

Discussing current events with Skeeter Skates

I could tell by the way the phone jumped straight up when it rang who was on the line. It could be none other than Skeeter Skates, owner of Skeeter Skates Tree Stump Removal and Plow Repair, located in Ryo, Georgia. Yes, phones jump where Skeeter is involved. I do, too.

Skeeter Skates doesn't have a high regard for those of us in the media. After watching the dysfunction at the New York Times, I am more inclined to agree with him than previously. "Hoss," Skeeter said with no preamble, "the boys in the Ryo Morning Coffee Club wanted me to ask you what in blazes has got everybody so stirred up these days. I said I would ask but I ain't got time to talk all day so just give me the highlights. I got a John Deere Moldboard Plow Shin 14" HS High Speed



Dick Yarbrough
Tribune Columnist

666H sitting here staring me in the face waiting for me to do something."

I told him some of the unrest was legitimate. There had been some high-profile examples of overreaction by the police around the country that had resulted in the deaths of the individuals they were attempting to arrest. No question that things could have been handled better and hopefully they will be in the future.

"I can't argue with that, Hoss," Skeeter said, "but Walleye, who

runs the bait shop over near Sugar Hill, says he wonders if that is any reason to not fund the police. Walleye says it's like doing away with all doctors 'cause one took out somebody's appendix when they should have taken out their tonsils."

I said that was one way to look at it. It is obvious to me that Skeeter Skates' morning coffee club contains some deep thinkers.

Skeeter said, "Uncle Coot wanted me to ask you that if we don't have any police, who is going to keep us from being robbed or mugged or shot and killed and if we are in a bad wreck who is going to pull us out of the car? Protesters?"

Another good question, I said, and I didn't have a good answer although I was pretty sure it wouldn't be the protesters.

"And how come," Skeeter mused, "the protest-

ers are tearing down all them statutes? What's that got to do with the police?"

Most of the protesters are young, I said, and don't like a lot of things about our country, including our past, so they are trying to erase it by tearing down statutes. They evidently are not aware of Santayana's admonition that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

"I ain't much of a religious person," Skeeter said, "so I don't know who Saint Anna is but that makes a lot of sense. By the way, have you asked protesters what they are going to do about all them counties in Georgia named for some Confederate bigwig? They going in and buy up all the atlas books and erase the names?"

I didn't tell Skeeter that nobody buys atlas

es anymore. They look that stuff up on their cellphones, but his point is a good one. What are the protesters going to do about the counties? Probably nothing. Tearing down statutes is easier.

Booger Brown, who is a charter member of the Ryo Morning Coffee Club, wanted to know about pro football players disrespecting our national anthem and the American flag while making tens of millions of U.S. dollars playing a kid's game. Wasn't that a little hypocritical?

I said it was but I wouldn't worry too much about them. They are about as relevant to society as a butter churn. Besides, after a few years of banging heads with each other, their brains are going to turn to mush and they will end up drooling their oatmeal and trying to remember their

names. Skeeter got back on the line. "Hoss, for an ol' boy that don't get grease under your fingernails like real working people, you made some sense out of the nonsense going on these days. I appreciate your time. Now if you will excuse me, I've got a Weed Wiper 3-Point Hitch Mount that ain't going to fix itself. In the meantime, keep speaking the truth and remember there are more folks like the Ryo Morning Coffee Club who love their country than a bunch of ingrates that don't."

I think that was the first compliment I ever got from Skeeter Skates. I am fulfilled.

You can reach Dick Yarbrough at dick@dickyarbrough.com; at P.O. Box 725373, Atlanta, Georgia 31139; online at dickyarbrough.com or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/dickyarb

The great debate: Is that school or is it not school?

Remember the dress? Or rather, #TheDress? A picture of it appeared on the internet one day, and suddenly people were arguing over whether it was blue and black, or white and gold.

Then there was "Yanny vs. Laurel." People who listened to a recording on the web could not agree which of those words was being said.

Well, the latest online ambiguity has arrived. Take a look at kids sitting at home for a whole Tuesday in September without going someplace else: Is that school, or not school?

OK, OK. This matter's more than a meme. But I say, embrace the ambiguity. It just might spark the conversation we ought to be having.

The current fight is between those who believe it's unsafe to re-



Kyle Wingfield
Tribune Columnist

open schoolhouses next month, and those who believe the alternative is worse: remote learning that is unacceptably poor, mental stress for students isolated at home, and a burden on working parents.

Already, several Georgia school districts have announced they will start the school year remotely. Among them are Atlanta, Augusta, Marietta and Savannah, as well as Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb and Fulton counties. Others are sure to

follow. That goes against what President Trump and his administration are urging. In a video event with the Georgia Public Policy Foundation this past week, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos reiterated her position that students need to be back - physically - in classrooms.

"We know that there are too many kids today who are suffering because of the isolation and the distance from their peers and their teachers, and having missed several months of learning in some cases, in many cases," DeVos said. "And we know that there are many measures of a child's health. And as we think about going into the fall, it is imperative that kids get back into a routine and into a forward-leaning learning posture to continue to

develop themselves."

Let's take a step back. I doubt we would have this debate if remote learning had gone better in the spring. There are many indicators that student learning fell significantly when classrooms closed. They struggled to learn, and parents struggled to find the time and resources to help them. For those educators now complaining that the push to get kids back in classrooms renders them "glorified babysitters," what message do you think it sends when a 6.5-hour school day is replaced by an hour or two (at most) of instruction and a few worksheets?

To be fair, many if not most teachers are as frustrated by that arrangement as parents and students are. But where's the evidence the coming school year will go better?

It's suspicious, for example, that the clearer it became that COVID-19 was spreading more rapidly than before, the more school districts decided to delay the start of (and perhaps shorten) their school year by a week or two. The pandemic's trajectory is unlikely to improve during that time, and in any case districts aren't waiting to see if it does before deciding how to proceed. One wonders if school leaders had assumed they could start the year in-person, and were unprepared to begin remotely.

That doesn't bode well for an improvement over the spring. I hope I'm wrong.

More than ever, this situation points out the lack of true options for most Georgia families. They are told to send them - or not - to their

assigned public school. If they don't like that option, they can figure it out on their own.

Many Georgia families are recognizing this false choice, or at least its full implications, for the first time. Maybe they bought a house in a good suburban school district thinking they wouldn't need other choices. Now, stuck with one unappealing "option," like so many other Georgians, maybe they see the problem for what it is.

And maybe we'll find our way to a more meaningful conversation: one about how we can stop funding only inflexible systems, and start funding a variety of educational options for each child.

Kyle Wingfield is president and CEO of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation: www.georgiapolicy.org.

CLAYTON

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have the CMBA, the two organizations would be duplicating services.

"What are you going to be spending money on? Are you going to be duplicating services?" Bradshaw asked representatives of Forward Rabun.

Story said that because they are a new organization, they don't have an itemized list of exactly what funds would be spent on but said that the goal is to have those "measurable metrics" in the near future.

He reiterated that any sort of partnership between Clayton and Forward Rabun would be beneficial.

"I have a very personal belief that this is the right thing for Rabun County," Shope said.

COVID-19 precautions and Kemp's executive order

In other business, council members passed a face cover policy that requires city employees to wear masks in City Hall.

Last week, Mia Sharp-ton, treasurer/human resources representative, discussed a policy that was drafted that required all employees and patrons of the public to wear masks in City Hall.

The policy read, "whereas, to be an effective precaution, it is necessary to

require all city employees and members of the public to wear a face covering over the nose and mouth while in public areas in the city building and while meeting in the city building."

However, following Gov. Brian Kemp's executive order 07.15.20.01 "Providing additional guidance for Empowering a Healthy Georgia in response to COVID-19," that stated local governments could not mandate the wearing of masks on public property, the mask policy was amended to apply to employees only.

"This is just the internal policy for employees," Sharp-ton said. She also discussed an attire and grooming policy that would affect employees as well.

Gov. Kemp's order reads "...any state, county, or municipal law, order, ordinance, rule, or regulation that requires persons to wear face coverings, masks, face shields, or any other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) while in places of public accommodation or on public property are suspended to the extent that they are more restrictive than this Executive Order."

Sharp-ton told council members that the policy was changed from "require" members of the public to "request" members of the public to wear a face mask.

Green said that this was a measure to ensure the

city is in complying with the executive order.

"We ask that you wear a face mask but cannot require it," Green reiterated.

He clarified that members of the public can meet with city employees at City Hall by appointment only. He said that the foyer would be open for customers to pay bills, but that people would not be allowed to "roam around" City Hall.

In comment on the matter after the meet-

ing City Manager Cissy Henry said, "If you're a member of the public, we recommend it [wearing a face covering]. If you're an employee, we require it."

In other business, Council members approved the first reading of an amendment to Article II of Sec. 38 streets, sidewalks and other places, of the city ordinance.

Zoning Administrator John Bozeman discussed at last week's work session having a detailed

code of ordinances that address businesses leaving materials on side-

walks in a manner that could obstruct the flow of traffic.

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