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## <sup>148</sup> Democrats: Haley proposal a tax hike for IM residents

The Associated Press.

COLUMBIA — Democratic legislators say Gov. Nikki Haley's plan to cut income taxes by \$9 billion over the next decade is nothing but a tax hike for more than a million South Carolinians.

House and Senate Democrats urged Haley on Thursday to stop holding infrastructure funding hostage to a proposal they say primarily benefits the wealthy and forces cuts in needed government services, without sufficiently addressing the state's infrastructure needs.

Haley announced last month she's willing to support increasing the gas tax by 10 cents over three years to pay for road and bridge work, but only if legislators cut income taxes by 2 percentage points over 10 years.

That would reduce revenue by \$1.8 billion yearly once fully implemented, according to the state Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office.

The office's economic advisers project that 1.1 million people who file income tax returns — or 46 percent of filers — would see no benefit because they would pay no personal income taxes anyway, due to previous cuts to the bottom brackets.

Democrats note those taxpayers would, however, pay the gas increase.

"One million people will only see a tax increase," said Rep. James Smith, D-Columbia.

In promoting her plan, Haley touts the average tax cut reaches \$689 in 2025. But Democrats say the average masks that the biggest beneficiaries by far are millionaires.

According to economic advisers, about 380 filers who report a taxable income of at least \$2 million would each see a \$146,000 reduction in personal income taxes in 2025. Those reporting between \$1 million and \$2 million would see a \$40,000 reduction.

"Her plan is a tax cut every year, for every South Carolinian who pays income taxes, while at the same time providing major new funds for roads. If others have plans that accomplish both of those things, she's happy to hear about them," said Haley spokeswoman Chaney Adams.

Recommendations of a House committee that's been meeting for months include lowering South Carolina's gas tax while placing a sales tax on fuel. That bill is expected to be introduced in the House next week. It makes

no changes to the income tax.

Haley insists the state could absorb her plan's eventual \$1.8 billion annual cut through the state's economic growth, without needing to cut, though the last decade doesn't reflect that kind of growth.

"She says that over and over, but it doesn't make it true," Smith said.

The Department of Transportation has said it needs an additional \$1.5 billion yearly over the next two decades to bring roads and bridges to good condition. South Carolina's 41,500-mile state road system is the nation's fourth-largest, funded overwhelmingly by the nation's third-lowest gas tax and the federal dollars it brings.

Haley's plan would bring in an additional \$400 million when the gas tax hike is fully imple-





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mented — \$339 million from the extra 10 pennies per gallon, plus \$61 million her budget diverts to DOT from the state sales tax on vehicles. But that represents a 2018 high. Beginning with 2019, the additional revenue brought in by that dime would begin to drop, partly due to vehicles' improved fuel efficiency, state advisers predict.

Haley had pledged since July to lay out her infrastructure funding plan in January. Democrats contend what she proposed in her State of the State isn't a plan at all. If she were serious, Smith said, she would have accounted for the cut's first year in her own budget proposal for 2015-16. She did not.

"She made a promise before the election to come up with a plan, and we're still waiting," Smith said.



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## Why our state must cut its income taxes

BY GOV. NIKKI R. HALEY

Special to the Chronicle

Our economic competitiveness as a state is in really good shape. But the nature of competition is that just when you think you're doing well, your competitors are gaining on you. To continue our state's remarkable progress, we must take further steps to improve our standing.

Tennessee, Florida, and Texas have no income tax. Georgia's tax is a full percent lower than ours. Last year North Carolina cut theirs two full points below that.

Our state's 7% income tax rate puts us at a disadvantage. To keep our economy growing, we must cut our income tax.

At the same time, we know we have to improve our state's roads and bridges.

We have a real problem with the way our transportation dollars are spent. Our system needs reform and restructuring.

The current system, with commissioners representing Congressional Districts and selected by legislators, is the ultimate exercise in parochialism. Instead of fighting for the needs of all of South Carolina, they fight for the needs of their districts.

The problem is it is not in our best interest. So I will not support more revenue for our roads and bridges until we restructure the Department of Transportation.

**CRUMBLING ROADS AND HIGHWAYS** are an economic issue. That's why we supported \$1 billion in new road funds last year. But we know that's not enough. We still

have substantial infrastructure needs.

We have studied every option including raising the state gas tax, the third-lowest in America. That means visitors to our state would pay a portion of the cost.

There are major problems with it, too.

We have not reached where we are by raising taxes. Quite the opposite.

I will veto any straight-up increase in the gas tax. It's wrong for South Carolina.

So here's the deal. Let's do three things at once that will be a win-win-win for us.

Let's cut our state income tax rate from 7% to 5% over the next decade. That's a nearly 30% cut in state income taxes.

Nationally, it will take us from 38th in income tax competitiveness to 13th.

Regionally, it will put our rate back below those of North Carolina and Georgia.

It will be a massive draw for jobs and investment to come to our state. And it will put more money in the pockets of every South Carolinian, letting them keep more of what they earn.

It will reward work, savings, and investment – all the things we need to do to make our people more prosperous.

**NEXT, LET'S CHANGE THE** way we spend our road dollars and get rid of the legislatively-elected transportation commission.

Finally, let's increase the gas tax 10 cents over the next three years and dedicate that money entirely to improving our roads.

That will keep our gas tax below Georgia and North Carolina and we can do it without harming our economy.

Coupled with the 30% income tax cut, it still represents one of the largest tax cuts in South Carolina history.

If we do all of those things, we will have better roads and a stronger economic engine for our people. That's a win-win.



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## Can the governor's plan fix our roads?

Critics are already lining up in opposition to Gov. Nikki Haley's tax swap plan.

She has proposed increasing the gas tax 10 cents a gallon now. In return your income tax rate will drop from 7% to 5% over the next 10 years.

See her explanation of why this cut is needed below.

That's basically what the governor proposed including dropping her threat to veto any gas tax hike and taking all gas tax money out of the general fund and devoting it to roads only.

According to the watchdog group, the S.C. Policy Council, the Lexington Republican gov-

ernor's proposal would save most of us \$100 over 10 years.

The income tax cut wouldn't affect a projected 1 million who pay no state income taxes. That's nearly 46% of the taxpayers over the 10 years.

But they would not be exempt from her proposed 10-cent — nearly 60% — hike in the state gas tax over the next three years.

**THESE PROJECTIONS ARE LISTED** in 11 pages of S.C. Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office charts she used as the basis for her plan the Policy Council reported. They show that your projected average taxes would

drop from \$1,483 in 2016 to \$1,383 in 2025, a decrease of just \$100 in all.

By 2025, the projected number of people owing no taxes would grow to a little more than 1.1 million compared to 2.46 million taxpayers.

The average taxable income would grow to \$37,837 from \$28,330, an increase of \$9,607, or about 34% in 10 years.

The state gas tax hike would go to 26.75 cents a gallon.

That added cost per gallon may not sound like much. But the state in 10 years would collect a total of about \$253 million beyond what the RFA list-

ed, the Policy Council said.

Russell Sobel of The Citadel's School of Business said the plan keeps "our stupid (tax) bracket structure." If it is enacted, he said, South Carolina will be "tied for the highest flat tax rate in the nation."

All of us should be relieved that the critics are doing their homework on this.

It's what the free exchange of ideas and solutions in an open society is all about.

Everyone has their say.

From that should come an even better plan for maintaining our roads and bridges.

— [JerryBellune@yahoo.com](mailto:JerryBellune@yahoo.com)



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## Haley wants income tax cut, gas tax increase

BY JERRY BELLUNE

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Gov. Nikki Haley has a deal for you. If the legislature will go along with her, she would:

- Drop your state income tax from 7% to 5% over 10 years or 0.2% a year.
- Up your gas tax 10 cents a gallon over three years.

Critics are already knocking the plan because you will pay more at the pump now in expectation of paying less income tax over the next 10 years.

In an interview with the *Chronicle*, the governor defended her proposal since:

- All gas tax money will go to pave

County uses.

This would take politics out of road paving and base it on traffic volume, school bus use and other factors.

- Do away with the legislatively-appointed highway commission and give responsibility for managing road money to her Transportation Secretary.

That also would take politics out of the process and put fairness in, she said.

According to the watchdog group, the S.C. Policy Council, the governor's proposal would save on average a taxpayer \$100 over 10 years including the increase in the gas tax.

*The governor writes about her plan on A-9.*

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and maintain crumbling roads and bridges, not the 50% that goes for that purpose now.



Haley

have no state income tax.

The Lexington Republican governor also wants to:

- Set up a road project grading system similar to one Lexington

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# 188 + 148 Koon makes his case in bid for Lexington sheriff

**BY HAL MILLARD**

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Jay Koon said he's ready to become Lexington County's next Sheriff.

The Lexington native has amassed a 21-year career in law enforcement, all but one year of it with the Town of Lexington.

He has risen progressively through the ranks to become the town's assistant police chief and is ready to make the leap to the county's top cop, he said.

In a four-man race, Koon has so far amassed an impressive campaign war chest, raising more than \$30,000 in early fundraising leading up to the March 3 primary.

He has also gained the support of some of the more powerful figures in Lexington County, including acting Sheriff Lewis McCarty.

But he says he is most proud of the grassroots support he is building countywide, a mix of races, ages and economic classes that represent a cross section of the fast-growing county.

If elected, Koon says he will seek to restore faith in the Sheriff's Department, a faith that has been tested since the federal corruption scandal of former Sheriff James Metts that led him to retire in December.

"I believe the law is the law," Koon said. "I'm going to enforce the laws without privilege, discrimination or bias. Also, I think it's important to keep government officials honest. I believe no one is above the law. Elected officials, law enforcement officers

or members of the public, it doesn't matter. My pursuit of justice is going to be blind. Immediately we need to bring some honesty and integrity back to the office, and of course keeping every community safe."

Koon was tapped to help McCarty reform the department after McCarty



**Koon**

ty was appointed Sheriff by Gov. Nikki Haley. On loan from the police department, Koon said he helped streamline some functions of the department.

One such change was ensuring that service calls were more quickly handled, even if deputies had to be pulled off other duties in order to respond in a timely manner.

"We can talk about new programs and new ideas all day long, but the biggest thing is when someone needs an officer to come handle a problem, they need them as quick as possible," he said. "We need to streamline those calls for service."

Keeping up with the county's rapid growth "is going to be one of my biggest concerns," he added.

Working for McCarty gave Koon invaluable insight into how the department is run and how it should be run, Koon said.

"Sheriff McCarty really is gold standard of law enforcement in this county," he said.

Koon said he was proud to have helped lead the department when it was up for re-accreditation after the Metts indictments, a process "that couldn't have come at worse time."



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Despite the challenges, the department passed with flying colors, he said.

The next Sheriff will almost immediately have to begin budgeting for the new fiscal year.

As Sheriff, Koon said he would run the department as a fiscal conservative, adding that the department needs to be run like a business, where deputies and employees are treated as valued assets and taxpayer interests are protected.

"Our customers are our taxpayers, and that's who we need to serve," he said, adding he would put his years of budgeting experience at the police department to use to reduce waste and maximize efficiency.

One area where Koon differs from his rivals is in the control of the county jail, which is managed by the Sheriff's Department.

Unlike them, Koon said he doesn't favor ceding control of the detention center, saying the potential cost to taxpayers could be millions of dollars.

A lot of the extra cost would come from new hires necessary to handle administrative and IT functions.

"I just don't think for the taxpayers it's reasonable to do it right now," he said. "We can spend that money in a lot of other places to help the citizens."

*The Chronicle is spotlighting Sheriff's candidates leading up to the March 3 primary.*

*Next week: West Columbia Police Chief Dennis Tyndall.*



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# 148 Amazon leaving? Haley says yes

## More than 2,000 county jobs in jeopardy

BY JERRY BELLUNE  
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Gov. Nikki Haley thinks we will lose Amazon's 2,000 Lexington County jobs.

If state lawmakers don't extend Amazon's sales tax



Haley

waiver this session, the giant retailer may close its Lexington County distribution center as it did in

Texas when it lost its waiver there.

"I talked with Rick Perry," she said of the Texas governor and presidential aspirant, "and he said we're going to lose Amazon."

Critics of the tax waiver say it is unfair to other retailers who must collect the tax for the state.

The waiver expires next year.

If it is extended, lawmakers would need to do it in this year's legislative session.

Lawmakers who serve citizens in Lexington County are divided on the issue.

Sen. Shane Massey said he does not support an extension. Sen. Ronnie Cromer said he will back it.

"I think the majority in Lexington would probably favor whatever Ama-

zon wants so that we can keep a 2,000-plus employer in the county," Cromer said.

Reps. Todd Atwater and Mac Toole said they are inclined to let the waiver expire.

Scott Adams, of Lexington-based AG&G Advisers and who worked for the waiver, said he will confer with Amazon's executives.

"We certainly don't want to lose an employer of several thousand residents and the local tax revenue that is being derived," he said.

"Amazon's position was that they would collect sales tax when the law required all internet retailers to.

"To date there is no such law. South Carolinians remain liable for reporting taxes on internet purchases on their tax returns."

Lexington Chamber President Randy Half-acre, who worked for the waiver, said Amazon does not intend to seek an extension.

"The five years was allowed under state law," he said. "The Amazon Fulfillment Center is humming with activity 24/7 and employs thousands of people.

"Maybe the more appropriate question to ask is when are our federal elected officials to pass the Fair Marketplace legislation that would require sales tax to be paid on e-commerce."

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# The most important South Carolinian ever

You have probably never heard of Charles Townes.

But if you measure a person's importance by how many people they or their work have touched, then Charles Townes is the most important South Carolinian ever – it's not even close.

And to add a little more mystery, he died this week at 99 years of age – and unless you lived in Greenville, you probably didn't read about it in a South Carolina newspaper. Governor Haley did not issue a proclamation; the state Legislature didn't order the state flag to be flown at half-staff; there were no mayors asking for a public moment of silence to remember and honor his life.

The story of his death was on the front page of *The New York Times*, though, and above the fold, at that. They said his work "transformed communications, medicine, astronomy, weapons systems and daily life in homes and workplaces."

All of this tells you something about South Carolina, and about how we sometimes do such a terrible job of recognizing the truly great things and great people here in South Carolina.

Greenville native Charles Townes was Dr. Charles Townes. And he was no run of the mill doctor; he won the 1964 Nobel Prize in Physics and his work has touched the lives of virtually every South Carolinian and millions – no billions – of others around the world.

If you've ever played music or seen a movie on a CD, he was there. If you have ever bought anything that used a bar code and scanner to check out, he was there. If you have ever made a phone call or used the Internet via fiber optic networks, he was there. If you've ever flown in an airplane or marveled at the landing of men on the moon or used a digital navigation system to go to grandma's house, he was there.

In virtually every aspect of modern life, literally dozens of times a day, you've been touched by his work.

Townes invented the maser, which was essentially the underlying technology of the laser. As *The New York Times* said, "The



**PHIL NOBLE**

SC New Democrats president

technology revolution spawned by lasers, laying the foundation for much of the gadgetry and scientific knowledge the world now takes for granted, was given enormous momentum by the discoveries of Dr. Townes ..."

And all these are just the most visible and ubiquitous examples of his work. Again, *The New York Times*: "Over six decades,

Townes developed radar bombing systems and navigational devices during World War II, advised presidents and government commissions on lunar landings and the MX missile system, verified Einstein's cosmological theories, discovered ammonia molecules at the center of the Milky Way and created an atomic clock that measured time to within one second in 300 years."

Yes, all this from a gangling young man who grew up in Greenville, graduated from Furman (valedictorian at 19 with two bachelor's degrees) and went away to other places to literally change the world.

About two years ago, I had the great privilege of interviewing Townes for the EnvisionSC project. Thinking about how most men his age would be spending their waning days idly relaxing and playing with their great grandchildren, my concluding question to him was about how he was occupying his time. I will never forget his answer. He said he still went to his lab every day and was "spending my time thinking about the stars and the future; there is so much still to learn."

What a stunning answer from a man closing in on 100 years.

And let me give you a few other names – Charles Goldstein, Kary Mullis and George Furchgott. All of these men won Nobel Prizes, they were all South Carolinians,



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and they all left the state and did great things in other places.

**Joseph Goldstein** is from Kingstree and he won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1985 for his pioneering work on cholesterol. Kary Mullis grew up in Columbia, went to Dreher High School, and won the 1993 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. George Furchgott from Charleston won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1998.

All South Carolinians, all men of genius, all men who changed the world. And all of whom I'll bet you had never heard of.

We in this state have virtually ignored our best and brightest. Yes, Greenville has done a good job of recognizing Townes; there is a statue of him on Main Street, and there is a school named in his honor. But by and large all these other men and their achievements have been ignored in their home state.

These men should be the role models of our state's students; every school child should know their names and study what they have done – and be inspired by their lives and work. We should erect statues to all of them,

name schools for them and boast of their achievements to the world.

But we don't and we haven't. And this says a lot about us. It's not too late to recognize them and celebrate their great achievements.

We are a truly great state and our native sons and daughters have done great things. We should be celebrating their work as an inspiration to us and our children. And the greatest tribute that we can pay to these men and women is to fix our broken schools so maybe, just maybe, the next generation of our best and brightest will not have to leave South Carolina to change the world.

Who knows how many future Nobel Prize winners there are today sitting in some rundown school in the Corridor of Shame looking out the window at the heavens – and thinking about what could be?

**Phil Noble** is a businessman in Charleston and President of the SC New Democrats.

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STAFF PHOTO BY SCOTT RODGERS

The Fox Creek High School band sets up shop on the Statehouse steps last Tuesday morning.

# Rally at the Statehouse highlights school choice

**BY SCOTT RODGERS**  
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COLUMBIA – The largest rally ever for school choice in South Carolina took place last Tuesday.

Among the schools in attendance was Fox Creek High, which brought its band and teacher cadets. The school was invited to participate in the ceremony through the South Carolina Public Charter School District. The band played Michael Jackson's "Beat It" and also led the parade of students from the Hilton on Senate Street to the Statehouse.

"School choice comes in a variety of formats," said Fox

Creek Principal Josh Trahan, who attended the event. "We are finding that many students benefit from the opportunity to choose their source of education. Fox Creek High School exists as a result of the establishment of school choice through charter schools. School choice has allowed us to provide a high school education in a community style setting. As Gov. (Nikki) Haley stated today one mode of education may not be suited to every child."

There were a handful of speakers on the Statehouse steps, ranging from students to educators who shared the importance of school choice.

Haley also provided a few remarks.

"We've done great things with charter schools, we've done great things with virtual schools ..." she said. "We want to ensure that everyone feels like in South Carolina they can get the best education that best suits them."

Haley also provided a proclamation in support of school choice, proclaiming the week of Jan. 25 through 31 as South Carolina School Choice Week throughout the state.

**Scott Rodgers** is the news editor at *The North Augusta Star* and has been with the paper since 2013.

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# Governor, state senator commend local life saver

By ANNA BROWN

Odell Curenton says he did not expect any recognition when he saved the life of a Union woman, but the letters he received from two state officials are nice keepsakes.

Curenton, 66, pulled 86-year-old Arrie Mae Foster out of her burning home on Dec. 22. Mrs. Foster and her daughter, Delores, both were burned in the blaze and Delores is still hospitalized.

Curenton received letters from Gov. Nikki Haley and Sen. Shane Martin.

"I saw the article about you in the Union County News and I want to thank you for your willingness to put yourself in harm's way in order to save the life of Mrs. Arrie Mae Foster," Gov. Haley wrote in a letter dated Jan. 8. "Your courage in the face of danger sets an example for all of us. South Carolina is better because of people like you and I am pleased to have the opportunity to recognize your selfless service to the people of our great state.

God bless."

The letter is signed, "My very best, Nikki."

The governor wrote "You make South Carolina proud," next to her signature.

Martin's letter is dated Jan. 14.

"I am at a loss for words when I think about the heroism it took to run selflessly into a burning house," he wrote. "You are a blessing to the community you surround yourself with. I am truly honored to represent you. Thank you for being an example and a role model for many in your community. Your act of courage is an inspiration to many and a reminder that we can make such a profound impact in the lives of our friends and neighbors."

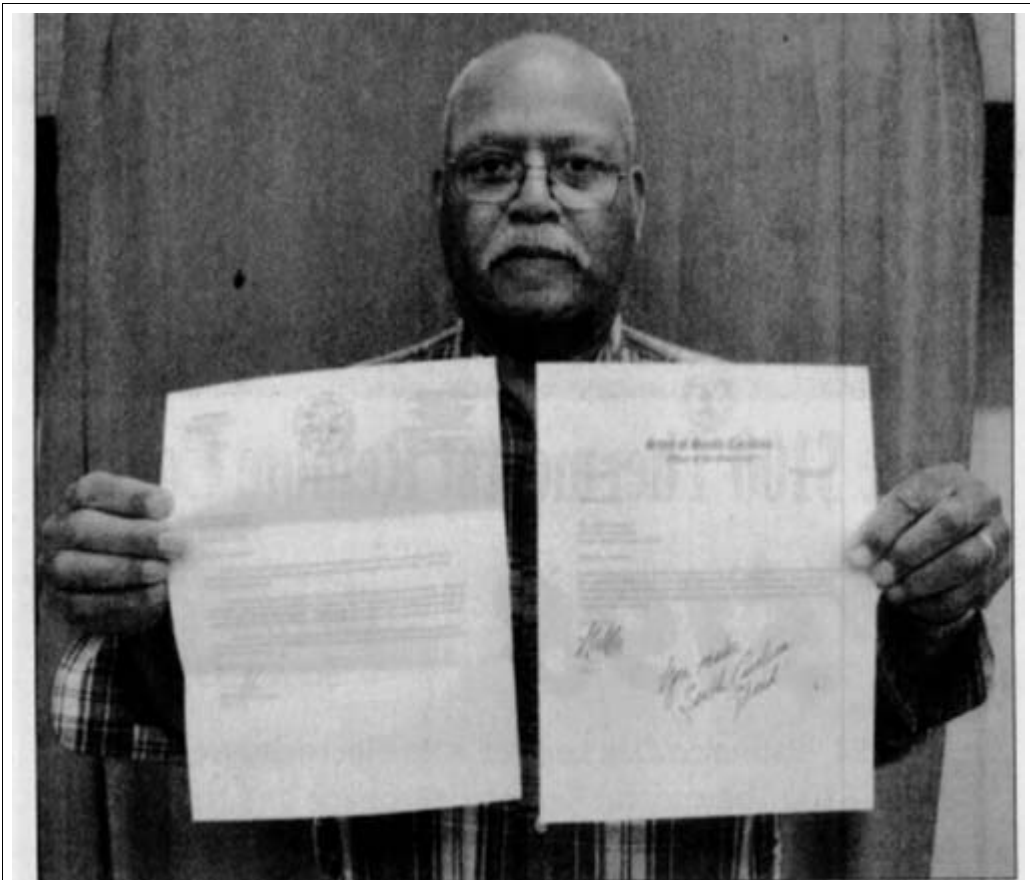
Martin said in the letter Curenton embodies what it means to be a hero.

Curenton said he received the manila envelope containing Haley's letter at home. Seeing "Office of the Governor" on

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**Odell Curenton holds letters he received from Gov. Nikki Haley and Sen. Shane Martin.**





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# Curenton

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the return address, he assumed it was junk mail.

"I got it and didn't open it - I left it lying on the table," said the Carlisle Finishing retiree, who continues to work at St. Paul Adult Day Care and at Divine Mortuary. "The next day I opened it up and I was surprised."

The letter from Martin was addressed to Curenton at Divine Mortuary. Martin had phoned ahead and gotten the address to the business and owner Joseph Harper and his daughter, Janet Brown the secretary, knew the letter was on the way. The mailman came after Curenton left work.

"I had just left the funeral home and

had gotten up to the Southside Fire Department when he (Harper) called me and said, "How about coming back to the funeral home?"

When Curenton got back, Harper and Brown were smiling and holding the letter.

Curenton was delivering food parcels from Potter's House to the Fosters the day he came up on the fire. He got there before any fire departments arrived. He said he helps others because that is what Jesus expects us to do and he likes being active.

"I didn't expect this," Curenton said. "I don't know how they found out about it."



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#### OTHER VOICES: EDITORIAL

### 148 **Post and Courier, Charleston, on fixing schools:**

Plenty of obstacles stand in the way of improving schools in the state's poor, rural districts, but in November the S.C. Supreme Court said that the Legislature and the districts must work together to get over them.

On Monday, the court eliminated one big distraction in that process, as it rejected an appeal by state leaders to rehear the case.

Now it's time for legislative leaders to get down to the business of addressing the shameful situation.

Several reform efforts already are under way. Gov. Nikki Haley has included money in her budget to recruit teachers to rural districts that are failing. She also wants to expand a program that coaches children in reading, and to devote \$29.3 million for technology.

House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Hartsville, has established a task force of lawmakers, business leaders and educators to evaluate reforms. Included are representatives of the districts named in the lawsuit.

Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, also formed a committee, to be chaired by Sens. Wes Hayes, R-Rock Hill, and Nikki Setzler, D-West Columbia.

Sadly, neither committee is expected to come up with a comprehensive solution any time soon. And that means the inadequate school transportation,

unprepared teachers and substandard education in "educational ghettos" that the Supreme Court decision targets will have to wait.

Educators from the rural districts must also play a big part in the conversation, not just because doing so could help their students but because the Supreme Court so ordered it. The court was critical of school officials as well as the Legislature, saying they have spent money unwisely on administration rather than instruction, on athletic facilities rather than academic enhancements. It also chided small districts for simply blaming the state without exploring on their own such options as consolidation to reduce administrative costs.

The Supreme Court took a stunning 21 years to rule on the case. The plan prescribed by the court needs to be completed with reasonable dispatch.

Meanwhile limited reforms like those proposed by the governor should be implemented in the next school year. Indeed, all involved should be looking for measures that can start giving rural students better access to an adequate education even before the comprehensive plan is completed.