

Title: **Columbiabusrollswith supportforPurpleHeart**
 Author: By JEFF WILKINSON jwilkinson@thestate.com
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Columbia bus rolls with support for Purple Heart

Photos of 9 Midlands' recipients hit road in time for Army meeting

By JEFF WILKINSON
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A specially wrapped city bus is hitting the streets this week to honor Purple Heart recipients and show the Midlands' support for the military.

The bus will bear photos of nine veterans spanning from World War II to Iraq and Afghanistan. The bus is sponsored by

Columbia, Lexington County, Richland County and the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority.

The Purple Heart bus will debut in time for the Army's community listening meeting on possible drastic cuts at Fort Jackson set for Thursday at Shandon Baptist Church, 5250 Forest Drive in Columbia. Orga-

nizers are hoping more than 2,000 people will turn out for the event, which features a host of public figures headed by Gov. Nikki Haley.

Doors open at 2 p.m. and the event will begin at 3 p.m.

The Purple Heart veterans portrayed on the bus will be in attendance. They include Lou Fowler, Lewis Monroe, Andrew McMahon and Harry Boswell from World War II; Donald D. Hotz from the Korean War; Henry J.

Geathers and Theodore Jenkins from the Vietnam War; and Ramon Guitard Jr. and Halsey Lynn Hinson from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The project has been spearheaded by Bill Dukes, who is South Carolina's civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army.

"This was a great opportunity to demonstrate our appreciation for what the military means to the Midlands," Dukes said.



A Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority bus debuting on local routes this week honors Purple Heart recipients and showcases the Midlands support for the military.

Title: **Haley, Spearman push for appointed schoolschief**
Author:
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Haley, Spearman push for appointed schools chief

Gov. **Nikki Haley** and state Superintendent of Education **Molly Spearman** have joined forces in urging lawmakers to pave the way for ending elections for the state schools chief.

Republicans Haley and Spearman urged members of the GOP-controlled House to move on a proposal that would ask S.C. voters whether they want to allow the governor to appoint the education superintendent. Supporters say an appointed schools chief would make the governor more accountable for education.

But some lawmakers and education groups have been reluctant to end popular elections for the statewide office that Democrats have had the most success in winning.

— *The Associated Press, Cassie Cope and Jamie Self contributed*

Title: **Haley, watchdogs urge Senateto pass ethicsreform**

Author:

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Haley, watchdogs urge Senate to pass ethics reform

Republican Gov. **Nikki Haley** and ethics advocates are urging state senators to pass independent ethics investigations of lawmakers.

Haley, **JoAnne Day** of the League of Women Voters, **Dana Beach** of the Coastal Conservation League and the AARP's **Teresa Arnold** sent senators a letter Wednesday asking them to reconsider a bill, sponsored by Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Larry Martin, R-Pickens, that the Senate rejected two weeks ago.

Martin's bill originally called for ending the practice of lawmakers policing themselves by creating an independent body to investigate ethics complaints against lawmakers. However, that reform was removed from the proposal on the Senate floor.

"Our constituents care deeply about ethics reform, because it is the heart of good government," Haley and the others wrote.

The letter also warned lawmakers that "grassroots are organizing, people are talking, and public scrutiny will not cease until the General Assembly passes ethics reform with truly independent investigations."

House Speaker **Jay Lucas**, R-Darlington, also has signaled that his chamber plans to keep ethics reform at the top of their agenda.

Lucas plans to introduce a new ethics bill – with the signatures of at least 100 of the House's 124 members – aimed at encouraging the Senate to reconsider ethics reforms.

Title: **DHECchangestactics indirectorsearch**
 Author: BySAMMY FRETWELL sfretwell@thestate.com
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DHEC changes tactics in director search

Board will advertise nationally for the post;
 chairman defends Kitzman hiring process

By SAMMY FRETWELL
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South Carolina's environmental and health agency board will conduct a national search for the vacant department director's job after encountering an avalanche of criticism over the way it handled the last selection for a director.

The Department of Health and

DHEC

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board voted unanimously to use a national search firm, Gomez and Associates of Chicago, to help find the best candidate for the post. The board will be-

gin advertising the position Thursday and accept applications until March 26. A three-member selection committee of the board - Amsler, Clarence

Environmental Control board agreed Wednesday to advertise the vacant position and work through the spring to find a nominee to replace Eleanor Kitzman. She quit Sunday as a furor was erupting in the state Senate, where her confirmation hearings

where her confirmation hearings

were underway.

"We're off and running," board chairman Allen Amsler said of the search.

Meeting via conference call late Wednesday afternoon, the

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Batts and Mark Lutz - would recommend final candidates by April 20. The board would send its nominee to Gov. Nikki Haley April 23 and to the Senate for confirmation before

May 1, the board agreed.

The Senate must confirm the board's choice for director.

"We've got a lot of work before us," Batts said, noting that it might be difficult

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to find the candidate the board wants at the director's salary. The job pays about \$150,000. DHEC is one of the state's largest agencies, regulating everything from hospital expansions to pollution discharges by industries.

Wednesday's decision is in sharp contrast to the process the board used to choose Kitzman in early January. Kitzman, an insurance executive who has no experience in environmental and health issues, got the nomination without facing any competition for the job, four days after previous director Catherine Templeton resigned.

The Haley-appointed DHEC board did not advertise the job or seek other applications, relying instead on a recommendation from Haley. Kitzman, who had served as insurance commissioner in Texas and South Carolina, is Haley's friend and a campaign donor.

Kitzman pulled out of the running for the DHEC director's job late Sunday afternoon following a brutal Senate confirmation hearing three days earlier.

At the hearing, lawmakers grilled Kitzman for some four hours about her lack of qualifications and inconsistent statements they said she made to the screening committee. Senators also criticized the DHEC board for the secretive way it chose Kitzman.

Templeton resigned the post Jan. 8. She got the job three years earlier after a national search that produced more than 250 candidates. When she quit, Templeton said she had given her service to state government and wanted to leave.

The company DHEC plans to use to help find candidates for the job, Gomez and Associates, is already working for the department after winning approval to help DHEC recruit qualified people for the agency's public health division.

Records show the company had been retained by DHEC in September, about a month before Templeton privately told the board she planned to quit. The agency said in a recent email to The State newspaper

that it did not hire Gomez and Associates to search for Templeton's replacement. The Gomez firm's agreement with DHEC could earn it up to \$250,000, depending on its recruiting success, the agency told The State on Feb. 4.

Sen. Tom Davis, R-Beaufort, said this week that a thorough search will help the next candidate's case with the Senate screening panel. The screening committee's concerns had placed Kitzman's nomination in doubt.

"The more extensive that diligence and the more exhaustive that search, the more confidence senators have that the person is qualified," said Davis, a screening committee member.

When the screening panel doesn't have confidence that the DHEC board thoroughly vetted candidates for the job, it can cause skepticism among senators, he said.

"What we say is, 'Perhaps we need to be doing the sort of due diligence and critical inquiry that wasn't done on the front

end' " by the DHEC board, Davis said.

Columbia Sens. Darrell Jackson and Joel Lorie, both Democrats, and Republican John Courson agreed.

But in an email Tuesday evening to The State, board chairman Amsler answered "no" when asked if the eight-member panel made any mistakes in the process of choosing Kitzman as director, saying it followed the law. He said the board had confidence in her.

Amsler said Tuesday the board had not discussed a new director with Haley, but he said the governor "will be consulted when appropriate" in accordance with the law.

Amsler's email to The State did say that the board would seek "the strongest candidate to continue the board's vision, while building on the work that was started three years ago by Catherine Templeton and the staff at DHEC."

Asked if in-house candidates would be sought, Amsler said "all qualified candidates will be considered."



FILE PHOTOGRAPH/THE STATE

Eleanor Kitzman took her name out of the running Sunday.

Title: **Bill to remove board hits snag**
 Author: By ANDREW SHAIN ashain@thestate.com
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S.C. STATE

Bill to remove board hits snag

Senator's
objection could
keep measure
from a vote

By ANDREW SHAIN
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A bill to oust South Carolina State University's trustees is headed to the Senate floor after quick approvals by education panels over the past two days.

But the proposal could face a roadblock that would block a vote.

The Senate Education Committee voted 10-1 Wednesday to replace the financially troubled school's board with five temporary members appointed by legislative leaders and Gov. Nikki Haley.

However, any vote on the bill could be delayed after Sen. Gerald Malloy, the Darlington Democrat who cast the sole dissenting vote, placed an objection on the proposal.

Malloy questioned the need for speed in pushing the proposal. He said a House proposal earlier this month – threatening to close S.C. State for two years – pushed the issue of S.C. State's solvency into crisis mode.

Malloy asked if lawmakers had considered less drastic alternatives that would not hurt the school's enrollment and accreditation.

S.C. State's accreditation is on probation because of its financial and governance issue. Students cannot get financial aid at unaccredited schools.

Malloy said some trust-

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S.C. STATE

FROM PAGE A3

ees just recently have joined S.C. State's board, adding they have not had enough time to turn the school around. He also said he would like to see alumni more involved in S.C. State's rescue, including having a say on its temporary trustees.

Other senators tried to persuade Malloy that swift action was needed to save the school. The bill can be considered only if Malloy lifts his objection.

Senate Education Committee chairman John Courson, R-Richland, said the Senate's four S.C. State grads favor the bill. Courson said he also had

spoken to U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, a Columbia Democrat and one of the school's most prominent alums, who also wants a change in trustees.

Sen. Darrell Jackson, D-Richland, said S.C. State could fall deeper into debt without a leadership overhaul. The school has a \$17 million deficit.

"The Titanic has hit the iceberg," said Jackson, who has a nephew attending S.C. State.

Senate Majority Leader Harvey Peeler, R-Cherokee, said cuts need to be made at the university, which has seen its enrollment drop by more than 2,000 students over the past eight years.

"S.C. State has flatlined," Peeler said. "We can pray for a miracle or

we can try to harvest the organs and keep S.C.

State's doors open."

If the Senate bill passes the General Assembly, a temporary board would run the state's only historically black public college until June 30, 2018, when new trustees would be elected by legislators.

The House has a similar bill and budget amendment to remove the Orangeburg school's trustees. Those proposals would give control of S.C. State to the State Budget and Control Board, a group of elected officials led by Gov. Nikki Haley.

The budget board members, who also include legislative leaders, could appoint their designees to run the state's only historically black public college.

The House plans to take up its version of bill to overhaul S.C. State's leadership as early as next week.

Lawmakers in both chambers expect any board named to lead S.C. State temporarily will sack embattled university President Thomas Elzey.

But they might get beaten to the punch.

The S.C. State board placed Elzey on paid administrative leave on Monday, and a board attorney told The State trustees plan to discuss parting ways with the president at a meeting Thursday.

Elzey has been criticized for not making enough cuts to stem the school's growing deficit.

Title: **Haley: Don't borrow \$500 million**

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S.C. SPENDING

Haley: Don't borrow \$500 million

Governor, fellow
Republican collide
over bond plan

By ANDREW SHAIN
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Gov. Nikki Haley accused the South Carolina House's chief budget writer Wednesday

day of trying to run up the state's debt with a proposed \$500 million borrowing plan to pay for college and

job-training projects, building maintenance and economic development.

"We've got an issue of a chairman of Ways and Means who wants to ... run up the credit card debt just because he can," Haley told

reporters, referring to House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Brian White, R-Anderson.

White said the governor's criticism was disappointing, adding the proposed bond issue would

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BORROW

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not increase the amount the state spends to pay off its debt.

"I have worked with her as a (State Budget and Control) board member. I've been one of her allies," White said. "I've worked with her, ever since I became chairman of Ways and Means, on the budgets, trying to do some of her priorities."

During a news conference, Haley said she has proposed paying down the state's debt - citing her executive budget, which included spending \$40 million to pay down debt.

But White said that was misleading, saying Haley did not add any new money

to pay off debt, but simply moved money around. "It's taking (money) out of your right pocket, putting it in your left and saying, 'I saved money.'"

'USE THE MONEY WE HAVE'

In her news conference, Haley said the state will have an added \$280 million in revenues for its fiscal year that starts July 1, adding the state should use that money before borrowing more.

"Whenever you have something in your home, your thoughts should not be, 'Let's charge it and put it on the credit card,'" said the governor, who proposed spending that new

money on a variety of projects in her executive budget. "Your thoughts should be, 'Let's use the money we have and pay for it.'"

White said all of the projects that would be paid for by the bond package were required to last longer than 15 years, the length of time it will take the state to pay back the money.

Rep. Gary Simrill, a York Republican who co-sponsored the bond package, likened the bond package to a business taking out a loan to accommodate expansion.

Simrill and White said fellow Republican Haley has done a great job selling South Carolina to industrial prospects, but the state now needs to deliver on her

promises for workforce training, education, and water and sewage lines.

Simrill also noted the state is paying off a previous bond package. "We're maintaining debt and not increasing it."

White compared the House proposal to borrow money, while interest rates are low, to buying a house. "You want to buy your house when the interest rates are low because your payments are not going to go up."

'THERE IS TIME TO REVERSE THIS'

Haley spent much of her news conference targeting the administration of President Barack Obama, say-

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ing the spending habits of the Democratic administration in Washington have reached GOP-controlled Columbia.

"The one thing, as an accountant, I always cared about was debt," said Haley, who returned Monday from a Republican Governors Association conference in Washington. "The taxpayers of South Carolina don't need to be dealing with debt on their shoulders. We've got that in D.C. The one thing I want to do was give us a reprieve in South Carolina."

She added, "Sometimes the D.C. air flows this way. So let's push it back. There is time to reverse this."

Haley also took White to task for backing a House proposal to raise money to repair the state's roads by, in part, adding a tax to

wholesale fuel, saying he favors a tax hike.

That House proposal is competing with Haley's plan to spend more to repair the state's battered roads by increasing the state's gas tax by 10 cents a gallon in exchange for a cut in the state income tax.

White said it will take more money to maintain the state's roads, which will require looking at increasing the gas tax and other options. "Any citizen in the state of South Carolina that's riding on our roads now knows that they need repair," White said.

Haley said she and much of the General Assembly learned about the bond proposal from White's committee in news reports. But White said he had informed House members of the bond plan. The propos-

al passed the House Ways and Means Committee unanimously, 25-0.

The proposal could have support in the Senate as well. Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said last week he would look favorably at the bond package. Leatherman, who also chairs the Senate's budget-writing committee, added the Senate could change or make additions to the House-proposed projects.

BORROWING \$500 MILLION?

The S.C. House Ways and Means Committee approved borrowing \$497.2 million for building and infrastructure projects last week, including:

\$146 million for higher

education building projects, including \$25 million for the University of South Carolina

\$94 million for technical schools, including \$35 million for an aerospace center at Trident Technical College to benefit Boeing

\$60 million for water-and-sewage projects to support economic development

\$50 million for deferred maintenance at state-owned buildings, parks and an armory

\$50 million for K-12 education, money that does not have a defined purpose but could be used to address a Supreme Court ruling that the state does not spend enough on rural schools



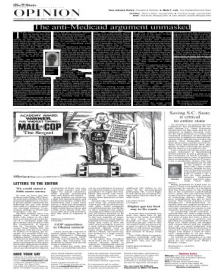
Haley

Title: **The anti-Medicaid argument unmasked**

Author:

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The anti-Medicaid argument unmasked

THE POST and Courier had an article the other day about the conversion of Tony Keck, who served as Gov. Nikki Haley's chief Medicaid-expansion opponent before he left last year to take a job with a Tennessee hospital system that, like pretty much any hospital system in the country, supports the Medicaid expansion that he worked so hard to block on this side of the border.

Under the headline "Former Haley health care adviser says Medicaid expansion might work elsewhere," the article noted that Mr. Keck's new employer supported the recent attempt to expand the program in Tennessee, and it quoted Mr. Keck as saying that expanding Medicaid to cover more people under Obamacare "might be the best choice for some states, and it might not be in other states."

And you could just feel Medicaid supporters in our state rising up in smug unison to cry out "Hypocrite!" Sort of like they did when he first landed his new gig, only louder.

And maybe they're right. But if so, so what? Mr. Keck was never elected to office. He was never accountable to us. He was accountable to the governor, who never hid her adamant opposition to Medicaid expansion.

And this is the problem with the self-satisfied joy we derive from uncovering hypocrisy: At best, it's pointless; at worst, it blinds us to something more significant.

What's significant about Mr. Keck's new perspective on Medicaid is what it tells us

about his old perspective. As one Medicaid advocate in Tennessee noted when asked about Mr. Keck: "If I work at McDonald's, I'm going to say the Big Mac is best. If I work for Burger King, I'm going to say the Whopper is best. We've all changed jobs before. You have to adapt."

Nothing sinister, or hypocritical about that. But important.

Important because Mr. Keck was the respectable face of Gov. Nikki Haley's purely partisan, and tea-partisan, opposition to a program that, by any honest analysis, would be good for our state. Maybe not for our nation — and maybe that's how we ought to look at it — but clearly good for our state, which is how our legislators normally look at such things.

Mr. Keck was the outside expert, the wunderkind our governor wooed away from Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration, who understood public health and public-health finances. The person who could make a respectable argument that didn't sound like warmed-over talking points from the National Republican Committee or FOX News. Certainly that's why I always liked and respected him, even though I disagreed with him.

But it turns out that for all of his expertise, he was, first and foremost, a hired hand. The guy hawking Big Macs not because he liked them best but because he worked for McDonalds. The guy waving the pom-poms for Medicaid rejection not because that was what was best for our state — or at least not primarily because of that — but because that's what the boss was selling.

I suppose there's nothing wrong with that — we expect gubernatorial appointees to back a governor's agenda, just as we expect

presidential appointees to back a president's agenda. As long as we all realize what's going on.

There's nothing wrong with that as long as we don't allow ourselves to believe that the governor's appointee is an objective expert whose views just happen to coincide with the governor's.

Nothing wrong with it as long as we don't allow the "expert" to dazzle-dazzle us with questionable assertions about the costs and benefits of an important public

policy initiative that we'd laugh out of the room if they came from anyone else.

In fairness to Mr. Keck, he was always careful and nuanced about his Medicaid commentary — if you listened to the fine print, and knew what to listen for. And today, he says he stands by his work to quash Medicaid expansion in South Carolina. Hence that "it works for some states, but not for others" answer, which is convenient but doesn't explain away that whole "insurance makes you sicker" line of argument that dazzled so many legislators.

Would our Legislature have refused to expand Medicaid if someone other than Mr. Keck had been selling that position? We can never know. Certainly, there are a lot of House members who wouldn't have dared support it in the face of the governor's opposition, no matter how ridiculous the arguments were.

For them, the single word "Obamacare" was reason enough to vote against allowing the federal government to provide three years of Medicaid coverage to a few hundred thousand South Carolinians who otherwise would just get sicker, until the rest of us had to pay for their care anyway through higher insurance rates.

For them, the single word "Obamacare" was enough to



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overshadow the fact that pumping an extra \$1.8 billion a year in federal revenue into our state would create 44,000 new jobs, and a much healthier workforce, and generate enough new tax revenue to pay at least half of the cost of the 10 percent match we eventually would have to pay to maintain that healthier workforce and all those new jobs.

But I suspect that Mr. Keck's smooth and reassuring explanations were a balm for a lot of

fence-sitting legislators — legislators who realized that the expansion was in the best interest of our state, but who worried about the political repercussions of supporting it in the face of the governor's adamant opposition. Oh, it really wouldn't help those hundreds of thousands of South Carolinians who can't afford health insurance, they could tell themselves, because Tony assured us that having access to health insurance doesn't actually

improve people's health.

Of course, Tony's assurances went only so far: Those legislators never did get around to canceling their own state health-insurance policies.

Wait, forget I said that: It almost sounded like I was accusing them of hypocrisy.

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Cindi Ross
Scoppe

*Associate
Editor*

Title: **Saving S.C. State is critical to entire state**

Author:

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Saving S.C. State is critical to entire state

As I breathe, I am grateful that the Legislature has considered the impact closing S.C. State University would have on this state and its institutions of higher learning. Now for the hard decisions to ensure the continued existence of this historic university. In addition to the hard decisions state officials must make, the alumni must financially support their alma mater, and the current students must demonstrate their allegiance to their university by achieving the dean's or president's list.

I am a South Carolinian born and raised. Educated in Spartanburg School District 5 and a graduate of the University of South Carolina, I have worked since I was 14 and have been a taxpaying citizen for 32 years. I am a productive citizen who has participated all my life in the welfare of this state that I have come to love, despite its history of injustice toward minorities and women, both of which I am. I live our state motto, "Animus Opibusque Parati" and most especially "Dum Spiro

Spero."

Being prepared in mind and re-

source, I have concluded that we are witnessing the results of a problem that has been years in the making due to the consistent underfunding of S.C. State. You can rob from Peter to pay Paul for only so long; the day of reckoning always comes. The poor management just got us here sooner. This clearly requires a more thought-out, well-intentioned response than the original proposal to close the university for two years — one that considers the impact to the students, the citizens and our state.

In Leadership South Carolina, I learned that our state's high unemployment rate is not necessarily due to a lack of jobs but more a lack of competent citizens to perform the jobs that are available. As I breathe, I hope Gov. Nikki Haley, the Budget and Control Board and the Legislature will use good judgment and leadership to do what is necessary to ensure S.C. State overcomes its challenges and attains a level of existence comparable to all the other state colleges and universities.

As critical as education is to this state, we must consider the greater good for our whole state. While I breathe, I hope.

ROSALYN L. GLENN
Columbia



Glenn



Title: **Army hears concerns on possible Fort Jackson cuts**
 Author: BY SUSANNE M. SCHAFER Associated Press
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Army hears concerns on possible Fort Jackson cuts

BY SUSANNE M. SCHAFER
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley reminded an Army delegation Thursday that as a military spouse, she is part of a community that values Fort Jackson and wants to continue supporting its soldiers in the face of budget cuts that could slash its workforce in half.

"I am a spouse of a soldier that deployed," Haley told the delegation, speaking of her husband, Michael, who deployed for a year to Afghanistan as a member of the South Carolina Army National Guard.

"We want you to understand that Fort Jackson is part of our family," the governor said, arguing that the Army's largest training site is more to the state than a source of jobs and federal financial input.

"There's never a soldier or veteran that we want to be in need," Haley said, leading a series of speakers who touted the community's military-friendly history and the strength of its ties to the 100-year-old installation and its 7,000 soldiers and civilians.

Fort Jackson is the Army's

largest training installation. It puts 45,000 soldiers through basic combat training every year, which is more than half of all new Army soldiers and more than 60 percent of its female soldiers.

Each year, another 30,000 attend advanced military training classes or attend military specialty schools on the installation, such as those for chaplains, drill sergeants and military financial or human resource officers.

The economic blow of the potential cuts would amount to a loss of 8,000 jobs in the region around the Columbia-based installation and a loss of \$189 million annually to the local economy, according to a University of South Carolina Moore School of Business study described several times by the Fort Jackson boosters.

Brig. Gen. Roger Cloutier (Kloo-TEE-ay), who led the Army delegation, met Thursday morning with Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin and others concerned about the cuts.

Opening the Thursday af-

ternoon community "listening session," Cloutier told the hundreds of attendees who filled the pews of a local Baptist church, "Your voices matter. Not a single decision has been made."

The one-star general said he expects the Army to make a decision on the potential cuts in the late spring, with an announcement coming in the early summer. Because of the pressure of the budget cuts, the reductions could begin by Oct. 1, he said.

If the Congressionally approved cuts go ahead as planned, the Army has said it would have to slash troops from 500,000 to 420,000 soldiers and severely shrink installations such as Fort Jackson.

Some supporters argued to the team that instead of making cuts at Fort Jackson, the Army should consider closing down smaller basic training sites at installations in other states, such as Fort Benning in Georgia, Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri and Fort Sill in

Oklahoma, and bring all basic training organizations to Fort Jackson.

"Making basic combat training the one and only job of the commanding general at Fort Jackson would improve

the training and bring it to the highest level possible," said retired Army Col. Kevin Shwedo, the former deputy commander at Fort Jackson, and current head of the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles.

Kathy Dent, a Columbia resident who works with nonprofit organizations that support soldiers and their families, said her family was one of the original groups that helped donate land to found the Army installation nearly 100 years ago.

"My message is that Fort Jackson supports this community and this community supports Fort Jackson," she said. "I know many veterans who have trained at Fort Jackson who come back here to settle down because they loved it during the time they did their training here."

"I know many veterans who have trained at Fort Jackson who come back here to settle down because they loved it during the time they did their training here."

Kathy Dent, Columbia

Title: **Taking gun rights a step too far**

Author:

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Taking gun rights a step too far

COLUMBIA Here's what Greenville Sen. Tom Corbin and Gov. Nikki Haley have in common: Both are gun-loving Republicans who have played the instigator in high-profile spats with fellow Republican Sen. Katrina Shealy.

Here's what they do not have in common: opposition to a plan, backed by Sen. Shealy and a lot of other Republicans, to temporarily strip batterers of the right to own guns.

But Gov. Haley's support for that provision probably doesn't bother Mr. Corbin, since presumably he considers the governor a "lesser cut of meat," just like Sen. Shealy, about whom he also "joked" recently that he had managed to get her to wear shoes.

The surprising thing that's happening at the State House isn't that a gun-have-more-rights-than-people advocate refers to the only female senator as a "lesser cut of meat," makes a show apology and then complains that she "chose to be offended" by his insult – you know, the typical "blame the victim" approach to women who have been assaulted. What's surprising is that the bully's side is losing the debate over requiring batterers to give up their guns temporarily if they are convicted of domestic violence or are subject to a protective order.

This is, after all, South Carolina, where you can count on two hands the number of anti-gun bills that have even been proposed in the past decade. Meantime, lawmakers have waged a contest to see who could dream up the most ridiculous pro-gun measures: A special tax-free weekend for guns and ammo (passed). An invitation to carry concealed weapons into bars (passed). A stand-your-ground law that a Columbia man was able to use when he mistakenly (read: recklessly) killed an innocent bystander after a carful of menacing girls followed his daughter home. A proposal to prohibit pediatricians from asking their patients if they have guns in their homes (not passed). A requirement that public schools spend three weeks every year teaching students an NRA-approved course on the Second Amendment (not passed, yet). And I can't even remember the others.

On Wednesday, Mr. Corbin tried very

hard to make it look like the no-guns-for-batterers bill was much broader than it was; he managed only to demonstrate that he either isn't very bright or isn't very honest, as GOP prosecutor turned Sen. Greg Hembree patiently explained, over and over, the very clear language of the bill that Mr. Corbin was mischaracterizing.

No, Sen. Hembree explained, it wouldn't apply to people who simply

were subject to a restraining order; it would apply only to people subject to a protective order issued under Chapter 4, Title 20 of state law. No, it isn't a violation of due process; that section of the law gives the batterer the right to counsel and a hearing. Why? Because that's what it says in the clear language of the bill.

When Sen. Corbin completed his demonstration of ignorance or deception, he found only four senators to join with him in trying to strip the gun restriction from the bill.

How radical is the provision that Mr. Corbin and his four allies are fighting? The better question is this: How radical are Mr. Corbin and his four allies?

In the fall, Gov. Nikki Haley came under withering criticism after she dodged a debate question about whether people convicted of domestic violence should forfeit their right to own guns, as federal law already requires but state law does not. The next day, her campaign issued a statement that said she would "absolutely support" such a law, and in December she said she was "thrilled" that Senate Judiciary Chairman Larry Martin had included the gun provision in his domestic-violence bill.

Nikki Haley, who posted a photo of the Beretta handgun she received as a Christmas present from her husband on her Facebook page ("I must have been good."). Nikki Haley, who had her office produce and distribute a video showing the governor firing a machine gun while touring a Columbia arms maker. Thrilled.

After he was outvoted 35-5 in the overwhelmingly Republican Senate, Mr. Corbin declared the domestic-violence bill "nothing but a big gun grab," even though it also splits domestic-violence charges into multiple degrees,

just like other assault charges, increases penalties and sets those penalties based on both the seriousness of the crime and the number of previous convictions.

Yet Sen. Martin says that to pass the bill, he might have to agree to give judges discretion to decide whether to take guns away from first-time offenders convicted of third-degree domestic violence.

There's nothing inherently wrong with that: In general, judges need more discretion, not less. What's wrong is the reason – not because senators want judges to have more discretion, but be-

cause they worry that, in the words of Sen. Chip Campsen, "Gun rights are important for self-defense, for people who are outdoorsmen" and "should not be taken away lightly."

True enough. And people who love their guns shouldn't beat up their wives or husbands or girlfriends or boyfriends.

The gun restriction won't solve the problem. It will help, but other provisions in the bill also will help. And if the Legislature passes a bill with the other provisions but not the gun restriction, it won't keep me up nights. Of course, I don't live with someone who beats me up and threatens to kill me because I don't cook his dinner just so, or because he realizes how much smarter I am than he is.

And here's the thing: There is no good reason not to include the temporary gun restriction. As Sen. Martin noted, gun rights, like other rights, are not absolute. A batterer doesn't get to take his gun with him when the police haul him off to jail. It makes sense that he shouldn't be able to keep his gun when a judge finds that he poses a significant threat to his spouse. It makes sense that he should lose his right to keep a gun for a few years after he's convicted of trying to kill (or succeeding in killing) his spouse. Just like you lose your right to vote for a while after you're convicted of certain crimes.

The gun lobby has this conspiracy-theory fantasy it peddles, where all the world is out to take away guns. If you don't support expanding gun rights, you're a gun-grabber. If you say that, no,



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you don't think the law ought to be rewritten to allow guns in bars, you're a gun grabber. If you think men who beat up their wives and promise to kill them next time shouldn't be allowed to have a gun, you're a gun grabber.

Funny, when it's convenient – like when people go crazy and shoot up schools – the gun lobby declares that all

we need to do is keep guns out of the hands of crazy people and criminals.

So now our Legislature is trying to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, and the gun-lovers are going ballistic. Or at least one of them is: the one who likes to verbally abuse the woman who is stuck sitting next to him in the Senate chamber, and then blame his victim

when somebody rats him out for being such a pig, and his victim acknowledges that it happened.

This is the man who is leading the fight to preserve the gun rights of batterers. Little wonder.

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Commentary

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