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is alleged to have used coun- investigation is ongoing.

## 148 Pasley hopeful that government funding will be restored

BY MICHAEL DUKE  
news@kingstreenews.com

Williamsburg County Council is hoping a push by county governments will restore some funding. Williamsburg County Supervisor Stanley Pasley said they have been monitoring the discussion about the surplus that's available at the state level.

Governor Nikki Haley has put in her budget a request for restoration of the Local Government Fund. Under Haley's proposed budget mil-

lions will go to local governments, fully funding the state's obligation for the first time since 2009 when lawmakers suspended the funding to cities and counties, which by statute were paid 4.5 percent of the General Fund revenues from the previous year.

Pasley voiced his dissatisfaction in regards to how the funding has been handled in the past. "You all who work closely with the state government, there is the lack of or unwillingness of the legislature

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# Smaller counties leading the charge

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for the past several years to restore the cuts to our local government fund," said Pasley. "That has created a really difficult circumstance for us just to be able to provide the basic services to our citizens."

Pasley said Williamsburg County has lost approximately \$500,000 annually for seven years but he is also optimistic things will change. "We're talking right at \$4 million. That's a tremendous amount of funding we lost but we've

been able to maintain. So we're hopeful that we're going to be - if in fact the governor's budget is approved or taken into some serious consideration by the legislature that we may get some relief." Even with the lack of funding Williamsburg County's credit rating has risen from A- to A.

Pasley added that what is most noticeable in the effort to restore local government funding is that smaller or rural counties are leading the charge. "The large counties - they

haven't been on board," said Pasley. "It's been kind of left up to the smaller counties to make that argument."

During a January 15, press conference Haley said restoring the funding is meeting a legal obligation but at the same time she would continue to push local governments to be transparent in how they are spending their money. "We're going to ask for more accountability but they've asked for that - it's a legal obligation to do it, so we're trying to make it right."

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**Gov. Haley's state of the state: More, less or better**

**By PHIL NOBLE**

Guest column

"This has been a different and difficult year for South Carolina; a year that warrants a different kind of speech," Gov. Haley said in her recent State of the State Address.

And indeed, there were some differences in the speech. She introduced people who were part of our recent tragedies of the Emanuel shooting and the floods. She called on senators to physically stand up during the speech to signify their support for her ethics reform.

For once, she talked a lot about education, especially some new spending on K-12 education. And, there was some new language about the need to do something about our crumbling roads and bridges.

But in the end, it wasn't really different. Yes, there was a bit of a difference in style and in format, but in terms of a difference in substance or vision – or even a real difference in

policy, it was pretty much the same politics as usual.

There was no new overarching vision. There was no linkage of our recent racial tragedy (the Emanuel shooting) with our historic racial legacy (failing schools). In the end, her proposals were really just a rehash of the familiar debate about spending more or less on this or that – and not about a new creative or innovative strategy for spending better, smarter or more efficiently.

**Education is most important factor**

Now don't get me wrong, I'm very glad that Gov. Haley focused on education – but what she didn't say was really more important than what she did say.



**NOBLE**

There is probably no other subject that has been the focus of more of these weekly columns than education.

There is a simple reason: It is the most important issue facing our state. What we do (or don't do) in fixing education will have more impact on the short, medium and long term future of our state than practically anything else.

**Haley's proposals**

Gov. Haley's biggest education proposal called for a bond to borrow \$200 million to repair K-12 schools. Anyone who has spent much time in some of our schools – especially in rural areas – would testify to the need.

The only question is how are the allocations going to be made? Will the decisions be made based on who has the most political clout or on which schools have the greatest needs? Left to politics as usual, we know how things will end up.



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Haley also proposed a much needed plan to slow teacher turnover in rural areas by paying for state college tuition for teachers who commit to teach for eight years in poor or rural school districts.

A good start and higher pay for good teachers in these schools would do even more.

If there was a (fairly) bold initiative, it was in her proposal for education and technology. She proposed seven new charter schools and more teachers in virtual school programs. She wants significant new spending to connect local schools and to bring broadband to 10,000 homes of underserved students.

She also proposed significant spending for new digital instructional materials. All in all, her new spending in these areas totaled more than \$50 million.

Her final education proposal called for a ballot initiative to abolish the superintendent of education as an elected position and

make the position appointed by the governor – just as it is in 38 other states.

This is a good idea as the governor ought to be able to choose the school chief they want to help carry out their educational objectives.

### **Not far enough**

Haley's proposals are all sound, but they don't go far enough – not nearly far enough.

We should begin by understanding that though these are steps forward, in recent years we took many steps backward.

A few years ago during the depths of the recession, South Carolina led the country in how much we cut education. While other states had a cut education last policy, we seemed to have a policy of cut education first.

And to make matters worse, Haley turned down millions of dollars in federal stimulus money that would have allowed us to continue to pay hundreds

of teachers rather than lay them off.

We are now left with her proposals that are trying to make up a few hundred yards of lost ground from the miles of ground we gave up in the recession.

And, we entered the recession far behind to begin with.

Moreover, it is far from certain that the legislature will even give Haley the modest education measures she asked for in her speech. Already we are hearing the same old voices talking about cutting spending so we can cut taxes further.

We are still stuck in the same old, worn out debate of spend more or spend less – not spend better.

I'm glad Gov. Haley took a few baby steps in the right direction, but we must not kid ourselves – we as a state need leapfrog jumps in education.

That really would be different.

*Phil Noble is S.C. New Democrats president. E-mail him at [phil@sc-newdemocrats.org](mailto:phil@sc-newdemocrats.org)*



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## 148 Club releases Legislative Scorecards

After Governor Haley's State of the State address last week, the South Carolina Club for Growth Foundation released its 2015 Interim Legislative Scorecards.

Of the 170 lawmakers in the General Assembly, only seven representatives and 11 senators scored well enough to earn an A or B from the club. However, the opposite end of the grading scale was well represented as 119 legislators received F grades from the conservative educational organization.

The South Carolina Club for Growth Foundation scored eight House votes and nine Senate votes from the 2015 legislative session, including votes on ethics reform, the gas tax increase

and the removal of the confederate flag.

"It is no surprise that politicians often talk a great game back home only to vote against the interests of hard-working South Carolinians and often under the cover of darkness while using inside-the-capitol procedural tactics aimed at making it difficult for everyday people to

follow," said club executive director R.J. May III. "These scorecards break through the clutter and paint a clear picture that shows who really cares about reducing spending, conservative reform and other pro-growth issues."

Scores are based on a thorough analysis of the thousands of votes taken last session with a focus on the

budget process, government reform and restructuring and pro or anti-growth policies.

A pro-growth vote received the maximum number of points, while a vote against

the pro-growth position received no points. In certain circumstances, points were deducted from legislators for changing a vote. If a legislator went on record as abstaining from a vote – due to a conflict of interest – that vote was not factored into their total score.

The SC Club for Growth Foundation Scorecard only looks at votes on the floor of the Senate and House or Representatives. It does not take into consideration a legislator's work outside the chambers.

# 148 National TV puts Haley in spotlight

**I**t's the call that every aspirant in the political hinterland dreams of: "Will you give our party's response to the president's State of the Union Address?"

The answer is always "yes" – and then the drama begins. The stakes are incredibly high. Many fail, some miserably (see Gov. Bobby Jindal in 2009) but the opportunity is exposure to more than 30 million people as the alternative voice to the president of the United States.

Gov. Nikki Haley got the call – pretty heady stuff for a kid from Bamberg, S.C., or anywhere else for that matter.

So how did she do?

Her speech had two parts. The first short section was an obligatory, gratuitous slap at President Obama with familiar lines about Obamacare, the deficit and terrorists. Then she moved on to talk about a "vision of a brighter American future."

But though she never used his name, her words were not really about America, but about Donald Trump. She talked about Trump's racism, inflammatory language and immigration. Then she talked about the good way that South Carolina responded to the Emanuel Nine shooting and then threw in a not-so-oblique reference to the troubles of Ferguson and Baltimore – "We didn't have riots, we had hugs."

Most of all, it was a repudiation of Trump. She used her own personal story as the daughter of Indian immigrants juxtaposed with Trump's rhetoric. "It can be tempting to follow the siren call of the angriest voices," she said. "We must resist that temptation. No one who

is willing to work hard, abide by our laws and love our traditions should ever feel unwelcome in this country."

She continued, "Some people think that you have to be the loudest voice in the room to make a difference. That is just not true."

David Brooks, the influential columnist for The New York Times, summarized Haley's speech as the Republican establishment's case against Trump, and indeed it was. The reaction from the Trump forces was swift and venomous. Pundit Anne Coulter tweeted: "Trump should deport Nikki Haley."

Haley's address rekindled the speculation that she would be the perfect vice-presidential candidate – but presumably not for Donald Trump. Her boosters cite the obvious: she is an attractive woman of immigrant parents whose handling of the removal of the Confederate flag was a rare example of racial sensitivity by a Deep South Republican. She's the perfect antidote to the "angry old white men" problem that is crippling the Republican Party with the fastest growing segments of American votes – women, the young and people of color.

There is so much irony in all this that it's hard to know where to begin.

First, the establishment Republicans. It is indeed rich that Haley is now the darling of the very folks she ran against when she was first elected. She was a Tea Party

favorite. Who can forget the picture and endorsement by Sarah Palin on the steps of the state capitol in Haley's first gubernatorial campaign (never mind that they had to pay Palin)? Palin went all out for Haley with recorded robocalls and TV ads that

blasted the establishment and praised Haley as a "kindred spirit."

In many ways, Haley and Palin were a lot alike – both came from nowhere politically, and they were light on substance and long on flash. But the difference is that Palin gave up being governor of Alaska and Haley has continued as governor of South Carolina.

Second, the flag. Prior to the shooting of the Emanuel Nine, no one ever used the words "Gov. Haley" and "racial sensitivity" in the same sentence. She had been an ardent supporter of keeping the Confederate flag flying, and the list of issues where she had ignored the interest of the 30 percent of her citizens who are African American is very long.

Third, the vice president nomination. The talk is hot and heavy and on the surface it all makes sense. She's on everyone's short list of possible candidates. But I'd bet dollars to doughnuts it will never happen. The reason is some issues from Haley's past.

In her first campaign and early days of her administration she was dogged by allegations of sexual affairs – complete with public accusations from two of the men, one of whom worked for a political opponent. Then there were allegations of financial irregularities and conflicts of interest that put tens of thousands of dollars in her pocket.

Were the allegations true? As regrettable as it may be, in the hyper media age we live in – it doesn't matter if they were true or not.

What matters is the allegations were there and though largely forgotten by most South Carolinians, they have



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never really been resolved. Now fast forward to about five dozen reporters, investigative journalists, hungry bloggers and political rumor mongers descending on Columbia 10 minutes after she is picked for vice president and... well, you get the picture.

And so does every political operative with access to Google who is charged with vetting Haley for consideration for the vice president slot.

So, I'm glad that Haley is taking the high road in condemning Trump. She presents a good image for our

state. Let her enjoy her time in the spotlight.

But let's not let ourselves get carried away. As many politicians have learned, too much time in the white hot heat of the national political spotlight, and you can get burned. Ask Sarah Palin.

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## Guest column



Phil Noble is president of the S.C. New Democrats.

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**Sen. Coleman's Legislative Update**

This second week in the  
nor's executive budget

**T**his second week in the General Assembly saw more legislation introduced and sent to the various committees. Most committees are just meeting for the first time either this week or next week.

We heard from Gov. Haley on Wednesday night in her annual State of the State address. While she did push for a roads bill, something we are all hoping to see early in this session, she did not mention the plight of our farmers following the floods of 2015. This group sustained major losses, and without federal assistance, some of our small farms may be unable to move forward. The gover-

and I want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to address this issue. I have a meeting scheduled next Tuesday with a Wal-Mart representative, and both Gov. Haley and Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt have reached out to their contacts in the Wal-Mart corporate office in Bentonville, Ark. On Tuesday I plan to first ask that they consider reversing this decision. Other issues I will address include their exit strategy, workers' transfers and/or jobs and voiding leases on properties they currently have tied up so that we might attract other retailers. I will continue to push

nor's executive budget, released this week, does address equalizing funding for rural schools, something that we must address in order to move S.C. forward.

As you know, we learned last week that Wal-Mart is planning to close their superstore in Winnsboro. This is devastating news,

hard for any solution, and will pass along any information that I receive.

It is an honor and a privilege to represent the citizens of District 17 in the S.C. Senate. Your input is important to me, and I hope you will contact me whenever you have concerns on issues being debated here in Columbia, or if I can ever be of assistance to you in any way. I can be reached at my district address, P.O. Box 1006, Winnsboro, SC 29180 (803-635-6884); at my legislative office in Columbia, P.O. Box 142, Columbia, SC 29202 (803-212-6032); or through my e-mail address, creighton-coleman@scsenate.gov.



**Guest Column**

Sen. Creighton Coleman





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## 148 + 174 County officials meet with governor's office

By Stan Welch

County Councilwoman Cindy Wilson is in the midst of a busy week. Monday, she traveled with a group of Pelzer officials and two county staff members to Columbia to meet with Governor Haley's deputy chief of staff, Joshua Baker.

Dianne Lollis, Larry Coker, Gilbert Garrett, Dr. Wayne Fowler, recently elected Pelzer Councilwoman Kimberly Wilson, Kelly Arnett, and county staffers Steve Newton and Michael Forman represented the town of Pelzer and the Pelzer Heritage Trust Commission. Also accompanying the group was Gail Jeter, environmental consultant for the group.

"We just wanted to put faces with names between here and Columbia, and get some of the future local projects on the state's radar," Wilson said. "As you know, the town had several streets included in a special historic district last year. And the Commission received a four hundred thousand dollar grant to work on cleaning up the upper and lower mill sites. They show no signs of slowing down, and while we were there, we learned of at least one new state funding source we can explore."

Rounding out the week, Wilson, along with State Rep. Anne Thayer will lead a litter pickup effort Saturday morning, along a stretch of Midway Road. Wilson said that the county will coordinate the effort, as well as providing traffic control, and the needed supplies, such as safety vests, gloves and garbage bags.

The group will assemble at the Midway Presbyterian Church at the intersection of Crestview and Midway roads. The area covered will depend on the size of the crowd, but the intention is to work north on Midway towards High Praises Church at the intersection of Midway and Hopewell Roads. There will also be a countywide cleanup on April 16, but Wilson said that she and Rep. Thayer agreed that they needed to get something underway. "There is so much positive energy in the county right now, and the appearance of the area needs to reflect that" said Councilwoman Wilson. The volunteers will assemble at 10:00 a.m. and the pickup will last a couple of hours.

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At Palmetto and Wren 148

## School Board previews designs for two new athletic facilities

By David Meade

During their regular monthly meeting Tuesday, Anderson School District One Board members approved the 2016-17 calendar, heard an update on the local option sales tax and previewed designs for two new athletic facility projects the tax is funding.

Scott Powell of Craig Gauden & Davis presented architect schematic designs for the planned Palmetto High School Multi-purpose facility and the Wren High Weight Room/Locker Room facilities.

Powell said the projects are in the design phase and they are working on about one year out so that it can be ready for fall 2017.

The 6221 sq. ft. multi-purpose facility at Palmetto High will be located near the softball field. It will be one large open space building with a 20 ft. ceiling and a turf or rubberized floor. Wrestling mats will be designed so they can be lifted up to the ceiling allowing more floor space, Powell said.

The exterior will feature brick veneer with some detail and no windows. It will have a red metal roof to incorporate school colors and a red sculptured metal horse at the entrance. Current facilities will be used for parking and dressing rooms, he said. The facility is identical to the one already constructed at Wren High.

At Wren, the new Weight Room/Locker Room will be located on adjacent property behind the football stadium.

It will have 49 lockers for eighth graders on one end and on the other end will be 49 lockers for JV and 74 for Varsity in addition



PALMETTO HIGH MULTI-PURPOSE FACILITY



WREN HIGH WEIGHT ROOM/LOCKER ROOM FACILITY

tion to toilets and eight showers. The eighth grade end will have three showers.

Powell said the area is being designed to have an athletic campus feel with plans for future tennis courts and a new practice field in the area.

The facility will be used for PE classes during the day and is close to the main school building.

There is a laundry room, training room, an office for the AD/Head Coach with private shower and toilet and another office for coaches with eight work stations and a toilet.

It will include a 2400 sq. ft.

weight room, team meeting room with a roll up door separating them.

The building features a windowed front with Hurricanes spelled out in film across the windows and athletes can be seen working out. It also features dormers. Havird said the facility will have new weight lifting equipment.

Havird said plans are to start on the projects in February allowing six to eight months to build them and ready for use in August.

During a special presentation principals and students showed their appreciation to District



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One Board members, presenting books which will be placed in school libraries throughout the district in each board members honor.

Following the presentation, Superintendent David Havird presented a 10 year pin to Board Member Dr. Doug Atkins for his service on Anderson School District One Board and the South Carolina School Board Association.

Board member David Merritt was recognized for 20 years of service as a District One Board member.

Havird summed up comments made during the recognition, stating that the principals and students made it clear that they see the board works in collaboration as a team, runs very professional meetings and "they understand that you love School District One." Havird said, "You focus on the children and learning and the goal is for students to achieve. You as a board work to make that happen, you are professional and care for students."

Several new hires for the 2016-17 school year were introduced and voted on later in the meeting.

As part of the instructional report, a Palmetto High ninth grader Gracie Poore presented a stop-motion video on cellular respiration.

The student told the board that without their support of the technology in District One she would not have been able to produce the video. "It allows me to be creative and have fun at school," Poore said.

The Board unanimously elected Fred Alexander Board Chairman and Nancy Upton

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## School . . .

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Vice-Chair. David Merritt was re-elected Secretary.

Melissa Hood was elected to serve on the Anderson County Alternative School Board.

Upton and Atkins were re-elected to serve on the Anderson Districts 1&2 Career and Technology Center Board.

The Board heard an update on revenues from the Local Option Sales Tax. Finance Director Travis Thomas reported the district received \$539,900 as its portion of the \$1,780,000 collected in the County in September and the district received just under \$535,000 for its portion from October.

The funds are being used for technology and equipment upgrades in schools and classrooms throughout the district, Havird said.

Thomas reported that the state had reduced the Base Student Cost by \$48 which he said will cost Anderson District One approximately \$491,000, an amount he described as "very significant."

Other adjustments in the state budget for EFA and weighted pupil units and growth will offset the reduction in the base student cost, Thomas said.

There was some discussion about the state budget process and the complex formula state legislators use to predict growth in the state.

Havird said he was "frustrated" with the way legislators manage the state budget.

He also said that State Superintendent Molly Spearman and Gov. Nikki Haley were working together on funding for education, however the funds for roads and bridges is coming out of the general fund and does affect the education funding.

The board also approved the 2016-17 countywide school calendar. All five Anderson County school districts will operate on the calendar, he said. District One Assistant Superintendent Robbie Binnicker chaired the countywide calendar committee.

During a special called meeting held in December, Board members approved the purchase of 12.04 acres of property located at 106 and 110 Wigington Road. in the amount of \$367,500.

The property is adjacent to the Wren High Football Stadium and across Wigington Road from Wren Middle School. The property will be used for athletic and/or academic use, according to Havird.

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# Haley tackles education at annual state address

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley tackled education, domestic violence and reforms to the Department of Transportation during her annual State of the State address last Wednesday.

Noting the high turnover rates of teachers in "challenged" South Carolina school districts, Haley proposed offering incentives for teachers to stay.

"If a student agrees to teach in a challenged district for eight years, we will cover the full cost of their education at a state university," the governor said. "For recent graduates who agree to the same commitment, we will repay their student loans. For career educators who want to grow professionally and teach in these challenged districts, we will cover the cost of their graduate coursework. And we will support mentorship programs for all of the above."

Haley also called for laws

regarding the state superintendent to be changed.

"We need to let the voters of South Carolina decide if they want the Governor to appoint the superintendent of education," Haley said. "Education must be a priority for every governor - and to be successful, every governor must have a partner in the education department."

Superintendent (Molly) Spearman has been a great partner since her election. But the history of South Carolina shows that has not always been the case, and our children have suffered as a result," she said.

During her speech, Haley also discussed the need for reform in the South Carolina Department of Transportation.

"Pass legislation that cuts our taxes, reforms our flawed transportation system, and invests in

our roads, and I will sign it," Haley told state legislators. "Pass legislation

that does not do all three of those things, and I will veto it. The choice is clear, and it's all yours."

The governor extended her domestic violence task force, which began last year. She said the task force will continue to take steps to curb a disturbing trend.

"There is no excuse for South Carolina to rank as the state in America with the highest percentage of

women killed by men," Haley said. "Domestic violence is an issue that has plagued us for far too long... There is more that we have done and still more to do. That's why I have extended the task force."

Part of the evening was dedicated to remembering the lives lost during a shooting in Charleston that claimed the lives of nine people last year, including state Sen. Clementa Pinckney



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## House approves plan to boost workforce

By SCOTT POWELL

Ledger Staff Writer

[spowell@gaffneyletter.com](mailto:spowell@gaffneyletter.com)

South Carolina lawmakers are considering a bigger investment in high school education and job training programs for the unemployed in an effort to boost the state's workforce.

The state House of Representatives voted 106-5 Wednesday to approve legislation which would increase dual enrollment opportunities for high school students and provide scholarships for the unemployed to participate in job training programs.

Under the bill, high school students could take more courses that could be used towards a high school diploma, earning a technical certificate, and/or two year associate's degree. The state would offer scholarships for unemployed workers to receive job training in their area.

House and Means Chairman Brian White, the bill's sponsor, joined Gov. Nikki Haley and state Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman on Wednesday afternoon for a press conference in the Statehouse in support of the "Pathways Initiative" legislation.

Spearman has requested state funding to pay for dual enrollment classes. The state superintendent of education noted students often must pay out of their own pocket to take a technical college course, which poor students can't afford.

"Many of our students now in high school are graduating with two-year degrees. They're ready to go to work," she said Wednesday. "Many are coming out with industry certifications. We need to give them more opportunity for that."

State figures show Cherokee County had a 5.7 percent unemployment rate in December while South Carolina's jobless rate remained unchanged at 5.5 percent. About 124,000 people are still out of work in South Carolina despite 60,000 job openings available.

The state's future depends on all businesses being able to hire locally, according to White. The bill seeks to help match job training with the needs of a county's businesses.

"If we can't do that as a state, we need to pack up our tent and head home," White said. "We'll be dead in the water. This is something vastly needed."

The House bill would create a council to coordinate all workforce training offered by state agencies. The council would survey businesses to gauge their hiring needs and work with the state's community colleges to fill in any gaps.

Tuition scholarships would be available for adults who need education to get a job. Grants would be available to pay for books and other fees students are unable to afford.

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This state proposal is similar to a scholarship fund that Cherokee County Council established in 2013 through the **KNOW(2) initiative to help students in technical fields of study** meet their tuition needs. More than \$35,000 has been distributed from the scholarship fund to cover shortfalls in tuition of students who enter an industrial program offered by Spartanburg Community College.

The impact of the scholarship program has been seen in examples such as the strong interest local residents have shown in the college's mechatronics certificate program. Mechatronics is an industrial field involving control, electronic, computer and mechanical systems in which students learn about product design and automated manufacturing processes.

There are 150 students now enrolled in mechatronics programs on Spartanburg Community College campuses, compared to just 28 students in the fall of 2012.

Although unfamiliar with the details of the Pathways Initiative legislation, Cherokee County Economic Development Board executive director Jim Cook said efforts to expand education and job training opportunities would help the county in its ongoing efforts to develop a highly trained workforce for local business and industries.

"This is part of a systemic effort to improve the quality of our workforce," Cook said.

*(The Associated Press contributed to this report.)*

## 148 Certificate of need process needs reform

With the need to fix state roads and reduce the inequity in public education, the Legislature may have too much on its agenda to get around to streamlining the certificate of need program.

But, as the endless dispute over who gets to build a hospital in Fort Mill indicates, the program needs to be overhauled.

Discussion of the proposal was sparked by a recent letter from the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice recommending that South Carolina repeal its certificate of need laws. Gov. Nikki Haley, who supports getting rid of CON, had requested the opinions from the federal agencies.

They said the CON process creates barriers to entry and expansion of health care facilities, and allows existing providers to block competition. The agencies said the process doesn't help control costs or improve the quality of health care.

York County residents are fully aware of the faults of the CON program. Piedmont Medical Center and Carolinas HealthCare System have been mired in a legal battle to build a Fort Mill hospital for nearly a decade, and the issue has yet to be resolved.

The current rules requiring an extended review process by the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, followed by appeals through the Administrative Law Court, are ridiculously unwieldy. The appeals process regarding the proposed Fort Mill hospital already has dragged on for two years — and counting.

Last year, the full S.C. House passed a bill that would ease the rules on building or expanding hospitals and eliminate the state's oversight entirely at the start of 2018. The bill, which passed 103-1, would let existing hospitals, medical centers

and nursing homes add beds within a mile of their sites.

It also would allow hospitals to expand services that already are approved under the program and remove the need to seek permission to buy costly equipment such as X-ray machines or MRI scanners.

But the bill stalled in the Senate, where its future is uncertain. The Senate's Medical Affairs subcommittee voted this month to remove the sunset provision that would end state oversight in 2018. But the bill still must clear a number of procedural roadblocks, and it is uncertain when, if ever, it might come up for debate.

We like the idea of streamlining the process, but we could not endorse ending state oversight altogether. There are good reasons not to simply allow the free market to dictate how health care is dispersed in the state.

As officials with the S.C. Hospital Association noted, it's unfair to apply free-market rules to an industry where up to 60 percent of hospital revenue comes from federal or state sources — and those sources set the prices they pay. The association also fears that eliminating the CON process would end protection for safety-net hospitals that deliver basic health care to thousands in the state.

With no regulation, we likely would see rapid expansion of health care facilities in urban areas and abandonment of rural, less-populated parts of the state. Investors inevitably would rush to build high-profit facilities, such as heart care centers, at the expense of other needs.

We also could see an abundance of shady MRI facilities with low-quality equipment providing inferior or unnecessary services.

And nursing homes of questionable quality could sprout up everywhere.

If the Senate does take up this bill, we hope lawmakers will be able to strike a balance between radically changing the process and eliminating it altogether.

The state needs to be able to foster competition while ensuring that all parts of the state have access to quality health care.

— *The (Rock Hill) Herald*

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