

THIS PROUD GEORGIAN THINKS PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO STATE IS A GREAT IDEA

I must confess that there have been days when I wasn't sure if Rep. Bobby Franklin's elevator stopped on every floor. The Cobb County Republican can think up some pretty goofy stuff — even for a member of the Georgia General Assembly — that makes you wonder if he needs a day job or if he is just pulling our leg. Last year Franklin's claim to fame was his valiant effort to have red clay declared Georgia's "official dirt." Sadly, the measure failed, and we are all dirt poorer for that.

However, I rise proudly to his defense today. Franklin is taking a lot of ribbing from his colleagues in the Legislature for pledging allegiance to Georgia every morning before getting down to the serious business of trying to decide whether the state's official pest should be the deer fly or Jimmy Carter. Franklin says, "I'm a proud Georgian, and it's just the right thing to do." He'll get no argument from me.

The Georgia pledge, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1935, goes as follows: "I pledge allegiance to the Georgia flag and to the principles for which it stands: Wisdom, Justice, and Moderation." It was written by Eugenia Sexta Eavenson Strickland, born in Elbert County and buried in Hart County. According to her biography, she was a pretty important person in her day — hence, all the extra names. (Note to the New Georgia Encyclopedia folks at UGA: Ms. Strickland gets no mention in the encyclopedia. That doesn't seem right. After all, she did compose the Pledge of Allegiance to Georgia. In order to get any information about her, I had to Google the lady. I don't think a woman of her stature should be Googled. It's not very dignified.)

If I have any criticism of the Pledge of Allegiance to Georgia, it is too short. Granted, Ms. Strickland was well-intentioned, but she left out a lot of stuff that should have been included. After the part about Wisdom, Justice and Moderation, I would suggest this addition: "I pledge that I will honor the Sweet Vidalia Onion, eat only Georgia peaches, pecans and barbecue, and that I will never put sugar on my grits or let sushi touch my lips. I further pledge that I will always be in awe of living in a state with beautiful mountains in the north and pristine beaches in the south, and will forever wonder why God blessed us above all others. I pledge also that when I die, if I can't go to heaven, I will gladly accept an eternity of warm autumn Saturday afternoons in Sanford Stadium, on the campus of the University of Georgia, the oldest state-chartered university in the nation, located in Athens, the Classic City of the South. Amen and amen." That should just about cover it.

My other quibble with the Georgia Pledge of Allegiance is that anybody can say it and not mean it. What is to keep some Yankee from taking the pledge but snickering under his breath at us because of the way we talk? Once Rep. Franklin gets the red clay matter handled, I would urge him to make the pledge some kind of loyalty test for people moving here. First, there will be no Spanish version. If you can't say it in English, you ought not to be here. Assuming you are here legally — a big assumption — all new residents would be required to recite the following: "As a transplant from (State), I pledge not to talk loud and act like an expert on everything. I pledge not to butter my sandwich bread, talk about the War Between the States or eat rutabagas. If I do not honor this pledge, I agree to be sent back to (State), where it snows ten months a year and all of the factories are rusted."

Living in the Great State of Georgia is a high privilege and honor, and asking us to swear allegiance to the state doesn't seem too much to ask.

So what if we don't have an official dirt? That's just God's way of keeping us humble. Amen and amen.