshine, but Georgia – it's announced if you live in Henry, DeKalb, Bartow, Clayton, or Fulton County – for an extra buck you can buy this that declares where your buck stops. A tag that says "In God we Trust." But those words are what caused all the controversy in a state-sponsored license plate design contest. Five hundred submissions, 8 finalists, the winner was supposed to be announced Friday morning. Instead, the governor announced this: "Based on the advice of the commissioner of the Dept of Revenue, we've decided to postpone that decision." Just as a place holder, some of the final tag choices had "In God we Trust" and others didn't. Voters thought it was part of the choice. Religious groups squared off against atheist groups. Some critics say the state allowed the confusion to create a buzz on the contests. Deal: "I wish we were that smart." Regardless, the online voting will be opened back up for three more weeks. "The look of the plates will be exactly the same but the only difference – there'll be nothing where that county or God label would be."

Date: 08/22/11 12pm duration :23 Fred Blankenship

In just a few hours, Georgia gets a new symbol. But not without some controversy. People voted online for their favorite design for the state's new license plate. Some people objected to the phrase "In God we Trust" on some designs. State officials say the phrase is available on a sticker that drivers can buy, if they choose. We'll be showing you the winning design later today.

Peachtree City Council Prayer Protest

Date: 08/25/11 5pm duration 1:54 Tom Regan

Before every city council meeting here in Peachtree City, the mayor says a short prayer. He told me it's generic, and could apply to most faiths. But an atheist organization argues it violates the separation of church and state. Al Stevanelli, American Atheists, Inc: "We're not fighting against religion, we're fighting for the Constitution." Atheist activist and Peachtree City resident Stefanelli told me the invocation that precedes city council meetings is overtly directed toward Christians and thus violates the law. He showed me a letter he sent to the mayor and council-members outlining his concerns. He said the term "Heavenly

Father” and “in his wonderful name” show bias toward Judeo-Christian beliefs of a male God at the exclusion of Hindus, Buddhists, and other religions. Stefanelli: “An invocation is permitted before a city council meeting. But it cannot be specifically aimed at a particular religions or creed. And “Our Heavenly Father” crosses the line. Mayor Haddix: “The claim that it’s Judeo-Christian is a false claim.” The mayor told me the term ‘father’ is not limited to Christianity, and is a commonly used symbol of authority. “It just stems from use in the ancient languages – Aramaic and the others – the name of authority was always male.” The mayor says he has no intention of changing the prayer nor accepting the atheists organization’s suggestion that leaders of other religious faiths be allowed to lead with their own invocation. Stefanelli: “I’m not trying to take it away. I’m just want the invocation to be more inclusive of the population here.” The mayor told me he had no plans to take the prayer controversy before city council. He says it’s a city policy issue. It’s his personal decision alone.

DeKalb Court Clerk Files Lawsuit

Date: 07/27/11 6am duration :30 Carol Sbarge

A clerk controversy in DeKalb County will now go to trial. Debra Deberry is the new DeKalb County Clerk of Courts. Former clerk Linda Carter filed a lawsuit accusing Deberry of tricking her into resigning. Deberry’s lawyers claim a medical issue leaves Carter incompetent to hold the office. Deberry says she hopes her longtime friendship with Carter can continue. Deberry: “I hope that my predecessor Ms Carter is well taken care of and she gets all the help she needs and any way I can help that happen I certainly will.” The case is set to go to trial in October.

Property Owners Question DeKalb County Sewer Expense

Date: 07/28/11 6pm duration :37 Monica Pearson

Some DeKalb residents say, the county is trying to stick them with an \$800,000 dollar repair bill it should pay. The controversy concerns sewers underneath historic homes in Scottdale off East Ponce de Leon. The county maintained the sewers for decades, but now claims they’re private. The residents’ lawyer says the county changed the designation to avoid cleaning up the sewers, as part of a more than \$1 billion dollar federal order. Attorney Barbara Gallo: “For over 50 years the records have indicated these sewer lines are publicly owned, but as of 2009 they have mysteriously appeared on public records as being privately owned.” The county wouldn’t talk to us about the lawsuit.

Neighbors Unhappy Over Proposed Cell Phone Tower

Date: 07/03/11 11pm duration :33 Linda Stouff4er

A cell tower controversy has some DeKalb County residents worried tonight. T-Mobile wants to build cell towers – about the size of this one – at 12 DeKalb County schools. One of them would go up at Medlock Elementary. The district recently shut down the school. Neighbors say building a cell tower here would be another blow to the neighborhood. Joanne Massey: “I’d like them to ask themselves, how would you like to have a cell phone tower in your front yard.” The district says the cell towers would bring up to \$1 million dollars per site over several years. The board could vote on the plan one week from tomorrow.

Property Owners Cited for Trash-Filled Development

Date: 08/09/11 03:45:06

duration 1:25

Craig Lucie

From the street, you can see why neighbors are upset about this Stone Mountain home. Amanda Smith: "It's a hazard, it's a hazard. I can't even let my dogs out because they have snakes in here." What's left of the garage is starting to cave in. The roof is gone after part of home on Golfcrest trace caught on fire. Smith: "We moved here in April 2006 and it looks as bad as it does now then so its been a long time." Amanda Smith says since April 2006 she's tried to get someone out here to clean it up. A crew started to a year ago ... "left after 5 days, and they left it in worse condition than it was before." This empty swimming pool is one of the neighbors biggest concerns. Look at this. It has been like this for so long, this pine tree is growing out of it. We've contacted people about it. Called code enforcement. We tracked down the man who owns the home. Reporter: "Are you the owner of that property?" Owner: "Yeah I'm working on that." Reporter: "A lot of residents want to speak with you and find out what you are doing to clean it up." Owner: "I've got plans to clean it up in the next two weeks." Reporter: "Next two weeks? What kind of plans are they?" Door shuts. Although we don't know what the plans are, neighbors are optimistic. "If he handles it in two weeks then water under the bridge. And if it's not done, I'll call you again."

Date: 07/19/11 5pm

duration 1:16

Aaron Diamante

Patrice Glover: "When we purchased these homes, we were promised that this property was gonna be kept up." But this is the view from Patrice Glover and Brian Baker's front door. Acres and acres of overgrown land – full of snakes, bugs, and who knows what else. Glover: "There's been a lot of different types of wild life, you know, things that could possibly carry rabies and all types of diseases that are harmful. Its not only the kids, but us, too." Her family forced to stay inside, about two dozen townhomes in Mallory Park off Flat Shoals Road surrounded by six foot weeds and undeveloped homesites. The subdivision now a dumping ground – tires and trash everywhere. Glover: "I mean, it kinda looks like a landfill, you know, it looks like nobody cares about it." The Homeowners Association that used to maintain the property went belly-up in 2009, so we wanted to know who's responsible now, but none of the phone numbers we found for the builder – Atreus Homes – worked. Brian Baker: "It looks abandoned, so we have a lot of vagrants that come in and break into houses because it looks abandoned. You cant even see the street from here." We saw a sign for this local realtor, who told me over the phone that Fulton County code enforcement is going after the builder to clean all this up, but we couldn't confirm that. Glover's luck – not much better. Glover: "Everybody Everybody passes the buck, everybody is like, oh, it's that area, that's not our concern, go to these people, oh, that's that area, that's not our problem."

Former State Rep Leads Pawn Shop Protest

Date: 07/28/11 6pm

duration :33

Jovita Moore

A former state representative is leading a protest outside a pawn shop. About two dozen people showed up to the Northside Loan Office on Martin Luther King, Jr Drive in southwest Atlanta. It's where police say the suspect in a midtown murder bought his gun. "Able" Mable Thomas wants the store to stop selling guns, even though they met all legal requirements in that sale. Thomas: "We stand for peace. we stand for peace and one thing we know is that the proliferation of guns in our community is not a good thing."

Gwinnett Mosque Lawsuit

Date: 08/27/11 4pm

duration :22

John Bachman

The US Justice Department and the city of Lilburn have agreed to settle a case of religious bias over building an Islamic center. The city of Lilburn twice rejected an Islamic Center's request for rezoning to build a mosque. The US Government sued in June saying the denials were based on religious bias to appease residents who opposed it. On August 16th, the city approved the rezoning.

EPA Steps in to Clean Long Closed Chemical Company Site

Date: 08/17/11 5pm

duration 1:29

Aaron Diamonte

Crews clearing the way for the EPA to clean up tons of toxic chemicals from two lots on New Street in DeKalb County. Timothy Neal, EPA: "At this point we have the site very well contained, or identified I should say." High levels of arsenic and lead traced back to this contaminated commercial property down the road. The long-gone Virginia Carolina chemical factory made fertilizer here from the 1890's to the 1930's. Neal: "They didn't have the best disposal of their contamination back then." Oil giant Exxon Mobil bought the chemical company decades ago, and is responsible for the cleanup. It found the contaminated soil between 2008-2010, but neither Exxon nor the EPA told nearby neighbors until earlier this month. Neighbor George Henry Stinson: "I said wow! I drank the water out of the well and things over there and partied over there and had picnics." Stinson has lived in this neighborhood for more than 80 years. The EPA told me it wanted to come up with a solution before clueing in neighbors. Still, we've heard from a couple of these folks who said, man, I just wish they would have told me sooner. [Neal] Yeah, well, we uh try to address all their concerns as best as we can and were still pursuing that. One of Emma Nelson's concerns – no one tested her property just a couple of houses down. Nelson: "We've lived here so long and my concern is health issues." Neal: "I don't think there's any reason for them to be concerned now. We've got a good handle on where the contamination is and were addressing it."