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OCTOBER 8, 2015

FEMA ready to offer help to flood victims



BY TOM O'DARE
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Over the weekend, a flurry of official declarations were put in place as floodwaters rose in South Carolina.

Gov. Nikki Haley declared a state of emergency for the entire state and this led to President Obama's issuing a federal disaster proclamation.

Haley

These were followed by cities and counties initiating their own civil emergency proclamations.

All of these were done in order to set the stage for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Local officials said hundreds, if not thousands, in the county have sustained or will sustain some kind of property damage due to the heavy rains and rising rivers. The county is still trying to gather the number of properties affected by the massive rain event.

Horry County spokeswoman Lisa Bourcier said unfortunately many residents don't have flood insurance and most homeowner insurance policies will not cover damage by water.

Since the county has been declared part of the federal disaster area, FEMA will be able to offer assistance to many of those affected by the floods. The agency provides information from a number of government sources to help with repairs and other vital needs.

To find out what FEMA provides and to apply for assistance, you can visit disasterassistance.gov or call 800-621-3362.

In order to expedite the application process, here's a list of what may need:

When you apply for disaster assistance, you should have the following available:

- Social Security Number (including your spouse's)
- Private insurance information, if available
- Address and zip code of the damaged property
- Directions to the damaged home or property
- Daytime telephone number
- A telephone number where we can reach you or leave a message
- An address where you can get mail

If you want your disaster assistance funds sent directly to your bank, provide the FEMA agent with your bank account type (savings/checking), account number and routing number.



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148 Disaster unemployment made available to local residents

Gov. Nikki Haley and the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) announced that 19 counties, including Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester and Colleton counties, are eligible to receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) after FEMA approved them for individual assistance.

The DUA program makes funds available to assist people who became unemployed as a direct result of the Oct. 3 - 4 storm and ensuing floods.

If you have questions regarding your eligibility, call 888-834-5890.

DEW Executive Director Cheryl Stanton said South

Carolina workers may be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits under the DUA program.

To be eligible, workers or business owners must meet the following criteria:

- Individuals who are unemployed due to the disaster, and do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits.
- Self-employed individuals and small business owners who lost income due to the disaster.
- Individuals who were prevented from working due to an injury caused by the disaster.
- Individuals who have become the major supplier of

household income due to the disaster-related death or injury of the previous major supplier of household income.

- Individuals who are unable to reach their job or self-employment location because they must travel through the affected area and are prevented from doing so by the disaster.
- Individuals who were to commence employment or self-employment but were prevented by the disaster.

Applicants can file immediately. Please check www.dew.sc.gov for updates on this program. Applicants have 30 days to file a claim under this program. Last day to file will be Nov. 6.

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Leo Lachapelle stands in the kitchen and living room of his house, which had filled with nearly three feet of water during the flood.

Monica Kreber/Journal Scene

Picking up the pieces

Town, county adjust fees for those affected by flood

MONICA KREBER

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Holly Street residents have seen better days.

On Monday many houses along the road had a few things in common: a musty smell, cleaning crew vans parked in the driveways and a pile of drywall and spoiled furniture decorating the front yards.

It is not an ideal situation, but residents are hanging in there as they move on from the flood.

People are pitching in as families re-

cover.

On Monday, three members from NewSpring Church in North Charleston could be found bringing food to Holly Street resident Leo Lachapelle, whose house filled with nearly three feet of water during the flood.

Church member Grant Wheelon said NewSpring is just trying to help out.

"We're going around to areas we know

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Victims

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got hit hard," he said.

Member Mark McElheney said the church has also been handing out water all over the state. He said they have visited houses and are assisting Low-country Food Bank by bringing food to families affected by the flood.

It is a little assistance Lachapelle is thankful for.

"It was nice to have the help," he said.

The bottom floor of Lachapelle's house has been wiped out. Drywall and insulation have been pulled out, as well as all the furniture that had been on the ground floor.

"It's one way to remodel the house, so to speak," he said.

Lachapelle is married and has a 15-year-old daughter. The family is living in a hotel as they work on repairing the house.

"Once the contractor says it's safe then we'll move back in," he said.

Summerville and Dorchester County officials are working to make that recovery as smooth as possible.

Summerville is waiving building permit fees – but only for those affected by floodwater damage.

Dorchester County has reduced residential building permit fees to a one-time \$30 fee for the next six months rather than the usual graduated fee schedule based on the dollar

amount of work being done.

The county is waiving the requirement for tree removal permits until Oct. 23.

Also, the county is delaying collecting real property tax for 30 days without penalty.

Friday, County Council voted to enter an agreement with the S.C. Department of Transportation whereby SCDOT contractors will pick up flood debris on all state and county roads in the county.

Dorchester County will be responsible for up to 25 percent of the cost of the debris removal, and that money will come from its "rainy day" fund.



Monica Kreber/Journal Scene

A line of furniture, drywall, insulation and other house material line Holly Street.

"It's one way to remodel the house, so to speak."

LEO LACHAPELLE



Jenna-Ley Harrison/Journal Scene

Gov. Nikki Haley steps off a helicopter in front of the Dorchester County Sheriff's Office Thursday for a press conference.

If the debris is picked up faster than expected, the county could end up paying a smaller percentage. That's what happened after the 2014 ice storm, when the county ended up paying a 15 percent match, County Administrator Jason Ward said.

Summerville Town Engineer Russ Cornette said he's working to get a similar agreement in front of Town Council for its Wednesday meeting, as there are town roads that flooded.

The building permit waiver is already approved.

Mayor Bill Collins said the idea was to offer some relief

to those who suffered damage to their homes or businesses. This waiver for building permit fees will last through Dec. 31.

Rich Palmer, building official for the town, explained folks are encouraged to get permits for documentation purposes. He said the waiver is only for flood-related damage.

Town council approved the motion during its finance committee meeting on Oct. 12. Palmer will report back to council members after the end of the year if the timeline for the waiver needs to be extended.

"More than likely we will

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waive it for both residential and business," Palmer said. "It's just things that were damaged by the flood itself, not rainwater."

On Monday, Palmer said the information will be posted on the town's website. He said this waiver will help save people's time and money in applying for a permit.

Palmer said they have not had any applications yet.

"I think people are still just trying to get the wet stuff out of their house right now," he said.

Palmer said the town is still making damage assessments.

Officials have driven through neighborhoods that they know received a lot of damage – like Evergreen, Gadsden and Arbor Oaks, as well as other smaller areas. Officials had plans on Monday to drive through more neighborhoods within Summerville.

This is the first major flooding issue Palmer said his department has had to deal with.

The last big incident they had was the ice storm in early 2014.

"In this case it was so extensive I felt like it would help the community if we did some-

thing to try to reach out and help out," he said.

Everyone who needs to do repairs is encouraged to get permits so the town will have documentation.

"FEMA has been super," Palmer said, praising FEMA and the National Guard for being out in the neighborhoods. "We've got a lot of support."

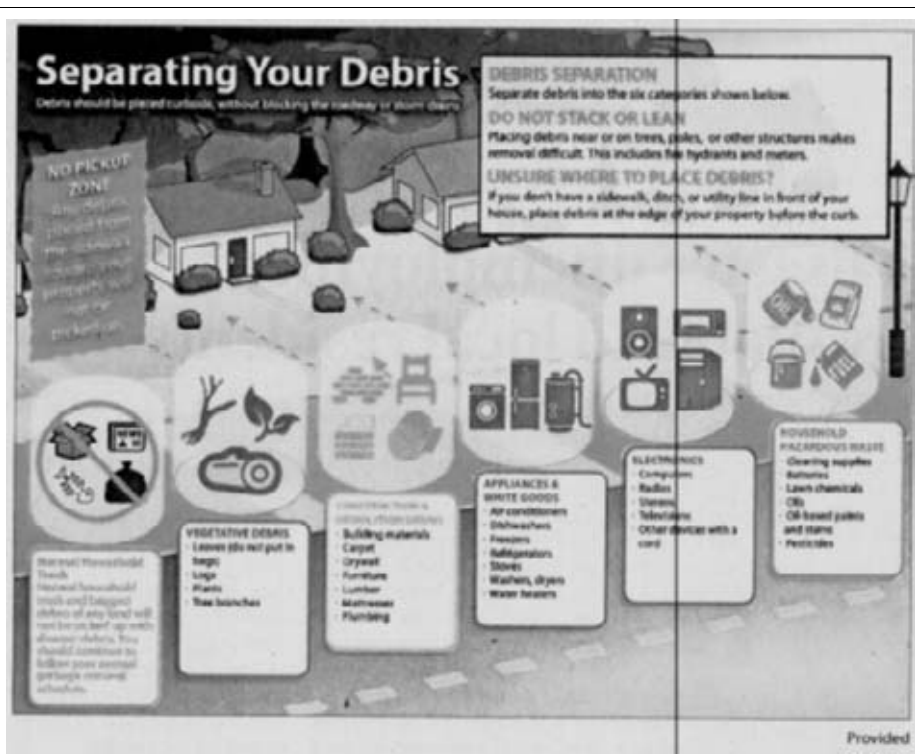
Leslie Cantu and Jenna-Ley Harrison contributed to this report.

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Leslie Cantu/Journal Scene

Children bicycle as a Jeep returns from flooded homes in the Ashborough neighborhood on Thursday.



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148 Tow truck driver faces price gouging charges

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A tow truck driver was arrested Wednesday after being accused of taking advantage of people trying to help during the flood.

Robert Andrew Boland, 40, of Summerville is charged with two counts of price gouging during an emergency and was cited for operating without a business license.

With the rain pouring down Saturday, the Frances R. Willis SPCA put out a "911" call on its Facebook page asking for help from the community because the facility was flooding.

Dozens flocked to the facility

off U.S. 78 to rescue dogs as the water rose in their pens.



Boland

But, according to social media accounts, many who had parked at a nearby gas station found that their cars were towed.

The Dorchester County Sheriff's Office investigated complaints that were filed with its office.

According to a press release, two people were charged towing fees in "gross disparity" to the usual price.

A price list found at the business, Carolina Towing and Recovery in Summerville, showed that a daytime tow would usually cost \$85, according to the sheriff's office.

However, one woman was charged \$250, and another paid \$150 to have her vehicle unhooked from the tow truck, the press release said.

Other receipts showed that Boland had charged an "unconscionable price" during the state of emergency as declared by Gov. Nikki Haley, according to the affidavit.

As of Tuesday, only those two victims had come forward to make reports, according to the sheriff's office.



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Staff at Frances R. Willis SPCA in Summerville is all smiles Wednesday as they begin the long recovery process.



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148 Summerville dojo brings home the cup

Ray Smith's Taekwondo once again brought home the Governor's Cup trophy.

The 27th annual Governor's Cup Taekwondo Championship tournament was held Sept. 26 at Powdersville Middle School in Greenville. For the 21st time, Ray Smith's Taekwondo earned the team championship trophy.

The Summerville dojo sent 25 martial arts students to the competition and they earned 46 medals (16 first place, 18 second place and 12 third place).

It has become a tradition for the Governor of South Carolina to declare the day of the tour-

namment Tae Kwon Do Day in the state and Gov. Nikki Haley honored the tradition this year by issuing an official proclamation.

Olivia Gross and Joshua Lease placed first in both forms and sparring. Also earning a first-place medal for forms were Alex Cheatham, Tamara Cheatham, Brayden Coyle, Hayley Donehoo, Jeffen Gimena and Jennifer Lease. Earning a first-place medal for sparring were Oakley Aguilar, Lucas Donehoo, Angela Gross, Jaylin Hayward and Antonio Venegas.



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Provided

Local students who earned medals at this year's Governor's Cup tournament are (l to r, bottom) Ella-Blu Forrester, Oakley Aguilar, Jeffen Gimena, Thomas Goddard, Olivia Gross, Aidan Donehoo, Brayden Coyle, Lucas Donehoo, Christopher Cheatham, (middle) Angela Gross, Dylan Crepeau, Joshua Lease, Antonio Venegas, Dylan Quinn, Aukal Waters, Alex Cheatham, (top) Jaylin Hayward, Ethan Sucku, Jennifer Lease, Hayley Donehoo, Ryan Donehoo, John Villeneuve, Tamara Cheatham, Caleb Simmons and (not pictured) Joshua Forrester.



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CAPITOL GAINS

Investigation: Candidates enrich themselves with campaign cash, gifts, travel
By Tony Bartelme and Rachel Baye on Sep 25, 2015

South Carolina elected officials and candidates have what amounts to a personal ATM that dispensed nearly \$100 million since 2009 for such things as car repairs, football tickets, male-enhancement pills, GoPro cameras, overseas junkets and gasoline.

A joint investigation by The Post and Courier and the Center for Public Integrity also found state lawmakers and candidates used this cash machine to hire their own companies, pay parking tickets, purchase an AARP membership – and even buy a used BMW convertible for “parades.”

The money funding this political cash machine comes from candidates’ campaign accounts, reimbursements from state government and outright gifts from special interests.

The inner workings of this cash network typically remain hidden unless prosecutors subpoena questionable receipts and other evidence locked away from public view, as happened in the case of ex-House Speaker Bobby Harrell.

The Republican’s conviction last year for misusing campaign money to pay for his private plane left many in the state capital wondering whether other lawmakers would be charged. At least one active criminal investigation is underway, and a handful of lawmakers have been mentioned in a State Law Enforcement Division report.

Following the money

This is the first story in an ongoing investigation by The Post and Courier and the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative news group based in Washington, D.C.

The Center analyzed campaign expenditures and statements of economic interest from the South Carolina Ethics Commission, obtained through public records requests. Rachel Baye and Ben Wieder, reporters for The Center, examined filings covering 2009 through mid-2015 from political committees, constitutional officers, state representatives and state senators, as well as candidates seeking those elective offices.

The Center and The Post and Courier reviewed the data to identify notable expenditures, gifts and spending patterns. Post and Courier reporters Tony Bartelme, Doug Pardue, Glenn Smith and David Slade, along with Center reporter Baye, contacted dozens of lawmakers and other officials to discuss the findings and gain additional insight into South Carolina’s ethics laws. Bartelme served as the lead writer on today’s article.

Taken together, this information provides the most comprehensive look yet at how state elected officials and candidates receive perks and spend millions of dollars in campaign cash.

Amid this backdrop, The Post and Courier/Center for Public Integrity’s investigation found questionable spending under the state’s ethics laws to be pervasive and unrelated to party affiliation or geography. The investigation raises fresh questions about the shadowy ways candidates and elected officials spend money. Consider:

- Rep. Rick Quinn, R-Cayce, poured more than \$105,000 into his own company and his father’s since 2009, accounting for near-

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ly 80 percent of the campaign funds he spent.

- Democratic Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter of Orangeburg spent \$4,500 in campaign cash to buy drawings and prints by her husband, an artist.

- Former House Majority Leader Jim Merrill of Daniel Island earned more than \$215,000 from fellow lawmakers who in many cases simply described the Republican's public relations work as "campaign expense," "consulting" or "mail."

- When candidates ran afoul of ethics laws, at least 26 used campaign money to pay their fines. Longtime critics of the state's ethics rules say the system is flawed and designed to protect cozy relationships and influence-peddling. Lawmakers created a state Ethics Commission to enforce laws – for everyone but themselves. House and Senate lawmakers each have their own separate ethics committees to take complaints and police themselves. "We have zero jurisdiction over members of the General Assembly," said Herb Hayden, executive director of the Ethics Commission.

To better understand spending patterns, the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative news group, and The Post and Courier analyzed public records of more than 100,000 expenses, gifts, travel and reimbursements.

Taken together, this information provides the most comprehensive look yet at how state elected officials and candidates spent and received millions of dollars over the past seven years. It exposes how lawmakers and candidates cloak expenditures with vague terms such as "travel," "unknown" and "incidentals." It shows how they follow a murky ethics rulebook that allows nearly unlimited spending.

To be sure, many lawmakers fulfill their public duties with honesty and without milking their campaign accounts and other sources. The Post and Courier/Center for Public Integrity investigation found that many expenditures, reimbursements and gifts were perfectly appropriate transactions related to campaigning, policy exploration and simple expenses related to being in the public eye. Others were legal but of questionable judgment. And some appeared to cross clear ethical lines.

Murky ethics laws

At first glance, South Carolina's ethics laws seem straightforward:

"No candidate, committee, public official, or political party may use campaign funds to defray personal expenses which are unrelated to the campaign or the office if the candidate is an officeholder nor may these funds be converted to personal use." The laws also prohibit public officials from using their positions to "obtain an economic interest for himself, a family member, an individual with whom he is associated, or a business with which he is associated."

In practice, candidates in South Carolina and elsewhere often stretch the boundary between what's personal and what's for their campaigns. Federal ethics laws, similar to those in South Carolina, allow candidates to use funds for both campaign- and office-related expenses. As in South Carolina, funds in some cases may even be used for gifts, provided that only a small amount is spent and that they are not for family members, said Paul S. Ryan, senior counsel with Campaign Legal Center, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit opposed to the influence of big money on local and national politics.

But many states have struggled to close loopholes in their ethics laws. About half the states surveyed in 2012 for potential corruption risks earned D's and F's in the Center for Public Integrity's State Integrity Investigation. South Carolina ranked 45th out of 50,



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largely because of its weak regulations.

Even when legal, some expenses still might not be appropriate, said Jessica Levinson, a professor at Loyola Law School who specializes in campaign finance.

"The line should be drawn a bit more stringently to really say these are funds that were given to allow you, legislator, to get your message out to obtain voters, and these aren't funds that were given out so that you could obtain personal perks," said Levinson, also president of Los Angeles' Ethics Commission. "A lot of what we're seeing here looks more like personal perks than bona fide governmental or legislative purposes."

Consider transactions by Rep. Alan Clemmons, a Republican real estate lawyer from Myrtle Beach.

An Eagle Scout and avid hunter, Clemmons made national headlines earlier this year for sponsoring a bill to add three weeks of gun rights classes in public schools. Using a mix of campaign money and gifts, he flew to Israel in 2014 to foster ties between that country and South Carolina. He also flew to New Orleans that year to visit Port Fourchon, an offshore drilling supply port, and to the luxury Streamsong golf resort in Central Florida to discuss "legislative matters" with U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross, a Republican from Florida.

Before a trip out West in 2014, Clemmons used campaign money to buy two GoPro video cameras and a GoPro bike mount from Best Buy.

That same day, his campaign spent \$107 at a Bass Pro Shops store in Myrtle Beach. In a campaign disclosure form, he described the Bass Pro Shops purchase as "campaign camping equipment." When asked about this expenditure, Clemmons said the item was a backup battery and that the entry on his campaign form was an embarrassing mistake and should have simply said "campaign equipment."

He used his campaign accounts to buy two hunting licenses from Utah's Division of Wildlife Resources in the first half of 2014. Clemmons explained that he mistakenly used his campaign's debit card and reimbursed his campaign three weeks later, after discovering the error.

Later, he used his campaign account to reimburse himself \$1,753 for another trip in 2014 to New Mexico to meet U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce. Clemmons said that he and the Republican congressman from New Mexico discussed management of public lands and other unspecified legislative matters.

He and Pearce also went hunting, and a YouTube video of their trip shows them in camouflage blasting three turkeys. In response to the Post and Courier/Center for Public Integrity's questions about those expenses, Clemmons said he had decided to reimburse his campaign \$792.12.

"My additional time in New Mexico resulted in significant personal benefit and [the expenditures] are, therefore, more appropriately a personal expense," he said in a written response.

Since 2009, Clemmons also forked over more than \$25,000 for neckties and scarves from a company in Taiwan. The ties and scarves have the S.C. House Seal on the front. He said he distributed them to members of the House, a practice that he said helped cement relationships among its members and further his legislative goals. Receipts provided by Clemmons show orders for more than 1,500 ties and scarves.

Clemmons is far from alone. Other lawmakers spent campaign cash and received gifts in ways large and small. Other examples:

- As with Clemmons, Rep. Michael Pitts, a Republican from Laurens on the House Ethics Committee, also enjoyed trips out West, spending nearly \$6,000 jetting to Alaska, Oregon, South





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Dakota and Montana to hobnob with "sportsmen legislators." Pitts said the summits were "mostly business" concerning hunting and fishing laws and initiatives. But photos from these events show Pitts and others proudly posing with freshly killed pheasants and other game.

"You do get an opportunity to do something while you're there," Pitts said of the hunting junkets. "The goal there is for the state hosting it to show off their natural resources. But that's absolutely not the focus of (the trips)."

- Rep. Bill Sandifer III, R-Seneca, dipped into his campaign war chest to pay about \$6,000 for charter plane "air taxis."

- State Treasurer Curtis Loftis, a Republican, paid three parking tickets, saving him \$35. Loftis did not return calls seeking comment.

The state's loose ethics laws are "a tangled mess" that make almost any expense allowable, said John Crangle, director of Common Cause South Carolina.

At one time, lobbyists provided lawmakers with cash and other freebies, but that practice ended in 1991 after the federal Operation Lost Trust corruption sting. Lost Trust led to 27 convictions and guilty pleas and fueled new ethics laws that put heavy restrictions on lobbyists.

"Now," Crangle said, instead of lobbyist money, "you see people using campaign funds to get these freebies."

Out one pocket, into another

Another practice that's ripe for abuse: Lawmakers spend thousands of dollars in campaign cash to hire each other's companies.

One beneficiary of this practice is Jim Merrill, the representative of Daniel Island, and his public relations company, Geechee Communications.

Since 2008, state lawmakers from both parties spent more than \$215,000 to hire Merrill or his company. Lawmakers often describe the spending merely as "campaign expense," "consulting" and "mail."

In an interview, Merrill said that most people tend to take their business to people they know. If he had a toothache and he knew a dentist, he'd go to that person, he said. Same with lawmakers. "My job just happens to be direct mail."

Other lawmakers used campaign cash to hire their own companies or those run by family members. One standout is Rick Quinn, the representative from Cayce. Since 2009, Quinn poured more than \$41,000 from his campaign into Mail Marketing Strategies, which he owns. "I find myself to be the cheapest mail marketing company I can find," he said, adding that he charges himself only "actual costs."

In an interview, he initially said he would be "happy" to produce receipts and invoices for his company's work. In his campaign disclosures, Quinn described his company's work in





vague terms such as "Mailing-Postage" and "District Newsletter & Postage." Later, Quinn declined to produce his company's invoices and receipts, writing in an email: "I have included great detail on my publicly reported ethics disclosures describing those reimbursements." The entries on his forms, however, don't describe specifics and costs of work done.

Quinn paid even more money — \$63,000 — to Richard Quinn & Associates, a political consulting company run by his father. "If there was someone cheaper, I would use them," Quinn said.

Quinn's father is one of the South's most influential GOP strategists, known for his work for such candidates as John McCain, Ronald Reagan and Strom Thurmond. In an interview, Richard Quinn said, "I can assure you that he never got RQ&A to do work that was never done. And it was usually done at cost." He added that he had no ethical concerns about his son hiring his company: "Why not use a family member you trust?"

A similar refrain can be heard from Rep. David Hiott, who owns a printing company in Pickens. Since 2009, the Republican paid his company \$8,000 for campaign materials. During this time, 14 other legislative candidates spent at least \$65,000 with Hiott's company.



State Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leath-erman spent more than \$109,000 between August 2009 and August 2015 on presents, describing them with labels such as "constituent gifts," "Christmas ornaments" and "constituent flowers."

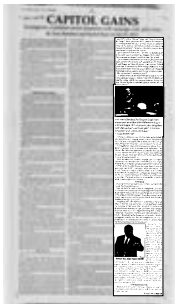
—Grace Beahm/Staff

"I'm the only printer in town," Hiott said, adding that he had no ethical problems with charging himself for work. Asked whether he would produce receipts for the work he did for his own campaign, he said: "I'm not going to open my books to individuals."

In Orangeburg, Gilda Cobb-Hunter saw no problem with using \$4,500 in campaign money to buy artwork by her husband, Terry Hunter. The Democratic representative used the drawings and prints to decorate her office. "I didn't give it a second thought because I thought it was appropriate for my office and I thought it was an allowable expenditure."

Some lawmakers also donated campaign cash to nonprofits that they run or where their family members work. For instance, W. Brian White, a Republican representative from Anderson and chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, gave more than \$9,000 in campaign cash to the nonprofit Tri-County Technical College Foundation. White's wife, Courtney, works there as a fundraiser. His campaign also pumped nearly \$10,000 into Anderson Interfaith Ministries, where White's wife is vice chair of the board of directors. White and his wife did not

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return numerous phone calls and emails.

Gassing Up

Running for office has its perks, and for many lawmakers, they include free fill-ups at the pump.

State Sen. Kent Williams of Marion often gassed up his SUV two or three times a week since 2009, spending more than \$28,000 at gas stations. Asked whether he used the gas for personal trips or the campaign, the Democrat said: "Every day is an election day. People come up to me when I worship in church, when I'm eating breakfast, when I go out to lunch."

Orangeburg Sen. John Matthews Jr., a member of the Senate Ethics Committee, was another prolific fuel purchaser, spending more than \$13,400 since 2009. Through 2012, the Democrat described these transactions as "gas" purchases on his campaign disclosure forms but in 2013 began describing them instead as "incidentals." Asked why, Matthews said: "It just fits better in my reports." He added that the change was not related to the ethics case against former Lt. Gov. Ken Ard, a Republican who in 2012 pleaded guilty to violating state ethics laws, including a charge that he purchased gasoline for personal use.



Former Sen. John Yancey McGill

Former Sen. John Yancey McGill, D-Kingstree, also was a frequent filler, shell-ing out at least \$17,000 from his campaign account on gas, much of it from a station within sight of his real estate office. Aside from his campaign coffers, he also tapped taxpayers for driving expenses. During the past four years, he received more than \$11,700 in mileage

reimbursements. His campaign also covered \$888 in "travel expense/car repairs" from a tire and service center in Kingstree. McGill did not respond to numerous requests for comment.

Altogether, lawmakers spent more than \$139,000 buying gas since 2009, which is surprising given the Ethics Commission's longstanding position that campaign funds cannot be used to buy fuel. The correct way to document driving expenses? "Mileage reimbursement" in the form of a log "is the only acceptable method," the Ethics Commission reiterated in a case settling the public corruption case against Ard.

Gifts that keep giving

The political ATM is used in other ways. One common practice is to shower constituents and charities with money and gifts. Notable examples:

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• State Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman spent more than \$109,000 between August 2009 and August 2015 on presents, describing them with labels such as "constituent gifts," "Christmas ornaments" and "constituent flowers." Leatherman is on the Senate Ethics Committee. "He has given Christmas ornaments to constituents for years, and frankly, they look forward to receiving them," said Robby Dawkins, the Florence Republican's chief of staff.

• Cobb-Hunter reported giving constituents more than \$3,600 in jewelry bought from an Orangeburg shop. She said she presented pins, earrings and necklaces to campaign workers and other supporters to show her thanks at Christmas, graduations and other special times.

• Kent Williams, the senator from Marion, spent more than \$7,000 on football tickets to Clemson University, the University of South Carolina, South Carolina State and Benedict College games. He said he distributes the tickets to youths and campaign volunteers.

While they showered others with gifts, elected officials also received their fair share:

• Between 2011 and 2014, Clemson board members, alumni and others gave Gov. Nikki Haley more than \$116,000 worth of football tickets, which appears to be allowed under state rules. (See sidebar.)

• The Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce gave more than \$16,000 in gifts to 39 lawmakers and other state candidates. Those included corkscrews, tumblers, wine holders and thousands of dollars in food and lodging.

• State Sen. Vincent Sheheen, a Democrat from Camden, and at least five other lawmakers flew to Turkey — \$7,000 trips provided by South Carolina Dialogue Foundation, since renamed the Atlantic Institute-South Carolina, and unspecified Turkish sponsors. The group's purpose is to increase dialogue and ties between the United States and Turkey. Its origins are in the Gülen Movement, which characterizes itself as a transnational network of moderate, pacifist Islamic organizations. Sheheen, who twice ran unsuccessfully for governor, said in an interview that trips such as these help broaden the horizons of state leaders. He did not respond to follow-up questions about the trips' sponsors.

• The Heritage Classic Foundation gave at least \$47,000 worth of gifts — mostly tickets to the golf tournament it sponsors. The state began subsidizing the golf tournament after Verizon dropped its sponsorship in 2011.

When 26 candidates were caught violating ethics laws, they dipped into their campaign accounts

to pay fines — more than \$133,000 over the past seven years.

Lawrence M. Noble, another senior counsel at the Campaign Legal Center, said that using campaign donations to pay ethics fines seems wrong on its face. Yet, he noted that South Carolina's weak ethics laws and tepid enforcement are relatively common among the states.

Cracking down?

Just a handful of lawmakers have been convicted of charges that they violated the state's anemic ethics laws.

Former Sen. Robert Ford, D-Charleston, became the poster child of campaign abuse after prosecutors in 2014 revealed that he spent campaign money on a gym membership to Planet Fitness, which he reported as a "campaign worker-gratuity," and bought adult novelty items from Badd Kitty, referring to them in disclosure forms simply as "purchase."

Investigators also alleged that Ford used campaign funds to buy male-enhancement pills, a Kangen water ionizer, and pay his renter's insurance. Ford eventually resigned and pleaded guilty to public corruption charges stemming from what prosecutors said was the misuse of more than \$69,000 worth of campaign funds. He was sentenced to five years of probation.

But the most prominent ethics law case brought down Harrell, at one time one of the most powerful leaders in state government.

After stories by The Post and Courier and a complaint by the government watchdog S.C. Policy Council, prosecutors eventually accused Harrell of paying himself \$294,000 from his campaign account, including \$94,000 toward expenses of his private plane, which he used, among other things, to fly with family and friends to a high school baseball tournament, costs he reported as "legislative travel." Harrell was sentenced to three years of probation but maintained to the end the expenditures were merely a reflection of differing interpretations of the state's ethics laws.

Harrell's prosecution triggered ongoing spin-off investigations into other lawmakers, a situation that has elevated anxiety levels throughout the state's political ranks. "The level of 'gotcha paranoia' in Columbia is at an all-time high right now," said Harrell's son, Trey Harrell, a Charleston attorney and longtime friend of Sandifer, the Republican representative from Seneca.

Sandifer declined to comment for this story, but Harrell said that Sandifer and many other lawmakers are taking a second look at their finances or having lawyers or others review their ethics filings. Some lawmakers argue that the state's ethics rules and legal opinions are so complex and

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unclear that they mess up even when they're trying to do the right thing.

Then again, it's helpful to remember that they make those rules.

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198 Volvo breaks ground in Berkeley County

BY DEBBIE MERLO
The Gazette

Moments before picking up a shovel to officially break ground with Volvo cars of North America President and CEO Lex Kerssemakers, Gov. Nikki Haley gestured toward the open field to her right calling it 'the most beautiful bit of mud.'

A backhoe bearing Volvo's name sat idle on a patch of the 6,825-acre site in Berkeley County off Hwy. 26 near Rid-

geville where construction has begun — and is ahead of schedule — on the site where Volvo plans to make 100,000 vehicles a year.

The first South Carolina-built Volvo is expected by 2018 and will include the debut of Volvo's S60, a redesigned, South Carolina version of the sporty compact sedan first introduced in 2000.

"The sedan market is big, and the Volvo S60 is a very popular car in the United States," Kerssemakers said,

explaining why that car was chosen as the American factory's debut vehicle.

Volvo will continue producing the XC90, a 7-seat SUV and the SC60, a 5-seat SUV.

They are creating an estimated 2,000 direct jobs initially and possibly increasing that number to 4,000 as sales continue to increase.

Volvo has seen U.S. sales

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increase by double-digit percentages over the past two months and that increase could eventually bring the total number of jobs created to exceed 8,000 according to an economic impact analysis offered by Dr. Frank Hefner at the College of Charleston.

Hefner's analysis said the plant would contribute approximately \$4.8 billion in total economic output on an annual basis.

"God is smiling today," Haley said.

"We are so excited."

As the mud quickly dried into dirt again under the full force of South Carolina sun, Haley, Kerssemakers and other key note public officials including Senators Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham and Katarina Fjording, Volvo's VP of purchasing and manufacturing, thanked South Carolina for the warm welcome.

"Team South Carolina at it's finest," Haley said.

According to Kerssemakers, kindness and friendliness were a 'huge part' of why Berkeley County was chosen as the site of the first American Volvo factory site.

Campus plans include a small museum and a test track for customers to drive before they buy.

"In the next two or three months we'll become a little more concrete how the campus will look, but we want to make something real good out of it," he said.

Kerssemakers also said he wants to encourage local schools to teach mechanics and leverage local talent to create a strong, educated workforce.

Committed to bringing a 'gentle footprint' and being a 'good neighbor' Kerssemaker said Volvo was here to stay.

"We can prove now that we will stay," the CEO of Volvo Cars North America said.

"We have been 60 years in the United States. We know we are going to stay another 60 years."

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Debbie Merlo/Gazette

Sen. Lindsey Graham, Gov. Nikki Haley, Katarina Fjording, Volvo VP and Lex Kerssemakers, Volvo cars of North America President and CEO turn earth for the new plant.



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FEMA ready to offer help

BY TOM O'DARE
THE HERALD

Over the weekend, a flurry of official declarations were put in place as floodwaters rose in South Carolina.

Governor Nikki Haley declared a state of emergency for the entire state and this led to President Obama's issuing a federal disaster proclamation. These were followed by cities and counties initiating their own civil emergency proclamations.

All of these were done in order to set the stage for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Local officials said hundreds, if not thousands, in the county have sustained or will sustain some kind of property damage due to the heavy rains and rising rivers.

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The county is still trying to gather the number of properties affected by the massive rain event.

Horry County spokesperson Lisa Bourcier said unfortunately many residents don't have flood insurance and most homeowner insurance policies will not cover damage by water.

Since the county has been declared part of the federal disaster area, FEMA will be able to offer assistance to many of those affected by the floods. The agency provides information from a number of government sources to help with repairs and other

vital needs.

To find out what FEMA provides and to apply for assistance, you can visit disasterassistance.gov or call 800-621-3362.

In order to expedite the application process, here's a list of what may need:

When you apply for disaster assistance please have the following available:

- Social Security Number (including your spouse's)
- Private insurance information, if available
- Address and zip code of the damaged property
- Directions to the damaged home or property

- Daytime telephone number

- A telephone number where we can reach you or leave a message

- An address where you can get mail

- If you want your disaster assistance funds sent directly to your bank, provide the FEMA agent with your bank account type

(savings/checking), account number and routing number.

Tom O'Dare • 488-7261



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The Times and Democrat of Orangeburg on decision to remove Confederate flag from Statehouse grounds

A new Winthrop Poll released Wednesday backs up the belief that a majority (two-thirds) of South Carolinians support Gov. Nikki Haley and the legislature in their decision to remove the Confederate battle flag from Statehouse grounds. But inside the numbers is a message that many, particularly Republican voters, stand by the flag as a symbol of Southern pride.

The decision came after nine African-Americans, including the pastor who was a state senator, were gunned down in their Charleston church by a man who used the Confederate flag as a symbol in espousing racism and violence. The symbolism of the banner being used in such way led to Haley calling for its removal, and even many ardent supporters of the flag's place in South Carolina history backed away from it flying in an official state capacity.

Breaking down the survey results by race, 54 percent of white respondents said furling the flag was the right decision, while support was 93 percent among African-Americans, who long have argued the flag must be recognized as a symbol of oppressing black people.

Just how much the Charleston tragedy changed opinions can be seen in the response by nearly 50 percent that they disapproved of the flag before this summer — a percentage not supported by November 2014 Winthrop Poll numbers showing only one-third felt the flag should no longer continue to fly on Statehouse grounds.

But nearly half of those surveyed Sept. 20-27 (47 percent) said the flag is a symbol of Southern pride and not of racial conflict. Forty percent responded that the banner is more a symbol of conflict than pride. Of political significance, nearly half of those who lean GOP in a Republican-dominated state said they their personal choice would be to let the Confederate flag continue to fly.

As to those who believe Haley will pay a political price for her leadership on the flag issue, comparing the poll numbers with those from a survey by the Democratic-leaning Public Policy Polling in early September offers insight on how the flag issue might play out politically, particularly for Republicans.

The PPP survey showed Haley's approval rating at 53 percent, up from 51 percent in February. But the support has shifted.

Thirty-nine percent of Democrats approved of Haley, up from only 17 percent in February. Among Republicans, support fell from 76 percent to 67 percent.

In the Winthrop poll, 55 percent of respondents approved of Haley, nearly identical to her overall approval rating in March.

Among Republicans and those who lean Republican, her approval rating is a strong 68 percent. But that number is down from the 78 percent she garnered from GOP supporters among the general population in March.

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148 Senate Update: Energy action month

More than 200 years after securing its freedom, our nation is waging a new battle for independence — energy independence.

Our efforts to secure an energy-independent future is being waged at the state and national levels. “Sustainable” or “renewable” energy are the new catchphrases in the battle to reduce pollution and curb energy consumption.

Gov. Nikki Haley and President Barack Obama issued separate proclamations declaring October as “Energy Action Month.”

“South Carolina is leading by example by mandating that public agencies, school districts, and colleges and universities reduce their energy consumption a total of 20 percent by the year 2020, as compared to year 2000 levels of usage,” the governor wrote in her proclamation.

According to the S.C. Energy Office, the state saved an estimated \$64 million on energy expenditures in the 2014 budget year by implementing energy-saving measures.



Kent Williams
Senate Update

“As Americans, we have a profound obligation to our children and our grandchildren -- to help them live better lives than we did, and to ensure the choices we make do not limit the range of their dreams,” President Obama stated in his proclamation.

“During National Energy Action Month, we rededicate ourselves to bolstering energy efficiency, investing in innovative clean power, and working together to preserve our planet for generations to come.” President Obama further stated in his proclamation.

In her proclamation, Haley stated smart energy choices help the economy and increase energy independence. She also

linked the support of clean energy to protecting the state’s natural resources and improving the air quality.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, efficient energy management at federal facilities and operations:

- » Saves taxpayers money;
- » Reduces greenhouse gas emissions;
- » Protects the environment and natural resources; and
- » Contributes to the preservation of our national security.

“During National Energy Action Month, let us recommit to forging the future that is within our capacity to reach by supporting clean, renewable, and independent means of energy production and by taking control of our own energy consumption,” President Obama stated in his proclamation.

“Everything we have is at stake — and we must fight for it,” President Obama further stated.

We all have a part to play in this battle. We have the power to make a difference.