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## *The damage left by the 59 + 148 October flood*

Dear Editor,

The damage left by last October's 1,000-year flood has caused an unprecedented \$12 billion in damages to our state and left thousands with destroyed or damaged homes, as well as significant damages to local businesses. We haven't witnessed anything similar since the devastation caused by Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

Some 96,829 South Carolinians have registered for FEMA disaster aid, with \$74 million dollars being approved. However, disaster relief continues well beyond the initial weeks and months after the storm strikes, and a large number of flood victims report that while the aid from FEMA was helpful, it wasn't enough to cover the cost for damages sustained. Many South Carolinians are still displaced from their homes, or living in severely damaged homes, even after receiving federal aid.

The flood wreaked havoc on 24 counties across the state, ranging from counties in the Pee Dee to the Lowcountry to the Midlands. The floodwaters did not discriminate and neither should the state of South Carolina when it comes to recovery relief efforts.

The recovery process will be a long, painful, and expensive process for many families and individuals across the state. Leaders in Columbia have a responsibility to ensure that impacted communities get back on their feet and are able to make a full recovery.

I have pre-filed a bill solely focused on helping families and individuals fully recover from the damages left by the flood. My bill allocates immediate funds through a supplemental appropriations to the FY 2015-2016 budget, and would designate over \$320 million in aid for families and individuals living in counties impacted by the storm. These funds are in the Contingency Reserve Fund, and 2015-16 unobligated projected surplus

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# *The storm is not over for thousands of South Carolinians*

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revenue that has been certified by the Board of Economic Advisors.

To be clear, the state has surplus revenue sitting in a bank account right now that we can use to help flood victims immediately.

In accordance with Section 25-1-440 of the 1976 Code, the Governor has the authority to make financial grants up to \$16,000 per family or individual, to assist with disaster-related needs once the President of the United States has declared a county or community a disaster area. On October 5, 2015, President Obama signed a disaster declaration for the state of South Carolina, and ordered federal aid to supplement state and local recovery efforts.

Put simply, the Governor now has the authority to make financial grants to flood victims. My bill gives her the money to send aid now. In

addition, my legislation speeds up the recovery process, and helps plug gaps existing between what flood victims may have received in federal aid and insurance coverage, which many victims have reported as being not enough.

Thus far, Governor Haley has refused to spend any state surplus money to help families and individuals recover. Instead she has decided to rely solely on charities and existing federal relief. While I applaud the state's private sector for their efforts to helping in the recovery process, the private sector alone cannot fully address the billions of dollars in damages we face throughout the state. Furthermore, the impact of the flood stands to impact future charitable contributions because those that traditionally give, now have to focus their attention on their homes or businesses. How can state leaders ignore the thousands of people in our state that

FEMA could not help enough?

If the General Assembly decides to use state money to help flood victims through another means, those funds would not be available until the new fiscal year that begins July 1. I believe that is entirely too long for flood victims to wait. My bill provides immediate help, using funds already available in existing budget appropriations.

I strongly encourage everyone living in counties designated as disaster areas to call Governor Haley's office at (803) 734-2100, and urge her to support H. 4569. Tell Governor Haley to do her duty and provide immediate recovery aid that is sorely needed by many across the state.

The storm is not over for thousands of South Carolinians. It is time we call and tell the Governor to send help now!

House Democratic Caucus leader, Representative Todd Rutherford





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## 148 School Board Holds Recognitions

By Craddock Morris

The Calhoun County Public School District Board of Trustees met Monday, January 25, at the District Office on Herlong Avenue in St. Matthews.

Under one of its first orders of business District Superintendent Dr. Steve Wilson announced that January is observed as **School Board Appreciation Month**. At that time Dr. Wilson called for the entire Board to be recognized and each was presented a special gift.

Next the Board recognized students Terrence Jackson and Luis Nunez along with Calhoun County High School's Jobs for South Carolina's Graduates Specialist Ms. Geraldine Sackiel who traveled to Washington, D.C. in December. They attended the annual Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) National Student Leadership Academy.

CCHS student Luis Nunez was named first place winner of the **National Math Competition** for 2016. He was presented a special plaque. Chief Academic Officer Christia Murdaugh conducted the student recognition.

Also during the recognition ceremony the Board honored the **2015-2016 District Classified Employees of the Year** in a ceremony conducted by Human Resources Director and Compliance Officer George Kiernan. They were Mrs. Lillian DeBruhl of St. Matthews K-8, Ms. Brenda Arant of Sandy Run K-8, and Ms. Rosalind Jenkins of Calhoun County High School.

The District Office recognized Ms. Ruby Guinyard for her 27 years of devoted service.

Under public participation Mr. Michael Lee had questions about the roll out for laptop computers and the student user fee of \$50. He inquired as to whether the fee covered insurance in the event the computers

could be damaged. He was advised a clarification of the matter will be addressed.

Finance Director Sky Strickland presented the December monthly financial report. She noted tax benefits have amounted to over \$2 million while delinquent taxes have amounted to \$254,328. Her report was approved by the Board.

Dr. Wilson's Superintendent's report addressed the resetting of the 2015-2016 academic calendar and said the Board meeting for February will be held at the District Office rather than Sandy Run K-8 because of student recognition. The March meeting will be held at Sandy Run K-8.

Continuing, Dr. Wilson gave information on the January digital device roll out for students and asked for Board approval for a CCHS cheerleaders field trip to Winston-Salem, NC, which will be no cost to the District.

Dr. Wilson also presented information on Governor Haley's K-12 education reform initiative involving \$230M as well as \$65M for school safety. It also calls for increasing bus drivers pay to \$10.95 per hour.

Concluding his report Dr. Wilson said there is an effort to make school lunches tastier and said a work session will address a policy concerning staff ethics.

The Board then went into executive session to hear an employee resignation and the Superintendent's evaluation.

Board members present were Chairman Gary Porth, who presided, Kevin Jenkins, Debra Fredrick, Ned Nelson, and Sandra Tucker.

Also present were District Superintendent Dr. Steve Wilson and Recording Secretary Pam Kennedy.





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## School Board Honored

The Calhoun County Public Schools Board of Trustees was recognized at its meeting January 25 in recognition of *School Board Appreciation Month*. Left to right they are: Ned Nelson, Kevin Jenkins, Chairman Gary Porth, Sandra Tucker, and Debra Fredrick.



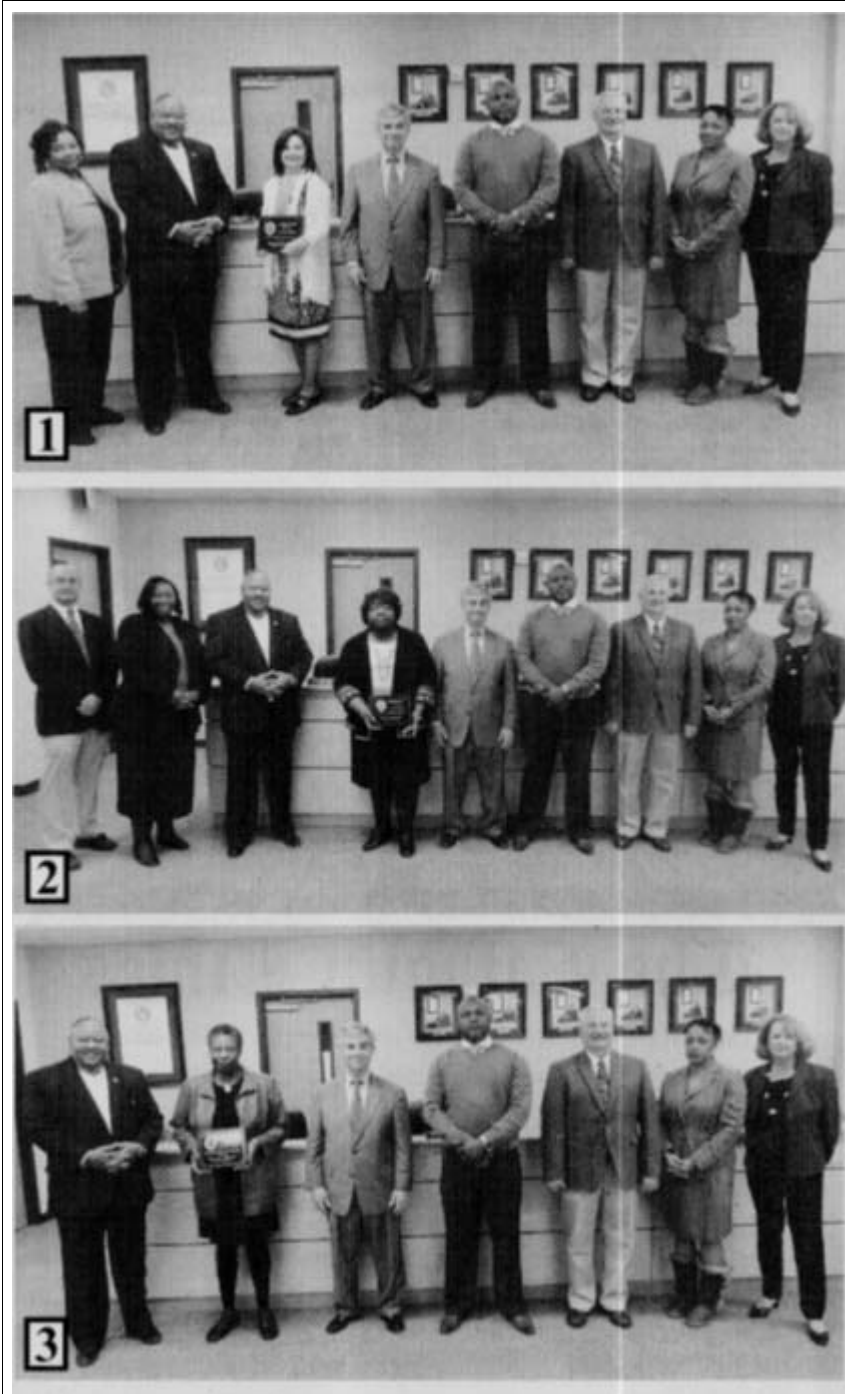
## Luis Nunez Recognized

The School District Board recognized Luis Nunez, a senior at Calhoun County High School, for achieving first place in the *National Math Competition*. Pictured left to right are: CCHS Guidance Counselor Jamie Stevens, Principal Cynthia Johnson, Superintendent Dr. Steve Wilson, Chairman Gary Porth, Luis Nunez, Board Members Kevin Jenkins, Ned Nelson, Sandra Tucker, and Debra Fredrick, and CCHS Assistant Principal Chris Mack.





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# School District Employees Honored

School District Employees honored were: PHOTO 1: Third left Mrs. Lillian DeBruhl. Also shown from left is St. Matthews K-8 Assistant Principal Ronda Simmons. PHOTO 2: Fourth left Ms. Rosalind Jenkins. PHOTO 3: Second left Ms. Ruby Guinyard.



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## Haley's address: More, less or better

"This has been a different, and difficult year for South Carolina; a year that warrants a different kind of speech," Gov. Haley said in her recent State of the State Address.

And indeed there were some differences in the speech; she introduced people who were part of our recent tragedies of the Emanuel shooting and the floods. She called on senators to physically stand up during the speech to signify their support for her ethics reform. For once, she talked a lot about education, especially some new spending on K-12 education. And, there was some new language about the need to do something about our crumbling roads and bridges.

But in the end, it wasn't really different. Yes, there was a bit of a difference in style and in format, but in terms of a difference in substance or vision – or even a real difference in policy, it was pretty much the same politics as usual.

There was no new overarching vision. There was no linkage of our recent racial tragedy (the Emanuel shooting) with our historic racial legacy (failing schools). In the end, her proposals were really just a rehash of the familiar debate about spending more or less on this or that – and not about a new creative or innovative strategy for spending better, smarter or more efficiently.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm very glad that Gov. Haley focused on education – but what she didn't say was really more important than what she did say.

There is probably no other subject that has been the focus of more of these weekly columns than education. There is a simple reason: it is the most important issue facing our state. What we do (or don't do) in fixing education will have more impact on the short, medium and long term future of our state than practically anything else.

Gov. Haley's biggest education proposal called for a bond to borrow \$200 million to repair K-12 schools. Anyone who

has spent much time in some of our schools – especially in rural areas – would testify to the need. The only question is how are the allocations going to be made? Will the decisions be made based on who has the most political clout or on which schools have the greatest needs? Left to politics as usual, we know how things will end up.

Haley also proposed a much needed plan to slow teacher turnover in rural areas by paying for state college tuition for

teachers who commit to teach for eight years in poor or rural school districts. A good start and higher pay for good teachers in these schools would do even more.

If there was a (fairly) bold initiative, it was in her proposal for education and technology. She proposed seven new charter schools and more teachers in virtual school programs. She wants significant new spending to connect local schools and to bring broadband to 10,000 homes of underserved students. She also proposed significant spending for new digital instructional materials. All in all, her new spending in these areas totaled over \$50 million.

Her final education proposal called for a ballot initiative to abolish the superintendent of education as an elected position and make the position appointed by the governor – just as it is in 38 other states. This is a good idea as the governor ought to be able to choose the school chief they want who will help carry out their educational objectives.

Haley's proposals are all sound, but they don't go far enough – not nearly far enough.

We should begin by understanding that though these are steps forward, in recent years we took many steps backward. A few years ago during the depths of the recession, South Carolina led the country in how

much we cut education. While other states had a cut education last policy, we seemed to



have a policy of cut education first. And to make matters worse, Haley turned down millions of dollars in federal stimulus money that would have allowed us to continue to pay hundreds of teachers rather than lay them off.

We are now left with her proposals that are trying to make up a few hundred yards of lost ground from the miles of ground we gave up in the recession. And, we entered the recession far behind to begin with.

Moreover, it is far from certain that the legislature will even give Haley the modest education measures she asked for in her speech. Already we are hearing the same old voices talking

about cutting spending so we can cut taxes further.

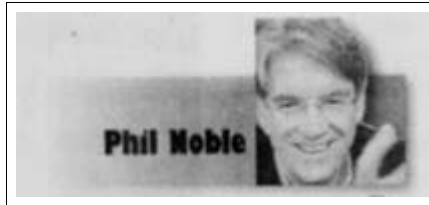
We are still stuck in the same old, worn out debate of spend more or spend less... not spend better.

I'm glad Gov. Haley took a few baby steps in the right direction but we must not kid ourselves – we as a state need leapfrog jumps in education.

That really would be different.

*(Phil Noble is a businessman in Charleston and president of the SC New Democrats, an independent reform group founded by former Gov. Richard Riley. His column is provided by the S.C. News Exchange.)*

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GEE ATKINSON/OBSERVER

**Jeremy Stokes stands in front of Highway 15 Liquors on Sumter Highway. The business is the first in Lee County to take advantage of the power of the sun with the installation of solar roof panels, made feasible by federal and state rebates, including incentives from Duke Energy's Distributed Energy Resource program.**

# Harnessing the sun

## *Local business installs solar panels*

**By Gee Atkinson**  
**Editor**

*Lee County Observer, Bishopville, SC*

When Jeremy Stokes decided he wanted to install solar panels on the roof of Highway 15 Liquors, owned by his uncle Ray Stokes and himself, he did research. A lot of research.

"We'd thought about doing it for awhile, but the economics didn't get 'right' until recently when federal, state and local energy rebates became available," Jeremy said. "Duke's rebate took care of about 25 percent of the cost of installing the system and that made it a lot more feasible."

Duke Energy's solar rebate program is designed to help its South Carolina customers "harness the sun" with the upfront cost of

installing solar on their property.

The rebate is another step forward in implementing Duke Energy's Distributed Energy Resource (DER) program – a direct result of several years of collaboration with the state's environmental leaders, businesses and community voices, and the creation of historic legislation passed by the General Assembly.

The rebate was approved by the Public Service Commission of South Carolina on July 15.

"The bottom line is now we can have the solar system paid off in about five or six years," Jeremy said. "And then we're getting free electricity, you might as well say."

The Stokes, who have operated their Bish-





opville business since December 2006, had their solar panels installed in October and Duke added it to their grid about six weeks later.

The premise behind solar energy is fairly simple, Jeremy said.

"We have 40 solar panels on top of the store that turn sunlight into electricity, direct current," he said. "There are two inverters

mounted on the side of the store that convert that electric energy to AC which goes straight into the grid. It's all tied into the meter so when we're producing too much electricity, we send it back to Duke; if we're not producing enough electricity for our needs, then we buy

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## **SUN** Continued from Front

some from Duke Energy."

People ask a lot of questions about the unusual-looking items on the roof. "We don't have any big batteries around anywhere," Jeremy said. "That's always one question. The panels won't blow up, either. There's a lot of misinformation and myths about solar energy. But after we explain how it all works, all the reactions are positive."

The Stokes' solar system will take care of 115 percent of their energy use, averaged over a year so "we will be getting a check back from Duke," Jeremy said.

Duke's DER program is designed to support customer use of solar energy and grow the company's renewable footprint in the state from less than 2 megawatts today to at least 110 megawatts and potentially 170 megawatts by 2021.

The rebate provides \$1/watt-dc for qualified residential customers who install systems up to 20 kilowatts-ac on their property and for business customers who install systems up to 1 megawatt-ac on their property. This means a residential customer who installs a typical 5 kilowatt system could earn rebates of about \$5,000 under the program. Likewise, a non-residential customer who installs 50 kilowatts could earn a rebate of \$50,000.

Systems installed as of Jan. 1, 2015, are also eligible for the rebate.

"For many of our residential and small business customers, installing solar on their property is a significant investment," said Clark Gillespy, Duke Energy president-South Carolina. "We believe a rebate coupled with our net metering incentive provides customers a meaningful financial incentive to seriously consider going solar."

Stokes said, with the solar panels, he expects their store's electricity bill to run only \$10 a month for a basic utilities charge. "Before we installed the system, our electricity

usually averaged around \$150 a month," he said. "But we're not only saving money, we're saving the environment, too."

Stokes said the panels should last about 25 years. "Solar energy has been around a long time," he said. "It's not space age technology but it's just starting to go mainstream."

Signed by Gov. Nikki Haley in 2014, the Distributed Energy Resource Program Act (or Act 236) opens up the state for solar leasing with appropriate consumer protection regulations, which will make rooftop solar more accessible for businesses and homeowners. It allows utilities to build solar in the state and recoup those costs – just like it does with other power plants. It also mandates that utilities craft programs for nonprofits and educational facilities to expand their solar presence.

More information about Duke Energy's overall solar program can be found here: <http://www.duke-energy.com/solar>



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## 148 Addressing the pothole state's magic carpets

**S**ame old, same old. That summarizes what is going on in the SC. Senate as it piddles around with the most pressing item on its calendar, that being the state's dysfunctional road system that in many locales resembles what would appear to visitors to be something found in developing nations.

Welcome to South Carolina, folks, and enjoy your ride on the pothole state's magic carpets. Every county in the state—including Sumter, Clarendon and Lee—is suffering

### EDITORIAL

from the malaise infecting the roads we drive on.

The last we heard, state senators spent hours on Thursday *arguing over their inability to officially debate the issue*. If this is what passes for progress, then we're in big trouble.

Senate Majority Leader Harvey Peeler expressed his frustration when he said, "I have

absolutely lost my patience when it comes to the infrastructure debate we are not having."

Our sentiments exactly, Senator.

Here's another wrinkle in the lack of progress on roads: Gov. Nikki Haley isn't helping matters by pledging to veto any legislation that increases gas taxes unless it also drastically cuts income taxes and restructures the Department of Transportation.

Fortunately, Sumter Sen. Thomas McElveen has been on top of the restructuring issue by pushing through the Senate last week a bill that would reorganize the DOT Commission through redistricting that increases the number of commissioners from seven to nine and an at-large member appointed by the governor with each regional council of governments district constituting

a DOT district, thus doing away with the present unwieldy boundaries based on congressional districts.

The COGS would thus have more say-so in the process by selecting three nominees who must be residents of each district, one of which would be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. McElveen's championing of this legislation bodes well for bringing more fairness into the process of allocating transportation funds that can surely benefit Sumter, Clarendon, Lee and Kershaw counties in the years to come and make our roads a pleasure to drive on and not an obstacle course. It appears that help is on the way.

Thanks to Sen. McElveen for taking the lead on a vital issue that must be addressed by the Legislature and soon.



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# DEW to run SNAP training program

## Move helps streamline state employment services

**BY JIM HILLEY**  
jim@theitem.com

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley has announced a partnership between the Department of Employment and Workforce and the Department of Social Services that will transfer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Employment and Training program from DSS to DEW.

The SNAP Employment and Training program is intended to assist SNAP recipients in gaining skills, finding work or getting the experience needed to become qualified for available jobs within their community or region, according to a

DEW news release.

“Putting people to work and giving them the skills they need to succeed has been a focus of our administration from day one,” Haley said. “We are always looking for more efficient and effective

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ways to serve South Carolinians, and this partnership is going to give our people an even better opportunity to move away from SNAP and into a job so they can provide for themselves and for their families.”

The SNAP E&T program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The program’s services include job-search training skills, such as resume writing and interview skills; job searching; education, such as reading and writing skills; and vocational training, the release said.

Robert Bouyea director of communications and marketing for DEW said program recipients will not notice the change.

“They are not going to feel any affect from this change; they will still have the same case manager, so to the end

user it is not going to have any effect on what to they do or where they go,” he said.

The SNAP E-T program is for able-bodied adults without dependents, he said.

“They have a 36-month period for this program and the requirement is they participate for at least 20 hours a week in either employment or some kind of training program.” Bouyea said. “Some people need either vocational training, remedial education or some job skills, so we will

be providing that type of

training for at least 20 hours a week so they will stay eligible.”

“We are using the strength of both agencies,” he said.

“I am excited about this partnership because it strengthens the service given to participants by combining DEW’s passion of providing employment opportunities and skills training with DSS’s expertise in providing assistance to state residents in need,” said Cheryl Stanton, executive

director at DEW. “Centralizing employment services will provide more opportunities for people to change their lives for the better.”

Marilyn Matheus of DSS media relations said DSS will still be involved with the program.

“We are making an effort to help people become job-ready and be able to find jobs,” she said. “That is in line with the mission of the DEW; it is a shift of personnel to another agency, but it has no impact

on the services of the program.

“Our department will still have an employment aspect and will still be involved in making sure employers are looking at our clients and making sure there are employment opportunities available to them,” Matheus said.

DSS has submitted a request to the USDA to formally transfer the program, the release said. Pending approval, the transfer will take effect on or about March 14.

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# 148 Farewell from the Chair



**Rechelle Dallas, 2015 Chair**

Dear Members –

Thank you and congratulations on another successful year for the North Augusta business community. The North Augusta Chamber of Commerce is led by a dedicated staff and board of business and community leaders working together with the common goals of advancing our local and regional economies and making North Augusta a great place to live, work and play. Recently, we adopted a strategic plan that focuses the Chamber's energy on opportunities that will enhance economic growth and strengths that continue to build our community.

2015 was a busy year for the North Augusta Chamber! We kicked off the year at our Annual Meeting, Passport to

Success. We welcomed 70 new members. For the first time we held two highly successful Power Lunches, one in June featuring Governor Nikki Haley and another in November with the South Carolina Angel Network. We implemented the Friends of the Chamber, a program that supports the needs of our Ambassadors Council and gives exposure to small businesses for a nominal fee. We were proud to host the Savannah River Region Grassroots Meeting for the South Carolina Chamber. This luncheon helps educate our members on the legislative issues that could affect our region, as well as gives our members a chance to voice questions or concerns on these issues.

We held six A.M. Connection breakfasts, including a Legislative Update and State of the Community Address. We had so much fun bowling with our members at Northside Lanes at the second Hollywood Bowl tournament, and we continued to educate our members with a monthly Business Academy in partnership with SCORE. Our Women In Business Series held six successful events, including the first-ever Spa Night Social.

We were a part of the two state, three county CSRA Leadership trip to Washington DC where we advocated for our business community. Our annual Business and Com-

munity Expo moved from the Community Center to the Riverview Park Activities Center and saw tremendous growth, reaching new audiences.

I am so looking forward to our upcoming Annual Meeting: 65th Anniversary Diamond Celebration, where we will be honoring our Small Business, Citizen and Ambassador of the Year. This is going to be a fantastic event that you do not want to miss. I hope you will support this event and look forward to seeing you there!

It always amazes me at the many volunteers working hard for our Chamber's wellbeing. Thank you for your support! Going forward, if there is one thing I could ask of you it would be to continue helping build and foster relationships for our Chamber, both new and old. I want to close by again thanking everyone for your patronage, guidance and leadership. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as your 2015 Chair. I have learned and experienced so much. I also hope that a little bit of myself has rubbed off on you. You will be in good hands with incoming Chair, Kevin Toole, at the helm. Please support him and continue to keep our Chamber strong.

Your business is our business!

Rechelle Dallas  
2015 Board Chair

# Gov. Haley's State of the State address: More, less or better

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"This has been a different, and difficult year for South Carolina; a year that warrants a different kind of speech," Gov. Haley said in her recent State of the State address.

And indeed there were some differences in the speech; she introduced people who were part of our recent tragedies of the Emanuel shooting and the floods. She called on senators to physically stand up during the speech to signify their support for her ethics reform. For once, she talked a lot about education, especially some new spending on K-12 education. And, there was some new language about the need to do something about our crumbling roads and bridges.

But in the end, it wasn't really different. Yes, there was a bit of a difference in style and in format, but in terms of a difference in substance or vision – or even a real difference in policy, it was pretty much the same politics as usual.

There was no new overarching vision. There was no linkage of our recent racial tragedy (the Emanuel shooting) with our historic racial legacy (failing schools). In the end, her proposals were really just a rehash of the familiar debate about spending more or less on this or that – and not about a new creative or innovative strategy for spending better, smarter or more efficiently.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm very glad that Gov. Haley focused on education – but what she didn't say was really more important than what she did say.

There is probably no other subject that has been the focus of more of these weekly columns than education. There is a simple reason: It is the most important issue facing our state. What we do (or don't do) in fixing education will have more impact on the short, medium and long term future of our state than prac-



**PHIL NOBLE**  
SC New Democrats president

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Haley also proposed a much needed plan to slow teacher turnover in rural areas by paying for state college tuition for teachers who commit to teach for eight years in poor or rural school districts. A good start and higher pay for good teachers in these schools would do even more.

If there was a (fairly) bold initiative, it was in her proposal for education and technology. She proposed seven new charter schools and more teachers in virtual school programs. She wants significant new spending to connect local schools and to bring broadband to 10,000 homes of underserved students. She also proposed significant spending for new digital instructional materials. All in all, her new spending in these areas totaled more than \$50 million.

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pointed by the governor – just as it is in 38 other states. This is a good idea as the governor ought to be able to choose the school chief they want who will help carry out their educational objectives.

Haley's proposals are all sound, but they don't go far enough – not nearly far enough.

We should begin by understanding that though these are steps forward, in recent years we took many steps backward. A few years ago during the depths of the recession, South Carolina led the country in how much we cut education. While other states had a cut education last policy, we seemed to have a policy of cut education first. And to make matters worse, Haley turned down millions of dollars in federal stimulus money that would have allowed us to continue to pay hundreds of teachers rather than lay them off.

We are now left with her proposals that are trying to make up a few hundred yards of lost ground from the miles of ground we gave up in the recession. And, we entered the recession far behind to begin with.

Moreover, it is far from certain that the legislature will even give Haley the modest education measures she asked for in her speech. Already, we are hearing the same old voices talking about cutting spending so we can cut taxes further.

We are still stuck in the same old, worn out debate of spend more or spend less ... not spend better.

I'm glad Gov. Haley took a few baby steps in the right direction, but we must not kid ourselves – we as a state need leapfrog jumps in education.

That really would be different.

**Phil Noble** is a businessman in Charleston and President of the S.C. New Democrats.



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## 148 OTHER VOICES: EDITORIALS FROM ACROSS THE STATE

### **The Post and Courier on gun violence in the state:**

It should have been evident to any South Carolinian even before Gov. Nikki Haley made it the central theme of her State of the State address on Jan. 20. South Carolina has emerged as a different state after last year.

In 2015, gun violence in South Carolina drew international attention. In June, nine people were murdered during a Bible study at Charleston's Emanuel AME Church with a gun that the accused killer should not have been allowed to purchase.

The death of the Emanuel Nine led to the governor calling for, and the Legislature approving, the removal of the Confederate flag from the front of the Statehouse. That was a truly significant achievement, though one that should have happened years sooner.

But lawmakers cannot rest on their laurels. The toll of South Carolina's gun violence extends far beyond a single, terrible tragedy. And there are simple, needed legislative measures that could greatly reduce the chance that the state's most violent or unstable residents get their hands on deadly weapons.

As reported in an investigative package of stories, "S.C. confronts gun violence," at least 34 bills in the General Assembly address crucial weaknesses in the state's gun laws.

Several pieces of legislation specifically focus on eliminating the so-called "Charleston loophole" that allowed accused Emanuel AME killer Dylann Roof to purchase that gun.

Mr. Roof should have been barred from buying a firearm after a felony drug charge was made against him a few months before he bought the gun. But a communications mix-up between state and federal agencies failed to raise red flags before the three-day maximum background check waiting period expired.

Eliminating that three-day maximum and requiring a completed process for all gun purchases is an obvious step to ensure that background checks serve their intended

purpose. And it has overwhelming backing from S.C. residents.

A Winthrop University poll in October found that 80 percent of South Carolinians surveyed support requiring gun buyers to wait until a background check is completed before taking possession of the firearm, even if it takes longer than the current three-day maximum waiting period.

Other bills currently on the table would add tiered penalties for multiple gun offenses, require gun buyers to register new weapons with the State Law Enforcement Division, add assault weapons to the list of firearms banned by the state and require gun owners and dealers to immediately report thefts to law enforcement, among other proposals.

Those ideas warrant discussion. Strengthening the state's background check laws should be a legislative priority.

But while the killing of the Emanuel Nine was a horrendous outlier in the scale of its violence, gun deaths are all too common in our state. In 2014, the last year for which statistics are available, more than 700 South Carolinians lost their lives to guns.

Nearly two-thirds of those deaths were suicides. That tragic statistic also reveals the importance of making better access to mental health care a priority in addition to — not instead of — serious gun reforms.

Bills to close loopholes or subject more gun sales to background checks do not erode the rights of law-abiding gun owners. Bills to strengthen penalties for illegal gun possession or require stolen guns to be reported to law enforcement do not flout the Second Amendment's protection of the freedom to bear arms.

Rather they will help protect South Carolinians from both horrific atrocities like the Emanuel shooting and from the less visible losses that impact families across the state each day.

There has never been a more appropriate time to address gun violence in South Carolina. State lawmakers must seize this opportunity.



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**GUEST VIEW**

## ***S.C. women deserve an equal-pay law***

*By The Herald Editorial Board*

While Gov. Nikki Haley is predictably conservative on most issues, she sometimes is willing to go against the grain, such as when she recently helped lead the effort to bring down the Confederate flag that had flown on the grounds of the Statehouse. We suggest that she now consider leading the charge to pass equal pay protections for women in South Carolina.

Haley, who, as a woman politician, has experienced gender discrimination in her public life, should be sympathetic to the plight of underpaid women in the state's workforce. And as the state's governor, she is uniquely positioned to make the case for South Carolina women.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which made it easier for women to challenge discriminatory pay in court, was the first bill President Barack Obama signed into law. As reported on Friday, the seventh anniversary of the law, South Carolina ranks as one of only four states in the nation without an equal-pay law.

The others are Alabama, Mississippi and Utah, although Utah introduced

equal-pay legislation this month.

Comparing the pay of men and women can be difficult, even when they have similar jobs. Nonetheless, the disparity is so wide in many cases that the only logical culprit is gender discrimination.

Women in South Carolina make 80 cents for every dollar that similarly employed men make, according to the National Partnership for Women and Families. That comes to a difference of \$8,272 a year.

For women of color, the gap is wider. African-American women make 57 cents for every dollar a white man makes in South Carolina, while Hispanic women make 48 cents.

Opponents of an equal-pay law in the state fear that it could have a negative impact on small businesses, although we can't understand how allowing small businesses to discriminate against women employees is a worthwhile benefit.

Some opponents no doubt have an aversion to the equal pay law simply because it is championed by the federal government — and specifically by Obama.

Another possible reason the law has not gained traction in the state is because the Legislature is so

heavily dominated by men. South Carolina has only 22 women in the state House and only one in the Senate, or about 13.5 percent of all legislators, which is among the lowest in the nation.

In Colorado, by contrast, women occupy 42 percent of the seats in the state Legislature, the highest percentage in the nation.

Some South Carolina lawmakers have tried to push equal-pay legislation. Charleston Rep. Leon Stavrakis, a Democrat, introduced a bill that would make it illegal for a state agency to "discriminate against an employee on the basis of gender" by paying a woman less than a man for the same work as long as they are equally qualified. But the bill has been stalled for more than a year.

Someone such as Haley might be able to break the logjam. She is a Republican and, with her final term as governor ending this year, she has nothing to lose politically.

Ironically, despite the widespread opposition to equal-pay legislation in the Legislature, it is extremely popular with voters. A 2014 Winthrop University poll found that three out of four South Carolinians are in favor of such a law.