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**75 CENTS**

**Top school investigator may be out**

Recent probes that fell apart put Finlayson under heavy pressure

By Megan Thornton  
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**MARIETTA** — Cobb County Schools has come under pressure recently to change the way it

investigates educators accused of misconduct and may have already taken action to remove its top internal investigator.

Multiple sources close to the situation told the MDJ that Mary Finlayson, the district's professional standards and ethics director who has led the charge in several high-profile investigations of school principals, may be on her way out.

After the last investigation fell apart because of a lack of evi-



Mary Finlayson

dence, the school district became the target of criticism by parents and teacher advocates who said it had taken a "guilty until proven innocent" approach to investigating accusations. Most of the cases have involved a principal allegedly not reporting a case of sexual misconduct.

*'Technically, yes.'*

The response by CCSD spokesman **Jay Dillon** when asked Friday if Mary Finlayson is still employed by the district.

District officials would not confirm reports that Finlayson had been terminated or asked to resign, but unofficial sources said Finlayson worked her last day Thursday, even though she would

still be on the payroll for a few more days.

When pressed Friday on whether Finlayson was still employed in her position, the communications director for Cobb Schools, Jay Dillon, said "technically, yes."

He also released a joint statement from Superintendent Michael Hinojosa and Board Chair Randy Scamihorn.

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**Price: Not candidate to replace Chambliss**

Congressman talks about Syria, guns, Internet tax debate

By Jon Gillooly  
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While there's a stampede of politicians lining up to run for U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss' seat when he retires, U.S. Rep. Tom Price (R-Roswell) is not among them.

Price told the MDJ on Friday he plans to seek reelection to the position he holds, representing Georgia's 6th District in the U.S. House.

He also weighed in on the Syrian conflict, the gun debate and the Internet tax bill the U.S. Senate has approved.

"I've been remarkably encouraged and inspired by



U.S. Rep. Tom Price

folks all across the district and the state to have us run for higher office, however, our assessment at this point is the House is the battle-

ground for politics in this country right now," Price said. "The president has identified it as the place where he wants to wage that battle, and he believes that taking the House is what will allow him to have an unfettered run at his agenda, and we've got to stop that."

Price said his role as vice chairman of the budget committee in the House puts him in a unique position to be able to wage that battle as well as put forward positive, conservative solutions.

"The financial support and encouragement that we've gotten around the state has been incredibly humbling, and I think we would have been able to wage a very competitive and successful race, but our assessment right now is that the House is where the battle is, and that's where we'll be offering for reelection in 2014," he said.

Kervin Swint, a political science professor at Kennesaw State University, believes Price made the right move.

"My perspective is that although I think he would be a

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**Church school's expansion odyssey a step closer to reality**



Staff/Laura Moon

Pre-kindergarten teacher Natalie Kane sounds out the word Friday and she goes over the days of the week with her class at St. Benedict's Episcopal Day School in Smyrna.

**After half-dozen appearances before zoning board, plans now go to Cobb commissioners for official vote**

By Megan Thornton  
mthornton@mdjonline.com

**SMYRNA** — St. Benedict's Episcopal Church Day School received a nod from the Cobb Planning Commission this week to expand its campus.

After a 3-1 vote in favor of a special land-use permit, with Bob Hovey opposed, the measure will now head to the Board of Commissioners for final approval.

The school, at 2160 Cooper Lake Road, plans to move into a

building on just over 2 acres on the northwest side of Cooper Lake Road east of Weaver Street this fall with plans to add a sixth-grade class.

After opening in 2009, the school now serves 264 children on its 3.5-acre campus ranging from 2-year-olds to fifth-grade students.

With the property only zoned for up to 280 students, the Rev. Brian Sullivan, chairman of the board of trustees, said the school had to look elsewhere to grow.

Sullivan said he plans to open the new location with 60 sixth-grade students this coming school year and add a grade per year through eighth grade each following year.

The 11,100-square-foot building is being used as a warehouse, but Sullivan said the facility will be renovated to include a cafeterium, an indoor/outdoor play area, 10 classrooms, five or six offices and a small kitchen. The exterior

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First-graders at St. Benedict's Episcopal Church Day School work on their Mother's Day presents on Friday.

**Emails: Talking points changes sought**

By Donna Cassata and Julie Pace  
Associated Press Writers

**WASHINGTON** — Political considerations influenced the talking points that U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice used five days after the deadly Sept. 11 assault in Benghazi, Libya, with State Department and other senior administration officials asking that references to terror groups and prior warnings be deleted, according to department emails.

The latest disclosures Friday raised new questions about whether the Obama administration tried to play down any terrorist factor in the attack on a diplomatic compound just weeks before the November presidential election. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans were killed when insurgents struck the U.S. mission in two nighttime attacks.

The White House has insisted that it made only a "stylistic" change to the intelligence agency talking points from which Rice suggested on five Sunday talk shows that demonstrations over an anti-Islamic video devolved into the Benghazi attack.

Numerous agencies had engaged in an email discussion about the talking points that would be provided to members of Congress and to Rice for their public comments. In one email, then-State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland worried about the effect of openly discussing earlier warnings about the dangers of Islamic extremists in Benghazi.

Nuland's email said such revelations "could be abused by members of Congress to beat the State Department for not paying attention to (central intelligence) agency

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YESTERDAY INDEX  
**80**  
0-14 = LOW  
15-89 = MODERATE  
90-1499 = HIGH  
1500+ = EXTREME





Staff/Laura Moon

St. Benedict's Episcopal Day School in Smyrna opened four years ago with only grades pre-kindergarten through second. It now goes through fifth grade. The school, at 2160 Cooper Lake Road, plans to move into a building on about 2 acres on the northwest side of Cooper Lake Road east of Weaver Street this fall with plans to add a sixth-grade class. **Above:** Members of the small fifth-grade class work on their journals Friday morning.

## Expansion

Continued from Page 1A

of the building will also be renovated to look similar to the main campus and have additional landscaping, including a row of 12-foot cryptomeria to separate the facility from neighboring homes.

Sullivan said it has been a long process of about six zoning hearings, but he looks at the school as a community venture and said it's worth the extra effort to fit in with the neighborhood.

"Commissioner Bob Ott has done a lot as far as addressing neighbor concerns," Sullivan said. "As a church and a school, it's been really fun to get to know our neighbors. It started off rather contentious, but we've really become friends."

Though Sullivan said

he believes the new site will be able to sustain the school's growth, a local resident said she still has several concerns about the addition and the process has been "more than a little disheartening," as she believes the plans vary too much from zoning code.

Mary Rose Barnes said her main problem is that the new site is too small for the intended use according to code, as county zoning requires schools to be on at least 5 acres.

"The situation there is just not big enough to sustain 200 children long-term," she said. "They're going to outgrow it ... There should be some stability there. I'm glad the school is successful, but in this case it's at the expense of the neighborhood."

Barnes also said she had traffic concerns, as the

two properties are not adjacent and the schools will have the same start times, coupled by the fact that there aren't any traffic lights on Weaver Street.

Sullivan said the entrance and exit to the carpool on Weaver Street has two carpool lanes to allow 50 cars to line up on the school property during drop-off and pick-up times.

The commissioners will meet May 21 to consider the special land-use permit.

This is the second south Cobb private school project to come before the Cobb Planning Commission this week. The other is an all-new school that wants to build a facility that could accommodate 300 students as part of a mixed-use development. This school, called The SAE School, hopes to open in August near Mableton.

## School

Continued from Page 1A

The statement acknowledges "concerns that have been expressed about certain employment decisions" but did not touch on Finlayson's employment status, nor did it mention her by name.

"We take the concerns very seriously and have spent the last several weeks looking at changes that need to be made," the statement reads. "Though personnel decisions can be difficult, we strive to make decisions that are in the best interest of the Cobb County schools."

Sources said Finlayson was told her position would be eliminated because of budget cuts. However, Finlayson's job is funded through July 1, when the 2014-15 budget kicks in.

The statement acknowledged that CCSD's central office will face a reduction

in positions, noting reorganization is "inevitable" in the coming school year.

Scamihorn said the Cobb School Board is in the midst of a tough budget season as it tries to make up for an \$86 million shortfall.

"Our tentative budget has 16 people cut at the central office and 182 out in the field at schools and other offices; most of them are teachers unfortunately," Scamihorn said Friday.

Also up in the air is what will happen with Finlayson's staff of two full-time investigators, Chris Dowd and Jay Morrissey.

One source suggested they could be reassigned to other jobs within the central office.

Finlayson, who was a former county police investigator before joining the school system, could not be reached for comment Friday.

Finlayson led investigations into three high-profile cases over the past couple

of school years.

Allegations against Awtrey Middle School Principal Jeff Crawford were dropped earlier this month, following an unsubstantiated claim that he failed to report an incident of reported rape. The alleged incident took place off school grounds between two seventh-grade students and it was later determined that no rape took place.

In another case, Kell High School Principal Trudie Donovan resigned last school year after district officials, led by Finlayson, brought accusations that she failed to file a mandatory report within 24 hours. The criminal charges against Donovan were dismissed March 27 of this year.

Just a few months prior to Donovan's resignation, the school board approved the firing of both Tapp Middle School Principal Dr. Jerry Dority and counselor Yatta Collins for similar allegations.

## Emails

Continued from Page 1A

warnings," according to a congressional official who reviewed the 100 pages of emails.

The official spoke only on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak publicly about the emails that still have not been released.

The final talking points that weekend reflected the work of several government agencies — CIA, FBI, State Department, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence — apparently determined to cast themselves in the best light as the investigation was just getting underway.

A scathing independent report in December found that "systematic failures and leadership and management deficiencies at senior levels" of the State Department meant that security was "inadequate for Benghazi and grossly inadequate to deal with the attack that took place."

Eight months after the attack, the long-running and bitter dispute between the Obama administration and congressional Republicans on the subject shows no sign of abating. The GOP argues that the administration deliberately tried to mislead Congress and the American people. The White House insists that Republicans are trying to politicize the issue. "There's an ongoing effort to make something

political out of this," White House spokesman Jay Carney said Friday of the disclosure of the emails, which the administration had provided to lawmakers. "The problem with that effort is that it's never been clear what it is they think they're accusing the administration of doing."

Republicans have complained that the administration was trying to conceal that the attack was the work of terrorists and not a protest over an anti-Islamic film that got out of hand. Such revelations just before the election perhaps could have undercut President Barack Obama's record on fighting terrorism, including the killing of 9/11 mastermind Osama bin Laden, one of his re-election strengths.

## Price

Continued from Page 1A

strong candidate for Saxby's seat, he's doing exactly the right thing by staying put for his own career and for what he can do for the party, because he is well positioned in the leadership ranks in the House GOP, and he could climb the ladder much more quickly in the House than he could in the Senate," Swint said.

Cobb GOP Chairman Joe Dendy has said whenever there is an open seat at the top, it causes a leadership loss because of the domino effect of everyone trying to run for the higher position.

Swint agreed. "Very often the case when you have an open seat is that you have a scramble, and not all of them can win, and so that means there is going to be vacancies and in this case in the U.S. House delegation," Swint said.

### Internet taxes

One topic coming before Price for a vote is the Marketplace Fairness Act, which the Senate has already approved. Voting for that bill was both Georgia's U.S. senators, Johnny Isakson and Saxby Chambliss. The bill would require online retailers to collect state and local sales taxes on Internet sales. Consumer advocate Clark Howard has warned that it could put small retailers who do less than \$5 mil-

lion a year in Internet sales out of business — because they would be hard-pressed to keep up with all of the different sales tax rates in the 50 states and hundreds of counties.

"I haven't taken a position on it because I think there are some real unintended consequences of moving wholesale to an Internet tax system without recognizing the kinds of things that Clark Howard is pointing out," Price said. "I also believe that fundamental tax reform, comprehensive tax reform, is absolutely vital if we're going to get this economy rolling again, and potentially addressing the issue of Internet taxation as part of a comprehensive solution may be appropriate, doing it in isolation I'm not convinced is appropriate at this time."

Price believes the debate over gun reform legislation is over.

"I think it's probably over because what most people recognize is if the administration would enforce the current laws on the books we'd be a whole

lot safer," he said. "The last thing we need to do is pass another law that the administration won't enforce."

### Obama leading from behind on Syria

Price also spoke of the civil war in Syria and President Obama's red line for deciding when the U.S. should take action.

"I think if you step back and take a look at why we're in the situation we're in, and why the Middle East is in the situation it's in, I believe it's because the president has been leading from behind," Price said.

"Leading from behind doesn't get you anything but being behind, and so consequently we have a much more dangerous Middle East than should be, we have a much more challenging situation than should exist and the president has put out his red line which is the use of chemical weapons."

That line has clearly been crossed, Price said.

"And the president is again less than in a stellar position or in a powerful position to lead because he has not responded and not lived up to his word on this red line," Price said.

At some point the U.S. must work with its friends in the area, such as Jordan, Turkey and Israel, doing all it can to ensure that chemical weapons are not used on the Syrian population or anywhere else.

At the moment, Price believes having American "boots on the ground" is not the way to go.

"I don't think it's appropriate because of the information I receive from our military folks is that is just not the most viable way to proceed," Price said. "That being said, we cannot stand idly by and allow (Syrian President Bashar) Assad to continue to expand his reign of terror over his own population."

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