

**PARTLY CLOUDY**

High: 65  
Low: 42  
20% chance of rain



**Saturday:** Sunny, 58/39  
**Sunday:** Ptly. sunny, 64/47  
**Monday:** Ptly. sunny, 73/59

Details on the back of Metro

# The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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METRO, B1

## 'PHANTOM OF THE FOX' JOE PATTEN HAS DIED

SPORTS, C1

## PLAYERS FACE STIFF BREEZE FIRST DAY AT THE MASTERS



BUSINESS, A11

## CAN TECHNOLOGY QUICKEN LINES?

### ECONOMIC FALLOUT



The Red Carpet Tour, with two dozen top economic development prospects, is designed to lure companies to Georgia. The four-day event is capped by VIP access for the Masters. BRANT SANDERLIN / AJC  
Find full coverage of the first round of The Masters in Sports, C1

# State woos firms fleeing religious laws

N.C., Miss. face loss of jobs, conventions from laws affecting LGBT.

**By Arielle Kass**  
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**and Dan Chapman**  
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Threats of canceled conventions and lost jobs in North Carolina and Mississippi could not have come at a better time for Georgia.

Laws passed in the Tar Heel and Magnolia states that are viewed as discriminatory to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people come on the heels of Gov. Nathan Deal's veto of similar legislation in Georgia — and just in time for the Peach State's biggest business recruiting event of the year.

The Red Carpet Tour, with about two dozen top economic development prospects, is making its way across Georgia this week. The four-day schmooze-fest designed to lure companies to Georgia is capped by VIP access for the first and third rounds of

the Masters golf tournament in Augusta.

Industry observers say recruiters are no doubt emphasizing Georgia's newly burnished reputation for tolerance at every turn, even though a new "religious liberty" bill is likely to come up in Georgia next year.

They may even use it to lure payments technology firm

**Fallout** continued on A10

**ALSO INSIDE**  
» GOP's social, fiscal conservatives at odds over gay rights, A10

### MARIJUANA POLICY

## Georgia city may decriminalize pot

Clarkston appears ready to challenge state drug laws.

**By Greg Bluestein**  
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Clarkston leaders may try to make their city the first in Georgia to decriminalize marijuana.

Clarkston Mayor Ted Terry said the City Council's public safety committee this month will review whether to make possession of less than 1 ounce of marijuana a



Clarkston Mayor Ted Terry: "The War on Drugs has failed."

ticket-only offense, putting it on the same level as a run-of-the-mill traffic violation. He expects the full council to bring it to a vote as early as May.

"The bottom line is the War on Drugs has failed," said Terry, also a vice chairman of the Dem-

ocratic Party of Georgia. "It is time for elected officials to use evidence-based policies to make our communities safer and fight drug abuse."

Other Georgia cities have flirted with the idea, but they've failed to gain traction. An effort in Athens sputtered recently when the city attorney concluded that state laws that make possession of the drug a misdemeanor crime take precedence over local ordinances.

Terry said his city is prepared

**Pot** continued on A9

### FEDERAL COURT FIGHT

## Donation box regulations land in court

Textile recyclers' lawsuit claims for-profit bin ban violates rights.

**By David Wickert**  
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Eager to help the needy or just to clean out their closets, Metro Atlanta residents have found donation bins at local shopping centers a handy place to unload their stuff.

But those convenient bins have become a nuisance for some local business owners. They appear in parking lots without notice or permission. Used mattresses and other items pile up and become an eyesore. And though residents may think they're donat-

ing to charity, many of the bins are placed by for-profit companies that property owners say leave them to clean up the mess.

Now an effort to address the problem has landed Gwinnett County in federal court.

Gwinnett outlawed for-profit collection bins altogether on private property in unincorporated areas in 2014. But two recycling firms have filed a lawsuit, saying Gwinnett has violated their constitutional rights to free speech and equal protection by discriminat-

ing against for-profit companies. The companies say Gwinnett's ordinance illegally distinguishes between for-profit and nonprofit companies, violating equal pro-

**Bins** continued on A8

### FARM-TO-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

## First lady digs in at Georgia school

Obama helps plant garden as she touts healthier choices.

**By Jennifer Brett**  
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WAYNESBORO — As her time as the nation's first lady draws to a close, Michelle Obama is on something of a Victory Garden Tour. On Thursday, she made Burke County Middle School in this town about a half-hour south of Augusta one of her tour stops.

"Burke County, right here, is a wonderful example of what schools are doing in rural com-

munities," said Mrs. Obama, who joined young farmers in action first in a greenhouse and then in outdoor raised beds. "You all are leading the way in farm-to-school programs. You're using it in your classrooms. You're eating healthier school lunches. And it's having a good impact on your education and on your overall health."

She has championed healthy dining and active lifestyle choices since the beginning of her husband's administration, an initiative that has a strong Atlanta connection. Chef Marvin Woods, a

**First lady** continued on A9



First lady Michelle Obama (right) helps plant a garden with Leslie Singleton at Burke County Middle School on Thursday. TAYLOR CARPENTER / TAYLOR CARPENTER @ AJC.COM



NATION & WORLD, A3

## Obama rips GOP for stalling on court choice

President Obama says Senate Republicans are jeopardizing the "integrity of the judicial branch" by ignoring Supreme Court pick.

METRO, B1

## Broun's former aide quits chief of staff job

A former aide to ex-U.S. Rep. Paul Broun of Georgia resigns from his job in another congressional office after indictment.

GO GUIDE, D1

## Find secret treasures at Georgia state parks

Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites is celebrating its 85th anniversary with special hikes, canoe rides and other activities.

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Volume 68, Number 99



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# FROM PAGE ONE



Glenn Wisdom of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District has been removing collection boxes placed by for-profit companies. TAYLOR CARPENTER PHOTOS / AJC

## Bins

continued from A1

tection provisions of the U.S. and Georgia constitutions. Among other things, they also say the collection bins – which serve as advertisements for their services – amount to commercial speech, and Gwinnett’s ordinance violates their First Amendment rights.

Gwinnett officials deny their ordinance is discriminatory. But they’re considering new, tougher regulations that would restrict for-profit and nonprofit collection bins alike.

Meanwhile, business leaders wonder what it will take to get rid of the nuisance collection bins.

“As of today, we have none,” said Glenn Wisdom, operations director for the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District. “But tomorrow I could go around and find four or five that showed up overnight.”

The dispute sheds light on the textiles recycling business, which one trade group estimates is a \$1 billion industry. Hundreds of companies across the country collect clothing, shoes and household textiles and resell or recycle them.

One of the companies involved in the lawsuit – Illinois-based USAgain LLC – has more than 970 collection bins in Metro Atlanta, accord-

ing to court documents. The company says it collected nearly 355,000 pounds of clothing and textiles in Gwinnett County before the ban of clothing and textiles.

In court documents, USAgain and the second company involved in the lawsuit, Maryland-based Mid-Atlantic Clothing Recycling, stress the environmental benefits of recycling. They say they share some of their proceeds with charities and with property owners who accept their collection bins.

The companies say they visit each bin weekly to keep them tidy and collect donated items, and they provide 24-hour telephone lines to report problems.

“Our clients are providing a service to the residents of Gwinnett County,” said attorney Julie Sellers, who represents the companies. “They save hundreds of thousands of tons of materials from going into landfills.”

Wisdom, the Gwinnett Place operations manager, tells a different story – one where bins frequently appear without the permission of property owners, donated junk piles up and companies without the permission of property owners, donated junk piles up and companies

don’t respond to complaints. “These things become a public nuisance,” he said. “People end up dumping mattresses, appliances and furniture. Then the property owner has the added expense of cleaning all that up.”

Complaints like that led

the Gwinnett Board of Commissioners to prohibit for-profit collection bins two years ago. Nonprofits can still use collection bins.

County Commissioner Jace Brooks said it makes sense to target the bins of for-profit companies. “A very high percentage of the problem (bins) are the for-profits,” he said.

But in December, USAgain and Mid-Atlantic filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Atlanta. It says Gwinnett’s approach is unconstitutional and asks the court to overturn the ban.

In court filings, Gwinnett argues it has the authority to regulate land uses and to restrict the placement of collection bins to protect the health, safety and welfare of its citizens.

Nonetheless, Gwinnett officials may revise the ordinance. A draft under consideration would allow charities and businesses to place bins at their own offices, but not elsewhere.

County commissioners recently tabled discussion of the proposal until April 26.

The companies’ attorneys said they had not seen the proposed ordinance. Wisdom said the ordinance could help. But he said any law will only work if companies abide by it.

“Duluth passed an ordinance banning these boxes,” he said. “That’s great, but I can drive over there right now and see boxes.”



A collection box placed by USAgain sits on a curb in Gwinnett. The county passed an ordinance prohibiting for-profit collection boxes to address problems with companies placing boxes without property owners’ permission. USAgain and another clothing recycling company have sued over the ordinance.

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