



Title: **Gov's office: Won't say where Haley went on trip**
 Author:
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Gov's office: Won't say where Haley went on trip

COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley is traveling outside South Carolina, but the governor's office refuses to give her whereabouts, saying only that she's on a job recruiting trip.

Spokesman Rob Godfrey said Monday that Haley and Commerce Department officials are on an economic development mission, which is confidential because of its competitive nature. Godfrey says details of the trip and its cost will be released when feasible.

Haley's office said she left Sunday with one member of her staff and Commerce officials.

Title: **Suspended president of SC State University sues school**
 Author: By SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press
 Size: 33.94 square inch
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Suspended president of SC State University sues school

By SEANNA ADCOX

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — The suspended president of financially troubled South Carolina State University sued the school on Tuesday for breaking his contract and asked the court where he filed suit to block his expected firing.

Thomas Elzey sued SC State in Orangeburg County court a day before trustees were set to meet privately to get legal advice amid ongoing turmoil involving South Carolina's only pub-

lic historically black university, which is wrestling with escalating debt. Last week, the trustees put Elzey on paid leave and promised to have more information on his fate Wednesday.

Under a four-year contract, which extends to summer 2017, Elzey can be fired only for cause. The lawsuit notes the suspension occurred less than two weeks after the board publicly backed him, despite legislators' calls for his removal, and that trustees gave him a satisfactory review last summer.

Breaking his contract without cause would cost \$428,000, which

includes \$30,000 for unused vacation, according to an estimate from state economic advisers, dated Tuesday.

Elzey's lawsuit seeks more than that. While giving no specific amount, it asks for lost wages and benefits, as well as compensation for the ordeal's emotional distress and embarrassment.

"We did try to resolve this prior to filing the complaint, and our efforts were not successful," said his attorney, Nancy Bloodgood of Charleston.

SC State spokeswoman Sonja Bennett-Bellamy said the school had no comment on the ongoing legal matter.

Elzey is supposed to be paid \$305,400 this year, with \$173,400 funded by taxpayers and

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SC STATE

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\$132,000 by the school's foundation. He also receives a \$25,000 annual housing allowance and is entitled to six weeks of paid vacation, according to the Budget and Control Board.

The lawsuit seeks to maintain Elzey's paid-leave status until the lawsuit's resolved.

Meanwhile, the Legisla-

ture moved closer to firing all trustees.

A House panel advanced a measure Tuesday to the full Ways and Means Committee that would put the state's financial oversight board temporarily in charge of the university until it gets out of debt. The measure also requires the board, chaired by Gov. Nikki Haley, to fire Elzey.

Also on Tuesday, senators

voted to give priority status to Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman's version of the idea, clearing the way for floor debate Wednesday. That fast-tracked proposal would create a new, five-member board to oversee SC State, with its members appointed by Leatherman and other GOP leaders. Elzey would not necessarily be

fired.

Sen. Gerald Malloy, D-Hartsville, objected, saying five white, Republican legislators should not decide all appointees to the historically black school. He said alumni should be more involved.

But Sen. Darrell Jackson, D-Columbia, asked his colleagues to support the measure.



THOMAS
ELZEY

Title: **Project results in books for United Way, partnering agencies**
 Author: By JAY MICHAELS jmichaels@indexjournal.com
 Size: 49.44 square inch
 Greenwood, SC Circulation: 16494



Project results in books for United Way, partnering agencies

By JAY MICHAELS

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Greenwood High School senior Mary Beth Grant participated in Furman University's Emerging Public Leaders program last summer and was tasked to come up with a community service project for her neighborhood.

On Wednesday, that project came to fruition

Grant donated books that were collected from October to February to the United Way of Greenwood and Abbeville Counties.

"I've always loved books," Grant said. "My mom is an elementary school teacher. I saw that students weren't reading on grade level."

She saw this as an opportunity to help.

"It's a good project," she said.

Grant organized the book drive with several members of her community. They included her senior class, her Links at Stoney Point neighbors, Westminster Presbyterian Church members, friends and family.

Grant's efforts helped collect 1,200 books. She decided to donate the books to United Way and partner-

ing agencies and contacted United Way Director of Community Impact Lindsay Henrichs.

"(Mary Beth) sent an email months ago," Henrichs said. "We do not have direct services. We give products to partnering agencies who work with children."

Henrichs said she thought the project was a neat idea.

"Mary Beth is completing her education, but she wanted to make sure that kids have an opportunity to further her education," Henrichs said. "It shows that you're never too young to make a difference."

Partnering organizations receiving books include The Children's Center, Bowers-Rodgers, Healthy Learners and Laurens Safe Home.

The Children's Center's LPN for Programs Yareni Beltran said the books will help.

"We do a visitation program," Beltran said, adding the books will "encourage moms to read through pregnancy while they are in our program."

The center's programs include Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Family and Healthy Steps.

Kayse Fabans is the victims advocate for Laurens County Safe Home.

"We don't get a lot of adult books, and we're getting them today," Fabans said. "It's a good thing."

Healthy Learners Program Manager Elaine Copeland said her agency serves a lot of elementary school children.

"We are a United Way partnering agency," Copeland said. "Our program helps kindergarten through high school students in the district who have unmet health needs."

Copeland's co-worker, Student Services Coordinator Alice Balentine, said the book drive speaks to their mission.

"The populations we work with don't get books very often," Balentine said.

Grant learned a lot from participating in Furman's program.

"I met Gov. Nikki Haley and former Secretary of Education Richard Riley," she said.

Her experience might explain her future plans.

"I'd like to go to Wofford (College) or Clemson (University)," Grant said. "I want to study political science."

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JAY MICHAELS | INDEX-JOURNAL

From left, Kayse Fabens of Laurens County Safe Home, Program Manager Elaine Copeland and Student Services Coordinator Alice Balentine from Healthy Learners, Greenwood High School senior Mary Beth Grant, United Way Director of Community Impact Lindsay Henrichs and Children's Center LPN for Programs Yareni Beltran all help unpack donated books Wednesday afternoon.



Title: **Senate looks for its own plan for more money for SC roads**
 Author: By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press
 Size: 40.76 square inch
 Greenwood, SC Circulation: 16494

■ MAINTAIN AND REPAIR

Senate looks for its own plan for more money for SC roads

By JEFFREY COLLINS
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA — As the South Carolina House prepares to begin debating how to raise more money to maintain and repair state roads, several other plans are being discussed by a special Senate committee.

While two bills in the House look to raise about \$400 million more for roads a year, the Senate appears to want to direct a larger amount to roads.

The Senate also appears less interested than the House and Gov. Nikki Haley in changing the way the South Carolina Department of Transportation operates.

In a report last year, the DOT estimated it needed more than \$1 billion extra to get the state's roads and bridges to good condition.

A special Senate committee is reviewing six bills with four different plans to increase road revenue. Here are highlights of the plans.

Grooms' funding plan

ROADS

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by Sen. Paul Thurmond.

After DOT submits its budget, any tax increase needed would be considered by a financial accountability board of state leaders, said Thurmond, R-Charleston.

But South Carolina taxpayers wouldn't have to pay the extra tax under Thurmond's plan. He is still working out the details, but said he would like a system where South Carolina drivers could scan their licenses at the pump, and get a printout at the end of the year of how much fuel they bought and

taxes paid. They would then get that money back on their income taxes.

Thurmond acknowledges there may be problems with the Commerce Clause in the U.S. Constitution by charging out-of-state drivers and not South Carolina residents. But he is asking for more research.

"We can charge more for out-of state people who go to college and out-of-state fishing licenses," Thurmond said.

Local gas tax

Counties could have referendums to decide if their

Sen. Larry Grooms has two bills to increase road funding. Both would involve raising the gas tax by 20 cents over a decade, while incrementally cutting the state's income tax rate 2 percentage points.

He also wants to take 20 percent of any new revenue South Carolina gets each budget year and put it toward roads until 5 percent of the state's general budget is paying for highways and bridges.

Grooms said his plans will raise much more than the \$400 million per year the House and governor seem focused on.

"Four-hundred million dollars doesn't even buy us any new lane capacity," said Grooms, R-Charleston, at the subcommittee meeting last week.

Gas tax rebate

South Carolina drivers would get a break from gas tax increases under a plan sponsored

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taxpayers were willing to charge a countywide 5-cent gas tax, under a bill filed by Sen. Greg Gregory, R-Lancaster.

Any county that passes the tax could use the money for its own roads. A county could hold a vote every two years.

Borrowing for interstates

Sen. Nikki Setzler wants South Carolina to borrow hundreds of millions of dollars to put new lanes on its interstates.

Setzler's bill would place about \$60 million from sales tax collected on vehicles

into a Lane Expansion Fund in the State Infrastructure Bank. That money would be used to fund road construction borrowing.

"You want to do something that would put us on the cutting edge very quick? Widen the interstates," said Setzler, D-West Columbia.

South Carolina has 851 miles of interstate highway. About 80 percent of it has only two lanes in each direction. But expanding interstates is expensive. A current project to make a 10-mile stretch of Interstate 26 east of Columbia six lanes is costing \$76 million.

Title: **Joe Riley mentions anti-union site in a new Boeing radio ad**
 Author: ASSOCIATED PRESS
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Joe Riley mentions anti-union site in a new Boeing radio ad

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLESTON — Charleston Mayor Joe Riley has recorded a radio ad promoting Boeing South Carolina in which he also mentions a company website with an anti-union message.

Riley tells *The Post and Courier* he agreed to make the ad because Boeing is a great company with a big impact on the economy.

In the ad running on Charleston radio stations he notes that Boeing has meant thousands of jobs for the economy and has made important contributions to local organizations.

He also suggests that listeners who want more information go to the website www.boeing.com.

The website has a video saying that unions break their promises all the time and can't guarantee anything.

"Union members across the country get laid off all the time," the video says, adding "what matters most to a union is when and how it can collect dues."

Riley said he's not recommending that employees vote for or against a union.

"I wouldn't tell anyone how to vote," he told the newspaper. "That would be up to employees."

He also would not say whether he favors a union.

"I'm not a union employee, so I won't take a position," Riley said. "But I am very impressed with the quality of Boeing."

The International Association of Machinists union has been ramping up efforts to organize the company's North Charleston operations, where Boeing makes the 787 Dreamliner. The union represents thousands of Boeing production workers in Washington state.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley has recorded radio ads urging Boeing workers in South Carolina to reject efforts to establish a union.

What do you think?

Comment on this story at www.aikenstandard.com, write to Opinions, *Aiken Standard*, Box 456, Aiken, S.C. 29802 or send an email to editorial@aikenstandard.com.



Title: **Storm funds may be matched**
 Author: BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER mschechter@aikenstandard.com
 Size: 57.66 square inch
 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635

Storm funds may be matched

Official: Haley would support funding in budget

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER
 mschechter@aikenstandard.com

There is the possibility local governments affected by the February 2014 ice storm might receive a state match for storm expenses.

After South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley's press secretary stated earlier this month that Haley's recommendation to provide a state match for local governments in fiscal year 2014-15 was not supported by the General Assembly, therefore a recommendation was not included in the upcoming

fiscal year 2015-16 budget, Press Secretary Chaney Adams said she would in fact support matching Winter Storm Pax expenses in the upcoming budget.

"Since the beginning of her administration, Governor Haley has made emergency management one of her highest priorities and South Carolina's response to last year's winter storm reflects tireless planning and coordination with local governments, state agencies and private utilities," Adams said

via email. "Last year, the governor recommended that the General Assembly appropriate funds that would cover local governments costs from the storms. Although this did not ultimately happen because the General Assembly did not support her recommendation, the governor would support such funding in the (fiscal year) 2015-16 budget."

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FUNDS

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In March 2014, President Barack Obama signed a declaration to grant federal reimbursement to areas affected by the February ice storm, after declaring South Carolina a state of emergency. This declaration prompted a letter from Haley in May 2014 to Senate Finance Chairman Hugh Leatherman and Brian White, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, outlining funding requests to agencies with expenses that had not yet been reimbursed.

Traditionally, local governments will handle more than half of the cost to cover storm recovery and emergency services after a disaster declaration is announced, and states then handle additional costs to take some of the financial pressure off the local governments and agencies.

For Aiken County and the 21 other counties hit by the ice storm, Haley requested about \$16 million of additional nonrecurring funds go toward recovery and emergency costs,

including those for municipalities, and about \$153,000 to go toward departments of public safety.

Aiken County spent a total of about \$33.2 million to pick up more than 1 million cubic yards of debris, clean up debris and enact recovery and emergency services after the ice storm, according to County Administrator Clay Killian. To date, the County has received federal reimbursement of nearly \$22 million out of the expected \$27 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA. That now leaves the County paying about \$6.1 million out of pocket.

Soon after Haley's letter, S.C. Emergency Management Division Director Kim Stenson sent a letter to Haley, White and Leatherman, former S.C.

House Speaker Bobby Harrell and S.C. Sen. John Courson asking how the non-federal share would be paid for.

Fast-forward a year later, and conversations on a state match, at least in the House Ways and

Means Committee, appeared to have died down.

"As far as it goes this year, to my knowledge, there has been no request and there has been no discussion of this," said S.C. Rep. Murrell Smith, R-Sumter. "That's something that obviously needs to be brought to the attention of the budget writers if there is money available – how it would be spent and what it would be used for to help offset the cost

from the ice storm from a year ago."

S.C. Rep. Bill Clyburn, D-Aiken, like Murrell, serves on the S.C. House Ways and Means Committee. Clyburn said he remembered no such discussion about matching funds, and instead thought Haley or Senate Finance would have handled it.

"I've been trying to get some funds to help out Aiken and Edgefield County, and I certainly would have liked to see Ways and Means move forward with that, but it just never came to be," Clyburn said. "I thought the governor or the Senate would have dealt with

it, but I haven't heard anything from the governor or Senate."

But State Sen. Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, said he doesn't "put blame on the governor's office."

"The legislature writes the budget; the legislature passes the budget," Massey said. "I think it is incumbent on those who are on the budget writing committees to include this funding when they're writing the budget."

Maayan Schechter is the local government reporter with *Aiken Standard*. An Atlanta native, she has a mass communications-journalism degree with the University of North Carolina Asheville.

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Haley

Title: **State's lack of relief a huge budget lapse**

Author:

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State's lack of relief a huge budget lapse

There seems to be little talk and a lot of finger pointing as the 2015-2016 budget discussions get underway at the South Carolina Statehouse.

Any discussion of providing relief funding from Winter Storm PAX that hit the state in February 2014 has apparently been non-existent, according to members of the House Ways and Means committee, which is essentially the budget writing committee in the S.C. House of Representatives. Also, S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley's executive budget recommendation for the upcoming fiscal year includes nothing for storm relief. The governor's office has essentially said they didn't recommend any funding because they didn't believe the legislature will pass funding.

While the governor doesn't write the budget, it's part of her responsibility to nudge the General Assembly to appropriate funding for items he or she finds particularly important. Haley, for instance, did this successfully with her \$160 million education reform package that she pushed for last year. Now, a statement released from her office is saying that since the "General Assembly chose not to support" the \$16 million in non-recurring funding that she pitched very late in the legislature's budget writing process in 2014, the 2015-16 executive budget now doesn't include such a recommendation. This has brought reasonable and expected questions from local government officials, particularly in Aiken County – which was hit the hardest by the storm – about what can be done locally to soften the fiscal blow of not getting any relief from the state. Aiken County Administrator Clay Killian and Emergen-

cy Services Director Tommy Thompson explained to the *Aiken Standard* that after virtually every natural disaster, the state has pitched in financially to take some of the burden off local governments.

To not provide funding in the 2015-2016 budget, would be a major gut punch to Aiken County's budget. The County, in particular, worked expeditiously to clean up roads in order to get the area back to normal as quickly as possible. About \$33.2 million in costs were incurred, according to Killian. To date, the County has received federal reimbursement of nearly \$22 million out of the expected \$27 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA. That now leaves the County paying about \$6.1 million out of pocket.

Sure, the governor's budget is only a recommendation. However, her recommendations at least give legislators on the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance committees a framework for future expenditures. For her – or apparently none of her cabinet officials – to give these committees a reminder of the costs incurred by local governments during the storm last year is a major omission.

It's ultimately incumbent upon the legislature to write and pass the budget, so let's hope they have the political foresight to include fiscally responsible, yet appropriate dollars for local governments to cope with these storm costs.

To be this late in the game, however, with seemingly little to no indication of doing so is already a major blunder on the part of both the governor and the legislature.

Title: **State's lack of relief a huge budget lapse**

Author:

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FILE PHOTO BY TEDDY KULMALA

Days after Winter Storm Pax touched down in Aiken County, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, standing next to residents and members of the Aiken County Legislative Delegation, addressed reporters and residents on the damage done to the County from the February ice storm.

Title: **Modern dancers bring their craft to kids**
 Author: BY ROB NOVIT rnovit@aikenstandard.com
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Modern dancers bring their craft to kids

BY ROB NOVIT

rnovit@aikenstandard.com

Like other children on Saturday, Olivia Overstreet and Skylar Seigler not only watched the modern dancers, they got to dance with them on the Etherredge Center stage.

The girls came up with just the right word to describe Juilliard Juniors Dance performers – “lyrical” – in the way they put their bodies into their musical interpretations.

The performers include Juilliard graduates Troy Ogilvie and Belinda McGuire. They were joined by Adam Weinert, who also attended Juilliard. All three have extensive careers in other components of dance, among them choreography and production.

Juilliard in Aiken officials have formally kicked off its annual week-long celebration of

vocal, instrumental and dance events. The Juniors Dance program, held at the Etherredge Center, is the first in a series of outreach events for young people.

The dance program “is so much fun,” said Janice Jennings, Juilliard in Aiken’s executive director. “We do a tremendous amount of outreach in the community and the schools throughout the year.”

The three performers have studied in all forms of dance, ultimately choosing modern dance.

“It involves my whole person,” Weinert said to the children. “We hope we can show you

some ways that this dancing is a way of making movements, the kind of things we do all day long.”

He and his collaborators will appear at the URS Center for the Performing Arts on Tuesday at 8 p.m. Ogilvie admitted she and her friends expected to be more nervous on stage in front of the children, not the adults.

“We don’t do a lot of outreach,” she said. “But teaching is really important. If it’s the first time someone is exposed to dance, it can be quite formative.”

Bethany Reesor has three daughters – Isabella, Abigail and Olivia – all of them studying at the Carolina Dance Studio.

“We thought it was great,” Reesor said. “We’re excited for Juilliard and having a little dance demo for the little ones. It was wonderful for them to see another discipline of dance.”

Three outreach programs are scheduled on Tuesday. Aiken

County middle and regional high school students will participate in trumpet and piano master classes at USC Aiken at 10 a.m. Middle school students will attend a “Young People’s Concert,” featuring the Allant Trio at the First Baptist Church of Aiken at 10:30 a.m.

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley will visit East Aiken School of the Arts on Wednesday. During her stay, the children will meet two pre-college Juilliard students – violinist Qing Chen and pianist Juliana Han.

Senior writer **Rob Novit** is the *Aiken Standard’s* education reporter and has been with the newspaper since September 2001. He is a native of Walterboro and majored in journalism at the University of Georgia.

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STAFF PHOTO BY ROB NOVIT

Kids in the audience got to join the performers on stage during the Juilliard Juniors Dance on Saturday. Belinda McGuire practiced with these children before making the number "formal."

Title: **'Selma is now'**
 Author: BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER mschechter@aikenstandard.com
 Size: 139.19 square inch
 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



'Selma is now'

Obama talks civil rights in his first visit to S.C. since 2008

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER
 mschechter@aikenstandard.com

COLUMBIA — In what was a highly anticipated speech for South Carolina residents Friday, President Barack Obama told the crowd of mostly college-aged individuals that the events which occurred in Selma, Alabama, 50 years ago are still relevant today.

More than 1,000 people packed into the Benedict College gym to welcome the president back into a state he hadn't stepped foot in since the 2008 primary election.

The main impetus for the event at the historically black college in Columbia was for a more question-and-answer-style town hall, but Obama took a moment to talk about an event in United States history that helped shift the path of the civil rights movement.

"Because Selma is not just about commemorating the past, it's about honoring the legends who helped change this country through your actions today in the here and now; Selma

OBAMA

CONTINUED from 1A

One of those individuals who helped shape the civil rights movement was Clyburn, who will stand with Obama this weekend on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, marking the 50th anniversary of "Bloody Sunday," a time in the

is now," Obama said, later making reference to civil rights icons U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., and U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C. "Selma is about the courage of ordinary people doing extraordinary things because they believe they can change the country; they can shape our nation's destiny."

Selma, Obama said, is about each "of us asking ourselves what we can do to make America better."

Pointing to the crowd, Obama said it's been young people who have helped lead the march, young people who "stubbornly insisted on justice, stubbornly refused to accept the world as it is."

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INSIDE TODAY

Obama: Ferguson report exposed racially biased system, **7A**
 Anniversary of Selma march rekindles Ferguson comparisons, **9A**

nation's history most recently referenced in the Hollywood blockbuster "Selma."

Although Selma was the foundation of Obama's speech, he referenced the strong jobs report just published, and his mentoring program established in February 2014, "My Brother's Keeper."

He also took on several un-

related questions from those in audience, such as 10-year-old Trace Adams's question about when did Obama know he wanted to be president, the debate over the contentious Keystone XL Pipeline, and the cost of college tuition.

"When he said, 'I'll take some questions,' my dad and I just had an idea, came up

with a question and he called my hand and I was amazed; I got to ask the president a question," Adams said. "I'll definitely use his (Obama) advice to change my future and possibly everybody else's in here."

In somewhat of a shift from the previous questions, one au-

Because Selma is not just about commemorating the past, it's about honoring the legends who helped change this country through your actions today in the here and now; Selma is now.

President Barack Obama

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dience member asked the president why Attorney General

Eric Holder, who was present Friday, did not charge Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson with a crime in the shooting death of unarmed teenager Michael Brown.

Obama appeared to take his time answering the question, stopping every few words.

He said there were two separate issues in respect to Ferguson – the case of Wilson and Brown and the newly released federal report that Obama said showed an “oppressive and abusive situation.”

“And there the finding was very clear, and it’s available

for everybody to read. What we saw was that the Ferguson police department, in conjunction with the municipality, saw traffic stops, arrests, tickets as a revenue generator as opposed to serving the community; and that it, systematically, was biased against African-Americans ...”

The eager questions from individuals and the multiple generations listening in on Obama’s words – those people – were the individuals who helped make Obama’s presidency happen, said South Carolina Democratic Party former Chairman Dick Harpootlian.

“He’s returned here to thank

us and to bring a message,” Harpootlian said. “The message is: If you grow up in a single-parent home, if you grow up in poverty, if you grow up an African-American young man, then if you work hard and you apply yourself, you could be president of the United States; that’s the American dream.”

Tarissa Young-Clayborn, a 22-year-old with the American Corps program City Year, said what she took away from Obama’s words Friday was a sense of optimism and hope.

“I work with fifth-graders; I have a lot of young men who are on the wrong path, and

they are very angry,” Young-Clayborn said. “I am walking

away today to let them know it doesn’t matter where you come from because you have opportunities. I actually took a video of when I asked the president my question, and I am going to show them – your president said you can do anything you put your mind to.”

Maayan Schechter is the local government reporter with *Aiken Standard*. Follow her on Twitter @MaayanSchechter.



PHOTO GALLERY
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STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL ULMER

President Barack Obama visited Benedict College in Columbia on Friday, his first visit to South Carolina since 2008.

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STAFF PHOTO BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER

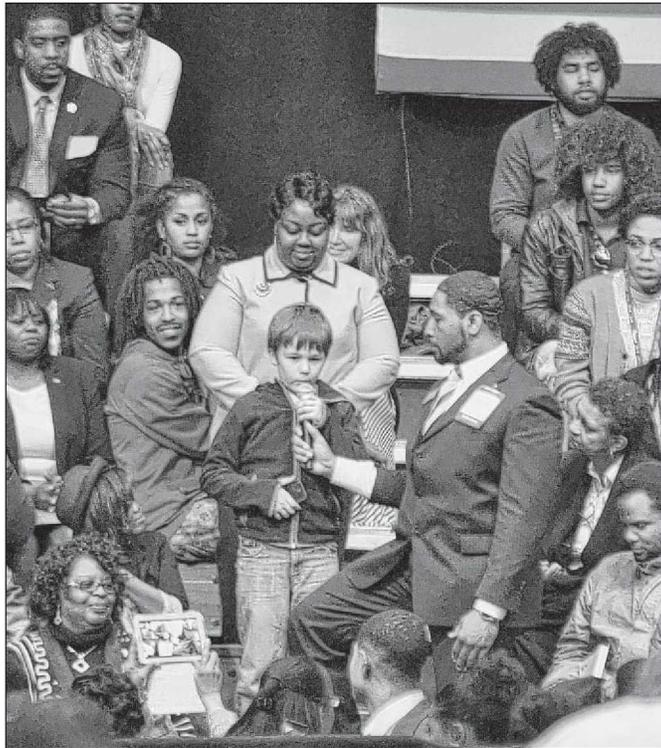
Tarissa Young-Clayborn, 22, left, with the AmeriCorps program City Year, asked President Barack Obama a question Friday at Benedict College in Columbia. Young-Clayborn said she walked away from the town-hall event filled with optimism and hope. She can't wait to visit the fifth-graders she works with to share with them her experience and a video from the event.



AP PHOTO/CAROLYN KASTER

Columbia Mayor Stephen Benjamin, left, and S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley greet President Barack Obama upon his arrival on Air Force One at Columbia Metropolitan Airport, on Friday, en route to Benedict College for a town-hall meeting about the importance of community involvement.

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STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL ULMER

Trace Adams, 10, received the opportunity Friday to ask President Barack Obama a question during his town-hall event at Benedict College in Columbia. Trace asked Obama, when did he know he wanted to be president?

Title: **Stop stalling efforts aimed at approving ethics reform**
 Author: THE POST AND COURIER Charleston
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Stop stalling efforts aimed at approving ethics reform

THE POST AND COURIER
Charleston

Different S.C. state senators give different reasons for opposing a bill to clean up the way ethics complaints against elected officials are handled.

None of those reasons is adequate, and S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley and S.C. House Speaker Jay Lucas are to be commended for pushing senators toward reform. The facts are on their side.

One reason senators have given is that reform isn't necessary. They point to the case of Robert Ford, who resigned from the Senate after being charged with ethics violations, as an indication that the present law works just fine.

But Ford's ethics problems existed long before the Senate took action — indicating the need for a tougher law.

Some senators say voters don't care about ethics reform. But how many voters really don't care if elected officials are corrupt?

Some senators say ethics reform is less important than finding ways to fix the state's inadequate roads and bridges.

Well then, senators shouldn't spend any more time than necessary on it.

The House has passed a fine

ethics bill. And Senate Judiciary Chairman Larry Martin, R-Pickens, has proposed a fine ethics bill for the Senate.

Instead of dickering, just revive the bill and approve it. Then move on to roads and bridges.

The sticking point in the Senate has been the investigation of members. Sen. Martin's bill calls for the State Ethics Commission to take the lead, its members to include four appointed by the governor, four by the legislature and four by the Supreme Court.

The commission also has the benefit of staff members who are SLED-certified and trained to do investigations, which can be complicated and protracted.

Any move to water down the independent investigation provision — as was offered by S.C. Sen. Luke Rankin, R-Conway — is unacceptable. Indeed, it was Rankin's amendment that contributed to Martin's bill failing by a 24-19 vote. In the end, the question is still whether senators think it's wise to let the fox keep guarding the henhouse.

S.C. Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, opposed Mr. Martin's bill, saying it's the House that has trouble self-policing, not the Senate. And House Speaker Bobby Harrell did resign last year and plead guilty to misus-

ing campaign funds for personal expenses.

But if the Senate doesn't pass legislation to fix it, the House will have no choice but to continue to operate as it does now.

Meanwhile, the more the Senate blocks ethics reform, the more people will ask, "What do these senators have to hide?"

Certainly those senators who act with integrity — presumably the vast majority — should be particularly eager for Martin's bill to pass. They do not deserve to live under the shadow of public suspicion that comes with the present law.

Of course, the manner of investigating ethics complaints is not the only point of reform. The public should know where their elected officials get their money, including money through political action committees, or PACs.

South Carolina indeed has major problems to solve beyond ethics reform. And our the state needs insightful men and women to make well-informed decisions on such significant issues.

But effective ethics reform is a serious concern, too — and can help assure that those calls are being made for the right reasons.

The House has done its job on that front.

Now it's the Senate's turn.