

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

It's Worth Knowing What's Really Going On.



NCAA Tournament in today's AJC ePaper

Visit ajc.com/epaper for expanded coverage in today's edition, including a look at how Georgia State fared against overall No. 1 seed Gonzaga.

If you haven't set up your digital access, go to ajc.com/activate or scan the QR code.



TOP LOCAL STORY ECONOMY

Metro job market stronger in January

MORE DETAILS	
Metro Atlanta job market	
Unemployment rate, January	3.3% (up from 2.8%)
Labor force, January	▲ 20,719
Employed people, January	▲ 5,992
Unemployed, January	▲ 14,727
Metro Atlanta jobs	
January, 2022	▼ 22,200
Average pre-pandemic January	▼ 47,500

Sources: Georgia Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Georgia adds 19,400 positions, with most in corporate, tech.

By Michael E. Kanell
michael.kanell@ajc.com

It may sound like bad news that metro Atlanta's unemployment rate rose at the start of the year, but the reasons were positive.

The official unemployment rate climbed to 3.3% in January

from 2.8% in December, the state Department of Labor announced Thursday. But that's because nearly 21,000 people joined the area's labor force.

The region posted one of its strongest Januarys on record, which helps explain the department's glowing report last week on the state economy. Georgia added 19,400 jobs. More than 60% of the jobs in the state are in metro Atlanta.

Typically, thousands of posi-

tions – those created to handle the holiday rush for retail and delivery companies – are eliminated in January. The state's data is adjusted to take into account seasonal trends. Metro Atlanta's numbers are not.

During an average pre-pandemic January, the area loses roughly 47,500 jobs. This year, the economy shrank by just 22,200 jobs. That means the upshot of

Jobs continued on A6

BRAVES IN-DEPTH COVERAGE ALL SEASON LONG

For Braves, it's time to play ball – again



INSIDE TODAY'S SPORTS

- » The pain is likely to linger for Braves fans as Freddie Freeman leaves for Dodgers, further intensifying the playoff rivalry with Los Angeles, C1
- » Remaining calm in big moments defines Braves starting pitcher Anderson, C4
- » Having grown up in Lilburn, joining his hometown team thrills Collin McHugh, C4

BRAVES OPENERS

Spring training
Twins at Braves at North Port, Fla., 1:05 p.m. today

Opening day
Reds at Braves, 7:20 p.m. April 7, Truist Park, BSSE, 103.7 FM, 1340 AM

« After taking some batting practice Thursday, outfielder Ronald Acuna Jr. gets in a little family time, admiring his son's form as Ronald Acuna Jr. II plays with his dad's bat during spring training in North Port, Florida.

CURTIS COMPTON/
CURTIS.COMPTON@AJC.COM

senators said. "The 29 cents is not going to completely solve the suffering of our citizens, but it's a start, and it's a statement," Senate Finance Chairman Chuck Hufstetter, R-Rome, told colleagues. "I think most everybody in Georgia will be grateful for this."

The average price of a gallon of regular fuel in metro Atlanta

Gas continued on A6

UNDER THE GOLD DOME TAXES

State Senate unanimously sends gas tax suspension to Kemp's desk

Untaxed fuel may take time to be reflected by prices at the pump.

By James Salzer
james.salzer@ajc.com

Georgia senators gave final approval Thursday to a measure suspending state fuel taxes to bring down sky-high gas prices. After the 55-0 Senate vote, House

Bill 304 now heads to the desk of Gov. Brian Kemp, who is expected to sign it into law today.

The measure would suspend the 29.1 cents-a-gallon motor fuel tax through May 31. Based on previous years' collections, the move would save drivers more than \$300 million in taxes. Kemp said the loss of revenue would be made up with surplus state funds.

Kemp can extend the suspension if gas prices remain high,

TOP INTERNATIONAL STORY WAR IN UKRAINE

Ukraine looks for survivors amid attacks

As deaths rise, Russia denies deliberately targeting a theater.

By Andrea Rosa
Associated Press

KYIV, UKRAINE — Rescuers on Thursday began pulling some survivors from the wreckage of a theater in Mariupol, the strategic southern Ukrainian port city of 430,000 that was struck a day earlier by a Russian attack, according to an adviser to the city's mayor. But more than 24 hours after the attack it was still not clear how many people survived at the site, the Drama Theater of Mariupol, which up to 1,000 people had been using as a shelter in recent days, the adviser, Pyotr Andryushchenko, said in a text message.

Scores of Ukrainians across

the country were killed in urban attacks on a school, a hostel and other sites.

At the Drama Theater of Mariupol, satellite imagery showed huge white letters on the pavement in front of and behind the theater spelling out "CHILDREN" in Russian – "DETI" – to alert warplanes to those inside. Across the city, snow flurries fell around the skeletons of burned, shrapnel-scarred apartment buildings as smoke rose above the skyline. Cars, some with the "Z" symbol of the Russian invasion force in their windows, drove through a neighborhood controlled by Russian-backed separatists. Russia's military denied bombing the theater or anyplace else in Mariupol.

The strike against the theater was part of a furious bombardment of civilian sites in multi-

Ukraine continued on A6

CONTINUING COVERAGE MITZI BICKERS TRIAL

Bribery trial witness grilled on his FBI role

Defense, ex-contractor spar over how long he was federal informant.

By Leon Stafford
leon.stafford@ajc.com
and Wilborn P. Nobles III
Wilborn.Nobles@ajc.com
and J. Scott Trubey
scott.trubey@ajc.com

The attorney for Mitzi Bickers said Thursday in the former city of Atlanta employee's bribery trial that a star witness in the case against her was working as a government informant far longer than he admits.

Drew Findling said in U.S. District Court that Elvin "E.R." Mitchell Jr., a former contractor who has accused Bickers of accepting bribes from him and then



Elvin "E.R." Mitchell Jr. said his cooperation with the FBI ended in late 2008 or early 2009.

paying another Atlanta city official to help him get lucrative contracts, was secretly working with the FBI when the alleged pay-for-play scheme began in 2010.

Findling said Mitchell, who began cooperating with the federal government in 2006 as part of an agreement to avoid prosecution over charges of construction overbilling at Fulton County Schools, continued to work for the Justice Department until 2012.

Bickers continued on A6

INSPIRE ATLANTA EXTRA
Extraordinary people and uplifting stories that bring out the best in all of us.

After finding long-lost letters in her attic, Astia Phillips began the hunt for their owner.

Lost love letters find new fans

Organ donors'

IN TODAY'S EPAPER

Two pages of bonus Inspire Atlanta stories

» Each Friday, our Inspire Atlanta Extra shows extraordinary people and uplifting stories that bring out the best in all of us. This week, we look at organ donors with only one kidney climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and a woman who is searching for the owners of long-lost love letters found in her attic. To read these stories, visit ajc.com/epaper. If you haven't set up digital access to your account, go to ajc.com/activate.

INDEX			
Classifieds	B4	Lotteries	C3
Comics	B8	Obituaries	A10
Crossword	B5	Television	B7

Volume 74, Number 77



7 22011 00002 1