

Title: **Gitmodetainees**

Author:

Size: 13.33 column inches

Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



Gitmo detainees

The Obama administration's protracted push to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and move the terror suspects detained there to a U.S. population center has always been ludicrous at best, reckless at worst. Yet the president refuses to abandon that ill-advised quest, despite bi-

partisan congressional prohibitions on putting those prisoners anywhere in our nation.

So it was worth the trip to Capitol Hill for Gov. Nikki Haley to testify before the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency on Thursday. She delivered another forceful reminder that South Carolina firmly rejects the folly of placing terror detainees at the Charleston Consolidated Naval Brig in Hanahan — a facility within a booming tri-county area that is now home to more than 720,000 people.

Yet the brig is one of the U.S. sites that the Defense Department, at the direction of the White House, has evaluated as a potential new home for terror suspects from Gitmo.

Gov. Haley told the subcommittee Thursday: "You could pay the state of South Carolina to host these terrorists, and we wouldn't take them. For any amount of money." ...

Gov. Haley fairly stressed, too, that South Carolina — and Charleston — saw more than enough of the face of hate with last June's mass murder at Charleston's Mother Emanuel AME Church.

— Post & Courier
Charleston

Title: **Gov.Haley: Gofull throttleonJasperport**
 Author: BY LUCASHIGH lhigh@islandpacket.com
 Size: 41.85 column inches
 Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



Gov. Haley: Go full throttle on Jasper port

Haley held meeting Monday in Ridgeland to update status of Jasper Ocean Terminal project

Consultants: Studies indicate \$4.5 billion project will be ready to take on cargo by 2025

Haley: "We need this done yesterday"

BY LUCAS HIGH
 lhigh@islandpacket.com

The Jasper Ocean Terminal is projected to be ready to operate by around 2025, but S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley says she wants the port up and running sooner.

Haley called for the estimated \$4.5 billion project to be fast-tracked at a meeting Monday in Ridgeland, where she was by joined a cadre of consultants, elected officials, project directors and state port authority leaders.

"We need this done yesterday," she said.

Shaving a few years off the project timeline will allow the Jasper Ocean Terminal to be ready when

the nearby ports in Charleston and Savannah can no longer handle their cargo demands, Haley said.

Michael Rieger, project manager with the consulting firm Moffatt and Nichol, said a 2013 study of both ports determined that "by about 2025, the two ports will have reached

their maximum capacity."

But Haley said she "would be shocked" if the Savannah and Charleston ports don't reach maximum capacity earlier.

While she acknowledged that it is "going to be an uphill, steep climb" to ensure the Jasper port is operational before 2025, Haley said the state "need(s) to be in front of this."

Rieger said, "The governor is absolutely right — we need to press very hard. ... But at this point in time, (2025) is our best forecast."

The port and its immediate facilities will sit on 1,500 acres of recovered dredge material in the southernmost portion of Jasper County, near the Tybee National Wildlife Refuge at the mouth of the Savannah River.

At full build-out, the Jasper facility will have the capacity to handle three times the amount of cargo currently moving through Charleston's port, Rieger said.

While the facility sits in South Carolina, it will be operated through a joint venture with Georgia.

An agreement solidifying that partnership was signed last year by officials from both states.

While South Carolina and Georgia leaders have not always seen eye-to-eye on the project, Haley said she has witnessed "a coming together of both sides to (determine) what we have to do get this moving forward."

Currently, that means working with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study the potential environmental impacts of the project.

"We are in the process right now of hiring a third-party contractor ... to help prepare an environmental impact study," Nat Ball with the Corps' Charleston-based special projects team said Monday.

Ball said the goal is select that contractor before the end of May.

The environmental

study, along with the permitting and regulatory process required by the federal government, will likely take at least four years, officials estimate. In the meantime, Haley said state and local leaders must work to get their ducks in a row "so that we are waiting on everyone else and no one is waiting on us."

Part of that preparation includes starting to put "money in savings and (budgeting) how much we are going to need for the Jasper port," she said. "That way the Corps never has to question (whether the state) can really do this."

Haley also vowed to maintain a high level of cooperation with Georgia officials. "(Georgia) Gov. (Nathan) Deal and I stay in constant contact," she said. "We are not going to let this fall."

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Title: **Student says bathroom bill discussion can be educational**
 Author: BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER mschechter@aikenstandard.com
 Size: 83.7 column inches
 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



Student says 'bathroom bill' discussion can be educational

Aiken resident talks living as a transgender

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER

mschechter@aikenstandard.com

For a 20-year-old Aiken County college student, it was never an issue of feeling trapped inside of his body, but more of an acknowledgment that he needed to be the person he truly always was and is.

Kory identifies as a male, but was born with female sex organs. He asked that the *Aiken Standard* not identify his last name.

A student at Aiken Technical College, Kory said he probably started to feel more male than female around the fifth grade. That's when he started to cut his hair short and started wearing more "guy" clothes, he said. "But I didn't say anything really about it until about high school," he said.

From there, Kory came out to his friends first, calling it a "great experience." The second person, his mom.

"My mom wasn't really freaked out by it, but was more like, 'That's expensive,' and 'I'm going to lose my daughter,'" Kory said. "She's become a lot more open

to it. My sister was pretty much the same."

Kory would come out a couple of times through his transition, as the transition for him was just as much of a process as telling family and friends about it.

"I can remember being in somewhere around 12th grade, and just going to my mom and saying, 'Mom, I'm serious about this,'" he said.

With the death of what has been called the "transgender bathroom bill," Kory, like others, are calling its aftermath an educational opportunity.

Overall, Kory said his coming out experience was positive, and that telling people was every bit as freeing.

"I wouldn't say I felt trapped, but I did feel, like, upset that I wasn't born a guy," he said. "I think my transition

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BILL

CONTINUED from 1A

for me has been a really cool experience. This isn't a fad or anything. It's really opened me up to a new community, and I really like educating people on it."

On Monday, Kory stood beside his sister in downtown Aiken, acknowledging that with more people knowing he identifies as a transgender person, the more names he likely may be called.

"But I need to speak up for my community. I need to show it's OK to be a transgender person,"

he said. "It's 2016. This isn't the 1960s."

Last week, primary sponsor Sen. Lee Bright found himself without the necessary votes to push a bill out of a Senate committee that would bar people from using public restrooms, changing rooms and locker rooms that do not correspond with their biological sex.

The bill also would have barred local governments from passing legislation in direct conflict of the bill.

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley called the bill "unnecessary."

Bright's bill followed similar legislation in North Carolina, that has since become law. The law in North Carolina has drawn criticism from several musicians including Bruce Springsteen, who canceled planned tour stops, and PayPal, which pulled its plans to open a 400-employee operation center in Charlotte.

More states also have filed or passed similar legislation.

The bill's proponents said the piece of legislation is necessary and would protect particularly children and women from pedophiles and men posing as women to enter women-only areas.

Roger Rollins, the executive director of the Family and Marriage Coalition of Aiken, told the *Aiken Standard* North Carolina's law is "common sense" and would ensure privacy for men and women.

Opponents of South Carolina's bill said, if passed, the bill could

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illicit harassment or even violence.

In a PFLAG meeting last week, Dr. Christopher F. Drescher, who works at the Medical College of Georgia, presented a general overview of frequently asked questions about being transgender to a room of about 20 to 30 people.

PFLAG stands for Parents, Families, Friends and Allies United with LGBTQ people. The national organization unites "people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) with families, friends, and allies," according to its website.

Drescher said the percentage of people who are transgender and experience violence and sexual assault is grossly underestimated, but around 43 to 60 percent of transgender people are victims of violence and 43 to 46 percent are victims of sexual assault.

Kory said he hasn't experienced negative incidents in Aiken County, but knows it's not

that way for every person who identifies as transgender.

"I really thought I would be terrified to come out to my mom. I kept thinking, 'What if she kicks me out?'" he said. "But, my mom would never do that. I've seen all of these stories about people getting kicked out and their friends not talking to them."

Kory has not gone through the full transition to male. Transitional surgery can be expensive, as many insurance companies don't cover them, he said.

And until he can get the money coupled with the bill holding at stalemate, Kory said he won't use men's restrooms out of fear.

"I am scared that someone is going to try to beat me up," he said. "I think I'll wait (to use the men's bathroom) until my transition becomes more masculine. I think if people start to see us as human, as people who also struggle, go through challenges, I think people would open up to the idea of a transgender person."

Kory said he knows the acceptance of the transgender community can take time. But, he said, "get with the times."

"... It's 2016. You shouldn't be discriminating any more. There are interracial couples, there are gay couples. Let trans people be trans."

Maayan Schechter is the digital news editor with the *Aiken Standard*. Follow her on Twitter @MaayanSchechter.



STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL SMITH

Kory, an Aiken Technical College student, said coming out as transgender opened him up to a new community. He called the experience positive.

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Size: 83.7 column inches
Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL SMITH

Kory, a student at Aiken Technical College, believes the aftermath of the death of the “trans-gender bathroom bill” can be a learning and educational opportunity.

Title: **Big names to rump: Don't pick me for VP**
 Author: BY PATRICK HEALY AND ASHLEY PARKER New York Times News Service
 Size: 55.95 column inches
 Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



VICE PRESIDENTIAL POSSIBILITIES

Big names to Trump: Don't pick me for VP

BY PATRICK HEALY
AND ASHLEY PARKER

New York Times News Service

It's a time-honored tradition for politicians to deny any interest in the vice presidency. But this year, with the possibility of Donald Trump as the Republican nominee, they really mean it.

"Never," said Chris Schrimpf, a spokesman for Gov. John Kasich of Ohio, who is still running against Trump. "No chance."

"Hahahahahahahaha," wrote Sally Bradshaw, a senior adviser for Jeb Bush, when asked if he would consider it.

"Scott Walker has a visceral negative reaction to Trump's character," said Ed Goeas, a longtime adviser for the Wisconsin governor.

Or, as Sen. Lindsey Graham put it, "That's like buying a ticket on the Titanic."

A remarkable range of leading Republicans, including Gov. Nikki Haley of South Carolina and Sen. Jeff Flake of Arizona, have been emphatic publicly or with their advisers and allies that they do not want to be considered as Trump's running mate. The recoiling amounts to a rare rebuke for a front-runner: Politicians usually signal that they are not interested politely through back channels, or submit to the selection process, if only to burnish their na-

tional profiles.

But Trump has a singular track record of picking fights with obvious potential running mates like Sen.

Marco Rubio of Florida, who has indicated a lack of interest in the vice presidency generally and has yet to reconcile with Trump publicly. Haley and another potential pick, Gov. Susana Martinez of New Mexico, have sharply criticized Trump and do not want to be associated with his sometimes-angry tone, according to advisers and associates who have spoken with these Republicans.

Several Republican consultants said their clients were concerned that Trump's unusually high unfavorable ratings with all voters and his unpopularity among women and Hispanics could doom him as a general election candidate and damage their own future political prospects if they were on his ticket.

Still, elected officials do have a way of coming around to the vice presidency, and Trump said in an interview Saturday that he was in the early stages of mending fences and building deeper relationships with leading Republicans. And in a sign of growing acceptance that Trump is their likely nominee, several Republicans

made it clear that they would join him on the ticket because they think he can win, or because they regard the call to serve as their duty.

Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, as well as Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama and retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson, said in interviews that they would consider joining the ticket if Trump offered. Two governors, Chris Christie of New Jersey and Mary Fallin of Oklahoma, have also told allies that they were open to being Trump's running mate.

"If a potential president says I need you, it would be very hard for a patriotic citizen to say no," Gingrich said. "People can criticize a nominee, but ultimately there are very few examples of people turning down the vice presidency."

Trump, who could well become the presumptive Republican nominee on Tuesday by winning the Indiana primary, is just starting to mull vice presidential prospects and has no favorite in mind, he said in the interview. Trump said he wanted someone with "a strong political background, who was well respected on the Hill, who can help me with legislation, and who could be a great president."

He declined to discuss

potential picks in any detail, but he briefly praised three governors as possible contenders — Kasich, Christie and Rick Scott of Florida — and said he would also consider candidates who were women, black or Hispanic. (A spokeswoman for Scott said he was focused on being governor.)

Asked if he was surprised about the array of Republicans who are uncomfortable being his running mate, Trump said: "I don't care. Whether people support or endorse me or not, it makes zero influence on the voters. Historically, people don't vote based on who is vice president. I want someone who can help me govern."

A cross section of leading Republicans agree that his most sensible choice would be an experienced female governor or senator, given that he would most likely face Hillary Clinton in November and need support from a majority of white women to offset her strong support among blacks and Hispanics. Yet Clinton is ahead of Trump with white women by double-digit percentages, according to a recent CBS poll.

The pool of Republican women in major offices is relatively small, and



Title: **Big names to rump: Don t pick me tor VP**

Author: BY PATRICK HEALY AND ASHLEY PARKER New York Times News Service

Size: 55.95 column inches

Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269

Trump has alienated some of them. Haley denounced him for not quickly disavowing support from former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, and Martinez has criticized his remarks about Hispanics. As a political novice, Trump will be widely judged on whom he chooses because voters and other Republican leaders will look to his pick to evaluate his priorities for the kind of advisers he would want as president.

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA,” WROTE SALLY BRADSHAW, A SENIOR ADVISER FOR JEB BUSH, WHEN ASKED IF HE WOULD CONSIDER BEING DONALD TRUMP’S RUNNING MATE.

Title: **Haleyto attend statusmeeting**

Author:

Size: 7.13 column inches

Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



Haley to attend status meeting

Gov. Nikki Haley is scheduled to participate in a public meeting on the status of the Jasper Ocean Terminal at 10:30 a.m. Monday.

The meeting will be held at the Jasper County Government Building, third floor council chambers, 358 Third Ave., Ridgeland.

Haley will be joined by members of the Jasper County Council, members of the board of directors of

the South Carolina Ports Authority, Jasper Ocean Terminal Joint Project Office officials and state legislators to discuss the progress of the Jasper Ocean Terminal Project, according to a news release.

The Jasper County Chamber of Commerce is holding a luncheon Monday afternoon to provide members with a port update.

Title: **Haley: Feds have left South Carolina in dark on Guantanamo**
 Author: BY MEG KINNARD Associated Press
 Size: 16.27 column inches
 Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



Haley: Feds have left South Carolina in dark on Guantanamo

BY MEG KINNARD
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA

Gov. Nikki Haley on Thursday criticized the federal government for keeping her in the dark about plans to potentially transfer Guantanamo detainees to South Carolina, telling a U.S. House panel that she has heard no details about what she says could be detrimental for her state.

"They've handled this very much on their own and have not included us in the process," Haley told a U.S. House Homeland Security subcommittee examining the implications of moving prisoners to certain communities.

Haley has been outspoken in her opposition to transferring the 80 remaining detainees from the prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. On Thursday, she told lawmakers that Defense Department offi-

cials surveyed the Naval brig 15 miles from Charleston but have said nothing about whether they still considering bringing prisoners there.

Haley said some of her concerns about housing the detainees in South Carolina come from a marketing standpoint: She said she would have a hard time recruiting foreign investors with terrorist suspects at the brig. Knowing that dangerous individuals are nearby, Haley said, could also make travelers hesitant to visit South Carolina.

The governor also referenced turmoil in the aftermath of the brutal slayings of nine members of a historic black church last summer, saying that the state is still recovering and shouldn't have to deal with more hate or a potential terror threat.

Title: **Port envisioned by 2025, Haley wants it yesterday**
 Author: Associated Press
 Size: 26.97 column inches
 Greenwood, SC Circulation: 16494



■ SC SHIPPING

Port envisioned by 2025, Haley wants it yesterday

Associated Press

RIDGELAND — Gov. Nikki Haley said Monday she expects lawmakers in South Carolina and Georgia will have to start banking money to help pay for a joint port terminal on the Savannah River, a terminal consultants expect will be needed by 2025 and which Haley said she would've liked to have had yesterday.

Haley met with local officials and representatives from both states Monday to get an update on the Jasper Ocean Terminal, a 1,500-acre terminal planned for a site in Jasper County on the South Carolina river, downstream from Savannah.

The first phase, expected to cost about \$2 billion, is now expected to be needed by 2025 when container capacity — space to stack containers — at terminals in South Carolina and Georgia begins to run out. Haley said with the growing economies of both

states, capacity could begin running out before then.

Monday's briefing was to have been last fall to mark a milestone in the decade-long Jasper project, when planners applied for an Army Corps of Engineers permit. Haley said there was no time for an observance then because the state was recovering from historic rains and flooding.

Several years ago, South Carolina lawmakers set aside \$300 million to pay the state's share of the \$510 million deepening of the Charleston Harbor shipping channel and Haley said assurances the money was in place helped speed the project.

She said she talks frequently with Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal, and both states plan a similar approach in paying for the Jasper Terminal, for which federal money might also be available. The project would greatly expand capacity for the steel containers.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley speaks with reporters Monday outside the Jasper County office building in Ridgeland after a briefing on a \$4.5 billion container terminal South Carolina and Georgia are jointly building on the Savannah River.

Transgender advocates fear bill's fallout even if it dies

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COLUMBIA (AP) — Transgender people said Thursday they fear a South Carolina bill that would require them to use the public bathroom for their biological sex will stoke misguided fears and endorse restroom vigilantism, even if the bill ultimately dies as expected.

Opponents told a Senate panel the unenforceable measure perpetuates myths against an already-ostracized community, while supporters contend it's about protecting the privacy and safety of women and children.

The measure mimics part of a North Carolina law passed last month that's caused economic fallout and debate nationwide.

A growing number of musicians have canceled concerts in North Carolina in protest, including Cyndi Lauper, Bruce Springsteen and Ringo Starr.

In Massachusetts on Thursday, an LGBT group booed the Republican governor off stage when he declined to commit to legislation expanding protections for transgender people.

The South Carolina bill, introduced last week, may go nowhere.

The proposal requires multistall bathrooms on public property to be designated and used according to the gender on people's birth certificates. It would also bar local governments from requiring businesses to let transgender people use the bathroom of their choice.

No vote was taken during the panel's second and final hearing. It's not yet clear whether the full committee will consider the measure.

But even if it manages to advance to the Senate floor, Sen. Joel Lourie, D-Columbia, promises to use Senate rules to block debate. House GOP leaders say their chamber won't deal with



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Transgender citizens, above, stand during a Senate hearing of a bill limiting their bathroom choices in Columbia on Wednesday. Grayson Keck and Dex Sexton, left, testify during a Senate subcommittee to consider a controversial bill that would ban transgender people from choosing the bathroom they use.



the issue before session ends in June anyway. And opponents include Republican Gov. Nikki Haley, who has repeatedly called it unnecessary.

The sponsor, GOP Sen. Lee Bright, contends his bill is a "matter of common sense," and its opponents are "forgoing the safety and privacy of the largest part of the population in order to defend" a tiny minority.

In a letter read at the hearing, Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott said the bill addresses a nonissue. In his 41 years in law enforcement, he said, he's never heard of a transgender person attacking or otherwise bothering someone in a restroom.

He said he can't enforce a bill that burdens law enforcement with bathroom checks and exposes his agency to lawsuits.

"Obviously, DNA testing is cost pro-





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hibitive," he wrote. And asking deputies to check genitalia "invades subjects' dignity and privacy."

Transgender people say the bill's requirement would put them in danger of harassment and violence, as they would clearly look out of place.

"To make discrimination legal is an atrocity," said transgender male Greg Green, a Citadel graduate and former police officer and firefighter. "Going to the bathroom is natural. Worrying about whether the person in the stall beside you is sitting or standing is not commonsense."

Sharon Mansell, a Beaufort mother of 10, said she sympathizes with transgender people's objections, but it's a mother's duty to protect her children. She said she fears that without the law, "someone with a perverted mind" can pretend to be transgender to abuse the opposite sex.

"I stand firm that we need to vote 'yes' for this bill for the protection of everyone," she said. "This is not a war against transgender people."

Oran Smith of the Palmetto Family Council said his members' top concern is "young girls who may have men in their shower rooms" at public schools.

Opponents argued laws already address assault, and shower curtains can provide privacy.

O.K. Keyes, a transgender Columbia resident who works with LGBT youth, said the bill invites people to hate a community they know little about.

"The legislation claims to protect, but it actually targets youth," said Keyes, 25. "Senators get to propose legislation to stir up their base and it ultimately dies, but in the process, it garners all this attention and talking points. And no one is thinking about what happens afterward."



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148 Lieutenant
Governor Visits

McMaster supports revamping of DOT

Road improvements,
transgender bathrooms
among chief concerns

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
Morning News
jlloyd@florencenews.com

FLORENCE — South Carolina Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster says he supports Gov. Nikki Haley's stand on reorganizing the Department of Transportation.



McMaster

McMaster was in Florence on Friday morning for an event with local seniors to discuss emergency disaster preparedness. After his presentation, McMaster spoke to the Morning News about several topics making headlines across the state, including the contentious roads bill and the controversial transgender bathroom bill.

Earlier this week, the House altered the Senate's road plan — leading to a

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McMaster

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consensus among many senators and Gov. Nikki Haley that the bill will not pass its last run through the Senate.

The House amendments removed the \$400 million annual general fund mandate and took away the governor's power to appoint all members of the DOT board, and instead requires House and Senate approval of board members and gives \$415 million extra to the Department of Transportation.

McMaster said he supported the Senate bill and stands by Haley's take on the debate.

"The highway department has got to be reorganized," he said. "Others have said, and I agree, throwing more money their way is like pouring water into a bucket with holes in it. I support the governor and those who are proposing that."

When asked if he would suggest the Senate vote down the bill that's been debated for more than two years, he said he'd have to consider the House amendments and go from there.

"I'm confident that we will get the job done, and I'm encouraging everyone to get something done in

a hurry," he said.

Transgender

Earlier this month, Spartanburg Republican Sen. Lee Bright introduced a bill that would require multi-stall bathrooms on public property to be designated "based on biological sex." It specifically includes student bathrooms, locker rooms and shower rooms in public schools.

If passed, the bill would also ban local governments from passing laws allowing transgender people to use the bathrooms or locker rooms of the gender with which they identify. The proposal has drawn widespread criticism and sparked protests in the capital. Haley previously called the bill unnecessary.

Though McMaster only spoke briefly on the bill and didn't say whether he would support it, he said he takes a traditional stance on the discussion.

"That's a very interesting debate, and I guess I'm just old-fashioned," McMaster said. "I think a men's room and a ladies' room ought to be sufficient enough."

That bill is under debate in a Senate committee, where lawmakers have heard testimony from supporters and opponents throughout this week.

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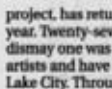
148 Shame on state lawmakers for fumbling plan to fix our roads

Thumbs down to our state government for failing AGAIN to agree on a plan to fix our crumbling roads. We were disappointed that the General Assembly didn't pass a road plan in 2015. The House had a plan, but we didn't think it was the best solution to a big problem.

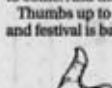


The Senate let time expire on its talk because of a filibuster by Tom Davis, a Republican from Beaufort. Leaders assured us that a roads plan was the highest priority in 2016. The Senate finally took action this spring, but the House made changes to the plan, and now senators and Gov. Nikki Haley are saying the bill probably dead for the year. Are you kidding us? The session is far from over. The debate should continue. Politics again seem to be getting in the way of progress. Haley wants S.C. Department of Transportation reform, to which we are not opposed. The Senate's bill would give her the power to appoint all members of the DOT board, with Senate approval. The House changed the bill to have approval by the House and Senate, knowing full well that the Senate would balk. So here we are, going nowhere while bad roads get worse. Big businesses and little citizens have complained loudly. Are our state leaders deaf?

Thumbs up to arts in the Pee Dee. Spring is prime time for festivals, concerts, performances, galleries, etc. The season is peaking. The Arts International Festival and the Florence-Darlington Technical College Welding Rodeo were warm-ups. This weekend brings the Bar-B-Que Shag Festival in Hemingway. The three-day event ends today at the recreation complex off McAllister Street. "Play Me, I'm Yours," an international street piano project, has returned to Florence and Lake City for a second year. Twenty-seven pianos — make that 26, because to our dismay one was stolen this week — are decorated by local artists and have been placed throughout Florence and Lake City. Through May 1, people are encouraged to play these pianos at their leisure. On Friday, "Shrek, the Musical" opens at the Florence Little Theatre. The Morning News and snow.com have been providing a behind-the-scenes look at preparations. Don't miss the videos, which will continue to come. And then there's The Big One. ...



Thumbs up to ArtFields. The nine-day art competition and festival is back in Lake City for a fourth year. It will open Friday night and will close on the evening of April 30. If you go to the finale, look for actor Bill Murray. He was there last year. As many as 20,000 people have come each of the past three years to an event that is far easier to experience than it is to be described. Nearly 400 artists from 12 Southeastern states — Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia — have had their art accepted into the competition. Some pieces are small. Some are huge. Some are two-dimensional; some are three-dimensional. All are interesting. With \$110,000 in cash prizes given to artists, ArtFields is the largest arts competition in the Southeast. You can read much more about it in the coming days. If you've been there before, you'll probably come back. If you haven't experienced it, just go.



Thumbs up from members of the Holladay family. Last week, we gave them a thumbs up. This week, the family wants to express its thanks to the community. These are the relatives of Sgt. John Charlton Holladay, a Marine from Florence who was killed in 1943 in the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific during World War II. His remains were found in February 2015 in the Solomon Islands, and earlier this month they were returned to Florence, where he was buried at Florence National Cemetery. "Overwhelmed is the best word we can think of to describe how our family felt in response to the outpouring of support and interest in the homecoming of our uncle, Sgt. John Charlton Holladay," a member of the family wrote. "We had no idea that the people would be interested in this amazing family event. Just the fact that he was found and identified after all these years was more than we could have ever hoped for, but the response of The Morning News, The News Journal, and all the local TV networks was beyond our imagination. We want to thank all who helped make this homecoming so special. To the news media, the U.S. Marine Corp, the Patriot Guard, veterans of all branches of service, law enforcement from Charleston to Florence (especially Sheriff Kenney Boone) who reached out to celebrate and participate in this event, we will always be grateful."



Thumbs up, thumbs down is a regular feature of The Morning News and appears each Saturday on our Opinion page. We seek nominations for both good and bad deeds from our readers. Send nominations to us by email at letters@florencenews.com. Be sure use the word "thumb" in the subject and include a contact number. Thumbs can also be mailed to us c/o The Morning News, 300 S. Dargatzis St., Florence, S.C. 29506.