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148 Controversial bill threatens S.C. refugee resettlement

BY HAL MILLARD

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What would Jesus do?

That's the question many faith leaders in South Carolina and elsewhere are asking after the state Senate late last month passed a bill that could hamstring agencies and churches that help refugees settle in the Palmetto State.

Critics of the bill (S.997) also fret that the proposed law, if successful, could ignite anti-refugee legislation in other states intent on curtailing refugee resettlement in the wake of terror attacks in Brussels and Paris, and calls from President Obama to accept up to 10,000 Syrian refugees this year.

The bill passed by the Senate would create a comprehensive registry of all refugees entering the state to be maintained by the Department of Social Services and shared directly with the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED). A provision to make the registry publicly available was shot down.

More troubling to opponents of the bill, however, is a provision that would make sponsors of refugees civilly and financially liable to victims if a refugee were to commit an act of terror or criminal act. Such liability would in essence have a chilling effect on resettlement efforts in the state, opponents contend.

All five Senators from Lexington County's legislative delegation — Katrina Shealy, Nikki Setzler, Ronnie Cromer, John Courson, and Shane Massey — voted in favor of the bill.

The S.C. House is expected to take up the Senate measure after it returns from Easter recess April 12.

An issue of safety?

Massey, the only delegation member to respond to the Chronicle's request for comment on the legislation, said the issue was strictly about safety.

"Most of the concern I've heard about refugees in South Carolina can be summarized like this: we don't know enough about the refu-

gees who are resettled here — bolstered largely by the FBI Director's Congressional testimony that the federal government can't accurately vet Syrian refugee applicants — and, once the refugees are here, we have no idea where they are," Massey told the *Chronicle*.

Massey is referring to testimony by FBI Director James Comey, which the non-partisan fact-checking organization, PolitiFact, has determined to be widely misconstrued and terribly misquoted by anti-refugee politicians such as Gov. Nikki Haley and GOP Presidential candidate Ted Cruz.

"I believe we should offer refuge to those who have been persecuted or tortured or, most especially, those who have risked their lives to aid or protect our armed forces," Massey added. "But government's first priority must be to protect its citizens. For the refugee program to be successful, people must have confidence that the program does not endanger Americans. I voted for the bill because it gives SLED more information to keep South Carolinians safe."

The threat from refugees in South Carolina would appear slight at best. In 2014, the most recent year statistics were available from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, South Carolina accepted just 121 refugees out of a nationwide total of 69,986. Only five states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico accepted fewer refugees. That year, refugees in the state came exclusively from Burma, Iraq, Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ukraine.

A credible threat?

The United States is widely regarded as having the most stringent and thorough refugee-vetting process in the entire world. The U.S. process has multiple components that take up to two years to complete and involves multiple domestic and international agencies, including the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), State Department, Department of Homeland Security,





the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Terrorist Screening Center, and the National Counterterrorism Center.

The process includes extensive paper applications, in-person interviews, and medical screening tests. Moreover, the U.S. only admits refugees that are referred from the UNHCR.

Much of the fear surrounding refugees now stems from the massive wave of displaced Syrians seeking asylum. However, according to the UNHCR, nearly 60% of Syrian refugees are women and children ages 4 and under.

According to Kathleen Newland of the non-partisan Migration Policy Institute: "The United States has resettled 784,000 refugees since September 11, 2001. In those years, exactly three resettled refugees have been arrested for planning terrorist activities—and it is worth noting two were not planning an attack in the United States and the plans of the third were barely credible."

"I fear this may be the start of similar nationwide legislation," said Jenny Yang, vice president of advocacy and policy at World Relief, an evangelical humanitarian nonprofit group that helps resettle refugees who have been vetted and approved by the State Department.

The organization, with an office in Spartanburg, and Lutheran Services Carolinas, in Columbia, are the two federally approved agencies in the state allowed to resettle refugees here, often with

the help of service partners, typically churches.

In an interview with the Washington Post, Yang called the bill "wrongheaded," "grotesque" and "anti-faith" and said World Relief worries that if passed, the bill would "infringe on our ability to carry out our mission, which is a matter of carrying out our faith and practicing our religion, to help people who are vulnerable."

Jason Lee, director of World Relief's South Carolina office in Spartanburg, told the Post more than 80% of refugees the group had resettled in the state have been Christians, some of them fleeing religious persecution.

None of the refugees World Relief has resettled in the state have come from Syria, and only a handful of refugees from other countries, such as Iraq, have been Muslim, he said.

Robin Woodfin, a member of Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist church in Spartanburg County, works with a World Relief Good Neighbor Team through her church. She described the liability provisions of the state's bill as "a scare tactic to prevent good neighbors and good Samaritans from helping others."

"It's an awesome job; I'm privileged to do it," Woodfin told the Post. "The fact that someone wants to prevent me from doing it is beyond my comprehension completely."

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148 State grant to plan new future for young workers

State Superintendent of Education Molly M. Spearman announced Monday that the South Carolina Department of Education has secured a \$100,000 grant to develop a detailed career readiness action plan. The \$100,000 planning grant through the New Skills for Youth grant opportunity, is a part of the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Career Readiness Initiative.

"I want to thank JPMorgan Chase, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Advance CTE, for this grant opportunity," said Spearman. "We will use this grant to implement the South Carolina Youth Education and Skills (SCYES) Initiative, a six-month project that will build on statewide workforce development initiatives to ensure an industry-driven college- and career-readiness system. This funding will enable us to develop an action plan to better align education and industry needs, so students can make a smooth transition from the classroom into the workforce and achieve success. This will be a win-win for students, families, and local businesses across South Carolina," concluded Spearman.

Adams named a director at CIU

Dr. Scott R. Adams, a Lexington businessman and attorney, has been named the new director of the Business & Organizational Leadership program at Columbia International University.



Adams

Adams has been very involved in community affairs in the Midlands of South Carolina, serving in key leadership positions with several civic organizations. He has also garnered several honors, including "South Carolina Ambassador for Economic Development" awarded by Gov. Nikki Haley and State Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt in 2012.

Adams becomes program director on July 1. He currently serves as an adjunct professor of International Business at CIU.

Benefit for Children's Center

Join The Village in Color event at The



Village at Southlake on Saturday, April 23, from 6 to 9 p.m. that is described as an "evening of the arts" to benefit the Dickerson Children's Advocacy Center in West Columbia.

Angelia Ross has also joined The Village recently as director of marketing from Deepwood Estates.

Shred day benefits Gods Helping Hands

A free shred Day with a donation to Gods Helping Hands will be held Saturday April 16, 9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. There is a four container limit. Snacks available while you wait. Our Saviour Lutheran Church, 1500 Sunset Boulevard, West Columbia.

Bomber pilot's inspiring story

World War II bomber pilot and retired business executive D. Murray Price will share his story of faith in war and peace at the S.C. Christian Chamber of Commerce meeting at noon Wednesday, April 27, at Stone River restaurant, 121 Alexander Road, West Columbia.

For information, go to <http://www.sc-christianch/>.

West Metro names new members

Lou Kennedy, president and CEO of Nephron Pharmaceuticals, Kristin Myers, representing Courtyard by Marriott, and Brandon Powell, of Mutual of Omaha Financial Services, were introduced as new members of the Greater Cayce-West Columbia Chamber of Commerce.

Suzanne Riley-White introduced the new members recently at the Chamber's breakfast at the Stone River restaurant.

Worldwide Automobile offers U-Haul

U-Haul Company of South Carolina, Inc. is pleased to announce that Worldwide Automobile Co. LLC has signed on as a U-Haul neighborhood dealer to serve West Columbia.

Worldwide Automobile at 590 Main St. will offer U-Haul trucks, truck sales, trailers, towing equipment, support rental items and in-store pick-up for boxes.

Hours of operation for U-Haul rentals are 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Call (803) 741-5071.

Email biz news: MarkBellune@yahoo.com



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S.C. ROADS Blame spreads as roads bill falters

BY JIM HILLEY
jim@theitem.com

The roads bill isn't dead yet, but the finger pointing has begun.

When the South Carolina House of Representative made amendments to the Senate version of a roads bill before sending it back to the upper chamber Wednesday, Senate leadership was quick to try to put the blame squarely on the House.

Newly elected Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, said the House was at fault for not rubber-stamping the Senate's bill, which emerged only a few weeks ago after being delayed by lengthy filibusters in the Senate going back to spring 2015.

"They knew before they voted that putting in a joint confirmation was going to kill it," Massey said. "Several of us told

them that beforehand. They knew it, and they did it anyway. I think they've killed the bill."

Gov. Nikki Haley joined in, reportedly using Facebook to chastise the overwhelming majority of House members, who voted 113-6 to amend the bill.

"The Republican House of Representatives plans to kill two years of work and that as a result, there will be no change in their road conditions anytime soon," Haley wrote.

All the commotion was caused because the House insisted on their own chance to vet appointees to the Department of Transportation and dropped the Senate's promise to fund road repairs through the general fund every year.

Rep. Gary Simrill, R-Rock Hill, pointed out the House passed a more comprehensive roads bill that included a gas tax increase nearly one year ago, and the proposal sat in the Senate for 11 months.

Sumter's legislative delegation isn't falling in line with the governor's and majority leader's take on who is responsible either.

"It's sad that the state of South Carolina and her leadership can't see the need to fix our roads," said Grady Brown, D-Bishopville.

"This is not partisan politics; it is reality," he said. "The leadership — being the Senate

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and the governor's office — has dropped the ball when it comes to road repair.”

The only Republican serving in the Sumter delegation defended the House.

“The House was trying to make the best of a bad situation that was handed to us by the Senate,” said Rep. Murrell Smith, R-Sumter.

“We worked on trying to improve some of the problems with their governance language.”

Smith said the roads will need a stable source of funding, not a year-by-year appropriation from the General Fund.

“We designated \$425 million in our budget in the House to go towards roads,” he said. “The problem with that appropriation is it’s a one-time appropriation.”

He said the House was able to find some recurring money, but only a fraction of what is needed.

“There was some money moved from the sales tax on cars that will be recurrent,” Smith said. “I think that is about \$65 million, but the rest of the money is nonrecurring.”

Sen. Kevin Johnson, D-Manning, said he was disappointed.

“I think we had a real opportunity to pass a real

roads bill this year,” he said.

Johnson said only a dedicated source of funding for roads will bring adequate relief, a contention backed up by a recent Legislative Audit Committee report.

“All of the polls indicate that the majority of South Carolinians are willing to pay a moderate increase in the gas tax,” he said. “That is something we have to do.”

Brown pointed out that the gas tax has not been increased in the Palmetto State for more than 27 years.

“You can’t pay for roads today for the same kind of money we were garnering 28 years ago,” he said. “It’s just sad that people can’t put politics aside and say that we are going to have a gasoline tax so that we can fix our roads.”

Brown praised the House leadership for passing a bill including a gas-tax increase in 2015.

“I give the Speaker of the House (Rep. Jay Lucas, R-Darlington) credit for trying to do his part because the House passed a 10 cents a gallon tax increase last year.”

Brown said he was not surprised the General Assembly has not been able to move forward on the issue during an election year.

“We are letting politics and wannabes running for governor in 2018 play a major role in what we are going to do about our roads,” he said.

“It’s sad.”



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**THANKFUL COUNCILMAN
LOOKS AT LOCAL ECONOMY**

I want to thank my constituents in Sumter County Voting District 7 (Lemira, Morris College, Crosswell, Loring, Mayewood, Turkey Creek, Magnolia-Harmony, Salterstown and Pocotaligo 1) for your past support.

Together we have made progress in moving Sumter County toward a brighter future for our children.

Twice, during tough economic times, you voted to pass a one-cent sales tax to bring in additional revenue to improve the quality of life for all Sumter residents.

These funds are being used to complete 46 projects costing approximately \$150 million. One of these projects helped Sumter County acquire Continental Tire. This 1-million-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility is a \$500 million investment that will create 1,600 jobs, paying average salaries above Sumter County's per-capita income.

The announcement that Continental Tire would build its facility in Sumter County was made at Sumter Opera House on Oct. 6, 2011, during my tenure as chairman of Sumter County Council. Gov. Nikki

Haley and Bobby Hitt, South Carolina secretary of commerce, were present. This was a momentous occasion and the biggest economic investment in the history of Sumter County. During this ceremony, I conveyed that Sumter County had a highly skilled, loyal and hardworking workforce that would ensure Continental's success in Sumter County.

I continuously advocate, along with other community leaders, that education is the foundation of economic development. Therefore, new programs are being provided at Sumter Career and Technology Center and Central Carolina Technical College. The CCTC tuition-free program is open to all high school graduates who maintained a 2.0 grade-point average and can enter directly into the program. This program is designed to provide the technically trained workforce needed for present and future economic development.

Education and job opportunities are here. Put in the work. Remember, "When you invest in yourself, people will invest in you."

Again, THANK YOU for your loyal support.

EUGENE R. BATEN
Sumter County Council,
District 7

Fashion-backward in North Carolina

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EASTON, Md. — It's been a long while since South Carolina could look down upon its neighbor to the North.

Thanks to North Carolina's anti-LGBT legislation (HB2),



**Kathleen
Parker**

also referred to as the "bathroom bill," the state effectively has begun re-defining itself from its long-popular characterization as a "valley of humility between two

mountains of conceit" (South Carolina and Virginia).

The new law, which ludicrously requires transgender people to use the restroom consistent with the sex on their birth certificates, has liberated South Carolina from its persistent place as the brunt of late-night jokes. Remarkably on the law, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley said her state doesn't have "that problem." Brava.

The law in question was hurriedly passed last month and signed by North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory in response to what one state official called a restroom free-for-all, referring to sudden hysteria over the possibility of transgender individuals using the "wrong" restroom. How would anyone know?

Will officials now post monitors at public restrooms to check birth certificates and human bladder-evacuation portals?

This would be riotously funny if it weren't so

patently discriminatory.

Many bad deeds go unpunished, but not this one. The economic fallout from the law already is being felt and the price of not doing business is about to go up. Bruce Springsteen recently canceled a concert in Greensboro and Deutsche Bank has frozen a planned 250-job expansion in the state. But the real showdown will be this weekend when not nearly as many buyers and designers as usual will attend the biannual High Point furniture market — the largest in the nation and the state's biggest economic event.

A recent study by Duke University placed the annual economic impact of the High Point market at \$5.38 billion. The furnishings industry also generates more than 600,000 visitor days to the state each year and accounts for 37,000 jobs.

If there were a Darwin Award for states, North Carolina would win hands-down. Already the High Point Market Authority reports that hundreds or thousands of the 75,000 retailers and designers who annually attend the market won't be visiting this year because of HB2, which, come to think of it,

sounds appropriately like a





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disease.

Many of those who plan to attend have expressed deep reservations amid likely plans to go to the relatively new Las Vegas furniture market next go-round. Among these is Don Wooters, interior designer and co-owner of Easton's Dwelling and Design, who told me he feels guilt about going to North Carolina.

"I feel like a traitor going to High Point, putting capitalism before human rights," he said. "I don't feel good about that and I know it's wrong."

Wooters isn't only baffled by the bigotry of the legislation but also by whatever generates the fear behind it.

"Why do people feel they have to be afraid? It's a big sign of how uneducated America is."

Another local designer, Jamie Merida, owner of Bountiful, told me he decided to go if only to make his case to vendors that they have six months to straighten out this mess or he, too, will be off to Las Vegas next time.

Although North Carolina has been noted in recent years for its increasingly hard-right politics, it is still

shocking that a state that boasts several of the nation's top colleges and universities and is home to the famed Research Triangle, could codify what is so plainly a discriminatory law. In comments Tuesday, McCrory, feel-

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atory law.'*

when bigotry raises its hideous head, better angels will prevail. Either the courts will overturn the law or the state will come to its senses, if only for economic reasons.

As to that valley of humility? In 1900, when Mary Oates Spratt Van Landingham, a cultural leader and author, first conjured the image in a speech, she was bemoaning her state's then-lesser "native literature."

"Could it be that being located between Virginia and South Carolina, our people for so long have been furnished such conspicuous illustrations of self-appreciation that they have, by contrast, learned modesty and silence?" she said. "Where there are mountains of conceit, there are apt to be valleys of humility."

Today, those mountains have good reason for self-appreciation by comparison. And North Carolina has proved itself a valley of ignorance, whose legislators and governor could use a moment of silence to consider their ill-conceived conceit.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleenparker@washpost.com. © 2016, Washington Post Writers Group.





'Although North Carolina has been noted in recent years for its increasingly hard-right politics, it is still shocking that a state that boasts several of the nation's top colleges and universities and is home to the famed Research Triangle, could codify what is so plainly a discriminatory law.'

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Julia Greer celebrated her 100th birthday with a party at Heartland Residential on April 3. She is holding her great-granddaughter, Julia Fant. Others pictured are her daughter and son-in-law, Judy and Brown Fant, who are standing behind her; her grandsons, Cam and Chris Fant; Cam's wife, Misty, and their children Connor Greer Fant and Travis Marshall. Mrs. Greer received around 200 birthday cards, including a card from Gov. Nikki Haley. Over 200 people attended her birthday party. The House of Representatives declared April 3 as "Julia Greer Day" in South Carolina on a motion by her great-nephew, Rep. Dennis Moss of Cherokee County. House District 42 Rep. Mike Anthony presented to Mrs. Greer a flag that was flown over the Statehouse.

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Santuc Firefighter Harrell "Bug" Bright shines a flashlight on a chair that was set on fire on April 3 at the old Carlsan School. Authorities said the fire was set in an attempt to burn down the building.

Arson fires keep local firemen busy

By ANNA BROWN

Local firefighters say two arson fires, set about the same time, 20 miles apart taxed the county's already burdened fire service and could have been much worse if both blazes had burned out of control.

The first fire was reported on April 3 at 7:14 p.m. at a doublewide mobile home on 280 Cudd Lane in the Kelly-Kelton Fire District. The second fire was reported at 7:54 p.m. at the abandoned Carlsan School on 3288 Carlisle-Santuc Highway in the Santuc Fire District.

The mobile home was destroyed. The fire at the school, which is built of cement blocks and has limited ceiling tiles left, was contained to a cloth chair that was set on fire.

Kelly-Kelton Interim Fire Chief Wesley Pruitt said most of the county's firefighters volunteer at more than one department. Some of those who reported to the Cudd Lane fire scene would have been also called to the fire at the school if it had spread.

"Under the county's mutual aid agreement the three closest fire departments are automatically dispatched to a structure fire," he said.



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structure fire, he said. "In this case, (the mobile home) that meant Kelly-Kelton, Lockhart and Philippi. When I pulled up and saw the heavy fire and heavy smoke I asked for Jonesville to bring their tanker. Hydrants are very limited in our district."

Pruitt also asked for the Union Fire and Rescue Squad - which is made up of firefighters and others with First Responder training from the entire county - to respond with manpower.

Because of the number of firefighters using air packs, Buffalo Fire Department was asked to respond with its air-bus. It also might have been needed if the fire at the school had spread.

"We had 39 personnel on scene," Pruitt said. "Some of the Kelly-Kelton firefighters and some of the other guys there run with multiple fire departments to try and help each other out. (Pruitt himself is also a member of the Philippi Fire Department, where he assists with training,

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Arson

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the Union County Fire and Rescue Squad and the rescue squad's dive team.) If it had been a working fire at the school, I would have lost personnel. It is tough county-wide. Every department is struggling to get volunteers. So many people work out of the county because of the economy and jobs. I drive a truck hauling feed and grain to dairy farms in three states. It's hard to find daytime people who will volunteer. We've been stretched."

Lockhart Fire Chief Lee Brannon, president of the Union County Firefighters Association, said the arsons were a threat to the safety of others and did tax resources.

"If the school had been on fire, some of the resources that normally would have gone to it had already responded to the fire on Cudd Lane," he said. "This hurts the taxpayers for sure."

There were three arson fires in Union County that weekend. One occurred on Saturday, April 2, when someone set fire to the old Boulware Plumbing building on Munroe Street. Nine departments fought this blaze, which occurred in the Monarch Fire District. This fire also remains under investigation. A mechanic was using the building to repair vehicles. An SUV and an ATV were inside at the time of the fire. The amount of monetary damage has not been determined, according to a Union County Sheriff's Office report.

The fire at Carlsan School caused little monetary damage, according to a sheriff's office report.

The fire on Cudd Lane, the home of sisters Donna and Rhonda Johnson, left six adults and two children homeless, according to the American Red Cross.

A neighbor on Cudd Lane told Deputy Roger Suber she was outside and saw smoke and thought someone on 280 Cudd Lane was burning trash. Fire suddenly shot out of a window and the neighbor called 911.

Suber contacted the Johnson sisters and met with them at the sheriff's patrol office. They said they had left home and went to eat at a restaurant. Donna Johnson said she had lit two candles at the house earlier in the day.

Local law enforcement officials said they hope a return to tougher penalties for arson will deter people from intentionally burning property.

A bill that restructures the degrees of arson was unanimously approved by state legislators in March and now goes to Gov. Nikki Haley's desk to be signed into law.

The "clean-up bill" essentially changes arson laws back to the way they were prior

to 2010, when the Omnibus Crime Reduction and Sentencing Reform Act was passed.

That law, in part, reduced sentences for arson offenders and made it more difficult to hand down an arson charge. A first-degree arson charge required that a person be killed in an intentionally set fire, and any lesser-degree arson charge required that a person suffer bodily injury.

Under the new bill, a suspect can be charged with first-degree arson if the fire involves death or serious bodily injury and would face a penalty of no less than 30 years in prison upon conviction.

A second-degree arson charge would involve a fire that damages or destroys any building typically occupied by people, such as residential homes, churches and office buildings. That offense would carry a penalty of no less than three years and no more than 25 years in prison upon conviction.

For third-degree arson, a suspect can be charged if a fire damages or destroys other kinds of property, such as outbuildings, sheds, vehicles and boats. The penalty would be up to 15 years in prison upon conviction.

The second- and third-degree offenses do not have to involve someone getting killed or hurt.

Sheriff David Taylor said he thinks the change in the law is a good idea.

"I am happy to see the changes that have come forth," he said. "We have seen an increase in arsons within the county with this past year when had 13 arson cases. So far this year we have already had six reported. Hopefully, with the tougher sentencing guidelines we will see less arsons in the county."

Chief Sam White of the Union Public Safety Department said there were seven arson fires in the City of Union in 2015. The city has been plagued for around 15 years by an arsonist on the South Side. This person typically starts a fire with paper on the outside of a structure.

The latest arson fire in the city was reported on March 25 on 101 Third Ave. Someone set fire to the outside of an occupied house around 3:30 a.m.

A similar fire was reported on Feb. 13 on 415 South Pinckney St.

White said he, too, hopes the new law will be a deterrent.

"When someone intentionally burns something that is serious to me," he said. "Fire is like a bullet - once it's fired there are a lot of variables that can come into play that can cause it to spread where someone didn't intend for it to go."

"We have seen an increase in arsons within the county with this past year when had 13 arson cases. So far this year we have already had six reported. Hopefully, with the tougher sentencing guidelines we will see less arsons in the county."

— Sheriff David Taylor

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OTHER VOICES: EDITORIALS FROM ACROSS THE STATE

148 The Herald-Journal on prescription drug abuse in the state:

What was once a growing problem has become a national epidemic: prescription drug abuse.

Addiction to painkillers has reached such a crisis stage that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention recently released new physician guidelines for prescribing opioids. Even the president has weighed in, speaking at the National RX Drug Abuse and Heroin Summit in Atlanta.

South Carolina certainly hasn't been spared. According to a 2014 CDC report, the Palmetto State ranked 11th in the nation with its prescribing rate of opioid painkillers.

Fortunately, the state is stepping up its game to address the problem.

On April 1, it began requiring most South Carolina prescribers (physicians, dentists, etc.) to consult the state's prescription drug database before writing a Schedule II, III or IV controlled substance prescription for patients who are on Medicaid or enrolled in the state health insurance plan for employees and their dependents. Controlled substances of this nature include drugs such as OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Xanax and Valium. The mandate does not apply to physicians when treating patients who are in long-term care or hospice.

Consulting the database enables prescribers to see patients' controlled substance prescription history before

issuing such prescriptions. Failure to consult the database can result in withheld Medicaid or state health plan payments as well as being reported to the appropriate medical licensing boards.

To say this was a necessary step is a major understatement.

Before April 1, when consulting the database was voluntary, only 21 percent of the state's physicians enrolled to access it, according to a 2014 report from the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Council, established by Gov. Nikki Haley.

Clearly, the voluntary participation method failed miserably. So South Carolina is now pressing the issue, and rightfully so considering such lax participation.

The prescription database, known as the S.C. Reporting & Identification Prescription Tracking System, or SCRIPTS, went into service in 2008, with pharmacies required by state law to report the dispensing of controlled substances.

The database — and prescribers' consistent participation — is vital to curbing addiction to painkillers as it can monitor two key problems that fuel the epidemic: overprescribing by physicians and "doctor shopping" by patients. Doctor shopping is a casual term for patients who abuse their medication and then seek out prescriptions from other physicians in order to obtain more drugs.

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David Kennard/Journal Scene

Dorchester County Sheriff candidate Ray Nash talks about the increase in homicides in the county. Nash spoke Monday at a forum hosted by the Summerville Republican Women's Club at Oscar's of Summerville.

County GOP candidates declare platforms, experience at forum

BY JENNA-LEY HARRISON
 jharrison@journalscene.com

Some of Dorchester County's Republican candidates made their first public cases Monday for why they should be chosen for a spot in this year's county and state ballots.

Voters will go to the polls on June 14 for party primaries.

Four individuals seeking seats in the sheriff, coroner and a state Senate race gathered at a forum Monday at Oscar's of Summerville. The Summerville Republican Women's Club sponsored the event, which allowed five minutes apiece for each candidate to stand and discuss personal platforms.

Former Sheriff's Office Lt. Robert Biddle, who resigned last month, and former Sheriff Ray Nash were among the most anticipated candidates to talk, according to those attending. Sheriff L.C. Knight was not present but told GOP officials he would be attending future forums. Nash didn't think Knight's excuse was good enough and during his time slot even made a light-hearted jab, again noting the current county law enforcement leader's absence. Nash said he was looking forward to hearing from all his opponents.

Nash, who served as sheriff from

1997 to 2008, told the crowd his main concerns for the sheriff's office are what he called its high turnover, low morale and unprecedented 2015 homicide rate, which neared 20 deaths.

He told the crowd homicides averaged three a year under his leadership.

Though Knight didn't attend the forum due to a scheduling conflict, he said, he had much to say about the increase in county deaths last year.

"I don't know anybody in police work able to prevent a murder, including my opponent," Knight said about Nash.

Knight said his deputies have already put at least 13 of last year's homicide suspects behind bars and solved all but one case.

With regard to the agency's difficulty in retaining officers, Nash said at least 20 have left over the last year to find law enforcement jobs in both the public and private sectors. He said he felt so strongly about the issue that he decided to come out of retirement to seek public office again.

Summerville resident Penny Meriman wasn't satisfied with Nash's

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explanation of county crime statistics. She challenged him during a question-and-answer session, asking him why FBI numbers reveal the crime rate has lowered across the county in recent years.

In response, Nash said FBI data is "totally dependent on the local agencies' reporting" and is not currently up-to-date on 2015 information.

According to Knight, crime has decreased under his ad-

ministration and is continuing to do so with the implementation of the agency's saturation team at the end of January.

"Population is up, and crime's down," Knight said.

While he doesn't mind numbers being reported, he wants Nash to report them accurately.

"Tell the facts but don't tell a bunch of lies," Knight said. "Get out there and tell the truth."

Merriman also pointed out the sheriff's office received state accreditation for the first time in agency history this year.

"If the sheriff's office is so bad, how come they met... state accreditation standards," she said.

Nash countered her comment with claims his administration also worked to abide by the state's more than 200 standards but due to "cost" and the "time intensive" nature of seeking accreditation, he chose not to.

"We took all the accreditation standards and made sure policies in place met them, even though we didn't go after it," he said. "If things were going well then I wouldn't be re-entering this race."

Biddle, who's worked for both the Nash and Knight administrations, also jumped in on the topic. He said while accreditation is prestigious, he doesn't believe Knight's

administration is abiding by all required policies and pro-

cedures – particularly in regard to hiring and promoting.

"A lot of people want to be deputies, but the hiring process is not fair," Biddle said.

He said he wants to completely revamp the sheriff's office, change deputy zoning, provide high-speed driver's training and increase the number of officers covering the county's upper end. Biddle said his restructuring plan would save the county in excess of \$200,000.

Both Nash and Biddle also discussed adding more deputies to cover the St. George area. Knight said deputies are already operating in a fluid manner, going where their supervisor sees fit, and crime just doesn't occur as much on the upper end.

"The shift lieutenant puts people where he needs them. It's his choice," Knight said.

Coroner's race

Coroner candidate Paul Brouthers, a former state highway patrolman and current funeral home director in Charleston County, told Monday's Republican Women's crowd he's the only qualified

person for the job because he's the only one with "mortuary experience."

"There are certain things you must be able to know and identify (as coroner)," he said.

When an

audience member asked him about his stance on the need for autopsies and when they should be conducted,

Brouthers said his views are in line with Charleston County Coroner's Office policies.

"If you are under 65 and in good health, and you died for unknown reasons and it wasn't...violent...then I'm going to request an autopsy," he said.

Brouthers served nearly 20 years as a state trooper – his jurisdiction including

Dorchester County. He also served in the Highway Patrol's community relations office.

"I absolutely loved it here... it was my favorite job, and now I want to come back," he said.

He reminded voters of this year's "important election" and of how it's "not to be taken lightly." Brouthers said he also plans to bring more di-

versity to the coroner's office, should he win, and restore its integrity – referencing but not directly naming the incident that forced former coroner Chris Nisbet from the elected seat. Nisbet resigned this year. Gov. Nikki Haley suspended him last year, the same day a grand jury indicted him for misconduct in office.

"A lot of respect and credibility in that office is gone," Brouthers said.

State Senate

State Senate candidate Sandy Senn also took time to detail her platform supportive of law enforcement and other first responders.

"What we have day after day after day are negative articles in the paper," she said about law enforcement.

The West Ashley lawyer is seeking the Senate District 41 seat, which is being vacated by Sen. Paul Thurmond.

She faces a crowded field. Republicans Culver Kidd, Roy Maybank, Tim Mallard and Joe Qualey have also filed for the seat.

Senn said for the past 20 years she's regularly defended police, firefighters and EMTs and as general counsel for the S.C. Sheriff's Association, has represented all 46 sheriffs in the state.

She said it's not fair that cops can't get insurance coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder and other necessary work-related items.

"Every day I have officers come in my office and say, 'Am I going to lose my house?' ...Now I cannot (promise) that," she said.

In addition to support for first responders, Senn's political goals include working

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Brouthers



to "end traffic nightmares," according to her campaign pamphlet, and increasing vocational and technical training for students.

She also took a stance against state mandates, when Peggy Bangle, vice chair for

the county's GOP party, asked for her position on the local government fund, which has been underfunded for years.

"We get all these state mandates with no way for local governments to fund (them). I think state mandates need to

cease," Senn said.

The Republican Women's group will host additional candidate forums in the near future. The Journal Scene will also host two candidate debates next month.

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Photos by David Reinhard/Journal Scene

Dorchester County Sheriff candidates Robert Biddle and Ray Nash visit prior to the forum Monday at Oscar's of Summerville.



Sandy Senn, a candidate for Senate District 41, speaks with members of the Summerville Republican Women's Club Monday at Oscar's of Summerville.



Penny Merriman asks a question during a candidate forum Monday hosted by the Summerville Republican Women's Club at Oscar's of Summerville.

148 + 280 Lawmakers shouldn't fall for a not-so-bright proposal

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Legislators shouldn't get sidetracked by a narrow, right-wing effort to push new anti-gay legislation through the General Assembly. There's too much vital work that needs to be done — from a real fix for potholes in roads and substantive reform for ethics laws to improving education, providing better health care and reducing poverty.

Unfortunately, state Sen. Lee Bright, R-Spartanburg, wants to divert everyone away from real issues, again. Known far and wide as a reactionary lawmaker who pushes over-the-top proposals with the zeal of a Neanderthal, Bright has ripped off and introduced an anti-gay measure from North Carolina that would force people to use bathrooms associated with their birth genders.

This is a solution in desperate search of a problem. Bright offers a bill that just seeks to create headlines to feed red meat to homophobic zealots without making headway on things that really matter.

Ladies and gentlemen, South Carolina should be better than descending into this gutter clogged by right-wing paranoia that unjustly preys upon people's fears.

If lawmakers don't quickly reject Bright's kind of nonsense, South Carolina could suffer. North Carolina already has been skewered in national media as a non-welcoming place, costing it jobs and business from other states. Compare that to Georgia. Earlier this year, it passed an anti-gay "religious liberty" bill, but Gov. Nathan Deal vetoed it after major corporations rallied against the measure.

Just as in Georgia, big businesses in the Palmetto State



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don't want legislation like Bright proposes. Why? Because they know it will hurt the state's competitive environment to work with and attract global partners like BMW, Mercedes, Boeing, Volvo and Michelin. Passing Bright's legislation would give pause to any company thinking of bringing jobs here — just like is happening in North Carolina and Mississippi, which also recently passed anti-LGBT legislation.

State Democratic Party Chair Jaime Harrison criticized Bright for stooping to a "new low" by filing the bill that "mimics the hate and fear-fueled law" that North Carolina lawmakers, who introduced and passed it in a single day. It was signed by their governor on the same day.

"Bright must be deaf to the outcry from North Carolinians across the political spectrum and the business community who know discrimination hurts, not helps, our communities," Harrison said. "This stunt is incredibly short-sighted."

Gov. Nikki Haley, who endorsed Bright for his courage in a 2012 GOP primary, pointed out to reporters this week that the senator's flash-in-the-pan proposal isn't needed because of a 1999 law passed by the legislature.

"What I will tell you is in South Carolina, we are blessed because we don't have to mandate respect or kindness or

responsibility in this state," she said. "And so I'll tell you that law has worked perfectly. I don't know of any example that we've had a problem on and South Carolina is going to continue to focus on ethics and on roads and on jobs and on all of those things because we think we've got that part covered."

It's something that the governor and folks at S.C. Equality, the state's largest LGBT rights group, might share views.

"We already have laws in place that make it illegal for anyone to enter a restroom to harm or harass people, or invade their privacy," the organization said in a press statement. "Police already use these laws to keep people safe, make arrests, and hold criminals accountable."

"All of us know what it's like to urgently need to use the restroom. But this law is designed to make it impossible for transgender people to go about their daily lives like other people."

Last year, South Carolina showed what it was really made of when lawmakers — Republicans and Democrats alike — banded together after the Emanuel AME massacre to finally remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds. It was hard. It was controversial. But it got done because it was in the best interest of the state.

Let's hope our state lawmakers can remember that victory and run out the clock on Bright's ill-conceived plagiarism so we don't get a black eye — and so we do the right thing.

Andy Brack is editor and publisher of Statehouse Report. Have a comment? Send to: feedback@statehousereport.com.