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Governor Nikki Haley News:

The State: Differences over restructuring proposal still divide SC House, Senate

<http://www.thestate.com/2013/12/19/3168312/differences-over-restructuring.html#storylink=cpy>

Adam Beam

House and Senate lawmakers appear far from a compromise on a government restructuring bill that will be a key issue in the 2014 governor's race. A conference committee of three S.C. House members and three state senators met Thursday for the first time in six months – two weeks after Republican Gov. Nikki Haley publicly criticized them for failing to act. After meeting for about two hours, the lawmakers adjourned, promising to meet again in January.

Note: "It's a positive sign that progress was made today and having fought for a strong DOA (Department of Administration) bill for over three years, Governor Haley is watching this process very closely," Haley spokesman Doug Mayer said. "The governor appreciates the work of the conference committee and greatly looks forward to seeing a completed report at the start of the upcoming legislative session."

Associated Press: Legislative committee meet on government overhaul

http://m.apnews.com/ap/db_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=RCIHvtjW

Seanna Adcox

The largest overhaul of state government in decades depends on the South Carolina House and Senate being able to resolve three points of contention. The chambers passed separate versions earlier this year of a bill aimed at modernizing government and making it more accountable. A conference committee on Thursday reached agreement on four outstanding differences.

Note: Both Gov. Nikki Haley and her chief Democratic opponent are pushing to finally get the proposal to the governor's desk. Haley has made restructuring a signature issue of her administration. State Sen. Vincent Sheheen, D-Camden, has been the idea's chief sponsor for years, even as it died repeatedly throughout former Gov. Mark Sanford's tenure.

Greenville News: Greer composite materials firm expanding

<http://www.greenvilleonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2013312200011>

Advanced Composite Materials, company that develops and manufactures specialty silicon carbide products and related composites, announced Thursday that it will expand operations at its existing facility in Greenville County, investing \$3 million and creating between six and 10 new jobs, the Governor's Office said. The company established its headquarters, research and development lab and manufacturing facility in Greer in 2007 to make silicon carbide microfibers for industrial ceramic applications, including microwaveable ceramic composites for the restaurant and food industry.

Note: "It's exciting to see existing, innovative companies continue to expand in our state," said Gov. Nikki Haley. "We commend ACM for growing their presence in the Upstate through this \$3 million investment that will create up to 10 new jobs in their facility."

Times and Democrat: S.C. Highway Patrol graduates 37 new troopers

http://thetandd.com/news/local/state-and-regional/s-c-highway-patrol-graduates-new-troopers/article_704e39be-690a-11e3-ba6c-001a4bcf887a.html

The South Carolina Highway Patrol announces the graduation of 37 troopers from Highway Patrol Basic Class 93 on Thursday. Gov. Nikki Haley spoke to the graduates for the fifth consecutive graduation. Basic 93 will bring the total number of troopers in South Carolina to 773.

Note: Haley said to the new graduates, "You were tested physically and you succeeded. You were tested mentally and you proved you were up for the challenge. And now you wear the uniform, and that uniform means so much. When you walk into a room, you are automatically respected."

Post and Courier: Tripp Wiles appointed to vacant seat on Charleston County School Board
<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20131219/PC16/131219330/1005/tripp-wiles-tapped-to-serve-on-charleston-county-school-board>

Attorney M. Emerson "Tripp" Wiles III has been tapped to fill a vacant seat on the Charleston County School Board. The Charleston County legislative delegation nominated Wiles for the spot, and Gov. Nikki Haley followed its recommendation and appointed Wiles to the seat on Monday. The School Board plans to swear Wiles into office when it meets in January. Wiles will serve in that role until the November 2014 election. Wiles is married and has two young children who haven't reached school-attending age. He is a former Army officer and research analyst for the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii and the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office.

Opinion / Editorial Roundup:

Florence Morning News: Reopening Stinney case reopens lots of questions
http://www.scnow.com/opinion/editorials/article_ab86d52a-6907-11e3-a4f6-001a4bcf6878.html

Editorial

There is no expiration date on setting the record straight. A lawyer in Clarendon County is fighting for that truism. What makes this fact-finding mission particularly knotty is that there isn't much left of the record — not that anyone involved would likely want any. George Stinney, 14, is the youngest person to be executed in the 20th century. It happened in 1944 in segregated Clarendon County. From the moment the African-American teen was arrested for killing two white girls until the time he was executed, a mere 81 days passed. Any notes on the trial's proceedings have been lost to history.

Rock Hill Herald: Eckstrom should have known better
<http://www.heraldonline.com/2013/12/19/5521352/eckstrom-should-have-known-better.html>

Editorial

One would think that S.C. Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom would have studied up on the ethics rules covering public officials on private vacations. The state Ethics Commission announced last week that it had found probable cause that Eckstrom violated state ethics laws when he used campaign money to travel with his girlfriend to the Republican National Convention last year. Eckstrom faces six charges of using campaign money for personal benefit.

Aiken Standard: Helping S.C. farms can grow economy
<http://www.aikenstandard.com/article/20131219/AIK02/131219255/1018/AIK02/editorial-helping-sc-farms-can-grow-economy>

Editorial

It's a message that's not new to the ears of South Carolinians, but one that bears repeating — buying local helps to grow the local economy. It's an economic cure that's particularly needed to help small farms in our state, according to a recent report commissioned by the state Agriculture Department. The role of small farms has diminished in South Carolina over the years, creating a gap in financial support for local agricultural businesses. For instance, while South Carolinians spend \$11 billion on food each year, 90 percent is spent on products produced outside of the state.

Greenville News: Online sales tax needed for everyone
<http://www.greenvilleonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2013312200004>

Editorial

As American shoppers are completing their purchases for this Christmas season, a point of unfairness sticks out that Congress should fix next year. Many shoppers are escaping their state's sales tax on holiday purchases because they are buying gifts on the Internet in a place where an online retailer isn't required to collect the tax for that state. It's time to end the free ride that many online shoppers get when they evade their state's sales tax because their purchases weren't made at a bricks-and-mortar store or at a national retailer that is required to collect sales tax even for online purchases.

Island Packet: Look for better plan next time, DOT
<http://www.islandpacket.com/2013/12/19/2856403/look-for-better-plan-next-time.html#storylink=cpy>

Editorial

It's unfortunate that the S.C. Department of Transportation could not find a better option when widening a stretch of U.S. 278 in Okatie at Indian Hill Baptist Church. Pastor Doug Ludlam of the Indian Hill Baptist Church is correct that the recent road widening project, which brings traffic within three feet of some

headstones in his church's cemetery, is dangerous. Such a narrow shoulder gives drivers along U.S. 278 little room to maneuver. Within seconds of veering off the road, drivers would plow into headstones. It also poses a serious threat to cemetery visitors, laying flowers and other items graves, not anticipating a threat from nearby traffic.

The State (Guest Column): D'Alberto, Morris: SC Students Need Economic Education, Financial Literacy And Entrepreneurship Training

http://m.apnews.com/ap/db_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=QVny1L7B

Daniel D'Alberto and Jim Morris

As South Carolina continues to emerge from the Great Recession, we cannot hope to simply recover, but we must look forward to becoming better. Our political leaders, educators and education stakeholders, through efforts such as TransformSC and the Liberty Fellowship's Education Forum, are beginning to recognize that our systems must change if South Carolina's citizens are to become more competitive.

S.C. Federal Delegation News:

Aiken Standard: Congress passes defense bill; sends to Obama for approval

<http://www.aikenstandard.com/article/20131220/AIK0101/131229987/1004/congress-passes-defense-bill-sends-to-obama-for-approval>

Derrek Asberry

South Carolina's two state senators were part of a Thursday majority vote to pass the defense authorization bill through Congress. The next step for the bill is approval by President Barack Obama which is expected to occur today. After a 71-29 vote in the Senate on the first vote on Wednesday, U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Tim Scott, R-S.C., voted in favor of the defense authorization bill in the final vote on Thursday as well. The final vote was decided in an 84-15 convincing fashion. Before the voting process, Graham openly endorsed the defense bill, which is the next step in getting funding for the MOX project at SRS.

Florence Morning News: Rice: Washington's fumbles holding economy back

http://www.scnow.com/news/politics/article_0c1a649e-691a-11e3-a4ca-001a4bcf6878.html

Gavin Jackson

Congressman Tom Rice, R-S.C., was in town Thursday evening to meet with supporters in a casual campaign event held at Victor's Bistro in the Hotel Florence. Rice spoke with the Morning News briefly prior to the event about his first year in office serving the 7th Congressional District, the recently passed budget, challenges facing the district, the upcoming election year and his recently introduced resolution to file a civil suit against President Barack Obama. "The most important thing for people in this district and the most important thing for people in this country is jobs, jobs, jobs," Rice said. "And therefore, my focus has been on that and particularly American competitiveness."

Island Packet: Mark Sanford seeks quieter path, back in the futon again

<http://www.islandpacket.com/2013/12/19/2857271/mark-sanford-seeks-quieter-path.html#storylink=cpy>

David Lauderdale

U.S. Rep. Mark Sanford is again sleeping on a futon in his congressional office. He said the futon made sense as he cranked up an office from scratch after winning a special election in the Lowcountry's 1st Congressional District in May. But Sanford acknowledged that his fiancée, Maria Belèn Chapur of Buenos Aires, is "not in that program." His futon was a minor part of Sanford's conversation with our newspapers' editorial board Thursday. But it was a major symbol of his frugality when Sanford slept on a futon during his first three terms in the House of Representatives, from 1995 to 2001.

South Carolina News:

Florence Morning News: Deadline looming for those needing ACA coverage

http://www.scnow.com/living/health/article_3327f614-6910-11e3-bcf3-001a4bcf6878.html

Gavin Jackson

Uninsured South Carolinians looking to have health insurance benefits from the federal marketplace on Jan. 1 need to enroll by Monday or will have to wait another month for coverage. And premium payments for those plans to insurers is now pushed to Jan. 10 to allow for a smoother transition, health care industry trade group America's Health Insurance Plans said Wednesday. Missing the Monday deadline for January coverage does not penalize an uninsured person, but it is just one in a series of monthly deadlines for insurance coverage that leads up to the March 31 enrollment deadline.

The State: 12,900 S.C. jobless will be affected by budget deal

<http://www.thestate.com/2013/12/19/3168320/12900-sc-jobless-will-be-affected.html#storylink=cpy>

Cassie Cope

Thousands of South Carolina residents will lose their unemployment benefits at the end of the year as part of the federal budget deal. The deal, passed this week by Congress, means that 12,900 residents will lose their federal unemployment benefits, according to the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce. Those jobless have exhausted their 20 weeks of state unemployment benefits and are in one of the three tiers receiving up to 29 additional weeks from the federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation program.

Post and Courier: Credit data breach at Target could affect thousands in SC

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20131219/PC16/131219331/1177/credit-data-breach-at-target-could-affect-thousands-in-sc>

Schuyler Kropf

James Island resident Nicole Zell and her husband shop at Target on average once a week. When she heard the nationwide retailer had experienced a data breach affecting as many as 40 million credit and debit cards, she took it in stride as another risk of being a consumer in 2013. The chain reported this week that accounts of customers who made purchases by swiping their cards in its U.S. stores between Nov. 27 and Dec. 15 - the prime Christmas rush - may have been exposed.

The State: DHEC will hold public meeting on huge potato farm

<http://www.thestate.com/2013/12/19/3167957/dhec-will-hold-public-meeting.html#storylink=cpy>

Sammy Fretwell

Under pressure to publicly discuss a big potato farm's impact on a small river, the state's environmental protection agency has agreed to hold a meeting in Aiken about the Walther Farms project and surface water withdrawals in South Carolina. The Department of Health and Environmental Control's public session will be at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 7 in the Aiken Electrical Cooperative office. A department notice said the meeting is not a formal hearing on the Walther project, but a discussion about the process of registering for a large river withdrawal.

The State: After sheriff's comments, NAACP investigating traffic stops in Pickens County

<http://www.thestate.com/2013/12/20/3168900/after-sheriffs-comments-naacp.html#storylink=cpy>

Adam Beam

The S.C. NAACP says it is investigating traffic stops conducted by the Pickens County Sheriff's office after Pickens Sheriff Rick Clark refused to lower his department's U.S. flag to honor the passing of former South African President Nelson Mandela. "What happens to young people, particularly African-American males, when they are stopped in Pickens County?" S.C. NAACP president Lonnie Randolph asked during a news conference on Thursday to announce plans for the 2014 King Day at the Dome Rally.

Local News:

Post and Courier: Federal official denies Charleston schools' request to delay controversial new teacher evaluation

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20131219/PC16/131219333/1389/federal-official-denies-charleston-schools-request-to-delay-controversial-new-teacher-evaluation>

Diette Courrage Casey

One federal official has shot down Charleston County School District's attempt to delay implementing a controversial new teacher evaluation system. District leaders had asked for an extra year to phase in the new BRIDGE evaluation system, which would've meant all of the district's teachers wouldn't be subject to the new evaluations until the 2016-17 school year. "After reviewing the timeline and rationale you provided, we do not believe that CCSD has sufficient rationale to approve your request," wrote Michelle Padilla, an education program specialist for the U.S. Department of Education in a letter to the district.

Rock Hill Herald: York County Council reviews hospitality tax

<http://www.heraldonline.com/2013/12/19/5521487/york-council-reviews-hospitality.html>

Jie Jenny Zou

York County Councilman Michael Johnson is leading the charge on reforming how the county's hospitality tax is spent, calling for a focus on sports tourism and an end to council bickering. "An emphasis on sports

tourism will be the most bang for our buck,” Johnson said to council members this week during a county workshop. The Tega Cay resident suggested the council also consider restructuring the committee overseeing how the hospitality tax – or h-tax – is spent. The county collects a 2 percent tax on food and beverage sales in unincorporated areas such as Lake Wylie and 1 percent from the western York County towns of Hickory Grove, McConnells, Sharon and Smyrna.

The State: Columbia-based developer lands \$1.5 billion investment

<http://www.thestate.com/2013/12/19/3168350/columbia-based-developer-lands.html#storylink=cpy>

Kristy Eppley Rupon

Edens, a Columbia-based firm that develops East Coast shopping centers, landed a \$1.5 billion investment Thursday that will help it grow to \$7 billion in assets, the commercial real estate company said. The equity deal was hailed as one of the largest of its kind in South Carolina and the nation, marking another step in the homegrown firm’s emergence as a major player on the national scene.

National News:

Associated Press: Obama commutes sentences for 8 drug convictions

http://m.apnews.com/ap/db_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=7pllgmDI

Nedra Pickler

President Barack Obama on Thursday commuted the sentences of eight people he said were serving unduly harsh drug sentences in the most expansive use yet of his power to free inmates. All eight were sentenced under old federal guidelines that treated convictions for crack cocaine offenses harsher than those involving the powder form of the drug. Obama also pardoned 13 others for various crimes. The president signed the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010 to cut penalties for crack cocaine offenses in order to reduce the disparity. But the act addressed only new cases, not old ones.

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