

Legislative session should be shorter

BY CECILIA BROWN
TheNerve.org

Editorialists and commentators have chastised the South Carolina legislature relentlessly for failing to get anything done during the 2015 session. In fact, though, they did plenty of work.

This year our Legislature met from January to July, and during that time 1,336 bills were filed between the House and Senate. Of those, 131 were passed by lawmakers. In addition, 950 resolutions were filed, and all but 64 of those passed.

The question, of course, is this: How many of these were actually worth legislators spending over half a year in Columbia?

The length of South Carolina's legislative session has consequences. Studies have found that professional, full-time legislatures are more prone to pressure from lobbyists — and this translates into higher spending and more favors for special interests.

Consider this year's attempt to deal with roads. There are two ways to devote new revenue to roads: raise taxes or cut spending. But lobbyists — in this case, lobbyists working for companies and industries that would benefit from additional spending on roads — aren't going to urge lawmakers to pay for new road projects by cutting other parts of government. They're going to urge tax hikes. And thanks to South Carolina's long legislative session, they had plenty of time to do it. In the end, thanks to citizen groups raising the alarm, they weren't successful. That's a rarity, unfortunately, and tax hike sup-

porters are sure to be back in January.

According to one media account, toward the end of session legislative leaders even tried to prevent the Board of Economic Advisers from publicizing a revenue surplus, presumably on the grounds that a surplus would undermine the argument for a tax hike. That simply couldn't have happened without a lengthy session.

Or take ethics reform. The year began with a few good proposals, but the longer they sat in committees, the longer lawmakers had to water them down or amend them with insidious provisions. A bill to reform the state's Freedom of Information law gained a provision allowing government agencies to take citizens to court for filing "frivolous" FOIA requests. A bill to require elected officials to disclose their sources of income eventually included a provision *loosening* requirements on disclosing government income. And so on. The longer the session went on, in other words, the more pointless these bills became.

Or consider the debate over the bond bill. House lawmakers introduced a bill to issue bond debt and use the money for a variety of largely unnecessary projects connected to state colleges and universities. It would have been difficult for lawmakers to pass such a controversial bill within the confines of a short session. As it was, though, they were able to introduce the bill; then take it off the floor when the Policy Council and (separately) Gov. Haley raised objections; then find ways to pay for the new projects

through the General Fund; and *then* spend much of the rest of the session trying to figure out how to pass the bond bill anyway, which they were almost able to do.

In short: our excessively long session gave the State House complex — lawmakers, lobbyists, consultants, various special interests — plenty of time to weaken reform, make tax hikes more likely, and spend every last available dime of revenue.

What should a session-shortening bill look like? A sensible reform would be to mandate an end to sessions by the second Friday in April, making each one last roughly 90 calendar days, and holding session every two years. This would encourage lawmakers to use their time — and our money — more wisely.

Members of the House argue that they pass a bill every session to shorten session but Senate ignores it. That may be technically true, but this year, anyway, the bill they passed was anemically weak. The House of Representatives passed a bill that cut a mere ten days off session. The Senate's bill would have shortened session by three months. It wasn't passed, but at least it was worthy of passing.

Our legislature's job is to ensure that citizens' rights are protected. After they do that, they should go home. More time leads to more mischief.

Cecilia Brown works as a research assistant at TheNerve.org and its parent organization, the S.C. Policy Council.

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148 Marlboro on list of 'contiguous disaster counties'

COLUMBIA - Governor Nikki Haley announced that United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack has issued a disaster designation for counties in South Carolina that suffered damage and losses due to heavy rains and flooding. The governor requested the disaster designation in an October 19 letter.

A secretarial disaster designation makes farm operators in primary counties and those counties contiguous to primary counties eligible to be considered for certain assistance from Farm Service Agency (FSA), provided eligibility requirements are met.

This assistance includes FSA

emergency loans. Farmers in eligible counties, which include both primary and contiguous counties, have 8 months from the date of a secretarial disaster declaration to apply for emergency loans. FSA considers each emergency loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of production losses on the farm, and the security and repayment ability of the operator.

Local FSA offices, administered by the South Carolina State Executive Director of the Farm Service Agency, can provide affected farmers with further information.

The following 29 counties were designated as primary nat-

ural disaster areas after USDA determined sufficient production losses had occurred:

Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Berkeley, Calhoun, Chester, Clarendon, Colleton, Darlington, Dillon, Dorchester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Kershaw, Lancaster, Laurens, Lee, Lexington, Marion, Newberry, Orangeburg, Richland, Saluda, Sumter and Williamsburg.

The following counties have been named as contiguous disaster counties:

Abbeville, Anderson, Beaufort, Charleston, Chesterfield, Greenville, Greenwood, Hampton, McCormick, **Marlboro**, Spartanburg, Union, York.



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148 The Times & Democrat of Orangeburg on manufacturing jobs

"South Carolina continues to lead the nation's manufacturing renaissance," S.C. Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt said Tuesday in an announcement on an industry expansion in Williston.

Hitt and Gov. Nikki Haley speak regularly about South Carolina's manufacturing sector thriving since they took office. They cite 28,000 new manufacturing jobs over the past four years, more than created in Georgia and North Carolina.

During Haley's tenure as governor, South Carolina has become the top state for exporting tires and passenger vehicles. The list of top companies locating or planning to locate in the state since she took office in 2011 is impressive: Continental Tire plant in Sumter County, Giti tire in Chester County, the Daimler van plant expansion in North Charleston, and Volvo in Berkeley County.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers show the total number of factory jobs rose 12.7 percent in the state between 2010 and 2015 to more than 231,000, a bigger percentage increase than in 39 other states.

And the prospects for the future are good.

Projections by the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce are that manufacturing jobs will grow by 16,000 to 17,000 between 2010 and 2020. And growth in key manufacturing areas such as the Midlands (9 percent) and Upstate (12 percent) is expected to be strong.

But South Carolina cannot rest on its laurels. The competition is intense and nearby.

A week ago, Site Selection magazine named Georgia as the state with the top business climate for the third consecutive year. As revealed in the November issue of the magazine, research based in part on a survey of corporate real estate executives and in part on the magazine's index of criteria led to Georgia repeating its first-place finish. And South Carolina's neighbor to the north, North Carolina, is second. Kentucky, Louisiana and Texas round out the top five.

"Capital investors tell us the ideas we put in place are actually working," Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal said. "Our tax reform in the manufacturing arena, for example, to remove the sales tax from energy use was a huge boost to our manufacturing sector."

The governor also points to removing as many regulatory impediments as possible and providing a well-educated and trained workforce as deliverables of particular interest to companies looking at Georgia locations. Corporate executives routinely cite Quick Start, Georgia's workforce training program; logistics assets, such as the Port of Savannah and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport; and tax reform as the factors that brought them to Georgia.

Fifty percent of the overall business-climate ranking is based on a survey of corporate site selectors who are asked to rank the states based on their recent experience of locating facilities in them.

The other 50 percent is based on an index of seven criteria: performance in Site Selection's annual competitiveness ranking; total Conway Projects Database-compliant facilities in 2014; total new facilities in 2014 per capita; total 2015 new projects year to date; total 2015 projects year to date per capita; and state tax burdens on mature companies and on new ones, according to the Tax Foundation and KPMG Location Matters analysis.

South Carolina ranked 13th overall and fifth in the survey of corporate executives.

The state fell down in the magazine's index of seven criteria, notably ranking 47th in total number of new plants locating in the state in 2014 and 45th in new plants per capita in the same year. The ranking is much better for January-August 2015, with the state at 11th and ninth, respectively, in the new-plants scoring.



The battle is fierce, and the top contenders among states are our neighbors.

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148 Vista Earns Cultural Arts Designation

By Dan Cook

Just in time for last weekend's ArtLinc Festival and its annual Vista Lights celebration on Nov. 19, the Vista has been officially designated a cultural arts district by the S.C. Arts Commission.

The designation is granted to areas "with a concentration of arts facilities that support cultural, artistic and economic activity," according to a press statement from the Vista Guild.

The designation was created by the General Assembly and Gov. Nikki Haley in 2014.

For the Vista, it is a particularly important statement of the district's intentions in the future.

The area was once a warehouse district with little retail commercial activity. Over the course of the past three decades — starting in the 1980s with pioneers like Clark Ellefson (of Lewis+Clark), Rosie Craig (M Craig and Co. Cabinetmakers) and the Motor Supply Co. restaurant, and continuing with city-funded streetscaping in the 1990s and the opening of the Convention Center in 2004 — it has developed into a thriving district full of restaurants, galleries, hotels and retail outlets. So thriving, in fact, that it has become more difficult for artists to remain there.

Even as rents rise, however, Vista and city leaders intend to emphasize the importance of the arts in the area. Among other things, the Vista has been especially proactive in bringing public art projects to the area. Plans also call for a new home for artists at Stormwater Studios near the Congaree River.

"We are seeing tremendous growth in the Vista because of the efforts of so many artists and arts organizations that have led the way in establishing the unique, creative identity of that area of the city," Mayor Steve Benjamin said in a statement.

Arts Commission Director Ken May points out that even in a cultural district, it's important to have other businesses, too.

"Those non-arts businesses are important pieces of a cultural district," May says. "A successful cultural district attracts creative enterprises, such as galleries and theaters, whose patrons want to dine out and shop, so nearby retail and other businesses benefit from that increased economic activity."

To receive the cultural arts designation, the district has developed a five-year plan that "includes goals of attracting tourists and visitors, encouraging responsible economic development, attracting artists and creating opportunities for the public to experience the rich arts and culture the Vista offers," according to the Vista Guild.

As property prices continue to increase, artists will no doubt look more to the margins of the district to find affordable space — as Ellefson already did several years ago, when he moved his studio from Lincoln Street to Huger Street. But the cultural arts designation makes it clear that the Vista intends to do what it can to honor its origins.

The Vista Guild will publicly announce the designation during Vista Lights.





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S.C. Gets D- in Government Transparency, Accountability

By Rodney Welch

South Carolina is the kind of place where change only comes after a massive shock to the system. The state where the Civil War began takes threats to tradition seriously. During the early 19th century, political disputes were settled at dawn with pistols. One governor, John Lyde Wilson, even wrote the definitive 1838 treatise on the subject: *The Code of Honor, Or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Dueling*.

Later means of battle included canes — like the one that pro-slavery U.S. Rep. Preston Brooks used to bash the skull of the abolitionist Charles Sumner in 1856 — and wrestling — like the moves that U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond put on Ralph Yarborough in 1964 in an attempt to prevent the pro-civil rights Texas senator from voting at a confirmation hearing.

South Carolina politics may be less violent today, but state legislators still cling tenaciously to doing things the old way — even when other states have moved on. South Carolina is one of only two states where judges are elected by the legislature and one

of only a handful that don't require public officials to disclose private income. As a host of reform advocates have said, South Carolina is still very much a "Wild West."

So it's no surprise that South Carolina earned a D- in the State Integrity Investigation, a data-driven assessment of state government accountability and transparency by the Center for Public Integrity and Global Integrity, ranking the state 36th out of 50. That's a marginal improvement from 2012, the first time the project was carried out, when the Palmetto State scored an F. The two scores are not directly comparable, however, due to changes made to improve and update the project and methodology, such as eliminating the category for redistricting, a process that generally occurs only once every 10 years.

The project also found that South Carolina has a particularly high "enforcement gap," which measures the difference between what the laws say and how well they're actually implemented.

In some cases, this is obvious. The law says you can't use campaign funds to defray personal expenses. The reality is that former House Speaker Bobby Harrell pleaded guilty

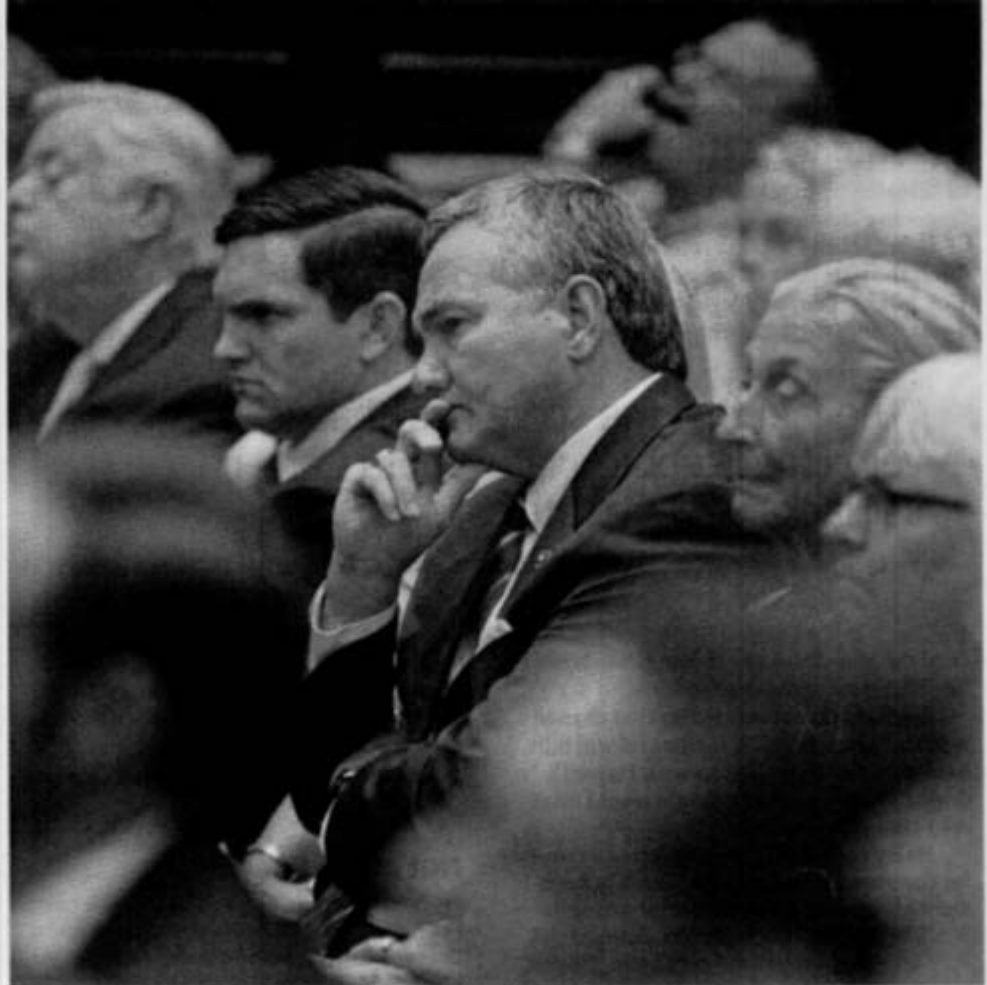


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Former House Speaker Bobby Harrell pleaded guilty last year to misusing campaign funds for personal benefit. *File photo*





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last year to misusing campaign funds for personal benefit.

The law gives citizens access to information, but legislators not only find ways to work around releasing documents, but also to discourage people from requesting them — either by charging exorbitant amounts or threatening to punish people who make “excessive” requests.

After South Carolina received an F in 2012, the state seemed poised for change. Gov. Nikki Haley and legislators all said they were committed to reform — Haley even

But he also told the court that he had “a fundamental disagreement over the proper use of a campaign account.” He was able to avoid jail by agreeing to give up his House seat, stay out of politics for three years, and cooperate with an ongoing investigation into corruption in the legislature.

Advocates saw the case as a clear sign that the state’s laws and oversight are inadequate.

“For years, the House and Senate were on public notice from Harrell’s disclosure forms that his use of political money was out of control,” wrote John Crangle, executive

“The fact that the score has changed very little is appropriate. South Carolina still lacks effective ethics law.”

— Lynn Teague, vice-president, South Carolina League of Women Voters

cited the State Integrity Investigation score in her 2013 state of the state address.

But it quickly became clear that change wouldn’t come easy. Numerous reform bills have gone nowhere — even with Harrell’s downfall, which many thought would finally spur change.

Haley’s office did not respond to a request for comment for this article. Good-government groups say the grade seems fitting.

“The fact that the score has changed very little is appropriate,” says Lynn Teague, vice-president of the South Carolina League of Women Voters. “South Carolina still lacks effective ethics law.”

No brakes on political campaigns

South Carolina once had clear limits on the amount of money that people could spend on politics. But in 2010, a federal judge upended all of that when he ruled that the state’s definition of a political committee was “unconstitutionally overbroad.” The ruling effectively opened the floodgates to unregulated donations. While limits on contributions to candidates remain, donors are now free to give unlimited sums to political parties, committees and politically active nonprofits. What’s more, contributions to any of those entities aren’t even subject to mandatory disclosure.

In 2013, for example, a New York real estate investor named Howard Rich was able to give more than \$150,000 to a couple of dozen candidates for state legislature, circumventing the \$1,000 cap on donations to candidates by funneling the money through an array of limited liability corporations, according to a report by *The State*.

The flood of cash has only highlighted the state’s vague rules for how candidates can spend that money. When Harrell, the former House speaker, pleaded guilty last year to six counts of using campaign funds for personal purposes, he admitted to using the funds to reimburse himself for flights on his private plane that weren’t official business.

director of the advocacy group Common Cause South Carolina, in a column for the news website *The Nerve*. Despite the clear warning, he wrote, no one “took any official actions to try to stop Harrell’s abusive conduct.”

Not all bad news

South Carolina scored among the best in the nation for its internal auditing practices — which covers both the department responsible for the annual financial audit of state agencies, and the new Office of Inspector General.

The Inspector General’s office, created in 2012, is free to investigate any department of the administrative branch of state government. The office established a fraud hotline, and investigators quickly got to work digging into several troubled areas.

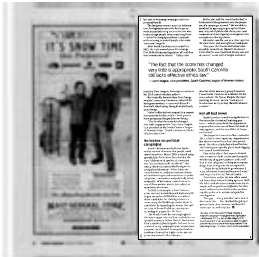
One of the office’s first reports showed that a majority of physicians aren’t properly monitoring drug prescriptions, and could lead to new safeguards to keep prescription drugs from falling into the wrong hands.

“I have broad latitude to go wherever I want, whenever I want and however I want,” said Inspector General Patrick Maley.

That ability makes the new office stand out from other state watchdog agencies. Both the ethics and elections commissions, for example, will respond to complaints, but they aren’t sufficiently funded to either perform regular audits or to initiate independent investigations.

This gap — along with the state’s lack of disclosure laws — has shielded the political process from close scrutiny, and kept the status quo securely in place. ■

This story is from the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative news organization in Washington, D.C. It is part of State Integrity 2015. How do each state’s laws and practices deter corruption, promote transparency and enforce accountability? Visit publicintegrity.org to read more stories in this investigation.



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**Red Ventures breaks ground
on \$90M IL campus expansion**
**Governor praises
company's growth**

Julie Graham

For The Lancaster News

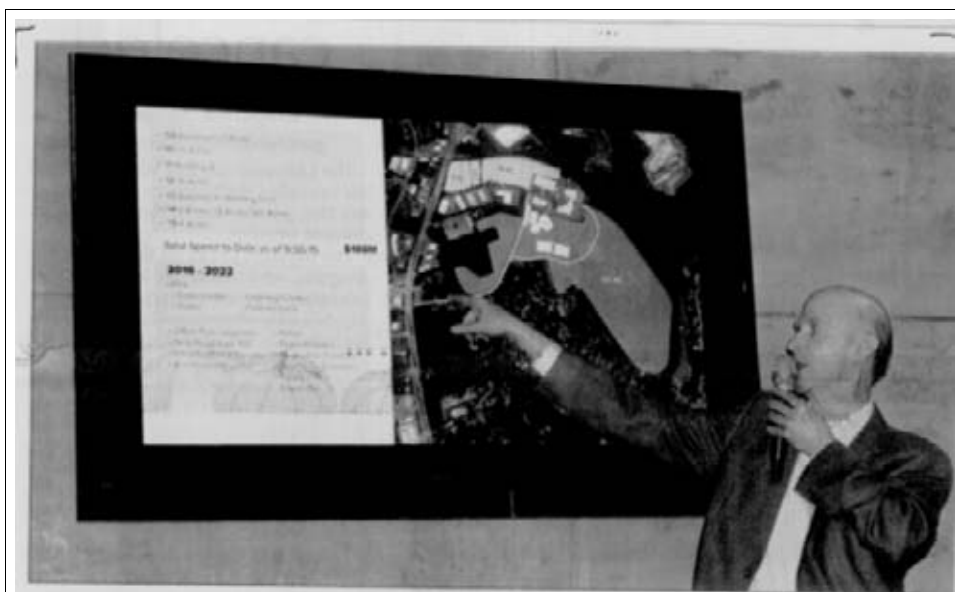
With the governor in a hard hat and a backhoe as the backdrop, Red Ventures broke ground Wednesday, Nov. 4, on a \$90 million expansion that includes three interconnected buildings and two parking decks.

The addition of the new facility, dubbed RV4, doubles the size of the Indian Land campus and creates 1,500 new jobs, officials said. RV4 includes a sales center, six-story office tower, a learning and development center, and two parking decks.

"I want to work at Red Ventures when I grow up," said S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, who praised the marketing and technology firm for its fast growth, attributing success to great customer service and teamwork.

"There is no losing at Red Ventures," said Haley, who has been to several groundbreaking events at Red Ventures and notably, bowled a winning game.

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JULIE GRAHAM/For The Lancaster News

Mark Brodsky, chief financial officer of Red Ventures, shows a bird's eye view of the company's property with its newly acquired 120 acres (in red) surrounding the existing Indian Land campus.



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photos by JULIE GRAHAM
For The Lancaster News
Red Ventures hosted a groundbreaking Wednesday, Nov. 4, for a new facility, named RV4, that includes three interconnected buildings on its Indian Land campus. From left are Joel Martinez, the company's executive vice president of human capital, Lancaster County Council Chairman Bob Bundy, S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, and Red Venture employees Chanda Schwartz and Eric Bristley, honored for being top in sales.



Ric Elias, founder and chief executive officer of Red Ventures, greets S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley before the company's groundbreaking of a new facility, dubbed RV4, on Wednesday, Nov. 4. The company is investing \$90 million in the campus expansion and generating 1,500 new jobs.





Growth

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Red Ventures has been expanding since relocating to the northern edge of Lancaster County in 2009, with one building and 325 employees.

Three buildings, a basketball court, bowling alley, cafeteria and parking garage are now onsite for the more than 2,200 employees who have bought into the company's "work hard, play hard" philosophy. Red Ventures is known for its innovative marketing techniques and high-tech analytics used in sales.

Ric Elias, Red Ventures' chief executive officer, anticipates more groundbreakings in the future.

"We feel like we are in the third inning of a nine-inning game," he said.

The learning and development center will anchor the complex and include a 275-seat auditorium, multiple training rooms and a multi-use ballroom with seating for 650 people.

Elias believes the learning center is the way to attract and retain the best employees. It focuses the company on "creating an environment that celebrates collaboration, creativity and continued learning," he said.

RV4's amenities will include an outdoor amphitheater, additional fitness facilities and cafes, and a jogging trail, company officials said.

Fort Mill Highway (S.C. 160) will be widened to become the main entrance to Red Ventures.

The first phase of RV4 is expected to be completed by the end of next year.

This year, Red Ventures bought an additional 120 acres surrounding its existing campus in Indian

Land, bringing the company's total footprint to 170 acres.

That's good news to Lancaster County Council Chairman Bob Bundy, who told the large groundbreaking crowd he was amazed at how much Red Ventures has grown in so little time. He credited the hard-working employees.

"The people who work here exude energy," he said.

Before the groundbreaking, the company's chief financial officer Mark Brodsky gave a land acquisition and construction recap.

Work is expected to begin in about a month on a Marriott TownePlace Hotel that is planned at the entrance of the Red Ventures campus, along with other retailers, he said.

Red Ventures is noted as a significant investor in the hotel, considered the first big-name hotel

in Lancaster County.

"You can see some red features have been added to this building," Brodsky joked.

For more information on Red Ventures, visit redventures.com.



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OTHER VOICES: EDITORIALS FROM ACROSS THE STATE

The State, Columbia, on arrest of Spring Valley high school student:

South Carolina is once again in the national spotlight. Video of a school resource officer throwing a Spring Valley High School student to the floor and arresting her is, as Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott put it, disturbing.

The video and the arrest have rightfully captured the attention of our state and nation.

As federal, state and local authorities investigate the incident and the deputy's actions, the rest of us must react as we did after the Charleston shootings in April and June and the statewide floods in October. It is essential that we again show amazing peace, calm and togetherness.

We inspired ourselves and the nation before. We must do it again.

Understandably, parents, students, administrators and the public have questions about what happened in that Spring Valley classroom. All have the right to seek answers, offer opinions and express concerns. A public discussion is healthy.

We had similar discussions in April after a white North Charleston police officer shot an unarmed black man; in June after a young white man massacred nine parishioners at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston; and just a few weeks ago after widespread flooding damaged thousands of homes and left at least 19 dead statewide.

After the North Charleston shooting, fears about violence surfaced because of the unrest we had seen in Ferguson, Mo., Baltimore and New York following the deaths of black men in police encounters.

"People mention Baltimore. People mention Ferguson. People mention

New York," North Charleston City Attorney Brady Hair told The Associated Press earlier in October. "What's different here is there were no acts of violence. There were no buildings burned.

"None of us did anything to escalate this into an uncontrolled environment. It is a different template from what you have seen around the country."

The Mother Emanuel shootings sparked outrage among South Carolinians of all races and religious beliefs. Immediately, the people and churches of Charleston reached out to the congregation, providing food and other support. A Toronto Star reporter tweeted video of a mostly white crowd marching through Charleston chanting "black lives matter."

A few days after the shootings, a crowd estimated at more than 10,000 gathered at Charleston's Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge to honor the victims and to show those who would divide us that South Carolina really is different.

Next, our Legislature voted overwhelmingly to move the Confederate flag from the State House grounds.

In October, when hundreds of our neighbors lost their homes, an army of volunteers showed up to help, uninvited and unannounced.

Our responses this year have been praised by national media and by politicians across the political spectrum, from Gov. Nikki Haley to President Obama.

Thankfully, the Spring Valley High School encounter did not end in the loss of life. But it is disturbing, as Sheriff Lott said. South Carolinians should ask questions. If any laws were broken, we should expect justice.

But in our response, we should continue being who we are — a community that will not be divided.

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¹⁴⁸ Flood strangles ag industry



KONSTANTIN VENGERSKY / THE SUMTER ITEM

Cag Brunson, a third-generation farmer in Summerton, lost both row crops and vegetables as a result of October's flood. Brunson's farm, Oak III, includes between 3,500 to 4,000 acres, some of which have become standing ponds.

Clarendon County farmers could lose millions

BY KONSTANTIN VENGERSKY

konstantin@theitem.com

Brent Cogdill, a third-generation farmer in Summerton, lost about 1,500 acres of crops from his family farm's 6,000-acre total as a result of the early October flood that hit the state.

"This is the worst thing our family has seen in the last 29 years in terms of crop damage," he said.

Cogdill's farm received about 28 inches of rain, destroying most of his cotton crop. The flood also destroyed some of the farm's peanuts, wheat and soybean crops.

"Farmers get paid once a year based

on the crop they produce," he said.

"Imagine working all year long and not getting your paycheck at the end."

Cag Brunson, also a third-generation farmer in Summerton, lost both row crops and vegetables. Brunson's farm, Oak III, includes about 4,000 acres, some of which have become standing ponds. The rest of his farm had standing water for about a week after the flood.

The farm lost all of its green beans and about 70 percent of its collards, turnips and mustard greens. Brunson also lost a sweet potato crop, which he shares with

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another local farmer.

"At least 60 percent of our sweet potatoes are gone," he said. "We were scheduled to start harvesting them the Monday after the flood hit."

Brunson estimates losing at least \$500,000 because of lost crops.

Clarendon County has about 70,000 acres of farmland, with many farms being affected by the flood, according to Hannah Mikell, agronomy agent and county coordinator for Clemson Extension Service's Clarendon County Office.

On Oct. 28, U.S. Department of Agriculture designated 29 counties throughout the state, including Clarendon, Sumter and Lee counties, as "Primary Natural Disaster Areas."

The secretarial designation makes farm operators in those counties eligible to be considered for loan assistance from the Farm Service Agency, provided eligibility requirements are met, according to a news release from Gov. Nikki Haley's office.

The assistance includes FSA emergency loans. Farmers in eligible counties have eight months from the date of the disaster declaration to apply for the loans. FSA considers each emergency loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of production losses on the farm and the security and repayment ability of the operator, according to the release.

To be eligible for an emergency loan, farmers must show at least a 30 percent loss on their crops, according to Larry Rogers, farm loans and outreach officer for USDA FSA's state office. The maximum amount that a farmer would qualify for is \$500,000 with an interest rate of about 3.5 percent, Rogers said. Repayment plans vary from one to seven years, based on a farmer's collateral, Rogers said.

The emergency loans would typically cover the difference between the loss and what insurance would not cover, he said. There are two types of emergency loans, one that covers production lost (lost crops)

and one that covers physical (real estate or tangible, movable personal property).

Farmers won't know how much emergency loan assistance they are eligible for until their insurance companies have assessed the lost crops.

"Farmers were hit hard this year with three consecutive disasters, including drought, heat and now the flood," Rogers said. "Additionally, the cost to produce a farm commodity has gone up, while prices have gone down drastically."

Local FSA offices can provide affected farmers with further information.

Row crop farmers are typically covered through crop insurance policies.

On average, producers usually insure for about 65 to 75 percent of yield or revenue. Insurance coverage is based on commodity prices, guarantee and farming history, according to Ashley Altman, crop insurance agent for ArborOne Farm Credit.

Altman said if commodity prices are low, guarantee is going to be low. Right now, commodity prices are low while input costs are high. Input costs include resources that are used in farm production.

There is limited insurance for vegetable farmers.

Some vegetable farmers can be covered under a U.S. Department of Agriculture FSA insurance policy called the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program. The program reauthorized by the 2014 Farm Bill provides financial assistance to producers of uninsurable crops to protect against natural disasters that result in lower yields or crop losses, according to the USDA's website.

An eligible producer is a landowner, tenant or sharecropper who shares in the risk of producing an eligible crop and is entitled to an ownership share of that crop. The bill specifies that an individual or entity's average adjusted gross income cannot exceed \$900,000 to be eligible for NAP payments, according to the USDA website.

"The drawback is that you have to apply for it the previous calendar year before plant-

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ing a crop,” Brunson said.

Clemson Extension Service’s Clarendon County Office has been encouraging local farmers to fill out damage assessment sheets. Mikell said the document will help farmers assess their risks for the future.

Clemson Extension will host a Farmer Flood Forum on at 7 p.m. Thursday at Weldon Auditorium, 7 Maple St., Manning.

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Standing water is seen at Oak Hill farm in Summerton. Cag Brunson, a third generation farmer, lost both row crops and vegetables as a result of October’s flood.

KONSTANTIN VENGERSKY /
THE SUMTER ITEM

