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148 Governor Haley announces education reform initiative

"It's time to deal with the facilities of the schools in our state," said Gov. Nikki Haley.

Continuing her focus on statewide education reform, she announced her 2016 Education Reform Initiative, which addresses some of the toughest issues facing education in South Carolina today - from basic governance and accountability, to building safe schools, addressing transportation needs and providing students across the state with access to technology. The governor made the announcement during a celebration with Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman at Frances Mack Intermediate School in Gaston.

"I have said many times that my heart is always in rural areas and growing up in Bamberg, I've always said we didn't know what we didn't have. Now I know what we didn't have. And once we know what you didn't have, and you know what children don't have, you can't ever turn away from that," said Governor Haley. "We're seeing teachers having to wear rain boots to walk through

the rain in schools. We're seeing walls that are molded. We're seeing building structures that are not safe. And so now we are saying 'it is time to deal with the facilities of the schools in our state.'"

Starting with a commitment Governor Haley made to South Carolina's children in 2013, this initiative is the third year of reform proposals built upon input from dozens of individual stakeholders and groups.

"I'm excited because we need a governor who listens to the folks who are out in schools every day, and Governor Haley has done that," said S.C. Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman. "Everything the governor has talked about today will make a difference and give us a better chance, so that everything we do as teachers, parents and administrators will help every student find what their passion is and be successful."

"Our education system has long been in need of serious attention and reform and I am proud of the work the House Education Task Force has done over the past year," said Rep. Rita Allison, chairwoman of the House

Education Committee. "We can no longer ignore the condition of our distressing infrastructure, the need for higher teacher retention and a host of other shortfalls that are denying our students of the resources they need to succeed. I am pleased that Governor Haley's plan sets a clear path forward on tackling this issue in a significant way and I look forward to working with her to institute these reforms that will give all of our children access to a quality education."

"Governor Haley started a critical conversation three years ago about the need to focus on our students and their education, and I'm grateful that she has decided to continue that conversation going into this session," said Sen. John Courson, chairman of the Senate Education Committee. "For too long, South Carolina's education system hasn't focused on the individual needs of students, and I look forward to working with the governor to ensure a great education for our students that is fair and equitable in every part of the state."



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Gov. Nikki Haley

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148 Senate to try again at SC road funding

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — A pair of senators — a Republican and Democrat who are not seeking re-election — plan to spend this week trying to shape a bill to get more money to improve South Carolina roads and get the rest of the Senate to finally go along.

Both senators warn the process is going to take a few weeks if not longer. But they are confident they can pull together a bill that business leaders and pot-hole-hitting drivers have

been clamoring for.

Consensus has been hard to come by. Lawmakers seem to agree any bill that raises more money for roads and highways will also need to cut taxes elsewhere and reform how the Department of Transportation is run.

But the 46 senators seem to have 46 different ideas. Conservative Republicans are leery about raising

the gas tax without a significant cut in other taxes. Democrats want to make sure any tax cuts get to the largest number of people and don't threaten services. Some senators are quietly hinting the board that runs DOT doesn't need to be changed at all. The board is made up of members picked by lawmakers and an at-large appointment from the governor.

"The road funding piece, that's pretty black and white. Either you want to raise more money or you don't," said Sen. Ray Cleary, R-Murrells Inlet, who plans to work on his fellow Republicans. "But there is plenty of room for disagreement elsewhere."

Lourie and Cleary have announced they aren't running for re-election next year, leaving them more room to take a stand that might lead to a challenger in a party primary.

The House passed a bill in 2015 that would raise around \$400 million a year for roads through an increase in the gas tax, and

reduce income taxes by about \$50 million. Rep. Gary Simrill shepherded the bill through the House and has said members are waiting to see what the Senate sends back. But the Rock Hill Republican thinks the House could al-

ter its earlier proposal and still come up with an agreement again this year.

Gov. Nikki Haley wants lawmakers to change the DOT structure and balancing any gas tax increase with a tax cut or she will veto the bill.

The DOT announced this month it needs about \$1.2 billion extra a year for repaving, bridge work and widening to get the state's roads and bridges to good condition.

The Senate adjourned last week with Cleary controlling the floor to assure a roads bill is debated. The Senate Transportation committee will take up a bill on the DOT board Tuesday morning, and the Senate Finance Committee is set to meet Tuesday afternoon.

The roads bill strayed from its lane last year when Sen. Tom Davis filibustered it in the final weeks of the session because he didn't think there was a need to raise taxes on gas. The Beaufort Republican was bothered by Senate President Hugh Leatherman putting together a group of four Democrats and four Republicans to discuss the roads behind closed doors, saying his and other conservatives' worries weren't heard.



BY JOSHUA LLOYD
jlloyd@florencenews.com

FLORENCE – Some state legislators from the Pee Dee praised the tone of Gov. Nikki Haley's State of the State address, but others said her speech lacked substance. Haley spoke at length about tragedies that marred South Carolina in 2015, and made proposals to the General Assembly on key issues expected to create contentious debate this year.

Among the highlights was a plan to pass legislation that will permanently dedicate up to one percent of the state's bond capacity to K-12 education facilities.

Haley also called out the Senate on its consistent inaction on ethics reform. She also said her views on infrastructure funding have not changed since her 2015 address – that includes a Department of Transportation overhaul, a decrease in state income taxes and no additional tax increases.

Here's how some Pee Dee lawmakers reacted:

Rep. Robert Williams, D-Darlington:

It's quite evident the Republicans are in the driver's seat. They have the steering wheel but they're not driving, and that's why we're in the shape that we're in. Gov. Haley had an excellent, well-spoken speech but there was no substance to what she said. The Republicans have been in power the last seven or eight years, but all I see is rhetoric. The same ones who can't agree on ethics reform are the same one who can't agree on fixing our education system or our infrastructure situation. Our primary goals should be to make sure all South Carolinians are taken care of. She talked about low unemployment but we still have families who

are not whole. She talked about our economy but said nothing about health care. There is so much more to talk about but she refuses to talk about it. The wealthy are OK and they will continue be OK, but what about the poor and sick? We have to learn to take care of all South Carolinians and ensure that we are doing right by the people who put us here. We're going to have to do better.

Rep. Jay Jordan, R-Florence:

Gov. Haley did a very good job articulating the year South Carolina had. It was a very tragic year for us but also showed a lot of positive in the ways that we responded to those hard times. She did a tremendous job at documenting our economic situation and the prosperity we're having from some of these

large industries. I think that's apparent across the Pee Dee and certainly across the state. I was surprised that she didn't talk more about roads. That's probably the biggest issue we're facing as a state, and while she did say her thoughts haven't changed, she didn't say much more about it. The House has a roads bill, as well as several ethics reform bills, sitting in the Senate right now and we're hopeful that they will pass something this year so we can get the ball rolling.

Rep. Terry Alexander, D-Florence:

It was a very "feel good for South Carolina" type of speech. The only one thing stood out to me, how she proposed to take care of the K-12 education system. That seems to be a lot of money geared toward K-12, provided we have the support of other legislators. Other than that, I admire the fact that she asked the senators who supported ethics reform to stand.

When she did that, the room was very quiet and a lot of people were uncomfortable. It was a bold move and I admire that, considering the House has sent ethics bills over and the Senate hasn't done anything with them. But overall it was more of a feel-good type of speech than anything of substance. This whole thing about cutting taxes, I understand that, but there a direct correlation between taxes and services. If you're cutting taxes, then somewhere along the way services are going to be cut as well.

Rep. Phillip Lowe, R-Florence:

Gov. Haley gave an emotional speech that brought out a lot of the emotional issues we had last year, in regard to the tragedies we saw. A lot of time was devoted to the issues Charleston saw. When it came to policy, the most difficult thing was the three provisions that have to be met for any sort of road bill to

pass. I'd be surprised if the Senate can work out all of those issues. All of those requirements are going to make it difficult but we'll see what the Senate does. She also brought out the discussion on ethics, which the House tackled last year and sent over to the Senate. It was the first time I had seen a governor ask for senators to stand up if they supported a bill, so that was something new. It was an emotional speech and hopefully we'll have a better year this year. We have a good economic rapport despite some concern about the stock market, and I think this year is looking good for the state.

House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Darlington:

Gov. Haley's tremendous leadership during times of tragedy and disaster effec-

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tively brought our state together and helped us heal. Although our specific solutions to areas of improvement may differ, I am confident that the House will work with her on our shared objectives to move our state forward. The House-passed plan is a responsible approach that shares all three components of Gov. Haley's infrastructure proposal ... Our plan also gives money back to South Carolina taxpayers, which is equivalent to the estimated gas fee increases.

The House has made significant, transparent and meaningful strides to reform South Carolina's education delivery system. I am encouraged that Governor Haley has chosen to join this conversation. Our task force looked at the bond capacity issue, as well as a myriad of other issues, and that was certainly a component of our plan. I'm glad to

see that she embraced that component. As our education reform package makes its way through the House, I look forward to working with her so that together we can make it a reality. The members of the South Carolina House of Representatives worked tirelessly last year to pass comprehensive ethics reform. Unfortunately, our efforts have been ignored and our bills idly sit in the bottom of an empty Senate desk drawer. Honest South Carolinians give elected officials the opportunity to serve and restoring their trust should not be difficult.

**Senate President Pro Tem
Hugh K. Leatherman Sr., R-
Florence:**

The governor struck a needed tone of reflection on the past year in our state, as well as optimism for the future with her message tonight. We must never for-

get the tragedy at Mother Emanuel and those nine victims, including Senator Pinckney. I want to thank her for the leadership she has shown over the past year, especially in times of adversity for our state. The Senate has now faced another tragedy this year with the passing of Senator Billy O'Dell. We must continue to do what's best for South Carolina and I firmly believe we accomplish the most when we work together. As we begin this new year, the Senate is doing the vital work necessary to fix our state's crumbling infrastructure, educate our young people, promote business growth and move our state forward. We look forward to working with Gov. Haley to make sure we fulfill those goals and do all we can for the people of South Carolina.

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AP PHOTO/SEAN RAYFORD

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley delivers the State of the State in the House chambers at the South Carolina Statehouse on Jan. 20 in Columbia.



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Capitol Report

**By Representative
Jackie Hayes
January 21, 2016**

Legislators returned to Columbia for the start of a new legislative session on January 12. Since 2016 is the second year of the 121st Session, the Legislature can carry over business from the point where we finished last year rather than start from scratch in the process of getting bills passed.

I expect many important issues to be addressed this year: improving public education in rural, poor communities, finding ways to help people who suffered losses during the October floods, seeking a permanent source of funding for repairing roads and bridges, adding protections for victims of domestic violence and strengthening ethics requirements for public officials. I will be doing all I can to make sure that the needs of vulnerable populations and rural, poor counties are not overlooked in the debate.

During our first week, the House approved a bill that would set new safety requirements for riders of mopeds. The bill (H 3440), which is pending in the Senate, would set new registration and licensing requirements, require moped operators and passengers to wear reflective vests and make it illegal to operate a moped at a speed greater than

35 miles per hour or drive on public roads with a speed limit greater than 55 miles per hour.

Education reform is high on the agenda this year, as the state Supreme Court has ordered the state to come up with a plan by to improve education in the state's most impoverished districts. One idea being discussed would provide free college tuition for teachers willing to work eight years in districts with high turnover rates. Other ideas include higher salaries for new teachers, improving technology, and building or renovating school buildings in poor school districts. I was fortunate to be able to serve on two education reform task forces: one established by Governor Nikki Haley and the other by House Speaker Jay Lucas. I am glad the Legislature is finally getting serious about addressing education reform, even though it took a 2014 Supreme Court ruling to force its hand. The original lawsuit on school equity was filed more than 22 years ago. There should be renewed efforts to strengthen protections for victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Reform Act was enacted last year, and Gov. Haley recently announced plans to add new prosecutors and judges to cut the waiting time for trials in criminal domestic violence cases. Certain state agencies

were ordered to start screening clients for potential domestic violence and Cabinet agencies were ordered to adopt policies to help victims of domestic violence. October's floods affected thousands of state residents, and damaged and destroyed their homes and businesses. Nearly 100,000 residents sought federal disaster aid, and, while this aid helped, it was not sufficient. So many families are hurting and need additional funds to recover. Bills are being filed to allocate surplus funds to help people impacted by the storm. Another measure would create the S.C. Farm Aid Fund to assist farmers who have suffered at least 40 percent loss of crops as the result of a natural disaster. The flooding, too, is forcing our state to pay more attention to the infrastructure needs of our state. Funding to maintain the state's roads and bridges will be a top issue this year.

The Legislature meets in Columbia on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from January to mid-June. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at 803-734-3099, at 333C Blatt Building, P.O. Box 11867, Columbia, S.C. 29211 or call me at home at 843-774-6125, at 240 Bermuda Road, Dillon, S.C. 29536. My email address is JackieHayes@schouse.gov.

Gov. Haley and the heat of the national spotlight

By Phil Noble

It's the call that every aspirant in the political hinterland dreams of: "Will you give our party's response to the State of the Union Address?"

The answer is always "yes" – and then the drama begins. The stakes are incredibly high. Many fail, some miserably (see Gov.



Bobby Jindal in 2009) but the opportunity is exposure to more than 30 million people as the alternative voice to the President of the United States.

Gov. Haley got the call – pretty heady stuff for a kid from Bamberg, S.C., or anywhere else for that matter.

Enough about the drama, so how did she do?

The speech itself had two parts. The first short section was an obligatory, gratuitous slap at President Obama with familiar lines about Obama Care, the deficit and terrorists. It was just a little red meat thrown to the Obama haters and then she moved on to talk about a "vision of a brighter American future."

But though she never used his name, her words were not really about America but about Donald Trump. She talked about Trump's racism, inflammatory language and immigration. Then she talked about the good way that South Carolina responded to the Emanuel Nine shooting and then threw in a not so oblique reference to the troubles of Ferguson and Baltimore – "We didn't have riots, we had hugs."

Most of all, it was a repudiation of Trump. She used her own personal story as the daughter of Indian immigrants juxtaposed with Trump's rhetoric – "...it can be tempting to follow the siren call of the angriest voices. We must resist that temptation. No one who is

willing to work hard, abide by our laws, and love our traditions should ever feel unwelcome in this country."

She continued, "Some people (Trump) think that you have to be the loudest voice in the room to make a difference. That is just not true....We would respect differences in modern families, but we would also insist on respect for religious liberty as a cornerstone of our democracy," (i.e. Trump's ban on Muslim immigration).

David Brooks, the influential columnist for The New York Times, summarized Haley's speech as the Republican Establishment's case against Trump and indeed it was. The reaction from the Trump forces was swift and venal; pundit Anne Coulter tweeted "Trump should deport Nikki Haley."

Haley's address rekindled the speculation that she would be the perfect Vice-Presidential candidate – but presumably not for Donald Trump. Her boosters cite the obvious: she is an attractive woman of immigrant parents who's handling of the removal of the Confederate flag was a rare example of racial sensitivity by a Deep South Republican. She's the perfect antidote to the "angry old white men" problem that is crippling the Republican Party with the fastest growing segments of American votes – women, the young and people of color.

There is so much irony in all this that it's hard to know where to begin.

First, the Establishment Republicans. It is indeed rich that Haley is now the darling of the very folks she ran against when she was first elected. She was a rabid Tea Party favorite. Who can forget the picture and endorsement by Sarah Palin on the steps of the State Capital in Haley's first gubernatorial campaign (never mind that they had to pay Palin)? Palin went all out for Haley with

recorded robo calls and TV ads that blasted the Establishment and praised Haley as a "kindred spirit."

In many ways, Haley and Palin were a lot alike – both are attractive, they came from nowhere politically, and they were light on substance and long on flash. But the difference is that Palin gave up being governor of Alaska and Haley has continued as governor of South Carolina.

Second, the flag. Prior to the shooting of the Emanuel Nine, no one ever used the words "Gov. Haley" and "racial sensitivity" in the same sentence. She had been an ardent supporter of keeping the Confederate flag flying and the list of issues where she had ignored the interest of the 30 percent of her citizens who are African American is very long.

Third, the Vice President nomination. The talk is hot and heavy and on the surface it all makes sense, she's on everyone's short list of possible candidates. But, I'd bet dollars to donuts it will never happen. The reason is Haley's "problems" from her past.

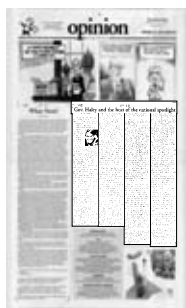
In her first campaign and early days of her administration she was dogged by allegations of multiple illicit sexual affairs – complete with lurid details by a blogger/lover and an affidavit by a lobbyist. Then there were all sorts of allegations of financial irregularities and conflicts of interest that put tens of thousands of dollars in her pocket.

Are the allegations true? Isn't it a double standard to raise sexual issues as she is an attractive woman? Were the payments she received legitimate or a clear corrupt conflict of interest?

As regrettable as it may be, in the hyper media age we live in – it doesn't matter if they are true or not.

What matters is the allegations are there and though largely forgotten by most South Carolinians, they have

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never really been resolved. Now fast forward to about five dozen reporters, investigative journalists, hungry bloggers and political rumor mongers descending on Columbia 10 minutes after she is picked for Vice President and... well, you get the picture.

And so does every political operative with access to Google who is charged with vetting Gov. Haley for consideration for the Vice

President slot.

It's unfortunate, it's ugly, it's disgusting – and it's also the way it is today.

So, I'm glad that Gov. Haley is taking the high road in condemning Trump and talking about the need for racial and religious tolerance. She presents a good image for our state. Let her enjoy her time in the spotlight.

But, let's not let ourselves get carried away. As many

politicians have learned, too much time in the white hot heat of the national political spotlight, and you can get burned. Ask Sarah Palin.

Phil Noble is a businessman in Charleston and President of the SC New Democrats, an independent reform group started by former Gov. Richard Riley to bring big change and real reform.

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What Next?

By Bill Shepard

The old year is history, and a brand new year is beckoning for us to follow. Life moves us in one direction only, forward, always forward! A backward glance can remind us where we have been, but what lies ahead is a dark path! In some of my predictions, I have said that if life follows any kind of pattern we can expect a lot more of what we have experienced in the past twelve months. In short, the year ahead will be much like the year that we have bade farewell!

I have witnessed the beginnings of a lot of new years; I have a lot to compare with the one that is breaking at my feet. I have lived in times of wars, hardships, and yes, good times. I have lived under the leadership of Republicans and Democrats. I have seen evil raise its ugly head in an effort to destroy America with its might and power. Always there was a sense of security that in the end everything would be all right. I have heard boisterous threats made about destroying America, but they did not bother me; remember the cold war? As an American, I felt safe. I recall that tense hour in time when the Russian ships were speeding toward Cuba with their cargo of missiles to be erected just ninety miles from American cities. The young President Kennedy had given order to confront them and turn them back to Russia. (The year was 1962. It was indeed a tense moment. I remember! I was living in Florida at the time.) We all know the happy ending of that story, and we took a deep breath when the Russian ships turned back. Under the brave and courageous leadership of those we had entrusted our security to, I felt safe and secure. I wish that I could have that same feeling of security today. I cannot!

American has lost ground! Its people are divided, many have lost confidence in those who are at the helm of the good ship as it travels through uncertain waters. Try as many can, it is hard to think positive while living in such negative times!

I have been thinking to myself the question, "What will it take to cause those in leadership positions to arise to the task of bringing an end to the terror and the terrorists that run rampage over our world?"

We have seen evildoers commit their barbarous acts and parade them before the world, as if daring anyone to rise to their defense. Thousands of innocent women and children have been slaughtered and their cry for help has been unanswered while free and strong nations boast of their mighty military but refuse to use it in an effective way! What will it take for the strong to use their might to put an end to the shame of what is happening all over the globe?

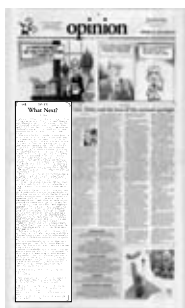
I am old enough to have vivid memories of what the world witnessed before and during World War II. A man named Hitler started his conquest to bring all of Europe under his rule. September 1, 1939 Hitler invaded his neighboring country, Poland; allowed to continue without interference, he moved on to Czechoslovakia. Unchallenged, his aggression continued and he grew stronger with every conquest. Too late, England, France, and in time, America, joined in the fight. After long years of fighting, millions of lives sacrificed, the most costly war in history came to an end.

Never again! The world cried, and this writer pondered at the time, "Why did the world of good men wait so long to confront the enemy?" I would never have believed that in my lifetime, I would see it happen again!

There is a saying, "those who refuse to learn the lessons of history must repeat them." Is that what the world is seeing today? Many of our world leaders today were not even born at the time of which I write. Could that be the reason we are watching history repeat its lesson?

No one likes war! America had seen its share and paid a great

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price for participating in them. The alternative is to bow to the enemy and surrender our freedom and the good way of life we have enjoyed as Americans.

What the year ahead holds for America, I do not claim to know! By this time another year, we will have elected a new leader for our nation. That person will need to be a person of courage, wisdom, and spirited strength. There are many voices being heard today, all are asking for your vote. Our nation is in trouble, more than any of us really know. We should all pray for divine guidance in selecting those who will lead our nation through these perilous times.

Read again the words that are always printed on the front page of this newspaper. Here they are:

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

Edmund Burke

Note: I was never more proud of a South Carolina governor that when Governor Nikki Haley gave her rebuttal to the President’s State of the Union address! Enough said!

Mr. Shepard is a native of Darlington, S.C., and a current resident of Piedmont, S.C. and author of “Mill Town Boy” and “Bruised”. He has been sharing his tales of growing up in Darlington for decades, and we are delighted to share them each week.

His mailing address for cards and letters is: Bill Shepard 324 Sunny Lane, Piedmont, S.C., 29673.

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148 **AMIkids visited State House last week**

AMIkids South Carolina, a nonprofit group that rehabilitates youthful offenders and at-risk teens, made an appearance at the State House in Columbia last week. On Wednesday, January 13, key leaders of the group, along with a large contingent of youth in the program, served lunch to legislators and educated them about the organization's success in rehabilitating youth with a troubled past. Afterwards, they were introduced in the House chamber by Rep. Patricia Moore Henegan.

The program, which partners with the state Department of Juvenile Justice and local school districts, has served more than 13,000 youngsters and their families since the first program in the state was established in 1985. AMIkids South Carolina is an affiliate of the national program, AMIkids, Inc., which boasts an impressive success rate.

More than 73 percent of the youngsters served nationwide do not reoffend; instead, they become productive, responsible community members. Up to 67

percent earn GED's, or enroll in college or vocational training. An alternative to traditional reform schools and incarceration, the program seeks to reverse the life-crippling odds stacked against them.

Through its residential programs and Infinity day school programs, AMIkids South Carolina challenges young men to change their behavior by focusing on education, goal development, life skills training, and decision-making. The program seeks to help the youngsters understand accountability, while raising their level of confidence and self-esteem. It addresses their mental health needs through behavioral therapy and helps the teens deal with their aggression, family relationships and past trauma.

Job training programs, sought by Gov. Nikki Haley, are also offered, including training in the fields of technology, carpentry, welding, medical training and catering.

Among the AMIKids leaders who came to the State House: O.B. Stander.

president and CEO of AMIkids, Inc.; Michael Cavanaugh, chairman of the board of AMIkids South Carolina; former Rep. Douglas Jennings, chairman of education policymakers; Larry McNeil, chairman of the board of Camp Bennettsville and the Marlboro Infinity School and a board member of AMIkids, Inc.; Heyward Golden, vice president for operations; Wade Goss, regional director for the Southern Region; Joshua Brown, AMIkids Bennettsville executive director, and Kimberly Dease, AMIkids Infinity Marlboro executive director.

Also attending were board members from Camp Bennettsville and Infinity Marlboro School: Ronald B. Henegan, John Troy Henegan, Freddie Hodges, Willie Gladden, vice chairman of the Marlboro County Council and City Council member Wilhelmina Pegues. Also attending were representatives from AMIkids White Pines (Union), AMIkids Sand Hills (Ches-terfield), AMIkids Piedmont (Laurens), AMIkids Georgetown and AMIkids Beaufort.



148 Lucas addresses 3 crucial issues in Haley's speech

S.C. House Speaker Jay Lucas, whose District 65 includes southeastern Lancaster County, issued the following statement in response to Gov. Nikki Haley's Jan. 20 State of the State address:

The people of South Carolina faced unthinkable challenges last year, but were able to persevere because of our strong and steadfast sense of community.

Gov. Haley's tremendous leadership during times of tragedy and disaster effectively brought our state together and helped us heal. Although our specific solutions to areas of improvement may differ, I am confident that the House will work with her on our shared objectives to move our state forward.

Road funding

Finding a long-term solution to repairing our crumbling infrastructure requires much more than directives. It demands tough decision-making and compromise.

The House-passed plan is a responsible approach that shares all three components of Gov. Haley's proposal. It accounts for fairness so that out-of-state motorists pay to fix our roads and not just S.C. drivers. Our plan also gives money back to South Carolina taxpayers, which is equivalent to the estimated gas fee increases.

The House carefully studied, debated and vetted our plan for nine months, and we are confident in this approach. It is my hope that the Senate will put forth the necessary efforts to adequately address this problem so that we can work together to fix our roads.

Education reform

The House has made significant, transparent and meaningful strides to reform South Carolina's education delivery system.

Our unique Education Task Force worked diligently and created an atmosphere where school superintendents, elected officials, business leaders and representatives from struggling school districts could gather together to hold an open dialogue and discuss ideas for real reform.

The Task Force's impressive suggestions will transform public education in our state and give every child the opportunity to succeed. I am encouraged that Gov. Haley has chosen to join this conversation. As our education reform package makes its way through the House, I look forward to working with her so that together we can make it a reality.

Ethics reform

The members of the S.C. House worked tirelessly last year to pass comprehensive ethics reform. We reformed our campaign finance laws, created an independent investigation to look into alleged wrongdoing and banned political action committees.

The House sent the Senate 12 individual bills and then bundled our legislation into an omnibus package to encourage Senate consideration.

Unfortunately, our efforts have been ignored and our bills idly sit in the bottom of an empty Senate desk drawer. Honest South Carolinians give elected officials the opportunity to serve, and restoring their trust should not be difficult.



Guest column



Jay Lucas is speaker of the S.C. House of Representatives.

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148 Governor Nikki Haley announces 2016 Education Reform Initiative

COLUMBIA – Continuing her focus on statewide education reform, Gov. Nikki Haley today announced her 2016 Education Reform Initiative, which



Haley

addresses some of the toughest issues facing education in South Carolina today – from basic governance and accountability, to building safe schools, addressing transportation needs, and providing students across the state with access to technology.

The governor made the announcement during a celebration with Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman at Frances Mack Intermediate School in Gaston, S.C.

"I have said many times that my heart is always in rural areas, and growing up in Bamberg, I've always said we

"It's time to deal with the facilities of the schools in our state."

didn't know what we didn't have. Now I know what we didn't have. And once we know what you didn't have, and you know what children don't have, you can't ever turn away from that," said Haley. "We're seeing teachers having to wear rain boots to walk through the rain in schools. We're seeing walls that are molded. We're seeing building structures that are not safe. And so now we are saying 'it is time to deal with the facilities of the schools in our state.'"

Starting with a commitment Haley made to South Carolina's children in 2013, this initiative is the third year of reform proposals built upon input from dozens of individual stakeholders and groups.

"I'm excited because we need a governor who listens to the folks who are out in schools every day, and Governor Haley has done that," said S.C. Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman. "Everything the governor has talked about today will make a difference and give us a better chance, so that everything we do as teachers, parents, and administrators will help every student find what their passion is and be successful."

"Our education system has long been in need of serious attention and reform and I am proud of the work the House Education Task Force has done over the past year," said Rep. Rita Allison, chairwoman of the House Education Committee. "We can no longer ignore the condition of our distressing infrastructure, the need for higher teacher retention, and a host of other shortfalls that are denying our students of the resources they need to succeed. I am pleased that Governor Haley's plan sets a clear path forward on tackling this issue in a significant way and I look forward to working with her to institute these reforms that will give all of our children access to a quality education."

"Governor Haley started a critical conversation three years ago about the need to focus on our students and their education, and I'm grateful that she has decided to continue that conversation going into this session," said Sen. John Courson, chairman of the Senate Education Committee. "For too long,

South Carolina's education system hasn't focused on the individual needs of students, and I look forward to working with the governor to ensure a great education for our students that is fair and equitable in every part of the state."

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Editor's note: The S.C. Democratic Party picked Rep. Mandy Powers Norrell to deliver the party's televised response to Gov. Nikki Haley's State of the State Address Jan. 20. Here are excerpts of Norrell's speech:

I am Mandy Powers Norrell, and I represent the southern half of Lancaster County in the S.C. House of Representatives.

Like Gov. Haley, I was also born and raised in rural South Carolina, and educated in our public schools. But while we have similar backgrounds, we see things from different perspectives.

Gov. Haley describes a South Carolina from the perspective of those at the top. I see it from the ground level. And from the perspective of a mother of teenagers in public school and a small-business owner in a former textile community, I see hard-working people struggling to make ends meet, senior citizens having to choose between paying their mortgage and buying their medicine, teachers trying to make do with less than minimally adequate funding, and families grieving after collisions on dangerous roads and bridges.

Twenty-five years ago, Gov. Haley and I were both finishing high school. She was in Bamberg, and I was in Lancaster. Per-pupil funding in our schools was at an all-time high. Our roads and bridges were some of the best in the nation. Our neighbors had jobs with reliable health insurance and stable retirement plans. The future looked bright.

What has changed in the past 25 years?

I'll tell you one thing that has changed. During that time, Republicans have been in almost total control of state government. They have had the governor's mansion, the House of Representatives, the Senate, our congressional delegation, and Republicans currently control every statewide elected office.

Are you proud of our public education system? Are you sat-

isfied with the condition of our roads and bridges?

Are you confident that if you got sick, you could afford the treatment?

In the past 25 years, our state has declined in almost every category. We've been duped.

I grew up in a textile town. Both of my parents worked for Springs Mills, and I worked there during the summers to pay for college. But those mills and that textile economy are gone. What's worse is that our Republican-led education system is not preparing our children for the economy of today, much less the next economy.

In the past two decades, public education has become grossly underfunded. If you find that hard to believe, ask yourself, did your parents have to send packs of paper, disinfectant wipes and glue sticks to outfit your classroom on the first day of school each year?

Republican leaders refuse to fund even minimally adequate education for our poor and rural schools. And now they are even refusing to obey a Supreme Court order requiring them to fund public schools equally.

This pattern of defunding is no accident. If public education is brought to its knees, then that strengthens the argument for those Republicans who want to divert our tax money from public schools to private academies that cater to the wealthy....

A Democratic legislature would invest in our public schools - the way we did 25 years ago. Democrats believe that our children are our future and that we need to start today to prepare them for success in this quickly changing world. I bet you agree.

While Republicans talk a big game about economic development, their policies have weakened our small businesses, small towns and farms.

Just one month ago, Gov. Haley turned her back on our agriculture community when farmers, reeling from the flood, asked for disaster assistance.

Her unwillingness to help our state's largest industry has put the future of agriculture in South Carolina at risk. The S.C. farm community can trust and believe you have a friend and unwavering advocate in Democrats.

You have heard a lot about the businesses that have relocated to our state. Sure the economy has improved in many ways, but I would submit to you that South Carolina's recovery is part of the national recovery, happening in every single state - not just in South Carolina. January marks the 70th straight month of job growth in our country, so of course South Carolina is sharing in this national trend.

It's true that we have brought in several out-of-state and overseas corporations by offering generous incentives funded by our citizens. But what about the local family businesses that are being taxed at the full rate while their larger competitors enjoy subsidies funded by everyday South Carolinians like you and me? That's not fair....

What if we didn't have to hand out hundreds of millions of dollars in tax incentives to convince companies to move to South Carolina? World-class public schools, a healthy work force, and safe roadways would be far more persuasive incentives than the hundreds of millions in tax dollars our citizens are paying to recruit these companies now.

And speaking of safe roadways - why haven't we passed a bill to improve our roads and bridges? I remember hearing my Republican colleagues say over a year ago that roads were the most important issue. Lately, you've heard Gov. Haley call for unity.

I agree. We need to start working together to get things done. But what she hasn't told you is that the fighting is within her own party. Republicans in the Senate actually filibustered their own roads bill last summer until it was dead for the year, and while Republicans are fighting amongst



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themselves, our citizens continue to suffer with tattered roads and dangerous bridges.

Democrats, on the other hand, remain unified in our commitment to pass a bill to reverse the decay of our long-neglected roadways. We hope the Republicans will join us. But make no mistake, if Democrats were in control of the legislature, we would have a roads bill on Gov. Haley's desk within days. Republicans have had over a generation and we still have no solution for our roads and bridges....

Under Republican leadership... South Carolina remains one of the most unhealthy states in the nation with one of

the highest rates of uninsured citizens.

Did you know that we actually turned down \$11 billion in federal funds that would have provided healthcare for 300,000 of our citizens who don't have it now, and would have created 44,000 new jobs?

Did you know that if you are working but making minimum wage, you would have health care coverage at no cost if the Republicans had only voted with the Democrats to accept these federal funds?

And this money would have come at almost no cost to our state either. You've already paid for it with your federal tax dollars. But Republicans said

no....

If the Republicans could have given us the South Carolina we want and know is possible, they would have done it a long time ago.

It's time for us as a state to wake up from these distractions and misinformation because we are better than that. We are smarter than that.

We are South Carolinians. We are a family.

And my colleagues and I urge you to come home to the Democratic Party – the party that cares about you. Everyone is welcome here.

Good night. God bless you and God bless the state of South Carolina.

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Lancaster's Mandy Powers Norrell was asked to deliver the Democratic Party's televised response to Gov. Nikki Haley's State of the State Address on Jan. 20.