Clinton Johnson is in the middle of a war zone – the zone being Dougherty County and the war being against the unseen, but deadly enemy, COVID-19. Like a seasoned veteran, Johnson, who serves on the Dougherty County Commission and the ACCG Board of Managers as an At-Large member, has learned lessons from the conflict. “It is a silent killer,” said Johnson, bringing “pain and heartache [that] is unreal.”

As of 1:00 pm, March 31, 2020, Phoebe Putney Hospital in Albany confirmed 586 cases of COVID-19 diagnosed in its hospital system which includes Americus and Sylvester, with a strong majority of the cases in Dougherty County and 25 deaths (Link) in the Albany hospital, the highest per capita rate of infection of any county in Georgia.

Johnson, said “it is important to use social media to get out the facts and do it fast to dispel the heavy doses of misinformation being consumed by the public.” He then offered advice to his fellow commissioners:

- Think about the pandemic like you do a natural disaster; you won’t see structural damage, but the impact will be just as severe
- Practice social distancing (the rapid initial spread of the virus in Albany has been traced to a funeral home and two funerals where family and friends congregated)
- Define essential businesses in the county’s emergency order
- Issue a shelter in place (SIP) if necessary
- Consider regionalizing your approach; with counties contiguous to or near Dougherty supplying workers for businesses in the county, the risk of spreading the disease can be better mitigated with a unified approach, inclusive of neighboring counties and the cities within them
- Work with local Chambers of Commerce and with the Regional Commission to help spread the word about mitigation efforts
- Work to ensure your local businesses adhere to CDC guidelines so their employees can continue to produce goods and services
- Equip your mental health community with the resources needed to provide safe community services to the public, which is especially important for people sheltering in place

Johnson praised the leadership of Phoebe Putney Hospital for setting up a hotline specifically for people concerned about the virus. “I think Phoebe Putney was ahead of the game [when they created] this special number. That was phenomenal,” said Johnson. Doing so in advance avoided burdening 9-1-1 with COVID-19 calls like are occurring in other counties.

It is never easy to lose a loved one, but Johnson noted “When you couple that with not being able to bury loved ones in the traditional way and meeting with families to console [them,] that is heartbreaking.”