The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

AJC EXCLUSIVE POLL VOICES ON HEALTH CARE

GEORGIANs WARY OF HEALTH LAW

AJC poll finds most Georgians view act unfavorably, but like some elements.

By Misty Williams

With the new health law's most significant reforms ready to take effect, a poll conducted for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution shows a majority of Georgians say they don't think it will help them.

Little knowledge, big worries
The AJC poll of 1,020 Georgians found deep divisions in the state about the Affordable Care Act and how it will affect people. A majority of Georgians oppose this law, especially African-Americans, but a smaller tier of majorities admit to not having a good understanding of it.

Q: There's been a lot of debate over the Affordable Care Act, which seeks to provide more people with health insurance. Do you feel that you have a good understanding of how the law will affect you and your family, or are you not very clear on how it will affect your family?

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<th>% Yes</th>
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Q: Given what you know about the law, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?

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<th>% Favorable</th>
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Q: Part of this law would expand Medicaid to provide coverage to many low-income adults without coverage. States have the right to refuse the expansion, and Georgia has decided against it. Citing the cost, Do you think that Georgia should allow the expansion of Medicaid to cover new low-income uninsured adults, or should it refuse to participate?

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ETHICS WATCH
Politics a factor
For many, polls tied to selected officials can engender distrust.

By Chris Joyner

Two years ago, Stacy Kilberman gave her replacement as director of the state ethics commission some advice: Watch out. The job is political and you can get counseled fired, she told Holly Larter, the commission's current director. Larter, who succeeded the career official in December, told her that the ethics law was "a bit odd." Kilberman and her deputy did not have their votes on the commission until their investigation into Gov. Nathan Deal's campaign. Both former officials had served in state, and the details emerging from Larter's deposition in those cases have raised a longstanding complaint. The ethics commission is a poor watchdog with a modicum of accomplishments that is politically vulnerable to the numbers of its officials. It is not supposed to regulate.

The deposition, Larter said, was her most transparent process with the governor's office for the job, and former officials said that she bragged that she "covered" the ethics law for how the handled the investigation. Also included in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution content is a series of articles on the Ethics Commission of Georgia, which includes discussions on how the commission conducts its work and how it is funded.

AJC exclusive report Testing the tests

Flawed grading can ruin students futures.

By Matthew Gigley

Tommy Porter knows that failing one of Mississippi's high school tests in high school can change the course of his life. It can mean the difference between college and a factory job, between scraping by and a chance for more. The former principal is still haunted by the years he told parents their children wouldn't receive a high school diploma because they had failed the exams.

"It's not uncommon," he said. "I don't know how many of those three of his students. It actually passed a state graduation test they had thought they failed. In the disillusionment he said, "You put your faith and confidence in the state department of education and the company that runs the school. It was built and built at the state."

Thoughts on the state's current test scores?

Test scores continued on A18

New! Lower prices

New! Lower prices

New! Lower prices
FLORIDA

With 825 miles of beaches, the Sunshine State has long been a top destination. The state's many theme parks, including Walt Disney World, are a big draw, but visitors can take in rich cultural heritage, too. By Jon Waterhouse, for the AJC

1. Clearwater Beach
Located on Florida's Gulf Coast, the area has a reputation for sugar sand beaches and clear Gulf waters that continues scoring high marks from critics and drawing the sun-worshipping masses.

Some enjoy street performers and special events at Pier 60, Philadelphia Phillies spring training at Bright House Field, and Clearwater Marine Aquarium. The latter is home to Winter, the dolphin with the prosthetic tail, made famous in the film "Dolphin Tale."

Bu Clearwater’s biggest draw remains the beach itself. Popular lodging options include the Sandpearl Resort and the Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach Resort and Spa.

Consider exploring the acclaimed natural setting of Caladesi Island State Park, located off the beach’s north end. Hop the ferry at Honeymoon Island State Park or skipper your part to the island. You can’t camp on the island, but you can sleep on your boat at the dock.

Some visitors kayak a 3-mile trail, complete with mangroves. Located west of Tampa and northwest of St. Petersburg in Pinellas County. www.visitclearwaterflorida.com

2. Havana 1957
Tourists regularly take bites out of the Cuban cuisine found at this restaurant, which sits at the bustling Miami Beach corner of Española Way and Washington Avenue. (There’s another location on Lincoln Road.)

Zero in on the roasted chicken with Cuban gravy, the fried cubed pork and the flank steak crowned with onions. Indulge in an encore with some flan or a belly full of tres leches cake with a Cuban coffee chaser.

If Frank Sinatra were alive today, he’d likely tip his fedora to the decor, including the red vinyl booths, vintage Cuban travel posters and other touches. Don’t be surprised if you see the ghost of Ol’ Blue Eyes sipping a mojito at the Cuban rum bar, which boasts more than 70 rum varieties.


3. Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex
Oodles of travelers land at this love letter to the U.S. space program. Equal parts history lesson and science study, the experience blends actual spacecraft and NASA memorabilia with kid-centric flash.

While dad may go gaga over a real Saturn V moon rocket, tots will likely gravitate toward the newly opened Angry Birds Space Encounter. All ages might drop their jaws while watching 3-D Imax space flicks.

The most recent buzz — we ain’t talking about astronaut Aldrin — centers around the opening of the Space Shuttle Atlantis attraction. Approximately $100 million was sunk into this 90,000-square-foot tourist draw. Guests get up close and personal with the actual shuttle, which flew 33 missions and has the weathered look and traces of space dust to prove it. Simulators and interactive activities give visitors a glimpse of what it would be like to stow away on a shuttle.


4. Universal Orlando Resort
For nearly a quarter century, this place has given the mouse a run for its magic. Theme park-loving families have a choice of two destinations: Universal Studios Florida and Universal’s Islands of Adventure.

At the former, some new additions launched last summer. A pair of motion simulator rides, Transformers: The Ride-3D and Despicable Me Minion Mayhem, put guests in the middle of those two respective movie universes.

The long-standing The Simpsons Ride serves as the centerpiece to a new, life-size re-creation of Springfield, the hometown of the animated Simpsons family. That’s where guests can nosh at Krusty Burger, tip back a Duff beer at Moe’s Tavern and ride Kang & Kodos’ Twirl ‘n’ Hurl, a nod to parking lot carnival kitsch.

Islands of Adventure lays claim to the resort’s biggest marquee value: The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, a land
within the park entirely themed on the Potter films. Fans ride rides, suck down Butterbeer, and see locations straight out of Harry’s mythos, from Hogs- warts Castle to the shops of Hogsmeade.

Restaurants, nightlife and retail spots can be found at the adjacent Universal CityWalk, which is free to visit. The resort’s three on-site lodging options (Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, Hard Rock Hotel and Loews Royal Pacific Resort) will soon be joined by Universal’s Cabana Bay Beach Resort. Based on the beach resorts of the 1950s and '60s, it’s set to open in March.

6. Daytona International Speedway Tour

The home of NASCAR’s most lauded race, the Daytona 500, Daytona International Speedway provides a pit stop for fans who want a glimpse behind the action.

The facility offers three different peek underneath the hood. The 30-minute Speed- way Tour takes guests on a ride through the infield, through NASCAR garages and the speedway’s pit road. The All Access Tour is an even more souped-up version with 90 minutes of exploration including a stop in the drivers’ meeting room, a look at Gatorade Victory Lane and a chance to get up close to a winning Daytona 500 car.

Die-hard NASCAR fans often indulge in the three-hour VIP Tour, which goes even deeper inside the speedway’s engine. Guests travel along this guided tour in an air-conditioned bus. A highlight is a visit to the Speedway Corporation Archives, home to a mother lode of memorabilia from trophies to racing artifacts.

7. The Dali Museum

Art buffs with a taste for the surreal don’t have to jaunt to Europe to get an eye- ful of Salvador Dali’s work. This collection spans the entire career of the Spanish surrealist painter.

Expect to see 96 oil paintings and a slew of other pieces, including sculpture and original drawings. The museum’s latest digs, protected by hurricane-proof walls, opened in early 2011.

The giant bubble-shaped glass structure on the outside serves as a definite eye grabber. Inside you’ll find a combined 20,000 square feet of art gallery space.

Massive works such as the 1954 oil painting “The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus” share space with the melting watches found in the much smaller “The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory.”

Events are consistently on tap, from craft beer tastings and art film screenings to children’s activities and yoga classes. The third annual Sueños de Dali, a dreamlike soiree honoring the artist’s penchant for the bizarre, takes place Oct. 26.


8. Biking at Everglades National Park

Some say biking through this subtropical wilderness is the best way to experience its trademark wildlife and landscape.

The Pineland trails, with dense foliage and open wet prairies, feature a 43-mile network of trails for biking with some open for biking. The area near the park’s Flamingo Visitor Center offers a pair of trails known for its bird-watching spots.

The Shark Valley section of the park is arguably the most popular for biking. It features a 15-mile scenic loop where folks can snap picturesque views of tree islands, the sawgrass prairie and animal residents. Deer, otter and even the Florida panther call the Everglades home.

Yeah, you’ll likely see alligators and other critters at a close vantage point. However, for the safety of visitors and the creatures, rangers remind the public to stay at least 15 feet away from all wild animals.

Guests can park their bikes and get a better view of the ecosystems by taking walks along the boardwalks and unpaved trails. Bike rentals are available at the Flamingo and Shark Valley Visitor Centers.

9. Little Palm Island Resort & Spa
It's hard to believe this romantic refuge is located on American soil. The oceanfront thatched roof bungalows tucked in the lush tropical environs give the impression of a luxurious version of "Swiss Family Robinson." You won't find a phone or a TV in the suites.

Sugar white sand beckons, and so does the bluer-than-blue sea. Some visitors experience the latter by scuba diving and snorkeling among the coral reef. Others pony up for excursions including deep-sea fishing, seaplane rides, dolphin encounters and more.

If your idea of a vacation activity simply involves pampering, its SpaTerre can suffice. Couples can be found having candlelight dinners on the shore, the waters of the Atlantic sparkling in the moonlight.

Keep an eye out for the resort's Sandbar Sessions events when big-name musical acts perform intimate concerts for guests. Can't wait to visit? Remember you can get there only via seaplane or boat.


10. The Key West Bed and Breakfast
This three-story Victorian sits amid a canopy of orchids and tropical trees. Built in 1898 by a crew of Bahamian ship builders, the William Russell House occupies a spot on the National Historic Register.

Bright and bold artwork, casual Caribbean decor and Bahamian ceiling fans set the island mood.

Vacationers choose from one of 10 rooms. Those traveling alone can bunk on the twin bed in the Nun's Room. The more spacious TFF Room features a queen bed and a view of Old Town through a large French window.

Many guests nosh on their complimentary breakfast at the patio tables in the lush backyard.

The slow-go feel of island time is apparent, with plenty of places to kick back, including a hammock and Adirondack chairs found on the decks. Its location makes it easily accessible to Duval Street, the Seaport and Mallory Square.


DISNEY WORLD
The most visited entertainment complex in the world, Walt Disney World saw 17.5 million visitors in 2012. The Magic Kingdom opened in 1971, and the complex expanded over the decades to include Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom.

HOLLY STEEL / HSTEEL@AJC.COM
Julia Cortes, 13, of Williamstown, N.J., (left) and Erika Gould, 19, of Pinehill, N.J., are hit by a surprise wave generated by the passing Captain Memo's Pirate Cruise (offshore) at Clearwater Beach. The area's sugar beaches and clear Gulf waters are big draws among the sun-worshiping masses. DOUGLAS C. CLIFFORD / TAMPA BAY TIMES