

Title: **COMPANY TO CREATE 450 JOBS IN GREENVILLE COUNTY**  
 Author:  
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### **COMPANY TO CREATE 450 JOBS IN GREENVILLE COUNTY**

PL Developments, a manufacturer, packager and distributor of pharmaceutical and consumer health care products, is launching new Greenville County operations to expand its presence in South Carolina, according to Gov. Nikki Haley's office. The development is projected to bring \$45 million in new capital investment and create 450 jobs.

Headquartered in Westbury, N.Y., PL Developments primarily serves U.S. retailers with an assortment of more than 450 products across several health care applications.

#### **ALSO . . .**

- Yahoo says it believes hackers stole data from more than 1 billion user accounts in August 2013. The company says it's a different breach from the one it disclosed in September, when it said 500 million accounts were exposed. Yahoo says the information stolen might include names, email addresses, phone numbers, birthdates and security questions and answers.

- MM Technics, a newly formed American subsidiary of Muhr Metalltechnik, is constructing a metal stamping facility in Newberry County, according to Haley's office. The company is expected to invest at least \$12.6 million and create 65 jobs during the next five years. Muhr Metalltechnik supplies more than 15 automotive companies throughout Europe.

Title: **Halefires 2 Richland RecreationCommission boardmembers**  
 Author: BY SARAHELLIS sellis@thestate.com  
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## RARE MOVE BY SC'S GOVERNOR

# Haley fires 2 Richland Recreation Commission board members

■ J. Marie Green and Barbara Mickens have been removed from the Richland County Recreation Commission board.

BY SARAH ELLIS  
 sellis@thestate.com

Two of the remaining three members of the embattled Richland County Recreation Commission have been fired by

Gov. Nikki Haley.

Chairwoman J. Marie Green and vice chair Barbara Mickens were

removed from office Wednesday in an usual move by an S.C. governor. A panel of lawyers made the recommendation to the governor after the board members defended themselves last month during a hearing.

Board member Thomas Clark is allowed to continue to serve for the remainder of his appointed term.

The other four board members – Weston Furgess Jr., Wilbert Lewis, George Martin and

SEE RECREATION, 6A

## FROM PAGE 1A

# RECREATION

Joseph Weeks – voluntarily resigned earlier after Haley said she would consider firing them.

In her order issued Wednesday, Haley said she found Green and Mickens guilty of neglect of duty, incompetency, misfeasance and malfeasance.

A majority of Richland lawmakers have said board members neglected their duties by allowing unwarranted pay raises and widespread nepotism and ignoring complaints against the commission's former longtime director, James Brown III.

The governor's hand was forced in this situation and she made the correct, if rare, decision to remove the board members, said John Crangle, former director of Common Cause SC and a longtime, outspoken ethics watchdog.

The next step to righting

the Recreation Commission, Crangle said, is "putting the right people" on the board. "Not cronies, but people who have background in athletics and recreation and people who have integrity and are willing to spend the time and effort to do the job," he said.

The commission's board members are recommended by the legislative delegation and appointed by Haley, who has the sole authority to remove the board members from service.

The governor's decision "closes the long and unfortunate issue of the Richland County Recreation Commission," said outgoing state Sen. Joel Lourie, D-Richland. "Many employees, current and former, have unfortunately had to bear the brunt of a director and board who were out of control and accountable to

no one."

Lourie was one of the first among the county's legislative delegation to push for an investigation into the Recreation Commission.

Rep. Leon Howard, D-Richland, said he respected but disagreed with the governor's decision. He was in the minority of the delegation who did not ask Haley to remove the board members.

"I think it's going to be difficult to get good people to want to serve after the way these commissioners have been treated," Howard said. "I'm disappointed that we would treat citizen representatives like we did when we asked them to serve. I'm disappointed in a lot of my colleagues. I don't know what their agenda is."

Brown, the former commission director, was indicted by a Richland

County grand jury in October, accused of using his position "to coerce and attempt to coerce female employees into having sexual contact with him." He says he is innocent.

Numerous civil lawsuits also are pending against Brown, Green, Mickens and the commission. Brown voluntarily retired after the indictment was handed down.

Mickens, Green and Clark defended themselves at a hearing before a panel of three Haley-appointed lawyers Nov. 30. The two said news media reports about their commission were false, inflammatory and made matters worse.

Appointed to the board in February, Clark had asked the governor to note that he is a recent appointee who wants very much to serve and was not involved in earlier controversies.

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Green



Mickens

Title: Legislator indicted; more cases coming?
Author: BY CLIF LEBLANC, CASSIE COPE AND AVERY G. WILKS
Size: 137.17 column inches
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STATE HOUSE PROBE

Legislator indicted; more cases coming?

Lowcountry's Merrill suspended from House seat after being accused of misconduct in office, violating ethics law

BY CLIF LEBLANC, CASSIE COPE AND AVERY G. WILKS
cleblanc@thestate.com, ccope@thestate.com, awilks@thestate.com

Lowcountry S.C. House Rep. Jim Merrill was indicted Wednesday on 30 charges that accuse him of misconduct in office as far back as 2002 as well as a series of ethics violations.

Altogether, the 30-page indictment accuses Merrill of illegally using his office to pocket at least \$1.3 million, either directly or through his business, Geechie Communications.

He also failed to disclose receiving payments of more than \$673,000 from trade, advocacy and political

groups in violation of state ethics law, according to the indictment.

Speaker of the House Jay Lucas, R-Darlington, suspended Merrill late

Wednesday afternoon. "This suspension is pursuant to state law and will remain in place until the matter is resolved or the seat is declared vacant," Lucas said in a statement.

The long-awaited indictment by a Richland County grand jury said Merrill, who has represented Berkeley County in the House since 2001, violated the ethics law 28 times and committed official misconduct twice.

Prosecutor David Pascoe, who was

SEE INDICT, 3A

OF ILLEGALLY USING HIS OFFICE TO POCKET AT LEAST \$1.3 MILLION, EITHER DIRECTLY OR THROUGH HIS BUSINESS.

indictments are expected, 3A

- Merrill led Trump's SC campaign, 3A
Officials react to Merrill charges, 3A
Timeline of the State House probe, 3A

MORE INSIDE

- More

THE INDICTMENT ACCUSES MERRILL

FROM PAGE 1A

INDICT

assigned to oversee the investigation, announced the charges in a news release that also states the probe is ongoing. Pascoe said he will have no public comment because the investigation is not over.

A bond hearing for the 49-year-old Merrill, once the House Republican Caucus leader, had not been set by late Wednesday.

Merrill's attorneys, Matthew Hubbell and Leon Stavrinakis, issued a statement late Wednesday afternoon.

"Representative Jim Merrill adamantly denies the charges brought against him by Solicitor David Pascoe," they said. "He has served honorably and in good faith."

"Contrary to the flawed allegations made today, the work performed by Jim Merrill's private company was completely legal and legitimate," the attorneys said. "In fact, the charges include conduct that has been declared legal in written opinions by the South Carolina Attorney General, the bipartisan

House Ethics Committee and the State Ethics Commission."

Merrill is accused of accepting money to influence government decisions and sponsor legislation for private interests. For example, Merrill is charged with taking \$172,485 from New Jersey-based bus contractor, Student Transportation of

America, in exchange for sponsoring a failed 2012 bill "regarding legislation to privatize school buses" in the Palmetto State.

"The defendant intentionally

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violated the law for the purpose of making money for himself personally," one count of the indictment states.

## THE GOP CAUCUS, HARRELL FROM PAGE 3A

# INDICT

ics violations.

The indictment also links Merrill to former House Speaker Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston. Harrell pleaded guilty and resigned in October 2014 to charges of misusing campaign funds for personal gain after an investigation by Pascoe, who is the state's 1st Circuit solicitor.

Merrill was charged with directing tens of thousands of dollars from the Palmetto Leadership Council, which is Harrell's political action committee, to Geechie Communications, in excess of the fair market value for his services.

The indictment also states that Merrill "colluded with the Republican Caucus and the Palmetto Leadership Council to give candidate contributions to members of the Republican Caucus in excess of \$5,000 and accept contributions in excess of \$3,500" that are the maximums under state law.

## PROFITING THROUGH GEECHIE COMMUNICATIONS, BROTHER

Besides the caucus and the school bus group, Merrill used his position to profit illegally from four other organizations, according to the indictment. Merrill is accused of accepting:

## CONNECTIONS

Prosecutors also say Merrill, through his public relations company, illegally received payments totaling at least \$276,561 from the S.C. House Republican Caucus. His

involvement with the caucus is tied to several of the accusations of eth-

**SEE INDICT, 4A**

- \$391,174 from the South Carolina Association of Realtors to serve as a lobbyist for the organization, according to the indictment. Those offenses happened between May 14, 2008, and April 25, 2012, the prosecution contends. Merrill received the money to influence legislation that benefited the association, the indictment states.

- \$35,000 from Infilaw Management Solutions, which was trying to buy the Charleston School of Law in 2014. He used his office "to influence a governmental decision" of economic interest to him, a relative, someone with whom he was associated or a business to which Merrill had ties.

- \$43,000 from Thomas & Hutton Engineering from March 2008 to February 2010 in exchange for using his position to help the Savannah, Ga.-based firm, prosecutors contend.

- \$148,693 through Geechie Communications from the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau while serving on the S.C. House's budget-writing committee from April 2012 through August 2014.

Merrill chaired a House subcommittee that oversaw the budget for the S.C. Department of Parks and Tourism, which provides money to the Char-

leston visitors bureau.

Merrill also was accused of accepting \$135,000 from the visitors bureau from October 2014 to October 2016. The money was laundered through Pluff Mud Public Affairs, a company owned by Merrill's brother, John Denver Merrill, prosecutors said.

Specifics of the misconduct charges are not spelled out in the indictment. Those counts, which carry sentences of up to 10 years in prison, state that the offenses happened between Jan. 1, 2002, and July 1, 2016.

One count says Merrill used his office for personal gain. The other charge says he violated the ethics and campaign reform law "to obtain a personal profit and benefit."

The lawmaker also, according to the indictment, failed to disclose Geechie Communications' receipt of:

- \$56,306 from the S.C. Manufacturers Alliance in 2008-10.

- \$24,000 from the state Trial Lawyers Association in 2008.

- \$37,000 from the S.C. Association of Convenience Stores in 2010.

## PASCOE FOUGHT TO KEEP THE INVESTIGATION

Ashley Landess, head of the S.C. Policy Coun-

cil, noted that Gov. Nikki Haley was brought before the House Ethics Committee during her time as a Lexington County legislator for her connections to Lexington Medical Center and a Columbia engineering firm. She eventually was cleared of any wrongdoing.

"So what's different here?" Landess asked. "There's not enough in the indictment to tell."

York County Republican lawmaker Rep. Ralph Norman said, "It's sad. I know Jimmy, and I've served with him a long time. But the law is the law, and it has to have consequences."

Pascoe, appointed as a special prosecutor by S.C. Attorney General Alan Wilson, had to fight to retain control of the investigation when Wilson attempted to assign the case to another state prosecutor. Wilson's attempt came just as Pascoe was about to activate the State Grand Jury, which has broad investigative powers.

Pascoe sued Wilson and in July won in the S.C. Supreme Court. The justices ruled that Wilson - who had removed himself earlier from the case because of an unspecified conflict of interest - could not fire Pascoe.

*Staff Writer Bristow Marchant contributed.*

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FILE PHOTOGRAPH / THE STATE

In 2006, then-House Speaker Bobby Harrell and Reps. Jim Merrill and Ralph Norman discuss budget issues.

Title: **Bill would OK guns in school**  
 Author: TIM SMITH TCSMITH@GREENVILLENEWS.COM  
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# Bill would OK guns in school

Another measure  
could up gas tax

TIM SMITH

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COLUMBIA — Bills to allow school personnel to carry guns, to expand background checks on gun purchases, to increase the state's gas tax and to require seat belts in school buses are among almost 200 pieces of legislation filed this week by state senators in advance of the legislative session that starts in January.

Guns and road funding are the subjects of legislation annually but Sen. Kevin Bryant, an Anderson Republican, said he

pre-filed a bill to allow school personnel to carry guns as a result of the shooting at Townville Elementary School in September that killed 6-year-old Jacob Hall and injured three others.

"I've always supported the concept," Bryant told *The Greenville News*. "The Townville shooting, I feel, could have been prevented had there been more armed school personnel on the school's grounds."

Bryant said the bill would allow school officials and law en-

forcement to work together to develop whatever procedures and training they want for guns to be brought onto school property. He also proposed a bill that would exempt Townville students from make-up requirements for the days they missed after the shooting.

A bill by Sen. Danny Verdin, a Laurens Republican, would

create an "institutional" concealed weapons permit that could allow gun owners to car-

ry weapons in schools, day-care centers, churches and hospitals. The State Law Enforcement Division would be asked to develop rules for such permits under the bill.

Sen. Marlon Kimpson, a Charleston Democrat and gun-reform advocate, said he is unconvinced the bills would improve safety.

**See BILLS, Page 5A**

## Bills

Continued from Page 3A

"I am unaware of one documented instance where a civilian with a gun was able to successfully apprehend and prevent a mass shooting," he said.

Kimpson said he wants to hear the arguments of the bills' sponsors but is inclined to vote against them.

"I do not believe they will make our neighborhoods safer," he said.

Verdin's bill also would allow gun owners to carry weapons in the event of a mandatory evacuation, and require concealed weapons permit holders to be given a license plate sticker indicating they hold such a permit.

Two other bills would toughen requirements for gun sales involving background checks. Currently, those buying guns at a firearms store submit an application that is immediately examined by the FBI. If the agency finds

no problems in the background check, the store is notified and the sale can proceed. If, however, the check prompts questions or the need for more records, the store must wait up to three days for the check before allowing the sale, though some stores do not allow such sales unless a background check is complete.

A bill by Sen. Mia McLeod, a Columbia Democrat, would not allow such sales until the background check is complete, while bills by Sen. Gerald Malloy, a Darlington County Democrat, would require a wait of at least 28 days from the time the check was initiated. Malloy filed similar bill's in the previous legislative session.

Kimpson, who has pushed for expanded background checks, said he wants to work on a bi-partisan bill for expanded

checks instead of introducing something himself.

The expanded background check legislation was propelled by the 2015 murders in Charleston of nine African-Americans in a church Bible study by a white shooter. The man accused in the shootings, Dylann Roof, now on trial for his life, was able to buy his gun because the FBI could not locate records during the three-day waiting period that would have disqualified him from owning a gun, officials said.

Roof was charged by federal prosecutors with 33 counts, including hate crimes, because the state does not have such crimes.

Malloy has pre-filed a bill that would allow murders committed against a person because of the victim's race, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability to count as an aggravating circum-

stance when considering a sentence.

On road funding, two bills propose to raise money for improvements.

One, proposed by Sen. Sean Bennett, a Dorchester County Republican; Sen. Paul Campbell, a Berkeley County Republican; Sen. Ross Turner, a Greenville Republican; and Sen. Greg Hembree, an Horry County Republican; is similar to a bill that failed to pass during the last session that would phase in an increase of 12 cents per gallon in the gas tax and also index it for inflation, though any inflation increases would be capped.

The bill also would increase vehicle registration fees, driver's license fees and the sales tax on vehicles, from \$300 to \$600.

The bill would offer income tax relief through



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the adjustment of tax brackets.

Lawmakers initially offered tax cuts in road funding plans in response to a demand by Gov. Nikki Haley that any plan include tax relief or face her veto.

Another bill by Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Larry Grooms and Campbell would create a local option motor vehicle fuel fee that could be used for

road projects within a county if a local ordinance is passed and the county's voters approve the fee on retail sales of fuel.

Also proposed this week is a bill by McLeod to require lap and shoulder belts in all school buses be installed by August

2019. All those riding in the buses would be required to wear them and drivers would be required to ensure the belts were

placed around students.

Sen. Darrell Jackson, a Columbia Democrat, proposed allowing local governments, schools and colleges to alter or remove historical monuments or rename buildings, structures or streets.

State law currently forbids any change in the historical names of buildings or the alteration or removal of historical monuments, a law that was

changed to allow lawmakers last year to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds after the Charleston church shootings.

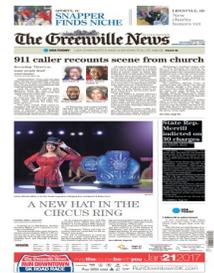
Some local and college officials have since pointed to the law as preventing them from changing Confederate-era names or monuments.

House lawmakers are scheduled to pre-file their bills on Thursday.

**"I am unaware of one documented instance where a civilian with a gun was able to successfully apprehend and prevent a mass shooting."**

STATE SEN. MARLON KIMPSON

Title: **State Rep. Merrill indicted on 30 charges**  
 Author: CLIF LEBLANC, CASSIE COPE AND AVERY G. WILKS THE STATE  
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# State Rep. Merrill indicted on 30 charges

CLIF LEBLANC, CASSIE COPE  
AND AVERY G. WILKS

THE STATE

COLUMBIA — Lowcountry S.C. House Rep. Jim Merrill was indicted Wednesday on 30 charges that accuse him of misconduct in office as far back as 2002 and a series of ethics violations.

Speaker of the House Jay Lucas, R-Darlington, suspended Merrill late Wednesday afternoon. "This suspen-

sion is in pursuant to state law and will remain in place until the matter is resolved or the seat is declared vacant," Lucas said in a statement.

The long-awaited indictment said that Merrill, who has represented Berkeley County in the House since 2001, violated the ethics law 28 times and committed official misconduct twice.

Prosecutor David Pascoe, who was

assigned to oversee the investigation, announced the charges in a 3 p.m. news release that also states the probe is ongoing. Pascoe said he will have no public comments on the case because it is not over.

A bond hearing for the 49-year-old

**See MERRILL, Page 4A**

## Merrill

Continued from Page 1A

Merrill, once the Republican Caucus leader, had not been set by late Wednesday.

Merrill's attorneys Matthew Hubbell and Leon Stavrakis issued a statement late Wednesday afternoon.

"Representative Jim Merrill adamantly denies the charges brought against him by Solicitor David Pascoe," they said. "He has served honorably ... for over 20 years.

"Contrary to the flawed allegations made today, the work performed by Jim Merrill's private company was completely legal and legitimate," the attorneys said. "In fact, the charges include conduct that has been declared legal in written opinions by the South Carolina Attorney General, the bi-partisan House Ethics Committee, and the State Ethics Commission."

Ethics watchdog John Crangle has followed the investigation closely. Crangle, head of Common Cause, said he suspects that as many as three or four more people are facing indictments. The fact that a bond hearing has not been set for Merrill could signal that Merrill will fight the charges, Crangle said.

Altogether, the 30-page indictment accuses Merrill of illegally using his office to receive at least \$1.3 million, either directly or through his business, Geechie Communications.

He is accused of accepting money to influence government decisions and sponsor legislation for private interests. For example, Merrill is charged with taking \$172,485 from New Jersey-based bus contractor, Student Transportation of America, in exchange for sponsoring a bill "regarding legislation to privatize school buses" in the Palmetto State.

Prosecutors also say Merrill, through his public rela-

tions company, illegally received payments totalling at least \$276,561 from the S.C. House Republican Caucus. His involvement with the caucus is tied to a series of counts.

The indictment also links Merrill to former House Speaker Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston.

Merrill was charged with directing tens of thousands of dollars from the Palmetto Leadership Council, which is Harrell's political action committee, to Geechie Communications, in excess of the fair market value for his services.

The indictment also states that Merrill "colluded with the House Republican Caucus and the Palmetto Leadership Council to give candidate contributions to

members of the Republican Caucus in excess of \$5,000 and accept contributions in excess of \$3,500" that are the maximums under state law.

Merrill is accused of failing to disclose contributions and expenditures made to and from the House GOP Caucus operating account and improperly using that account for campaign purposes. That failure allowed Merrill to collect \$164,564 from the House Republican Caucus without without accountability between Jan. 1, 2005, and Dec. 31, 2008, according to prosecutors.

Merrill is charged with using his office for financial gain as a House member for receiving \$108,169 to Geechie Communications from the GOP caucus just from Jan. 1, 2010 through Dec. 31, 2011.

He is accused of using his position from 2005-2008 while serving as House GOP leader to direct \$82,515 from the caucus to his PR firm.

In addition, the indictment alleges Merrill directed



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\$186,332 from the caucus to Geechie Communications, in excess of the fair market value for services it rendered between 2008 and 2010.

Besides the caucus, five other organizations are named in the indictment.

Merrill is accused of charging the caucus and Palmetto Leadership Council roughly \$275,522 for candidate mailings and advertisement placements during elections and failing to properly report those “expenditures in an effort to conceal the contributions.”

Further, Merrill illegally marked up by more than 50 percent the charges to the council for printing and graphic services.

In another count, Merrill is accused of laundering \$148,693 to Geechie Communications from the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau while serving on the S.C. House’s budget-writing committee from April 2012 through August 2014. During that time, Merrill chaired a House subcommittee that oversaw the budget for the S.C. Department of Parks and Tourism, which funds the Charleston visitors bureau, the indictment said.

Merrill also was accused of accepting \$135,000 from the bureau from October 2014 to October 2016.

The money was laundered through Pluff Mud Public Affairs, a company owned by Merrill’s brother, John Denver Merrill, prosecutors said.

Specifics of the misconduct charges are not spelled out in the indictment. Those counts, which carry sentences of up to 10 years in prison, state that the offenses happened between Jan. 1, 2002, and July 1, 2016. One count says Merrill used his office for personal gain. The other charge says he violated the ethics and campaign reform law “to obtain a personal profit and benefit.”

Among the ethics law violations, Merrill is charged with accepting \$391,174 from the South Carolina Association of Realtors to serve as a lobbyist for the organization, according to the indictment. Those offenses happened between May 14, 2008, and April 25, 2012, the prosecution contends.

Merrill received the money to influence legislation that benefitted the association, the indictment states.

Another count states that Geechie Communications accepted \$24,000 from the state Trial Lawyer’s Association in 2008 and Merrill failed to disclose receiving that money.

Merrill also is accused of accepting \$35,000 from Infilaw Management Solutions, which was trying to buy the Charleston School of Law in 2014. Merrill used his

office “to influence a governmental decision” of economic interest to him, a relative, someone with whom he was associated or a business in which Merrill had ties.

Geechie Communications, accepted \$37,000 for the S.C. Association of Convenience Stores and failed to disclose that in his statement of economic interest.

The lawmaker did not disclose \$31,056 from the S.C. Manufacturer’s Alliance to Geechie Communications.

Merrill also accepted about \$43,000 from Thomas & Hutton Engineering from March 2008 to February 2010 in exchange for using his position to help the Savannah, Ga.,-based firm, prosecutors contend.

The indictment alleges violations for conduct that is common in the Legislature, said Ashley Landess, head of the S.C. Policy Council.

“Like all lawmakers with a consulting firm or a company, he was paid for performing a service,” she said. “And don’t think I’m defending Jim Merrill, because this shouldn’t be happening at all.”

Landess noted that Gov. Nikki Haley was brought before the House Ethics Committee during her time as a Lexington County legislator for her connections to Lexington Medical Center and a Columbia engineering firm.

“But they couldn’t prove it,” Landess said. “So what’s different here? There’s not enough in the indictment to tell.”

York County Republican lawmaker, Rep. Ralph Norman, said, “It’s sad. I know Jimmy and I’ve served with him a long time. But the law is the law, and it has to have consequences.

“We’ve heard for a while that they had substantial evidence, and almost wonder why it’s taken this long. I expect you will see others that will follow.”

Pascoe, appointed as a special prosecutor by S.C. Attorney General Alan Wilson, had to fight to retain control of the investigation when Wilson attempted to assign the case to another state prosecutor.

Pascoe sued Wilson and in July won decisively in the S.C. Supreme Court. The justices ruled that Wilson — who had removed himself from the case because of an unspecified conflict of interest — could not fire Pascoe.

Pascoe argued in court that Wilson was trying to scuttle the case just as the investigation was reaching a crucial phase.

Wilson, a Republican, has political ties to Merrill and other legislators that are being investigated.

*Staff writer Bristow Marchant contributed.*

Title: **Welcome to Donald Trump's Cabinet picks**  
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# Welcome to Donald Trump's Cabinet picks

**LEONARD PITTS**  
 COLUMNIST

**A**s low as my expectations might be for the Donald Trump presidency, he finds new ways to drop the bar.

Take his cabinet nominees. Please.

They aren't all bad. Retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, the president-elect's choice for secretary of defense, comes well-recommended by old guard defense experts like Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and turns out to be nowhere near as nutty as his nickname implies.

And it's hard to dislike the bipartisan appeal of Gov. Nikki Haley (R-S.C.), although Trump's choice to name her U.N. ambassador is a puzzlement. She has little experience in foreign relations but she opposes President Obama's Iran nuclear deal.

But some of Trump's other choices illustrate how dramatically an election can swing our government's executive branch into a Bizarro World – like the fictional planet in DC comics where everything is the reverse of Earth.

This is particularly true when government appointees don't seem to care very much for government.

For secretary of labor, Trump wants Andrew Puzder, a fast-food executive with a negative attitude toward additional overtime pay for workers and raising the minimum wage.

To head the Environmental Protection Agency, Trump proposes Scott Pruitt, Oklahoma's attorney general, a climate-change skeptic, who is currently engaged in the latest in a series of lawsuits he's filed against the agency Trump would now like him to head.

And I can't leave out Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL). A tough critic of the Voting

Rights Act, Trump has tapped him to be attorney general, a move that, aided by a Republican Congress, puts him in an excellent position to launch a Reconstruction-style collapse of civil rights enforcement.

Still, the prizewinner for puzzling choices may well be Trump's naming of Dr. Ben Carson, his former rival for the Grand Old Party's presidential nomination, to be secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Sure, Carson is a nice guy with a great ghetto-to-Gold-Coast narrative. The retired neurosurgeon has been the subject of best-selling books and a made-for-TV movie, "Gifted Hands," starring Cuba Gooding Jr. as Dr. Ben.

But what does he know about housing and urban development policy? Well, he owns a house and grew up in Detroit. Fine. But driving a car does not make you an auto mechanic.

HUD doesn't need a brain surgeon. It needs people with good brains for housing and urban development.

Trump's urban "disaster" views sound frozen in the riot years of the '60s. Poverty fighters in both parties whom I have covered in recent decades have learned a lot of valuable lessons about what works and what doesn't in urban policy.

Sometimes the lessons have come with unintended consequences.

But there's enough good news in public-private partnerships, housing vouchers and other innovations to make many "inner-city" neighborhoods into oases of gentrification. To help those who have been left behind by these signs of urban hope, our nation needs wise leadership that doesn't require on-the-job training.



Title: **Former S.C. House majority leader accused of misconduct in office**  
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# Former S.C. House majority leader accused of misconduct in office

BY SEANNA ADCOX  
*Associated Press*

COLUMBIA — Former state House Majority Leader Jim Merrill is accused of using his position for personal benefit, a prosecutor who's been investigating possible corruption at the Statehouse announced Wednesday.

A Richland County grand jury indicted Merrill on two counts of misconduct in office and 28 counts of violating state ethics laws, said Solicitor David Pascoe.

A hearing has not been set, according to his release.

Merrill's attorneys did not immediately respond to messages. Pascoe's release said he would "have no further com-

ment," and his office said no one there could answer questions.

According to the indictments, the charges involve Merrill's caucus leadership role and his public relations company, Geechie Communications.

Merrill, first elected in 2000, was majority leader from 2004 to 2008.

The 49-year-old Charleston Republican is accused of lobbying for companies as a legislator, not reporting income from them on campaign disclosures, and charging the caucus above market value for work his company performed for GOP candidates.

The indictments come two years after former House Speaker Bobby Harrell, R-

Charleston, pleaded guilty to misdemeanor ethics violations and resigned from office after more than 20 years. The deal also required him to cooperate with ongoing Statehouse investigations.

After Harrell's plea, state police released a heavily redacted investigative report, with 11 of the 42 pages completely or mostly blacked out. As explanation, the State Law Enforcement Division cited a public records law provision exempting the release of information to be used in a future or likely law enforcement action.

Wednesday's announcement marks the first indictment since then.

In 2012, the House Ethics Committee twice cleared

Gov. Nikki Haley of accusations that she lobbied for employers while representing Lexington in the House and did not report that income on campaign disclosures. She argued successfully at the time that state law didn't require her to report the income, her work didn't meet the legal definition of lobbying and that there was nothing illegal about asking lobbyists for donations to a hospital nonprofit she worked for, since she wasn't paid on commission.

Haley then pushed for reforms, agreeing with her colleagues that the state's ethics laws are too vague. While the Legislature passed ethics changes earlier this year, none of them addressed lobbying.



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Graham,
Wilson
praise
Perry

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER
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South Carolina Republicans U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson are commending President-elect Donald Trump's selection of former Texas Gov. Rick Perry to head the Energy Department.



Perry

Trump's intention to tap Perry for DOE was announced Wednesday morning through Trump's transition team.

Trump called Perry one of the most successful governors in history.

"My administration is going to make sure we take advantage of our huge natural resource deposits to make America energy independent and create vast new wealth for our nation, and Rick Perry is going to do an amazing job as the leader of that process," Trump said.

Following the announcement, both Graham and Wilson commended the decision.

Perry

from 1A

projects, such as Yucca Mountain in Nevada and the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility, or MOX, at the Savannah River Site.

"(Perry) espouses the goal of energy independence and has constantly talked about the need for an energy revolution in the United States," Graham said.

"He is a great choice to lead DOE, which has a substantial impact on South Carolina," he said. "I look forward to discussing the future of the Savannah River Site (SRS) with (former) Gov. Perry and making the case for how important the site and national lab are to the nation."

Wilson said he is "confident" that Perry will prioritize several unfinished

Please see PERRY, Page 9A

"With Gov. Perry, I am confident we can accomplish an 'all of the above' energy policy - one that includes finishing Yuc-

ca Mountain, supporting SRS, completing MOX, building the Keystone Pipeline which produces jobs at Michelin of Lexington, and advancing energy

independence."

The South Carolina Republican Party joined in with support through social media.

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Through its official Twitter account, the organization said, “Congrats to our friend @GovernorPerry on his appointment as U.S. Secretary of @Energy!”

As for Palmetto State legislators, it is unclear what nuclear policy might look like.

With 36 million gallons of

high-level liquid radiological waste and more than 10 metric tons of plutonium, the Savannah River Site is a heavy element in the Energy Department nuclear complex.

President-elect Trump recently nominated S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley to be UN Ambassador.

As soon as she takes the oath of office, the power of the governorship shifts to current Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster.

Because Haley has yet to be confirmed, the McMaster team can’t open up about potential policies. How nuclear policy plays out in the state whose pre-

vious governors threatened to lay down in the road to stop nuclear shipments and refused to let the state become a “nuclear dumping ground,” remains unknown.

*Staff writer Thomas Gardiner contributed to this report.*



AP PHOTO/KATHY WILLENS

**In this Dec. 12 photo, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry smiles as he leaves Trump Tower in New York. President-elect Donald Trump selected Perry to be secretary of energy.**

Title: **New photos released, taken by Roof of Confederate flag formerly at Capitol**

Author: BY CYNTHIA ROLDÁN AND JOHN MONK [croldan@thestate.com](mailto:croldan@thestate.com); [jmonk@thestate.com](mailto:jmonk@thestate.com)

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# New photos released, taken by Roof of Confederate flag formerly at Capitol

■ Images posted on Roof's website resulted in a controversy reigniting the call for the removal of the banner from the State House grounds.

BY CYNTHIA ROLDÁN  
AND JOHN MONK

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CHARLESTON

Since Dylann Roof was arrested for the slayings of nine black parishioners at a Charleston church, a few photos of the Columbia self-avowed white supremacist with the Confederate battle flag have circulated, taken from Roof's internet site.

But Tuesday, at Roof's federal death penalty trial, prosecutors introduced numerous other photos of Roof, 22, with the Confederate banner – at antebellum plantations, at the house where he was staying and, most

prominently, at the S.C. State House.

Roof's undated photos included one of the Confederate battle flag, in a place of honor in front of the State House, with another showing the banner flying in the breeze.

When the photos taken from Roof's website were published, the resulting controversy reignited the call for the removal of the rebel banner.

The flag, which flew as part of the State House's Confeder-

ate Soldier Monument, had done so since 2000, when it was taken down from the capitol dome after flying there since 1962.

Five days after the June 17, 2015, massacre, Gov. Nikki Haley called on state lawmakers to pass legislation that would remove the flag. They did.

House Minority Leader Todd Rutherford, D-Richland, was among those who vehemently argued in favor of the flag's furling, arguing it represented a divisive past and that having it flying on state prop-

erty was an endorsement of that time.

But legislators did not know at the time when they ordered the flag's removal that Roof had come to admire that specific monument at the State House.

"Since we have taken the flag down, that area no longer represents the place where mean-spirited people come to congregate," said Rutherford on Tuesday. "There were people who gathered in that area, trying to sow the seeds of division. Dylann Roof was no different."



THE STATE / FBI

A photo Dylann Roof shot of himself, released in federal court on Tuesday

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THE STATE / FBI

A photo Dylann Roof shot at the South Carolina State House of the Confederate battle flag, released in federal court on Tuesday

Title: **State workers to pay more for pensions**  
 Author: BY CASSIE COPE [ccope@thestate.com](mailto:ccope@thestate.com)  
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# State workers to pay more for pensions

■ **S.C. taxpayers also will contribute more toward those pensions, starting July 1.**

BY CASSIE COPE  
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State workers soon will have to pay more out of their paychecks to cover their retirements. S.C. taxpayers also will contribute more toward those workers' pensions, starting July 1.

S.C. employees will pay 9.16 percent of their paychecks, up from 8.66 percent, according to an increase approved Tuesday by the State Fiscal Accountability Authority.

The workers' employers — including taxpayer-funded state agencies, school districts and local governments — also will have to pay more. Their rates will increase to 12.06 percent of

a worker's salary, up from 11.56 percent.

Lawmakers likely will put money in the state budget to pay for the employer part of the increase in the state's next budget year, which starts July 1.

The Legislature's top two budget writers — state Senate leader Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, and state Rep. Brian White, R-Anderson — both voted for the increase Tuesday. Gov. Nikki Haley also voted for the hike.

S.C. Treasurer Curtis Loftis and Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom voted against the

increase. In a statement, Loftis said the increase alone will not fix the problem, which, he said, demands legislative action.

The state's ailing S.C. Retirement System pays the pensions of workers at state agencies, teachers and local government workers.

The 1 percent increase in payments into the pension sys-

**SEE PENSION, 6A**

➔ **ONLINE**

To see which S.C. state workers make more than \$50,000 go to [thestate.com/databases](http://thestate.com/databases).

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## PENSION

tem — split between workers and their employers — would yield about \$100 million, according to Pension Employment Benefit Authority.

Too little money going into the pension system has resulted in billions of unfunded liabilities. The pension system's investments also have failed to

make as much money as expected.

The pension system's roughly \$20 billion shortfall is the difference between the amount it has on hand to pay the pensions of state workers and the amount it has promised to pay current employees and retirees.

Lawmakers are expected to start addressing that gap when they return next month. They could make changes to state law to put more money in the retirement system from taxpayers or from the paychecks of government workers.

*Cassie Cope: 803-771-8657, @cassielcope*