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Friday, January 8, 2016

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Charleston, S.C. \$1.00

Governor takes on domestic violence

Haley proposal spends \$19M to relieve police officers of prosecutor's role

BY MAYA T. PRABHU
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COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley wants to spend \$19 million to hire 144 prosecutors so that police officers no longer are the ones prosecuting domestic violence cases in South Carolina.

Haley unveiled a number of requests and executive orders in a news conference Thursday aimed at reducing instances of domestic violence in South Carolina, which has been ranked No. 1 in the nation for the rate of women murdered by men.

South Carolina is one of three states in the country where police officers — not lawyers — prosecute domestic violence crimes in the courtroom. "I was mortified when I learned that law enforcement (officers) were the ones that were prosecuting these cases," Haley said.

Charleston's 9th Circuit Solicitor Scarlett Wilson, who stood with Haley during the news conference, said she thought the move was a huge step forward. "Law enforcement does a great job, but they have enough on their plate," she said.

pc Poll
Do you think South Carolina taxpayers should spend \$19 million to hire more prosecutors, judges and staff to process criminal domestic violence cases? Go to postandcourier.com/polls to vote.

Courtroom support for Slager raises concerns

Do officers demonstrate brotherhood or send the wrong message?



Supporters of former North Charleston police officer Michael Slager, including several former co-workers, stand at his attorney's request Monday afternoon during a bond hearing in front of Judge Clifton Newman.

BY ANDREW KNAPP
aknapp@postandcourier.com

Officers' courtroom show of support this week for the North Charleston police officer who killed Walter Scott has stirred tensions among some people who interpreted it as an endorsement of the fatal shooting.

At least five members of the city's police force, including two supervisors, stood when former officer Michael Slager's attorney asked supporters to rise during a bail hearing Monday. They were not identified as officers. They wore no uniforms or badges.



Michael Slager consults with attorney Andy Savage at the bond hearing.

None of them spoke. But to some who recognized the officers, the display served as a worrisome sign that others at the North Charleston Police Department agree with Slager, who fired eight times as Scott ran away after a traffic stop. Slager now stands charged with murder, largely as a result of a bystander's video of the shooting.

Activists said the courtroom scene illustrated a need for an examination of whether civil rights abuses are rampant at the department.

Please see **SLAGER**, Page A4

Exams decision welcomed by seniors

School board votes to overrule memo

BY PAUL BOWERS
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Much to the relief of what Charleston County School Board Chairwoman Cindy Bohn Coats called "4,000 freaked-out seniors," the school board voted Thursday that high school seniors can exempt exams with an 85 this school year.

On Wednesday, less than a week before final exams are to begin for semester-long classes, district officials sent out a memo announcing that all of the schools would have to abide by Policy JKAA, a pre-existing rule wherein any high school student can exempt an exam with a 93 average and no unexcused absences.

Under a one-year pilot program in 2014-2015, seniors had been allowed to exempt exams with an 85 average in a class. Student handbooks this year repeated that policy, despite the school board not approving it for the current school year.

Please see **EXAMS**, Page A4

pc Poll
Do you agree with the Charleston County School Board's decision Thursday to allow seniors to exempt exams with a class average of 85 or better? Go to postandcourier.com/polls to vote.

President rips NRA in forum

Obama frustrated by 'conspiracy' theories

BY JOSE LEDERMAN
and KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

FAIRFAX, VA. — President Barack Obama tore into the National Rifle Association on Thursday as he sought support for his actions on gun control, accusing the powerful lobby group of peddling an "imaginary fiction" that he said has distorted the national debate about gun violence.

In a prime-time, televised town hall meeting, Obama dismissed what he called a "conspiracy" alleging that the federal government — and Obama in particular — wants to seize all firearms as a precursor to imposing martial law. He blamed that notion on the NRA and like-minded groups that convince its members that "somebody's going to come grab your guns."

Please see **GUNS**, Page A8

Inside

LOCAL
Mayor Brian Hicks: Mayor Riley rides into the sunset at a full gallop. **A2**

BUSINESS
Dow drops 392 points to have worst 4-day start ever. **B1**

Mt. Holly closure notice creates tight deadline for talks. **B1**

SPORTS
Painter leads College of Charleston past Hofstra. **C1**

Prosecutor seeks officer's indictment in shooting of Moncks Corner native

BY ANDREW KNAPP
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A Georgia prosecutor said Thursday that he would seek a murder indictment against the Atlanta-area police officer who fatally shot Anthony Hill, a Moncks Corner native who ran after him last spring while naked and unarmed.

Robert James, the district attorney in DeKalb County, said during a news conference that a grand jury will have several options for charges against Robert Olsen when it hears the case on Jan. 21. Those include two different counts of felony murder, a

count of aggravated assault, two charges of violating an oath of office and a count of making a false statement.

"Right now, our country is on edge in cases where officers have shot and killed civilians," James told journalists in the news conference broadcast online. "Justified or not, it's a sensitive issue in our country right now."

"This is a decision that justice requires I make."

Contacted by The Associated Press, a representative of the DeKalb County Police Department declined to comment on



Anthony Hill was a Moncks Corner resident and a 2006 Berkeley High School graduate.



Chance of showers. High 61, Low 52. Complete 5-day forecast. **B10**

Bridge — B9 Crossroads — B8 D6 Movies — B7
Business — B1 Dear Abby — B7 Obituaries — B4
Classified — D1 Editorials — A10 Sports — C1
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Charleston Deals Today

Charleston Harbor Resort and Marina
Half off at Charleston Harbor Fish House. See **A2**



SPORTS
**SKAI MOORE
RETURNING**



E GREENVILLE
Week has deals for area diners

The Greenville News PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

FRIDAY,
JANUARY 8, 2016
GREENVILLEONLINE.COM

USA TODAY EXPERTS SAY WALL STREET SWOON JUST A CORRECTION **PAGE 1B**

Clemson families going to party like it's '81

MICHAEL BURNS
MBURNS@GREENVILLENEWS.COM

J.J. Bowers' half-orange, half-purple painted face floated above orange overalls as he stood in the Orange Bowl in Miami on Jan. 1, 1982, watching Clemson win the national championship. Now 47, the Greer resident couldn't make it back to Florida as Clemson won

the College Football Playoff semifinal on New Year's Eve, but he'll be in Glendale, Arizona, on Monday night as the Tigers reach for the grandest prize once more. Like others who made that trip and are now preparing to make new memories, he just couldn't stay away. It's taking a bite out of his bank account, and his kids are having to rearrange class schedules—even exams—but

they'll watch the team that forever holds their hearts play the most storied opponent in the game, and they'll likely never forget it. It's Clemson versus Alabama for the 2015 national championship, and it's like 1981 again. "We've already won, but it sure would be nice to bring it home," said Bowers, known to many throughout the area as a founding member of the band Craving

Melon. "It's definitely not that easy, but it's worth it." Easley's Brian Garvin, 46, trekked to Miami as a 12-year-old in 1981 with his mom, dad and little sister. This year he's joining several golf buddies and a legion of Clemson faithful by flying to Las Vegas, then rolling in a caravan of six char-

See **FAMILIES**, Page 4A

HOMES NOT SO SWEET



Mobile home mold upsets residents

ROMANDO DIXSON
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Valdena Walker-Rainey walked through her mobile home, rattling off a list of maintenance issues ranging from black mold to a furnace that inadequately heats the two-bedroom trailer.

She pointed to mold in her daughter's bedroom, mold surrounding a sliding door that doesn't lock and mold in two bathrooms in her residence at Dixie Estates in Greenville County. Walker-Rainey's daughter has dealt with upper respiratory issues for months and lost her job. Her asthmatic son has missed more school this year than ever. She said both of their issues are because of the mold.

Walker-Rainey also said her oven doesn't work and the toilet in the master bathroom does not fully flush. She has lived at Dixie Estates for nearly a year and complained about the issues for months, she said. "I'm ready to go," she said. "I can't live like this anymore."

Walker-Rainey is not alone in her discontent with management. Fighting Injustice Together, a nonprofit, organized a meeting for residents to talk about their issues and explore options to remedy their problems.

Multiple residents have complained about mold and maintenance issues that they said go weeks or even months without repair. Many are struggling to pay the rent of \$540 a month. Some want to leave but don't have any options they can afford. Others are just hoping for a

PHOTOS BY HEIDI HEILBRUNNSTAFF
Carolyn Williams has found mold in her Dixie Estates home as well as other maintenance issues that she claims her landlord has not addressed.



Residents of Dixie Estates, Carolyn Williams, right, and her neighbor Monique Yazid, left, claim that the landlord has not been completing maintenance requests.

"bad tenants" and those people like to criticize Dixie Estates, she said. "None of these residents are

Wells wanted to attend Wednesday's meeting to hear complaints and discuss solutions, but she was

Murder suspect faced gun charges

Pickens man dies while in Chicago hospital

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A murder suspect accused of gunning down a former Pickens Blue Flame football coach and his friend died while in federal custody, authorities said. Albert Leon Bowen, 64, was charged with two counts of murder in the deaths of William Isaacs Jr. and Dickie Stewart. Bowen admitted to deputies that he was responsible for their deaths on at least two occasions, according to supplemental reports obtained by *The Greenville News*. The reports reveal new details about the case. The victims were found dead Sept. 14 along the roadside of North Homestead Drive in Pickens.

Bowen was in Chicago for a psychiatric evaluation when he was admitted to the hospital earlier this week for health issues, said Deputy U.S. Marshal Douglas Leslie.

He was turned over to the Marshals Service in October, flown to Illinois and housed at Chicago's Metropolitan Correctional Center, Leslie said. Bowen died of natural causes at 4:30 a.m. Wednesday. According to preliminary indications, Bowen suffered massive organ failure, Leslie said. His cause of death is pending an autopsy. Thirteenth Circuit Solicitor Walt Wilkins said Bowen was court-ordered to undergo a mental evaluation after federal prosecutors charged him with felon in possession of a firearm. Bowen was in possession of a H&R model Pardner pump 12-gauge shotgun when he was arrested in September, according to a criminal complaint filed in Greenville federal court. Detectives who searched Bowen's home on Gilliland Road found a pump shotgun propped against the wall by the front door and two bags of ammunition, the complaint said.

Bowen was previously convicted of assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature in 1996 in Greenville County, according to the complaint and State Law Enforcement Division records. Court documents show Bowen was to undergo a mental evaluation Oct. 1 to determine if he was mentally competent to stand trial. Less than a week earlier, Bowen had been charged with assaulting a fellow inmate at the Pickens County Detention

Dillard's set to close

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
ccleveland@aikenstandard.com

Dillard's at the Aiken Mall is set to close in the near future.

The *Aiken Standard* confirmed with the department store's corporate office Thursday that the location on Whiskey Road is closing, though there is no official date.

Julie Bull, director of Investor Relations at Dillard's Inc., said the store is now working with its Aiken associates to place them in nearby Augusta or Colum-

bia locations.

There are around 75 employees at the location, Bull said.

"Our commitment to our Aiken associates remains strong," she said.

The store's closing comes weeks after an official with Jones Lang LaSalle Retail confirmed the Aiken Mall had been purchased.

Karie Chatwood, the specialty leasing and marketing manager with JLL, did not identify the buyer but said JLL Retail was still managing the property on behalf of the Aiken Mall's ownership as of December

Dillard's owns its property at the mall. Bull said the building will be sold, but the buyer is undetermined at this time.

Few people were out shopping at the mall Thursday.

Becky Campbell, who was headed to Bath & Body Works during the afternoon, said she was unaware about Dillard's potentially closing and that she remembers a time when the mall used to thrive.

"I'm sad for Aiken if it does close. It is one of our big department stores," Campbell said. "If the Belk closes, the mall goes."

As the news about Dillard's infiltrated social media Wednesday and Thursday, chatter about the status of Belk also drew questions.

Jessica M. Graham, vice president of Communications and Community Relations at Belk Inc., said Thursday, there aren't any plans to close the store in Aiken.

Christina Cleveland is a general assignment reporter at the *Aiken Standard*. Follow her on Twitter @ChristinaNCleve. Digital News Editor Maayan Schechter contributed to this report.

McKenzie will not seek to be re-elected

BY DAN BROWN
dbrown@aikenstandard.com

Longtime Aiken County Council member LaWana McKenzie has announced she will not seek re-election in November.



McKenzie

After serving 32 years on Council, McKenzie, 64, told the *Aiken Standard* on Thursday she "prayed long and hard" about her choice to retire this year.

McKenzie added she gave the decision "a lot of heartfelt thought," but wanted to announce her intentions in January so as to allow those interested in running plenty of time to consider their interest in seeking public office.

"I would like to see someone who truly loves serving Aiken County and loves District 3, and not their own personal gains, run for this office," she said. "By announcing my intent not to seek re-election now, it gets the burden off my mind and allows others time to consider and begin their campaigns."

McKenzie represents District 3, which covers the western portion of Aiken County to the Savannah River, which includes the Beech Island area. District 3 also covers the area of the Savannah River Site.

Council member Phil Napier, of District 6, and other members expressed their admiration for the senior member of council.

"LaWana has been a tremendous asset to County Council, and Aiken County, and the district she represents," Council Chairman Ronnie Young said. "She will be missed by everybody, by County Council and, especially, those in her district. LaWana loves Aiken County, and I'm going to miss her."

"She's been on Council the longest of any member there," said Kathy Rawls, of District 1. "When I came on in 1988, she was already here. She

Please see MCKENZIE, Page 12A

AREA DEATHS

Catherine Ella Hallman McGee, Aiken

Lands Edfr Johnson, Vauchoise

Wendell Raynell Edwards Sr., Houston, Texas

Wilburn F. Edgar, Aiken

Deaths and Funerals, 6A

The big 'gray area'

Obama's gun order gives way to more questions, not sales

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
ccleveland@aikenstandard.com

Aiken gun store owners said they have not seen a huge uptick in sales following President Barack Obama announcing his executive action to reduce gun violence in the United States on Tuesday.

Instead, they're getting a lot of questions.

"We've seen a lot more people asking about it. What is it going to mean? What is it going to affect?" said Mike Ludwikowski, manager of The Gun Rack on Edgefield Highway. "More people are looking for education."

The FBI is set to hire more examiners to process background checks, federal agencies have been ordered to research smart gun technology and mental health has also been brought back into focus as part of the president's 10-point plan.

Part of the plan is also aimed at keeping guns out of the wrong hands through background checks. It states the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, also known as ATF, is making it clear that those "in the business of selling firearms" should get a license and conduct background checks or face criminal prosecution.

Under current law, only federally licensed gun dealers must conduct background checks on buyers, according to a report by The Associated Press. Sellers at gun shows, websites and flea markets have been able to bypass the requirement by declining to register as licensed dealers, AP reported.

Ludwikowski said that part will affect face-to-face transactions and could also deal with inheritance



STAFF PHOTO BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND

Handguns like these at Crescent Armory have been harder to restock this week, according to co-owner John Speer. Speer said the national reaction about President Obama's executive action is part of the reason and the other half, an expected increase in business during Christmas.

Yes, guns are weapons. They're designed for one purpose, but it doesn't mean that everyone uses them for that.

Mike Ludwikowski, manager of The Gun Rack

be able to receive that without government intrusion?" he said.

Ludwikowski said he believes if someone is a responsible person, they should take the steps necessary to be safe in a transaction.

"It's my opinion that if you have

car. Do people use cars to kill people? Yeah. But they can't fit a car in their pocket," he said. "Yes, guns are weapons. They're designed for one purpose, but it doesn't mean that everyone uses them for that."

John Speer, co-owner of Crescent Armory on Silver Bluff Road, in Aiken, said his store received more of an uptick in sales before the executive order because no one knew what it would be. He added some of the increase is also normal this time of year, which is the busiest for the industry.

But Speer is questioning language in Obama's executive action when it comes to sellers as well and said he doesn't know how it will be effective.

"What defines 'the business of selling firearms?'" Speer asked. "Where's the line between a father who wants to give a gun to his family members? What defines a

Progress expected on roads, education legislation

BY DERREK ASBERRY
AND MAAYAN SCHECHTER
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COLUMBIA — South Carolina students are not receiving a 21st century education, said House Speaker Jay Lucas at the 2016 Legislative Workshop for the Media.

Senate and House representatives met with members of the media on Thursday highlighting the top priorities that will likely generate much discussion in the General Assembly this session. Those topics included infrastructure, ethics, public information requests and education.

Lucas, a Darlington Republican, was one of several legislators who tackled the "harsh reality" that Palmetto State education, particularly in rural areas, has been suffering for years and may impact the state's ability to produce an educated workforce in the future.

Issues in the educational system range from lack of technological resources to an inability to recruit and retain quality teachers in rural areas, said S.C. Sen. Brad Hutto, D-Orangeburg.

Fellow Orangeburg Democrat, S.C. Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter, took it a step further and generated a lengthy discussion on the Abbeville lawsuit decision — one made by the South Carolina Supreme Court more than a year ago that staved high minority, impoverished rural school districts had not been receiving a "minimally adequate education."

The high court initially gave lawmakers a February deadline to present a solution after the ruling of the 22-year-old case. Though other panel members said they are confident that some changes will be made, Cobb-Hunter said the can has been kicked down the road for too long.

"We can study and study and study until we can't study anymore," she said. "At what point do we stop studying problems and issues, and actually do something?"

Infrastructure/flood funding

A high-priority topic discussed during media day was transportation funding and reforms to the S.C. Department of Transportation. The House passed a roads bill last session, but the Senate disapproved and was unable to send another version before

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Reach and Rise matches mentors with students

BY ARDIE ARVIDSON

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The Reach & Rise Mentoring Program is a mentoring program at the YMCA of the Upper Pee Dee in Hartsville designed to give children and youth ages six to 17 one-on-one time with a mentor.

This program was started about 20 years ago at the YMCA in San Francisco, said Lee Freeman, Reach & Rise director at the Hartsville YMCA. Freeman said about two years ago the program was taken nationwide in 38 states, South Carolina being one of them.

Volunteers from the community give their time to mentor students — to help provide them the tools to succeed, to

improve their academic performance, self-esteem, decision-making skills and relationships — for a least one hour per week for a year. Sometimes the match can extend for an additional six months.

The service is free. "This is the volunteer's way of giving back to the community," Freeman said. "They get a sense of fulfillment by being a positive role model to these kids."

Currently, he said they have about 26 volunteers working with the program.

The mentors are required to be at least 23 years of age and must attend a 15-hour class, which once a week for five weeks.

After completing the class a match is made between a mentor and mentee.

Freeman said students are often referred to the program by guidance counselors at schools, churches and Y staff.

He said he has had a lot of referrals from Carolina Elementary School.

"These are not always kids that have challenges at home," he said.

He said the mentors are trying to make a positive impact on these students.

"They try to be positive role models," he said.

He said the students may not realize the benefits from the program right away; it may be in the years to come, but he said that parents and guardians have said they see a vast improvement in their children from participating in the program.

Freeman, a former teacher and tennis coach who has been with the program for about two years, said volunteer mentors spend a minimum of one to two hours with their mentee every week for a year. This includes time together involved in sports, arts, helping with homework and other enriching activities.

He said some spend time with their mentee fishing, while others attend plays or visit the museum.

Freeman said the program is funded through a federal grant and has recently been extended for four more years. He said the program is a partnership with the Department of Juvenile Justice and is housed at the YMCA. He said that the Juvenile Jus-

tice Department is trying to be proactive to keep children from ending up in the system.

"Volunteers are always needed," he said.

He said that male mentors are especially in demand.

"We tend to have more female volunteers than men," he said. "We have a lot of request for male mentors from parents."

He said there are about an equal number of boys and girls in the program. The majority of the kids are between 8 and 12 years of age, he said.

Anyone wishing to become a mentor or to recommend a mentee should contact Freeman at 843-245-6836, 843-383-4547 or at lfreeman@upperpeedyymca.org. His office is located at the YMCA.

Christmas in April

Keeping residents warm and dry

From staff reports

The holidays are over and we have wonderful memories of family and friends gathering at each other's homes. You know that place where you feel warm, content, comfortable and safe.

Many take those feelings for granted. However, so many of our fellow residents — your friends, neighbors and maybe even a family member, lack that luxury. They're cold and wet due to broken windows, holes in their floors, leaking roofs and living in homes with no insulation. They don't feel safe due to broken doors or having doors with no locks. Some are in wheelchairs and are confined to their homes because they have no ramp accessibility. These are just some of the repairs that are greatly needed.

Christmas In April and its volunteers are their only hope of getting the help they need. This is why Christmas in April has been such a strong tradition in Hartsville for the past 26 years.

"We are urging everyone in our community — with a special appeal to the area churches, clubs, organizations and businesses — to seriously consider becoming annual participants in a very worthwhile community project," said Joann DeLong, chair of the Christmas in April committee.

See CHRISTMAS, Page 5A

Legacy of charity



The Rev. Eddie Thomas, president of the Good Samaritans for All People, loads up his pickup truck with items for the charitable organization's 21st annual Christmas Giveaway.

Good Samaritans for All People celebrate 21 years of Christmas giving

BY JIM FAILE
faile@hartsvillemessenger.com

The Good Samaritans for All People celebrated its 21st annual Christmas Giveaway Dec. 19, handing out a variety of free items for families in need at Lee Central Comprehensive High School in Bishopville.

The Christmas Giveaway seeks to provide free food, clothes, toys, bicycles, household goods and other items for the needy, said the Rev. Eddie Thomas, president of the charitable organization.

Thomas, a Hartsville native, and his wife Corine started the organization in

counties. Today, it serves people in 12 counties in the Pee Dee and midlands, including Darlington County.

"Our goal is to help as many people as possible not to have to go without," Thomas said.

"We want to thank everybody who has helped us with their donations and support from churches, businesses, organizations and individuals," Thomas said. "We want to thank all the people of Hartsville for helping us."

The Good Samaritans hold several giveaway events throughout the year to help those less fortunate.

The organization accepts donations of

as well as monetary donations, Thomas said.

The group is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization which allows for tax-deductible donations.

Thomas, who previously pastored in United Methodist churches, retired as a pastor in 2011. "But I still preach somewhere every month," he said.

"This gives me more time to help needy people in South Carolina," Thomas said. "I get joy out of making people happy. I have more to do now than I used to have. But when I get discouraged, I just ask the Lord to give me strength."

To donate or for more information



TERRIERS, MOGS BATTLE IN SOCON MATCHUP

SPORTS, B1



FINDING A HOME, GETTING BACK ON THEIR FEET

FAITH & FAMILY, D1

Herald-Journal

SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

Friday, January 8, 2016



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TODAY SAT SUN



47°/41° 50°/44° 55°/27°

Complete forecast, B8

SPORTS

Swinney optimistic Lawson will play

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney is optimistic that All-America defensive end Shaq Lawson, who injured his knee early in the Orange Bowl win over Oklahoma, will be able to play in the College Football Playoff National Championship game Monday against Alabama. **B1**

UPSTATE



SC Restaurant Week

South Carolina Restaurant Week has returned to celebrate cuisine at more than 230 restaurants across the state. Carolina BBQ & More (above) is participating. **C1**

NATION & WORLD

State Department responses faulted

The State Department produced "inaccurate and incomplete" responses to public records requests while Democratic presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton led the department, the agency's watchdog reported Thursday. **A3**

A weird weather stage this winter

Get ready for weather whiplash as powerful climatic forces elbow each other for starring roles in a weird winter show. The spine-chilling polar vortex is taking center stage in Europe and bringing persistent cold to much of North America —

SC LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS TUESDAY

Infrastructure repairs a priority

By Chris Lavender
chris.lavender@shj.com

South Carolina lawmakers said fixing state roads and improving education in rural communities top their list of priorities for the upcoming legislative session.

Inside

Can Republicans, Democrats work together? **C1**

Lawmakers highlighted some of the issues they will address this year during the

annual preview workshop held Thursday in the Solomon Blatt Building in Columbia. This year's legislative session will begin on Tuesday.

Repairing the state's deteriorating roads and bridges has been a priority for the last several years, but legislators

said infrastructure needs are a higher priority since the historic flooding in October.

"If we didn't have any incentive before, I think we certainly do now," said Sen. Greg Hem-bree, R-North Myrtle Beach.

SEE LEGISLATURE, A4

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

District 7 in talks to take over Meeting Street Academy



Spartanburg School District 7 has begun preliminary discussions about taking over the operations of Meeting Street Academy. The agreement, if approved at a later date by the boards of both Meeting Street and District 7, would lead to Meeting Street Academy becoming a public school operated by District 7 in a public-private partnership. ALEX HICKS JR./ALEX.HICKS@SHJ.COM

By Zach Fox
zach.fox@shj.com

Spartanburg School District 7 has begun preliminary discussions about taking over

District 7 would operate the school's facilities and supply necessary services, such as transportation, food services, technological support and maintenance.

Meeting Street Academy would own

alleviate overcrowding issues at both Cleveland Academy of Leadership and Mary H. Wright Elementary School. Both are at or near capacity, Booker said.

There still are hurdles to clear before the

the Sumter ITEM

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SCIENCE

Mating dinosaurs left their marks on the ground A5

Lawmakers back at work

Legislators ready to respond to tumultuous year

BY JIM HILLEY
jim@thesumteritem.com

When South Carolina's General Assembly convenes Tuesday, legislators will deal with a \$1.3 billion surplus, a mandate from the S.C. Supreme Court to overhaul public education and the aftermath of a 1,000-year flood that only made the state infrastructure problem worse.

At the annual Legislative Workshop for the Media on Thursday in Columbia, legislators sounded hopeful that the General Assembly will make significant headway towards solving some of the state's problems, particularly after the state came together around the Confederate flag issue and responded to the flood with a united and courageous effort.

"Everyone is working together and that is a big deal," said one panelist.

Director of Budget Development Les Boles laid out how the surplus was calculated and where it came from, but differences of opinion soon surfaced about its use.

Rep. Gary Simrill, R-York, said the money only brings the state back to where it needs to be.

"We already have budget requests for nearly three times that much," he said. "Our role is to be good stewards of taxpayers' dollars and send the money back."

"It's like we put \$1.3 billion in the trough and yelled 'Soo-ie'" commented Sen. Harry Peeler, R-Cherokee, about the budget requests.

The state's deteriorating infrastructure is one area that may be taking money out of the trough. Last session, the House passed and sent to the Senate legislation calling for a gasoline tax to fund road repairs, but that may not get much traction in the Senate in an election year. Bills introduced by one chamber last year are still viable during the two-year General Assembly cycle.

"It's difficult to go home to taxpayers and explain



PHOTOS BY RICK CARPENTER / THE SUMTER ITEM

Above, state Sen. Thomas McElveen, D-Sumter, explains problems with the existing system of representatives for South Carolina Department of Transportation Commission during Thursday's legislative briefing held by S.C. Press Association in Columbia.

Below, McElveen enjoys a light moment with members of the Pickens County delegation, state Rep. Gary Clary, R-Pickens, and Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, during Thursday's S.C. Press Association legislative briefing in Columbia.



raising taxes with a surplus coming in," Peeler said.

Sen. Greg Hembree, R-Horry, said the flood only highlighted how poor the roads are.

"It will bring us a new sense of urgency," he said.

"We are already two decades behind on our infrastructure plan," Rep. Kenny Bingham, R-Lexington said. "The need is

now obvious."

Last year, the Senate had its own version of a roads bill, but the debate on infrastructure never reached the floor. This year, it is listed at the top of the upper chamber's agenda.

Legislators from both parties said more money for roads must be accompanied by reform of the roads commission with some calling for the com-

mission to be appointed by the governor.

Sen. Thomas McElveen, D-Sumter, said that could hurt smaller counties.

"Governors know the votes are in places like Charleston, Lexington and Horry counties," he said. "It's important to have push-back from the smaller districts. They must

SEE SESSION, PAGE A6

FACT CHECK

Obama's gun proposals may fall short

BY ALICIA A. CALDWELL
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Obama's proposals to tighten gun control rules may not accomplish his goal of keeping guns out of the hands of would-be criminals and those who aren't legally allowed to buy a weapon. In short, that's because the conditions he is changing by executive action are murkier than he made them out to be.

Obama was scheduled to talk again about guns Thursday evening when he plans to take questions from gun control supporters and opponents alike in a televised town hall meeting on CNN.

Some of Obama's comments and how they compare with the facts:

OBAMA: "A violent felon can buy the exact same weapon over the Internet with no background check, no questions asked."

THE FACTS: It's not that straightforward. In fact, federally licensed gun dealers are required by law to conduct background checks for gun purchases no matter where the sale takes place — in a store, at a gun show or online. While private gun sales can be conducted online, if the sale involves people in different states, a licensed gun dealer in the state where the gun is going still has to be involved in the transfer.

Regardless of the seller, it is illegal for a convicted felon to buy or possess a gun unless they have had their rights restored. But prohibited buyers have evaded the law to buy guns.

OBAMA: "We're going to require firearms dealers to report more lost or stolen guns on a timely basis."

THE FACTS: The effect of this is unclear because the government already requires gun dealers to report all lost or stolen guns within 48 hours of discovering that they are missing. This is true for guns in their shops or those being sent to them. Obama did not say how much faster he wants the reporting to be or how he would achieve that.

OBAMA: "Anybody in the business of selling firearms must get a license and conduct background checks, or be subject to criminal prosecutions. It doesn't matter whether you're doing it over the Internet or at a gun show. It's not where you do it but what you do."

THE FACTS: "In the business" is the key condition for coming under this requirement, and the definition may have a lot of wiggle room. Federal law defines people who "repetitively buy and sell firearms with the principal motive of making a profit" as being "engaged in the business" of selling guns and requires them to be licensed. The license process includes a \$200 application fee and a criminal background check. People who only occasionally sell guns from their personal collections don't have to apply for a license.

The law does not specify how many guns a person has to sell to be considered "engaged in the business" of selling guns and neither did Obama. His new guidance defines a dealer as one whose

Kazakhstan Army visits U.S. Army Central

BY MASTER SGT. GARY QUALLS
Special To The Sumter Item

ARCENT and Shaw Air Force Base to see how the Army and Air Force



SPORTS: Greenwood, Emerald lock up on wrestling mat, **1B**

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 2016

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Sen. William H. 'Billy' O'Dell: 1938-2016

'He made SC a better place'

O'DELL BIOGRAPHY

NAME: William Hamilton 'Billy' O'Dell
BORN: Oct. 11, 1938 in Ware Shoals to William B. and Sara Francis O'Dell
DIED: Jan. 7, 2016 in Greenwood
OFFICE: 4th District state senator; represented Abbeville, Anderson and Greenwood counties; first elected in 1988
PARTY AFFILIATION: Republican (former Democrat)
JOB: CEO of The O'Dell Corporation
EDUCATION: The Citadel
COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS: General, chairman; Banking and Insurance; Finance; Interstate Cooperation; and Labor, Commerce and Industry.
FAMILY: Married to Aedra Gayle Tisdale with two children, William B. and Patricia Michelle.
PAST POSITIONS: President, Ware Shoals Chamber of Commerce, 1985-86; director, State Chamber of Commerce, 1985-88; president, Ware Shoals Community Foundation, 1985-88; vice chairman, Abbeville Development Board, 1987; Piedmont Technical Board of Visitors, 1987-88; The Citadel Board of Visitors, 1990-91.
HONORARY DOCTORATES: The Citadel, 1997; Medical University of South Carolina, 2008; and Lander University, 2009.
LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS: Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, 2001; South Carolina Emergency Medical Services Association, 2006-07; South Carolina Economic Developers' Association, 2007; South Carolina Dental Association, 2007; South Carolina Association of Regional Councils, 2008; Old 96 District Tourism Commission, 2011; South Carolina Emergency Medical Services Association, 2011; and South Carolina Staffing Association, 2011.
OTHER AWARDS: Palmetto Award, The Citadel, 1994; J. Verne Smith Humanitarian Award, 1998; Guardian of Small Business award, NFIB/SC, 1998; Legislative Award, South Carolina Counseling Association, 1999; Alumni Achievement Award, Camden Military Academy, 2000; Resolution of Appreciation, County of Greenwood, 2004; Legislative Appreciation Award by South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts, 2006; Champion for Access to Healthcare, South Carolina Primary Healthcare Association, 2007; Small Business Legislator of the Year, 2007; Public Servant of the Year, South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, 2008; The South Carolina Primary Health Care Champion Award, 2009; Dutchesson Leader in the



State Sen. William H. "Billy" O'Dell, who served in the state senate representing Anderson, Abbeville and Greenwood counties, died Thursday morning.

Senator's influence felt across state, area

From staff reports

State Sen. Billy O'Dell is remembered as a Southern statesman who worked tirelessly for his district with no desire for recognition during a 27-year tenure that saw O'Dell use his seniority to draw state funding for projects across the three counties he represented.

The Ware Shoals native and businessman died Thursday morning, likely from heart-related issues, at his home in Greenwood, according to the Greenwood County Coroner's Office. He was 77.

Sen. Floyd Nicholson, D-Greenwood, said he was "devastated" by O'Dell's passing, while a number of other colleagues said they were surprised by the news.

"I think everybody I know is just stunned and shocked," said Mark Warner, director of business development at Davis & Floyd Inc. and former CEO of Greenwood Partnership Alliance.

Pitts said O'Dell's passing "was a shock that it was sudden, but wasn't totally unexpected" -- O'Dell "had heart surgery and cancer surgery" -- but O'Dell told Pitts he planned to seek re-election.

See O'DELL, page 3A



Special election needed



Morning News

FRIDAY JANUARY 8, 2016

TODAY'S WEATHER

Mostly cloudy with a touch of rain. High 58, low 45. DETAILS 2A

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S.C. Education

Lawmakers claim systemic problems

Legislators say lack of funding not main cause of woes



JOSHUA LLOYD/MORNING NEWS

Senators and representatives from across the state took part in a legislative workshop for the media Thursday in Columbia. Pictured: Rep. Gary Clary, (R-Pickens), answers a question about education reform.

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
Morning News
jlloyd@florencenews.com

COLUMBIA — Several state lawmakers say a lack of funding isn't necessarily the biggest problem facing South Carolina's notoriously inadequate primary education system in rural school districts.

At a legislative panel session Thursday in Columbia, several legislators said South Carolina is ranked 23rd in the nation for the amount of money spent per student — just above average — while remaining near last

2016 Legislative Outlook

Coming in the Sunday edition of the Morning News, an in-depth look at the topics that lawmakers' say will shape the 2016 legislative session. Topics of interest will involve road funding, ethics, oversight, mopeds and more.

in national education competency statistics.

More than one lawmaker pointed toward poor money management and lack of viable leadership as primary problems.

"The truth is, the numbers show

we're above the national average for per-person funding," said Beaufort Republican Sen. Tom Davis. "Maybe we can allocate the dollars in a way that is more equitable; maybe we can get a better bang for our buck. There is a disconnect between spending and results. This suggests to me reforms need to be made in how we use the dollars we spend."

"Throwing money at our education system will not solve the problem. If that was the case we could have solved it long ago. Is it a component?"

See **FUNDING**, Page 3A

Haley: Changes being made to fight domestic violence in SC

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Progress is being made in South Carolina's fight against domestic violence, but more time is needed to study the problem and come up with ways to combat it, Gov. Nikki Haley said Thursday.

At a Statehouse news conference, Haley told reporters she has signed three new executive orders pertaining to the issue, which was a major topic during last year's legislative session. One would give the South Carolina Domestic Violence Task Force more time to continue finding ways to fight the problem.

Nationwide, South Carolina consistently ranks among the worst states per capita in women killed by men. A year ago, Haley created the task force to come up with systemic, cultural changes to combat the problem.

In August, the panel issued dozens of recommendations, including training more 911 operators, improving documentation of the crime scene and increasing the number of shelters statewide.

Another order would direct Cabinet agencies to change human resources policies to provide more guidance on how to handle employees who may be affected by abuse, such as providing them with leave and available resources.

The third order requires Cabinet agencies that regularly screen people for benefits and other assistance to look for domestic violence signs.

In the session that ended last summer, legislators passed a law that increased penalties for domestic violence convictions and gave prosecutors more options for punishment.

On Thursday, flanked by prosecutors from across the state and other members of the task force, Haley said the panel is "going too good to stop" and needs more time past the Dec. 31, 2015, deadline originally set up in her order that created it.

Haley also said that her executive budget for the coming year would allocate funding to help combat the problem, including about \$19 mil-

Headed to the dance floor



MICHAEL/MORNING NEWS

Dancing partners Pam Flowers and Cole Davis select songs from a list for their Dancing with the Stars performance.



Nick Townsend, Jeff Helton, Dr. Deepak Chowdhary and Dr. Supen Patel look at the seating chart for the Dancing with the Stars event.

Couples set for annual dance contest

BY MELISSA ROLLINS
Morning News
mrollins@florencenews.com

FLORENCE — The couples are set and the competition has begun. The Dancing with the Stars of Florence pairing party was held Thursday night at the Floyd Center at Carolinas Hospital System, giving the new group of celebrity dancers their first look at the competition ahead of them.

Mindy Taylor, School Foundation board member and a member of the planning committee for Dancing with the Stars, said the pairing party is usually the most stressful night for the dancers because everything is new.

"They are meeting their partner for the first time. They are trying to strategize about selling ads and selling tables," Taylor said.

See **DANCING**, Page 3A

Greek Orthodox Church to observe Feast of Epiphany

BY SHAMIRA MCCRAY
Morning News
smccray@florencenews.com

der the gazebo at The Palms course at Oakdale Lake in Florence.

Christian Church celebrates blessing services with water as a means of extending the bless-

ness it that way," Haros said. "Those who attend the service will also be sprinkled and



The Beaufort Gazette

FRIDAY, January 8, 2016

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2015 BEAUFORT COUNTY KILLINGS

2015 breaks record for homicides

The year was the deadliest in Beaufort County in at least the past 20 years

Port Royal faces lawsuit

Beaufort man charged in flawed church molestation case has filed a lawsuit against the town, DSS and others.

By **MATT McNAB**
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843-706-8125

A Beaufort man cleared of a charge of sexual conduct with a 4-year-old at a church Sunday school has filed a lawsuit against the town of Port Royal, alleging its police department slandered him and violated his civil rights in its handling of the investigation.

Both Joel Iacopelli and his wife, Marianne Iacopelli, filed suit against the town in Beaufort County court on Dec. 31. Both lawsuits also include police Sgt. Robert Bilyard, the Beaufort County Department of Social Services and two DSS employees — Latasha Williams and Kyra Speller — as defendants.

The lawsuit alleges that Iacopelli was slandered and maliciously prosecuted by the police department, which initiated and maintained the criminal process long after his charges had been dismissed. Iacopelli's arrest and the department's false accusations will follow Iacopelli the rest of his life, the lawsuit says.

Both lawsuits accuse Bilyard and the two DSS employees of violating the couple's Fourth, Fifth and 14th Amendment rights during their investigations.

Joel Iacopelli's lawsuit also includes Hope Haven of the Lowcountry as a defendant, which he alleges was negligent in interviewing the alleged victim, according to court records.

Iacopelli was charged July 10 with criminal sexual conduct with a minor under the age of 11 for allegedly touching the child inappropriately during a June 28 class at Community Bible Church in Port Royal. Six weeks later, following a preliminary hearing, Beaufort County's Magistrate Richard Beales



Iacopelli

MORE ONLINE
For video of Joel Iacopelli talking about the day of his arrest, click on this story at beaufortgazette.com.



File • Staff photo

Beaufort County Sheriff's deputies gather on Oct. 22 to investigate the scene of a fatal shooting in the Muddy Creek Road area of Hilton Head Island. Hilton Head resident Charles Miller, 30, was shot and killed in the area of Snider Walk. Brian Allen Jr., 22, was later arrested and charged with murder. Allen is being held at the Beaufort County Detention Center as he awaits court proceedings.

By **CAITLIN TURNER**
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This past year was the deadliest in Beaufort County in at least the past 20 years, more than doubling the previous year's number of homicides.

The Wednesday discovery of a body in Burton brings the number of homicides believed to have occurred in 2015 to 16, only the third time since 1996 that the number of killings has reached double digits. Six homicides were reported in

2014, and only three in 2013. The previous record is believed to have been 12 in 2012.

In May, when the Island Packet and Beaufort Gazette first reported about the large number of killings, Sheriff P.J. Tanner said he didn't see a trend developing. Today, he's changed his mind.



Seven days into the new year, police are already investigating three homicides. **7A.**

For an interactive chart showing the number of homicides over the

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