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OTHER VOICES: EDITORIALS FROM ACROSS THE STATE

The Greenville News on state's report card for government ethics laws:

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Yet South Carolina lawmakers have seemed perfectly content with scores consistently that low - or lower - on the report card for government ethics laws. It's inexcusable. The state ranked 36th among the 50 states in a report that demonstrated most states have room to improve their ethics laws. The highest grade given was a C.

Sure our state's grade is up from an 'F' the year before on the Center for Public Integrity report, but that's no thanks to any meaningful reform here.

For three years running, the South Carolina Legislature has stubbornly refused to hold itself accountable by passing ethics reform with any teeth. It consistently tries to weaken tough reforms, limit who can hold lawmakers accountable or simply refuse to be governed.

Why would it reform ethics laws, when the report calls state ethics laws a "Wild West" of loose laws and accountability where elected officials can do what they want with virtual impunity.

The report said South Carolina has a high "enforcement gap" between its ethics laws and how they are carried

out; that it discourages citizens from requesting public information by charging excessive fees or threatening to punish people who make "excessive" requests; and that it has too much in unregulated political contributions.

We have frequently weighed in on these failures, and will again and again until they are fixed.

One of the most significant shortcomings in the state's ethics laws is that legislators are accountable only to themselves. Last session, senators killed a bill that would have created an independent body to investigate ethics complaints against both houses, saying it was the House that had the ethics problem.

Such logic defies understanding. The Senate is not uniquely able to police its own ethics. It only makes sense that a body with no ties to the Legislature would be able to better investigate complaints in both houses. A system where lawmakers judge themselves is fertile ground for favoritism and manipulation.

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Former state Sen. Robert Ford of Charleston pleaded guilty in January to misconduct in office, forgery and two counts of ethics violations. Prosecutors alleged that Ford committed 350 ethics violations including converting campaign funds for personal use.

The list goes on. It's a roll call that should embarrass South Carolina lawmakers enough to tighten up what people around the country recognize as a bad system.

Upstate Sen. Larry Martin has been a leader in the push for ethics reform. He and Gov. Nikki Haley and others need to continue to put pressure on our state's elected leaders so meaningful ethics reform is passed early in the upcoming session.

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Let's hope that message sinks in.

Greenville Mayor DRONCO DOSTICK

Hartsville
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148 Pandering to fear is not the American way

Recall Thanksgiving afternoon as you watched football and digested turkey after giving much thanks for your freedom, blessings and family.

Imagine hearing the doorbell as you're dozing. At the door is a young brown woman, heavy with child. She's wearing a scarf on her head. On the street, you see a beat-up car with a man inside.

The woman holds her belly. "Sir, my husband, Jose, and I have no place to stay tonight. We're new to this country and haven't been able to find steady work. We're cold. We're hungry. But we're not any trouble. We're legal — we're refugees. Can you help us tonight?"

You're perplexed, torn, conflicted. What should you do? Like most Americans, you're generous. You're kind. But this? Somebody else should deal with it, right? What do you know about these people, this woman who claims her name is Maria?

America, a nation made strong by immigrants, is once again confronting nasty, Joe McCarthy-like debates about immigration — about who should be in the country and who shouldn't.

Most Americans seem to forget that in just about everyone's background is an immigrant like Jose or Maria who turned up on these shores to start a better or different life, some as immigrants, some as slaves, and others as refugees from war and violence. With each wave of new arrivals, some Americans were frightened at first, worried by the backgrounds, baggage and competition that the newcomers brought. But over time, each new wave became part of the fabric of the nation, adding new strength



Andy Brack

Statehouse Report

to the diversity of people called Americans.

With just about every family's immigrant past, it's unsettling how quickly so many forget and fall into xenophobia, the fear or irrational dislike of foreigners. Case in point: Gov. Nikki Haley, a brown woman and daughter of Sikh immigrants who has joined 29 other governors — all but one Republican — in saying Syrian refugees shouldn't be resettled in the Palmetto State.

Really, governor? The overwhelming majority of refugees, all of whom go through extensive background checks, are women and children. Where's your Christian charity? Where's your leadership? You could be a spokesman to highlight how America is the land of opportunity for all. Instead, you conveniently join the crowd of pandering politicians and seem to forget how your family was welcomed into the United States.

Meanwhile, GOP presidential candidates turn up the heat with vitriol and rhetoric, inflaming feelings of fear. Chief fearmonger is billionaire Donald Trump, who talks about maintaining databases of Muslims and making them wear identification, the same kind of labeling done in Nazi Germany to





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Jews, gays and Communists.

Ladies and gentlemen, this isn't the America in which I grew up. We're better than the political nonsense that is fueling the airwaves and social media. The Greatest Generation toiled and fought to preserve freedom for all, understanding what one president said: "The only thing to fear is fear itself."

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee recently wrote that his state would continue to welcome refugees because it's part of what being American is:

"The American character is being tested. Will we hew to our long tradition of being a beacon of hope for those chased from their homelands? I have always believed that the United States is a place of refuge for those escaping persecution, starvation or other horrors that thankfully most in America will never experience."

Since 2002, South Carolina has accepted 1,813 refugees from 30 countries, according to federal sources. More than a third (680) were from Burma. Iraq was the mother country to 249 and Ukraine to 205. One refugee was from Syria.

Fear, as Inslee notes, is a powerful thing. If we succumb to it, aren't we letting the terrorists win? Aren't we letting them change our lives of freedom? We shouldn't blame people running from terrorists into the refuge of America or France or Sweden for what the terrorists are doing. Instead, we, like other free countries, should welcome them so they can blossom from victims into capitalists.

Andy Brack is editor and publisher of Statehouse Report. Have a comment? Send to: feedback@statehousereport.com.



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To serve a sixth term: Michael Seymour of Laurens, right, was sworn in for a sixth term as commissioner for the Laurens County Soil and Water Conservation District by Marc Cribb, Conservation Districts Program Manager, during the Conservation District's regular monthly meeting on Nov. 17.

Seymour to serve 6th term on LCSWCD

Michael Seymour was sworn in Nov. 17 to serve a sixth term as Commissioner for the Laurens County Soil and Water Conservation District.

His appointment was approved by the South Carolina DNR Board and Gov. Nikki Haley. He is currently vice chairman of the conservation district, having previously served as chairman.

Seymour said after the ceremony that he is committed to making sure Laurens County's water, soil and other natural resources are protected for future generations by working with the SCDNR, USDA-NRCS, Laurens County and all cities and towns in Laurens County.

Seymour operates his family

business, Print-A-Matic, in downtown Laurens and has served on a variety of local boards for many years.

He currently serves as president-elect of the Laurens Rotary Club, board member for the Laurens County Touchdown Club and chairman of the Legislative Committee for the SC Association of Conservation Districts.

He has previously served on the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce board, Joe Adair Foundation board, executive committee of the SC Association of Conservation Districts, and the SC Nature Based Tourism Commission among others.



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280 + 148 South Carolina's predictive power

CHARLESTON

Sen. Tim Scott, who evidently has not received the memo explaining that politics is a grim and bitter business, laughs easily and often, as when, during lunch in this city's humming downtown, he explains that South Carolina's Lowcountry is benefiting from what are called "halfbacks." These are migrants who moved from Northern states to Florida in search of warmth but, finding high prices and congestion, then moved halfway back, settling in South Carolina. Doing so, they have located in the state where, Scott believes and history suggests, the 2016 Republican presidential nomination will begin to come to closure.



George Will

Since picking Ronald Reagan over John Connally and George H.W. Bush in 1980, South Carolina's Republican primary electorate has sided with the eventual nominee every four years, with the exception of 2012, when Newt Gingrich from neighboring Georgia was rewarded for denouncing as "despicable" a journalist's question during a debate here. This year, South Carolina votes just 10 days before the selection of convention delegates accelerates with the March 1 "SEC primary," so-named because five of the 12 primaries that day are in Southern states represented in that football conference.

The Human Snarl, aka Donald Trump, is leading polls here, where South Carolinians share the national consensus that, in Scott's mild words, "however it is today is not the way it should be."

But it remains to be seen whether Republicans will vote for Trump while so warmly embracing the senator who is his stylistic antithesis. Scott is "an unbridled optimist" (his description) who thinks Republican chances in 2016 depend on whether their nominee is an "aspirational leader" or someone "selling fear." Scott's un-Trumpian demeanor is both a cause and an effect of his popularity: He was elected with 61 percent of the vote in 2014 to complete the term of a senator who resigned. Which is why 13 of the Republican presidential candidates have eagerly accepted his invitations to hold town meetings with him.

He took Ohio Gov. John Kasich to Hilton Head because it has so many Ohioans, some of them halfbacks. All the candidates covet Scott's endorsement, which will happen only if, as the Feb. 20 vote draws near, polls show a close race, perhaps a four-point difference between the leaders.

This could be a choice between two of Scott's Senate colleagues, Florida's Marco Rubio and Texas' Ted Cruz. If, he says, South Carolinians choose well — "not sending independents fleeing in the opposite direction" — America will be en route to a Republican presidency.

Scott, 50, became a congressman by defeating in a Republican primary the son of Strom Thurmond, the Dixiecrat presidential candidate in 1948 and then eight-term U.S. senator.



In 2013, Scott became the second African-American Republican senator since Reconstruction (Ed Brooke of Massachusetts was the first), and today he and New Jersey Democrat Cory Booker are the Senate's only African-Americans.

Henry Olsen of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, whose specialty is conservative politics, says that among the four states that vote in February (the others are Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada), South Carolina's electorate "best mirrors the nation's."

Writing for National Review Online, Olsen says the state's primary electorate closely reflects the national balance among the GOP's four factions — "moderates and liberals" (32 percent), "somewhat conservatives" (32 percent), "very conservative evangelicals" (28 percent) and "very conservative seculars" (6 percent). Iowa says Olsen, favors candidates who are very religious and conservative, New Hampshire favors moderates, Nevada favors conservative seculars. Here, however, a dominant cohort is that which Olsen calls the national party's "ballast" — the "somewhat conservatives."

South Carolina's primary 11 weeks from now will be as distant from the state's 1980 primary that chose Reagan as Reagan's first presidential victory later that year was from Franklin Roosevelt's last victory in 1944. And when South Carolina voted in 1980, the huge and still growing Boeing plant in North Charleston, the Mercedes plant in North Charleston and the BMW plant in Spartanburg were still in its future.

As were the halfbacks who are another reason South Carolina no longer has stereotypical Deep South demographics.

And why whichever Republican wins here will have done so in the first 2016 contest that approximates the electorates of the swing states that will determine the 45th president.

This fact must be deeply satisfying to Nikki Haley, 43, South Carolina's Indian-American governor, and to Scott, who was born 44 days after enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that made all of this possible.

George Will is part of the Washington Post Writers Group. Will's email address is georgewill@washpost.com.

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148 South Carolina's share of \$1.2B in flood damage is \$114M

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina taxpayers will need to pay at least \$114 million for the state's share of damage caused by October's massive flooding, which has a price tag topping \$1 billion, the governor said Tuesday.

Gov. Nikki Haley said the state won't need to borrow any money, and she will ask lawmakers to use part of a predicted increase of more than \$1 billion in revenue to pay the bills.

The estimates released at a news conference Tuesday include the state's obligations for damaged roads, houses and other infrastructure like the Columbia Canal, which was damaged and left the state's largest city without clean water for more than a week.

The governor also said there have been \$181 million in insurance claims to private companies, and the federal government plans on paying about \$500 million to help with roads,

individual damage claims and assistance to government agencies. Add in the estimated \$375 million in direct damage to agriculture, and the total bill for flood damage is around \$1.2 billion.

The floods happened after up to 2 feet of rain fell over a few days in early October. The worst flooding extended from Columbia east and south to the coast. Nineteen people died in South Carolina and more than 540 roads and bridges were closed. Less than

70 bridges and roads are currently closed, and officials said 26 of them can't be fixed now because they run over damaged dams with undecided futures.

Haley said the delay in reporting damage numbers was necessary.

"It's the accountant in me. You never guess numbers. It's the worst thing you can ever do. When you guess numbers, you make mistakes," Haley said.

The governor has two requests of the federal government. She is asking the

state's congressional delegation to obtain \$140 million to help repair private homes. The flood, made worse by dams breaking in the Columbia area, affected many people without flood insurance.

Haley is also asking the U.S. Department of Agriculture to accelerate its payments to South Carolina farmers. They were some of the hardest-hit people, losing crops like peanuts and cotton that were just days from harvest. Some also have

drought claims from the summer, where the hot, dry season burned corn crops in the fields.

University of South Carolina economist Doug Woodward said recent growth in the state means it can absorb flood losses better. Plus, rebuilding will stimulate the already growing construction sector, he said.

"There never is a good time for a disaster like this, but there is a good time to have to pay for it," Woodward said.

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148 Democrat calls for increased security at 3 abortion clinics

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — A Democratic state representative asked GOP Gov. Nikki Haley on Monday to increase security at the three clinics in South Carolina that provide abortions following last week's deadly shootings at a Planned Parenthood in Colorado.

"It doesn't matter whether you're pro-life or pro-choice, our focus right now should be to make sure what happened in Colorado Springs doesn't happen" in South Carolina, said Rep. Mia McLeod of Columbia, a three-term House member who's running for an open Senate seat in 2016.

"We need increased security at South Carolina clinics now," she added, without being specific.

McLeod called on the governor to coordinate with state and local law enforcement to monitor clinics in Charleston, Columbia and Greenville.

Haley's office said the governor's already doing that. Officials with the State Law Enforcement Division and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security have told Haley there are "no known threats" to Planned Parenthood in the Southeast, said her spokeswoman, Chaney Adams.

"The governor will continue to communicate with law enforcement to make sure we do everything we can to keep all South Carolinians safe, as violence is never acceptable in our state," Adams said.

Robert Dear, a 57-year-old former South Carolina resident, is accused of opening fire Friday at a clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado, killing three people and injuring nine others. Colorado Springs police have declined to disclose any information on his motive.

"I'm afraid some of the rhetoric being tossed around by some South

Carolina politicians may motivate someone here at home to try the same thing," McLeod said.

Her request comes a day before a House Oversight panel, on which she sits, holds its next hearing on abortion clinics in the state. The panel's investigation was among several launched by Republicans following the release last summer of secretly taped videos showing Planned Parenthood officials in other states discussing the collection of fetal organs for research.

Planned Parenthood officials have repeatedly said none of the organization's clinics in the South Atlantic region — which includes the Carolinas, West Virginia and much of Virginia — participates in fetal tissue collection.

Of the three abortion clinics in South Carolina, Planned Parenthood operates only the one in Columbia.



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148 **State**
**Deadline to apply for flood aid in
South Carolina extended**

COLUMBIA — South Carolina residents who suffered damage in October's massive floods will have an extra month to request federal help.

Gov. Nikki Haley's office announced in a statement Monday that the deadline to apply for aid from the Federal Emergency Management Administration has been extended to Jan. 4. The original deadline was Friday.

Flood survivors can ask FEMA for help with renting a temporary home or repairing their homes, Small businesses can seek low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration for uninsured damage.



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The Greenville News

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148 Tax break expiring

SC last state to collect taxes on Amazon sales

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A sales-tax break the Legislature gave Amazon in 2011 expires Jan. 1, making South Carolina the last state to collect among those where officials cut similar deals with the online retail giant.

Taxing Amazon's in-state sales could add tens of millions of dollars to South Carolina's coffers in 2016, said Max Behlke, the National Conference of State Legislatures' manager of state and federal relations.

State Revenue Director Rick Reames declined to give estimates beyond saying, "We expect a significant increase in sales tax revenues."

For years, the Seattle-based company fought collecting sales taxes from its customers. The U.S. Supreme Court has twice ruled — in 1967 and 1992 — that a state can't require a company to collect and remit the tax unless it has a "physical presence" in the state.

As Amazon expanded, rather than collect taxes in states that

tried to force it, the company severed ties with affiliates and scrapped plans for distribution centers. South Carolina was among 10 states that gave Amazon a temporary tax reprieve in exchange for jobs and investment, Behlke said.

In all, South Carolina loses out on an estimated \$254 million in taxes from out-of-state sales — mostly online but also through catalogues and phone purchases, according to a 2014 report by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Behlke cautioned the number's not precise.

"No one knows the full amount states are losing," he said.

But on New Year's Day, South Carolina joins 26 states where Amazon, the heavyweight of online retailing, collects the tax, according to the company's website. Five states don't have sales taxes.

Spokespeople for Amazon did not return multiple phone and email messages.

South Carolina gave Amazon a 4 1/2-year exemption from collecting sales taxes from its residents in exchange for creating at least 2,000 full-time jobs with health benefits and investing \$125 million by Dec. 31, 2013. But the deal that brought a distribution center to Lexington County — and later, a second center in Spartanburg — almost didn't happen.

The law passed in June 2011 without the signature of Gov. Nikki Haley, whose vocal opposition nearly sank one of her predecessor's last big economic deals.





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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Customer Michael Wallenfels looks at children's books with his son Henry at the opening day for Amazon Books, the first brick-and-mortar retail store for the online retail giant. The store is in Seattle.