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OUR VIEW

Economist issues call to prepare for change

Hope: Everyone is looking for some.

The Oconee Alliance had a record turnout this week. The large meeting room at Thrift Development in Bountyland was overflowing. And, why not? The speaker was noted Clemson economist, Bruce Yandle, who is about as engaging and entertaining an economist as can be found.

But the room wasn't full because of Yandle's distinctive ability to make charts on domestic productivity enthralling. Rather, the crowd came, hoping to hear some good news. It has been a long two years for everyone.

Yandle didn't disappoint but, in true economist fashion, he didn't send everyone away with their buckets full of optimism.

He confirmed that the recession is over. We've hit the bottom and are coming back. However, he cautioned that unemployment will linger, at least into the third quarter. He said productivity is up, but that business has learned how to produce more with less. The result will be fewer jobs than existed when this recession began. He said stock portfolios will recover, but urged patience. He said banks have plenty of money, but that consumers remain afraid to do more than pay off their debts. Inflation, he said, will be low in the short-term but looms large down the road.

We appreciate Yandle's candor. His message of a prolonged recovery with long-term unemployment must signal both producers and consumers of the need to stay the course in terms of both our financial actions and expectations. His comments should be seen as a call to action for communities to come together to embrace what he termed a "new economic era."

We need leaders to recognize and proactively prepare for this new era of fewer jobs "on the floor," more working mothers and a technology-driven economy.

That is where our hope must really lie.