

Title: **State's dams must become top priority**

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■ WHAT OTHERS SAY

State's dams must become top priority

The following is the opinion of the newspaper represented and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Index-Journal.

At an additional cost of \$1.8 million per year, it is difficult to envision a rationale for South Carolina to not improve its dam safety program in the wake of last fall's torrential rains that caused nearly three dozen dams to fail.

A bill presented by South Carolina Speaker of the House Jay Lucas would nearly quadruple the budget for the program that's administered by the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, according to a report by The State newspaper. The department's current budget is about \$470,000, and it is woefully inadequate.

Unfortunately, South Carolina got irrefutable proof of just how inadequate the program now is. When October's 1,000-year rainfall event dumped more than 20 inches of water on parts of the state, 32 dams failed causing significant property damage and putting lives at risk.

An analysis of the state's dam safety program revealed that the state's network of 2,400 regulated dams is not inspected frequently enough and the staff that does the work is far too small. In addition, too many dams in the state are not being inspected at all.

In a detailed report in November, Greenville News investigative reporter Rick Brundrett revealed that DHEC has only 6.75 employee positions dedicated to inspecting all of the state's regulated dams. Unbelievably, that's an improvement from 2005 when only 1.5 full-time positions were in the program. At times, the program's budget has been as low as

\$200,000.

The national model calls for dam inspections every year for those structures that pose the greatest risk to life and property if they fail; every two years for the next class of dams, and every five years for the least risky dams. Brundrett's analysis found that at least a dozen dams that were under emergency order for repairs after the fall's floods had not been inspected in the past five years or more.

Such a lag should not be allowed to continue.

The dangers of a breached dam are far too great for South Carolina not to take this seriously. Although this state has a history of requiring agencies to operate on bare-bones budgets and kicking problems down the road, the need to fix this funding disparity should be obvious.

As DHEC director Catherine Heigel said, "We do have a role at the end of the day to keep people safe."

To their credit, lawmakers appear to readily see that need, as well.

Lucas' bill would expand the office by 13 staff members, allowing them to properly inspect and monitor the state's regulated dams and increase the number of dams that the agency inspects.

It is hard to imagine that this legislation would not get the support it deserves. The total cost to recover from the October deluge exceeds \$1 billion. Certainly only a fraction of that would have been prevented had the dams been inspected more routinely, but it seems worth the relatively small cost to make the dams safer.

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Once Lucas' bill is passed, the Legislature and the governor need to follow through with funding.

A spokeswoman for Gov. Nikki Haley acknowledged after the flood that there's a funding gap in the agency and said that there would likely be a more money for the program in the executive budget. That needs to happen.

The reality is, South Carolina gets heavy rains throughout the year. The 1,000-year rain might have been a freak occurrence, but it doesn't mean the state shouldn't be prepared for the next significant rainfall. Ensuring the state's dams are properly inspected, and that more of them are inspected, is simply common sense.

This should be an easy vote and it should happen very early in the upcoming legislative session.

— *The Greenville News*

Title: **S.C. comes through death and destruction with hope**
 Author: By Jeffrey Collins and Bruce Smith Associated Press
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S.C. comes through death and destruction with hope

By **JEFFREY COLLINS**
 AND **BRUCE SMITH**

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The police shooting of an unarmed black man in North Charleston. The killing of nine people during Bible study at a historic African-American church in Charleston. Historic flooding that dropped nearly half their yearly rain fall in less than two days. The Confederate flag flown on the Statehouse grounds coming down after multiple other efforts had failed.

The past year has been one of significant change for South Carolina. Here are a series of snapshots about the key moments and players in 2015:

WALTER SCOTT

Before his death was shown around the world and he be-

came a symbol of the ongoing debate over police shootings of unarmed African-Americans, Walter Scott was just a 50-year-old forklift driver at a warehouse and a father behind on his child support payments.

He was pulled over on April 4 for a broken brake light by North Charleston Officer Michael Slager. People go to jail all the time in South Carolina for missing child support payments and Scott, who was behind on his, called his mother from his car to say he might need her help getting bail.

Moments later, he ran from his car and around the corner. Slager ran after him toward a vacant field. A passer-by captured what happened next

on his cellphone. The video showed Slager firing eight shots at Scott's back. Scott was struck by several bullets and fell.

The shooting happened in a city whose officers faced years of accusations of mistreating minorities.

Scott's family called for calm, especially after Slager's swift arrest, saying they did not want Scott's memory soiled by violence.

A co-worker of Scott said at the time it was a fitting tribute. "He wouldn't hurt a fly, man," Ronald Smith said.

JOE RILEY

In his 40th and final year as Charleston's mayor, Joe Riley faced his most trying time.

The man who steered the city through Hurricane Hugo in 1989 found his toughest moments on a hot, sticky summer night when what he called "pure, pure concentrated evil" came to a church in his 345-year-old city.

After a call at 9:30 p.m. June 17, Riley hurried to historic Emanuel AME Church where nine black parishioners had been shot and killed during a Bible study.

In the days following, Riley again became the face of the historic city, comforting victims, attending funerals and being a voice of calm.

"I knew that in this incident everything I did, everything I said, had to be perfect," to ensure calm prevailed, Riley

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said.

The city — and indeed the whole nation — seemed to come together in the wake of the shootings, with thousands gathering on sweeping Ravened Bridge over the Cooper River in a show of unity several days later. President Obama and other dignitaries traveled to Charleston to pay their respects for those who died. More than \$5 million has been donated by thousands of people to help support the victims' families and fund college scholarships for Charleston-area students.

Riley has made it clear that he will continue to work on the issue of gun violence after he leaves office.

"We do not want to encroach on law-abiding citizens' rights to own a gun but we must prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands," Riley said at an event earlier this month at Emanuel to announce a new effort to curb gun violence.

The suspected killer in the Charleston shootings, Dylan Roof, was able to buy the gun that was used in the shootings because of a record keeping problem that prevented federal officials from disqualifying him before a three-day deadline expired.

RUSSELL OTT

Russell Ott knew that the Confederate flag flying outside the South Carolina statehouse had to come down, and it had to come down now — not later.

The eyes of the nation and the world were squarely fo-

cused on his place of work and the little known 37-year-old House member who took over his dad's seat back in 2013 was having trouble believing what was happening. He hadn't made a passionate speech imploring his colleagues to let go of the symbol of a bygone era, but he firmly believed it was time for it to happen and he didn't want to see the legislature and the state blow their chance of having it happen and risk looking like fools or obstructionists.

Gov. Nikki Haley had said less than a week after the slayings at Emanuel AME Church that the flag should come down and the state Senate had reached the same conclusion.

But as the sun set on July 8, the people who wanted the flag removed were stunned. Flag supporters in the house suddenly appeared to have enough votes for an amendment to the bill backed by Haley and the Senate that would postpone its passage, keeping the rebel banner flying outside the chambers. The flag supporters wanted a guarantee that the flag would be sent to a museum and they were willing to hold up the process for it, even if it meant going against the rising tide of support to bring it down.

Ott has been around the Legislature but never before had been a key figure. He lobbied for farmers for nearly a decade before replacing his dad and in three years had been the sponsor of one bill that has become law — creating a migratory waterfowl

committee. But he knew parliamentary rules and he knew there was an arcane, rarely used way that he could get the flag supporters what they wanted and also keep the state on pace to bring the banner down.

His goal was simple. The longer the debate went on, the more likely it was that the whole process would get derailed.

He and his colleagues went to work, twisting arms, holding last minute votes and watching the clock tick past midnight to allow them to vote on the final measure during a new day.

At 1 a.m. the bill finally passed. On Friday July 10 the flag finally came down. In South Carolina, however, the debate over the fate of the flag still rages on.

MAJ. GEN. ROBERT LIVINGSTON

It was the most important mission of South Carolina National Guard commander Maj. Gen. Robert Livingston's life, directing thousands of soldiers and civilians during South Carolina's historic floods.

Livingston was a true soldier working with Gov. Nikki Haley to carry out her wishes and by her side when she gave the public updates.

But people around the state left little doubt that Livingston's preparation in the days and years before the floods, and his decisive action as the disaster unfolded, prevented

a terrible situation from being so much worse.

"We were rescuing people at the same time we were putting things together back in Columbia," Livingston said.

Livingston helped get clean water into the pipes at Columbia hospitals worried about how many critically ill patients might die if they had to close and move them. His soldiers saved dozens of lives with air and boat rescues and helped repair washed out roads and bridges. They averted what would have been a disaster on top of a disaster by keeping Columbia's water system running and water coming from almost 400,000 taps by fixing a canal breach and laying pipe to get water into the treatment plant.

"A lot of the guys who were doing a lot of discussion had built roads and dams and things like that down in Ecuador and Honduras and places like that back in the 1980s and 90s," Livingston said. "They understood building structures in less than ideal conditions."

Now Livingston laughs that he has another set of problems, created by well-meaning South Carolinians who poured kindness at his soldiers for weeks.

"The support from the people of South Carolina was just tremendous," Livingston said. "I'm having to put half of my soldiers on the weight control program now because they got fed so many doughnuts, cookies and everything else."

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FILE/AP

A honor guard from the South Carolina Highway patrol lowers the Confederate battle flag as it is removed from the Capitol grounds in Columbia, S.C. in July 2015.

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Most doctors will be required to use prescription database

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Most doctors in South Carolina will soon be required to consult a statewide database of patients' medical history as a way to combat the state's rampant prescription painkiller problem.

The changes will direct any doctor who wants to bill either Medicaid or the state health plan to use the database that's been voluntary since 2008, said Christian Soura, director of the state's Department of Health and Human Services.

Announcements will likely go out in February on the mandate, which starts April 1, he told The Associated Press.

The South Carolina Medical Association supports the change, but "there will be some doctors unhappy about yet another step thrown into the mix," said its CEO, state Rep. Todd Atwater.

"Some say it will slow me down another minute and half I don't have, but really?" said Atwater, R-Lexington. "Sometimes you have to have a little inconvenience to do the right thing and get some of these opioids off the streets."

The mandate will come three years after Inspector General Patrick Maley recommended it in a report, describing high-prescribers as either motivated by money or naively helping "doctor shoppers." In response to his report, Gov. Nikki Haley created the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Council, which similarly concluded one year ago that mandating the database's use is key to combatting abuse of OxyContin, Percocet and other opioids.

Similar mandates enacted in New York and Tennessee in 2012 resulted in drops of 75 percent and 36 percent, respectively, a year later in patients seeing multiple doctors for the same drugs, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2014 Vital Signs report.

That report ranked South Carolina 11th highest nationwide in prescribing painkillers, with 102 prescriptions written for every 100 people.

"When you look at the impact of other states with similar policies, it's harder to say, 'I don't want to spend another minute or two in front of the computer,'" Soura said of doctors' decreasing resistance.

Technology improvements to the database were also critical to gaining their support and — according to officials — the reason for delaying the mandate.

A law passed in June 2014 required pharmacists to report daily on the controlled substances they sell, to ensure the database is regularly updated. But a clause specified that doctors and pharmacists don't have to actually consult it before prescribing or dispensing medicine.

According to the council's report six months later, just 21

percent of South Carolina's prescribers had registered for the Prescription Monitoring Program and few of them actually used it.

Officials say that's partly because registering required filling out paperwork, getting it notarized and mailing the application to DHEC. And only the prescribing doctor had a login to access the database.

Under improvements that went live Nov. 23, doctors can register online and set up an account for a delegate, such as a nurse, to run the queries. The new system also summarizes patients' prescription history, calculates their daily opioid dose and generates an alert if their prescriptions already exceed the recommended amount, said Lisa Thomson, DHEC's drug control director.

The changes were "about making the system user-friendly and not disrupting work flows," said Bryan Amick, pharmacy director at the state's Medicaid agency and a member of the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Council.

South Carolina will join 29 states that require doctors or pharmacists to consult a prescription database in at least certain circumstances. Nevada was the first to do so in 2007. Such a database exists in every state except Missouri, according to the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws.

The decree will affect the vast majority of doctors in South Carolina, though the exact percentage is unclear. About 1 million South Carolinians get their health care through Medicaid, while the state health plan covers more than 460,000 people, when combining public employees, retirees, their spouses and dependents.

SC's painkiller abuse problem

COLUMBIA — Beginning this spring, most doctors will be required to register and use a state database of patients' prescription history. Here's a look at South Carolina's painkiller abuse problem and current use of the Prescription Monitoring Program:

■ Last fiscal year, 291.4 million opiates were dispensed statewide to 1.2 million patients. Compared to the previous year, that's 18.6 million more opiates to 670 fewer patients.

■ In 2014, at least 487 South Carolinians died by accidentally overdosing on a prescription drug. That's up from 236 in 2013 and 225 in 2012. The state's public health agency doesn't track how many of those were painkiller prescriptions.

■ The database helped lead to 400 arrests last fiscal year. Charges included controlled substance fraud, doctor shopping and prescription forging. Health care professionals made up a quarter of those arrested. The agency doesn't track case outcomes.



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■ About 4,300 doctors have registered to use the database. That's little change from last year. However, those registered are consulting it more often. Doctors and pharmacists ran more than 1 million queries on patients in the fiscal year ending June 30. That's nearly 417,000 more than the previous year. The increase follows a June 2014 law allowing them to authorize a delegate, such as a nurse, to run the query for them. The agency didn't breakdown the query numbers by doctors and pharmacists.

■ That law also required doctors to complete two credit hours of training on responsibly prescribing opioids as part of their license renewal. So far, more than 7,500 doctors have done so.

■ The annual operating cost of the more user-friendly database launched Nov. 23 is \$102,000.

SOURCE: SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

Title: **Businesses take message against drilling to Haley**
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Businesses take message against drilling to Haley

By ANITA CRONE
 South Strand News

Three representatives of small South Strand businesses took their opposition to offshore drilling and seismic testing to Gov. Nikki Haley's representatives in Columbia on Dec. 16, pointing out potential economic and environmental problems with the proposal that has been endorsed by the governor.

The trio – Sandra Bundy and Rick Baumann of Murrells Inlet and Peg Howell of Pawleys Island – argued against claims by proponents of testing and drilling that the procedures are safe and would not adversely affect the all-important tourism industry along the South Strand.

They also joined in presenting the governor's office with a petition signed by more than 400 small business-owners, more than 65 of them in Georgetown, Pawleys Island and Murrells Inlet, opposing drilling and testing.

"Any time you get a small business-owner to put his name on anything that has political implications, you know it's important," said Frank Knapp, president and CEO of the SC Small Business Chamber of Commerce.

Howell, president of Howell Consulting Group, a home-based business, told the gathered media, that "all one needs to run a home-based business is a computer, a telephone, Internet access and transportation to your clients' offices and, of course, a home."

She added more than 16 million people work from home in the U.S. and, as that number is predicted to increase by 64 percent in the next four years, fewer people may settle along the South Carolina coast.

"Owners of home-based businesses choose where they want to live," Howell said. "Seven years ago, my husband and I chose Pawleys Island. I know that when the South Carolina coast is threatened by damage from offshore drilling, this once beautiful place will no longer be an attractive choice to home-based businesses. We will take our businesses, our revenues, our tax dollars and our homes elsewhere."

Bundy, a real estate agent, was equally strong in her opposition. She cited statistics from an economic impact study that Coastal Carolina University completed for Murrells Inlet 2020 that set the Marsh Walk's impact on the 29576 ZIP code at \$249 million of the area's total \$720 million.

"The most remote possibility of an oil spill is not worth the risk of our estuary, our marsh or the ocean," she said. Bundy said after the BP Horizon spill, real estate sales were down in the Gulf of Mexico, even in areas not affected by the spill.

An April 20, 2010, explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil drilling platform started what NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration calls "the largest marine oil spill in U.S. history," and released millions of barrels of oil into the Gulf.

"The perception of oil beaches kept away visitors and buy-

ers who normally filled homes along the coast," Bundy said. "We can create a better legacy for South Carolina, and I challenge Gov. Haley to do just that, by changing her position on drilling in the Atlantic."

Baumann, founder of Murrells Inlet Seafood, was steadfast in his opposition to drilling, citing what he called the continuing profound effect of the BP Horizon disaster.

"Going on six years now after the event, the Gulf is not back to business as usual as the thousands of BP TV commercials we have seen would indicate," Baumann said.

He cited fishery statistics that he said "paint a totally different picture" of business as usual in the Gulf.

"Louisiana (Department of Natural Resources) statistics show a drastic landings decline in seven of eight critical commercial and recreational fish species," Baumann said. "Depending on which landing statistics you use, yellowfin tuna, the most important money fish harvested in the gulf, are down from 53 to 70 percent since the spill."

All of the speakers, including Robert Barber of Bowens Island Restaurant and Kathie Livingston, representing the Bulls Bay Chamber of Commerce, Nature Adventures Outfitters, S.C. Paddlesports Industries Association and the S.C. Nature-Based Tourism Association, called on Haley to reverse course and remove South Carolina from the four states with offshore areas that are considered for drilling.