

Title: **No waste or drilling**

Author:

Size: 10.85 square inch

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No waste or drilling

I want to thank Gov. Nikki Haley for taking an appropriate, strong environmental stance on the Barnwell nuclear dump and for protecting our state from receiving radioactive waste from the entire nation.

Her particularly passionate phraseology that “we don’t sell our soul for jobs and money” and that the expansion “could harm the quality of life in South Carolina and would be a huge step backwards” was very impressive.

I just wish she would consider using the same language, passion and environmental concern for oil and gas exploration and development off our coast that would result in even greater potential impact to our coast’s natural resources and way of life.

Recently, James Island became the 40th coastal community on the East coast and the 7th coastal community in South Carolina to have formally opposed offshore drilling and seismic testing.

I hope she makes note of this trend, sees that this is what is best, not only for the coast, but the state of South Carolina as a whole, and changes her stance on this issue.

RYAN DADDS
*Ronald Lane
Charleston*

Title: **Fund state roads responsibly**

Author:

Size: 51.46 square inch

Greenville, SC Circulation: 113473

THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

Fund state roads responsibly

Plans are moving forward in both the South Carolina House and Senate to repair many of this state's deplorable roads with an increase in the gas tax. As *Greenville News* writer Tim Smith reported on Friday, the bills that would pump millions of dollars into road repairs apparently don't have the blessing of Gov. Nikki Haley.

As always, there's a lot of political maneuvering going on behind the scenes, and probably more so in the Senate where the Senate Finance Committee's road-funding plan wasn't set for debate. For example, as Smith reported, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Larry Martin argued the Senate plan had to wait on the House to deal with its plan because of a state constitutional requirement that all revenue-raising bills originate in the House. That is a small setback, if even that, and it should not be seen at this point as an effort to undermine what appears to be a healthy majority view in the Senate to fund drastically needed road improvements with new taxes.

What's important is that while the plans coming from the House and Senate finance committees aren't perfect, each is a significant improvement on the long-awaited plan that Gov. Haley unveiled in January that could reasonably be described as an effort to cut an extraordinary amount of state taxes while raising a relatively small amount for state roads. Gov. Haley acknowledged the need to increase the gas tax to improve state roads, but she married her plan with a whopping decrease in the state's income tax.

An agreement to support an increase in the gas tax essentially was used as leverage by the governor to try to gain a reduction in the state income tax from

the top rate of 7 percent to 5 percent over 10 years. If enacted into law, the governor's plan would blow a hole in the state budget. It also relied on belief

that such an income tax cut would stimulate such dramatically higher tax revenues that South Carolina would not suffer in just about every aspect of state government from education to social services, prisons to law enforcement. That would be asking for a whole lot of trust in a state with a proven track record of cutting taxes recklessly and then dealing with the consequences.

In the House, a 20-1 vote came out of the House Ways and Means Committee last week that would raise more than \$400 million for infrastructure needs. The House plan would allow for a cut in the income tax that would be estimated to save the average taxpayer about \$48 a year. The House plan has been called "revenue neutral" for the average driver — meaning that tax increases in some areas would be offset by tax decreases in other areas, but there would not be sweeping tax cuts unrelated to the need to better fund improvements to South Carolina roads.

The House bill relies on a partial shift from the gas tax to an excise tax. The gas tax would be cut by 6 cents per gallon but there would be an excise tax of 6 percent at the wholesale level on fuel. It would be capped so the overall increase would not amount to more than an effective increase of 10 cents per gallon for gas.

The House bill would do other things such as raise the cap on the sales tax for vehicles from \$300 to \$500, offer counties a carrot to take over some local roads in the state inventory, and

allow the project threshold for financing by the Infrastructure Bank to be lowered to allow smaller and more rural communities to have an opportunity to participate.

The Senate Finance Committee plan is cleaner; the gas tax would be raised by 12 cents. It has a few other twists and turns, but ultimately projects raising about \$800 million more per year for roads and bridges.

South Carolina has seriously underfunded improvements and repairs in its roads for at least a decade or more. The state gas tax of 16.75 cents per gallon is almost the lowest in the nation, and the gas tax has not been increased since 1987. Also today's vehicles are more fuel-efficient than they were decades ago, and continued improvements will mean the gas tax will bring in even less revenue in the future.

At the same time, South Carolina has needs of about \$1.5 billion a year as far as the eye can see above what the gas tax now brings in. Anyone who has ridden on South Carolina roads in recent years surely knows they are bad and getting worse.

Either the House or the Senate road plan is an improvement over what came out of the Governor's Office. Even with a small spike in the price of gas at the pump in recent weeks, South Carolina drivers are paying far less for gas than they did a year ago.

Let's fix South Carolina roads, and do it in such a way that tax increases are not back-breaking but instead are fair and realistic. Let's also do it in a way that is fiscally responsible and doesn't eventually cripple other essential state services. It's possible to accomplish all of these goals if the House and Senate work together.

Title: **Fund state roads responsibly**

Author:

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ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE

**Plans in the S.C. House and Senate to
repair state roads rely on an increase
in the gas tax.**

Title: **SLEDchiefremembers hisBarnwellCountyroots**
 Author: By TEDDYKULMALA TheAssociated Press
 Size: 71.61 square inch
 Columbia, SC Circulation: 128564



SLED chief remembers his Barnwell County roots

Keel has helped
rebuild agency's
relationships with
smaller departments

By TEDDY KULMALA
The Associated Press

He came from a small town, but Mark Keel had big changes in mind when he came to be chief of the State Law Enforcement Division in 2011.

"We didn't have the personnel to do the job," Keel said during an interview with the Aiken Standard. "We were hurting. We tried to rebuild the agency. We tried to rebuild the relationships with our local law enforcement."

Since Keel took over as chief, the budget has increased, the agency is nearing its highest em-

ployment ever, technology has been upgraded and relationships with local law enforcement agencies have been rekindled, or in some cases, born.

A native of Barnwell, Keel spent some of his teenage years as a volunteer firefighter with the Barnwell Fire Department and a

SEE **KEEL** PAGE **A7**

"We were hurting.

We tried to rebuild

*the agency. We
tried to rebuild the
relationships with
our local law
enforcement."*

Mark Keel, SLED chief

KEEL

FROM PAGE **A3**

member of the volunteer rescue squad. He chuckled about his brief foray into the newspaper business before that, delivering the Aiken Standard on bicycle at age 12.

"They were trying to get their coverage into the Barnwell area at that time," he said. "We were delivering them to households, trying to get people to see the paper and subscribe to it."

He got his start in law enforcement with the Orangeburg County Sheriff's Office. One of his first assignments was to go undercover as a student at a local high school.

"They had a drug problem," he said. "I was try-

ing to find out what I could about the drug problem at the high school."

Keel also worked weekends with the Barnwell Police Department before going to Georgia Southern University to get his criminal justice degree. His first job after graduating in 1979 was with the Denmark Police Department.

Later that year, Keel accepted a position at SLED, ascending the ranks to chief of staff, which he left in 2008 to serve as the director of the South Carolina Department of Public Safety. He even obtained a law degree from the University of South Carolina while at SLED.

Former U.S. Attorney Reggie Lloyd was selected over Keel by then-Gov.

Mark Sanford to lead SLED. But Sanford did appoint Keel to lead the Department of Public Safety, which was reeling from instances of misconduct by state troopers.

SLED's budget was hacked from \$36 million in 2008 to \$23.7 million when he became chief in 2011, Keel recalled. The Associated Press noted that the number of agents also dropped from 340 to 220 during the same time.

Keel knew the agency was hurting, and this bled through to its relationships with smaller law enforcement agencies, who had begun seeking help elsewhere. He credited the state Legislature for helping get the agency back to its roots by restor-

ing its funding.

"They basically gave me every dime I asked for in the year," he said. "SLED's role is to be an assisting agency. Our goal is to provide manpower and technical expertise for those agencies that can't afford it."

Keel noted that 70 percent of the police agencies in South Carolina have less than 25 officers.

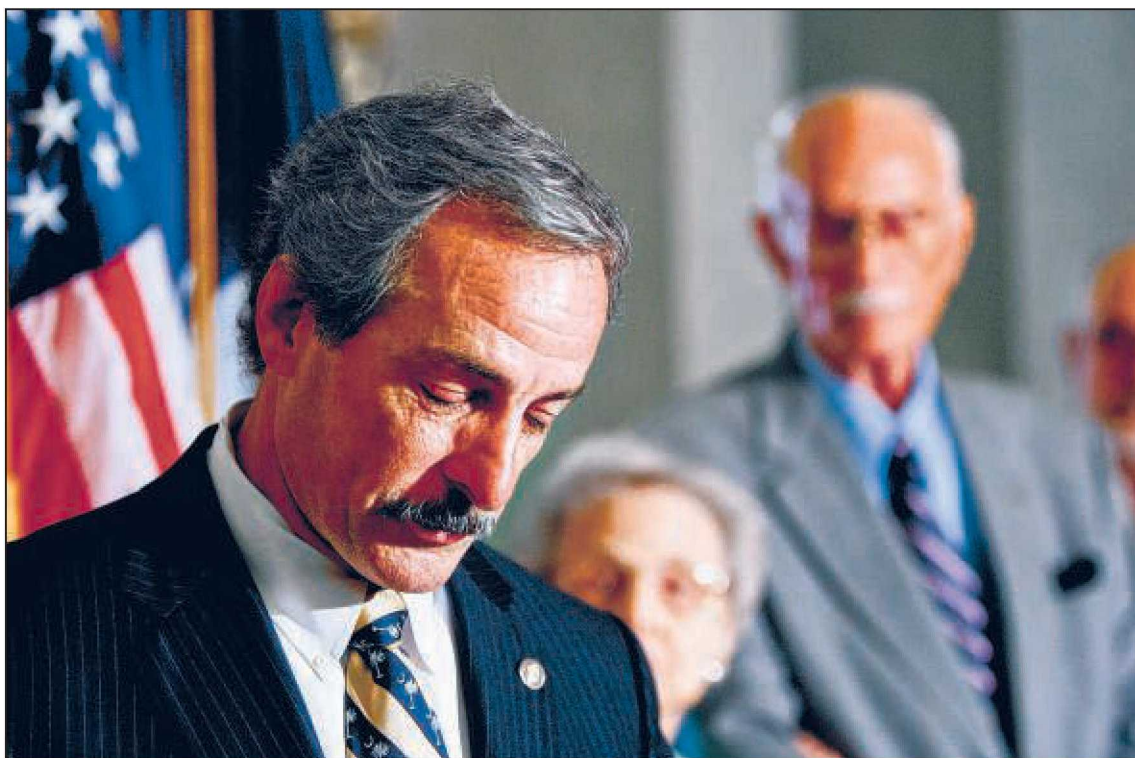
"Those are the agencies that call on us every day," he said. "Whether it's Allendale, Barnwell, Richland or Greenville, everybody should have an equal level of law enforcement service."

Keel is most proud of the rehabilitation of SLED's image as he approaches his fourth year as chief. This includes their relationships with smaller agencies.

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“Agencies know now, drugs, violent crime in when they call us, we’re some parts of the state and gonna respond,” he said. cybercrime.

The agency has made “We’re never where we great strides, but Keel said want to be,” he said. “We there’s more work to be want to stay ahead of the done, particularly with game. We don’t want to get behind.”



THE STATE/FILE PHOTOGRAPH

Mark Keel addresses the media after being chosen by South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley in June 2011 to run the State Law Enforcement Division.

Title: **Officials at odds over offshore drilling in S.C.**
 Author: By SAMMY FRETWELL sfretwell@thestate.com
 Size: 45.41 square inch
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'WE'RE NOT FOR SALE'

Officials at odds over offshore drilling in S.C.

By SAMMY FRETWELL
sfretwell@thestate.com

When Charleston's City Council voted this week to oppose offshore drilling in South Carolina, the decision widened a fracture over U.S. energy policy between local government leaders and their counterparts at the federal and state levels. Gov. Nikki Haley, U.S. Sens. Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham and a bevy of congressmen favor efforts to extract oil and natural gas off the South Atlantic coast, in-

cluding the waters off the Palmetto State.

But coastal governments dislike the idea, fearing that gushing oil spills could

SEE **DRILLING** PAGE **A7**

DRILLING

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one day contaminate the beaches their economies are based on.

Charleston Mayor Joe Riley said coastal city leaders realize better than anyone how an oil spill could affect their communities.

"We are closer to understanding the damaging impact of this," Riley said Friday. "It's not abstract to us. It's very real."

Charleston City Council voted 7-5 Tuesday to oppose seismic testing to locate possible oil deposits,

as well as offshore drilling. So far this year, nine city councils on South Carolina's coast have come out against seismic testing and offshore drilling.

They hope their input will help persuade the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to scrap the idea of oil and gas drilling off the South Atlantic coast.

The deadline for commenting on a federal plan to allow offshore oil leases is Monday.

While federal leaders, such as U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan, R-S.C., say the state should at least look to see if

oil exists off the coast, Riley said it doesn't matter whether any oil exists it or not. It's not worth trying to extract the fossil fuel from the ocean floor, he said.

Riley said he suspects most coastal residents would vote against offshore drilling if the matter were put on a referendum. Charleston and other coastal cities need a clean environment to drive the economy and provide a good quality of life, he said.

"We're not for sale," Riley said.

"We don't need to risk trading the quality of our

environment for some prospective economic gain. There are other ways to grow our economy.

"South Carolina is on the move, people are moving here, and it's a great place to do business. We don't need this."

Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling, who has led efforts by city governments to oppose offshore oil and gas exploration, said he believes South Carolina's congressional leaders are simply supporting national energy policy.

But like Riley, he said many constituents remem-

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 Author: By SAMMY FRETWELL sfretwell@thestate.com
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ber what happened in the Gulf of Mexico five years ago, when a drill rig exploded and spilled oil that washed up on tourism-dependent beach communities along the gulf.

It was the worst oil spill in U.S. history.

"People are thanking me for doing this," Keyserling said.

"No one on the street likes this idea. They have this vision of what happened on the Gulf Coast. They figure (tourism) is our golden egg, so why put it at risk?"

Attempts to gain comment from Scott, Duncan

and Graham were unsuccessful this week. Each has said the state could gain jobs while helping the U.S. gain energy independence if oil drilling occurs along the state's nearly 200-mile coast. Energy companies have been among major campaign boosters in recent years for Scott and Duncan, who does not represent coastal South Carolina.

Haley's office said the effort to find oil and gas remains a worthwhile effort.

"Gov. Haley has always been a strong supporter of offshore exploration of oil and gas," Haley spokeswo-

man Chaney Adams said in an email.

"It's good for jobs – in a way that preserves our local environment, our ports and our tourism industry."

The federal plan has stirred passions because exploration and drilling has been banned off the South Atlantic coast for more than three decades. In 2014, that changed when the federal government opened the area for exploration through seismic testing, a method considered effective at finding deposits but that can kill dolphins and whales.

In January, the Bureau of

Ocean Energy Management included an area off the Carolinas, Virginia and Georgia that could be leased for drilling between 2017 and 2022.

In addition to Beaufort and Charleston, South Carolina cities that have formally expressed concern about seismic testing and drilling are Hilton Head Island, Folly Beach, Isle of Palms, James Island, Port Royal and Sullivan's Island, according to the environmental group Oceana. Edisto Beach has voted only to oppose seismic testing.

Title: **Charleston Republican files bill restricting use of nuclear waste dump**
 Author: BY CYNTHIA ROLDAN croldan@postandcourier.com
 Size: 39.21 square inch
 Charleston, SC Circulation: 110289



Charleston Republican files bill restricting use of nuclear waste dump

BY CYNTHIA ROLDAN
croldan@postandcourier.com

COLUMBIA — A Charleston Republican has filed a bill to reinforce a law preventing more states from bringing low-level radioactive waste to South Carolina.

Rep. Chip Limehouse's bill filed Tuesday states the Barnwell County Nuclear Waste site "must not accept" waste from anywhere else in the country except South Carolina, New Jersey and Connecticut, which was the agreement established in 2000, when the site was closed off to the rest of the nation.

"I think South Carolina needs to double-down on our policy of out-of-state nuclear waste," Limehouse said. "We're not going to be the dumping ground of the United States of America for low-level nuclear waste."

The bill also requires that the Department of Health and Environmental Control update the Legislature twice a year on the water quality surrounding the site.

Limehouse filed the bill a few days after Gov. Nikki Haley held a March 19 news conference at which she sought to counteract lobbying by the company operating the waste site. Haley said she opposes expanding the intake at the nuclear waste site because it could harm the quality of life in South Carolina.

She added that her announcement was in response to Utah-based EnergySolutions contacting lawmakers and her staff about again letting every

state dump nuclear waste at the landfill. That company is under a court order to address radiation leaking into drinking water supplies for Hilton Head.

"Now there's an opportunity that's being presented in front of the Legislature to be able to take in more nuclear waste from other states, and we just want the Legislature to know we don't want to go in that direction," Haley said.

Sen. Brad Hutto, D-Orangeburg, said Friday, however, that he doesn't understand why Limehouse filed a bill or why Haley called the news conference. He said he has yearly discussions with staff at EnergySolutions, and that even a proposal to reopen the site isn't imminent.

"It does seem like people are jumping the gun," Hutto said. "Nothing has changed right now."

Hutto added there has been a discussion on increasing the consistency of the flow at the site, which is intermittent with only three states allowed to use it. The idea is not to expand the type of waste or the site, and it would not change the outcome of filling it up.

But accelerating dumping at Barnwell should be out of the question, Limehouse said.

The Barnwell County dump site is a 235-acre expanse that opened in 1971 close to the Georgia line. The equivalent of more than 40 tractor-trailers full of radioactive trash from 39 states was buried there each

year before South Carolina lawmakers in 2000 ordered the company to scale back.

Trash sent to Barnwell included protective clothing and gloves, tools, cleaning rags, lab equipment, industrial measuring devices and equipment used to treat cancer patients. The waste was stored in steel containers that were put in concrete vaults and then buried in long trenches.

Limehouse said he is "100 percent committed" to prevent that from happening at such a high rate again. He acknowledged, however, that it'll be a tough fight, especially since the proposal being shopped around is touting the creation of jobs.

"It's a huge mistake," Limehouse said. "Gaining a few jobs is not even remotely worth the downside and risk. South Carolina is open for tourism and manufacturing. Hazardous waste? Go away."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



Poll

Should the state reopen the Barnwell nuclear site to waste from the rest of the country? Go to postandcourier.com/polls to vote.

Palmetto Politics

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Title: Did loose lips nearly sink Daimler deal?

Author:

Size: 113.92 square inch

Charleston, SC Circulation: 110289



Did loose lips nearly sink Daimler deal?

Curiosity over what a Charleston legislator says he didn't say

A deal this month to bring 1,300 new jobs and a Daimler Sprinter Vans plant to North Charleston was in danger of being derailed at the last minute, at least in part because of something a Charleston legislator says he never said.

It's an example of how ultra-sensitive and hyper-secret the world of economic development has become.

So skittish about scuttling a deal — even one that's already been inked — many of the players involved in the Daimler negotiations still won't talk on the record about what went on behind the scenes.

Officials with the S.C. Commerce Department, Daimler AG, North Charleston City Council and state Sen. Hugh Leatherman's office all either declined to comment or did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Gov. Nikki Haley's office referred questions to the Commerce Department, which, in turn, wouldn't comment.

Finally, North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey laid bare the back-room wrangling that took place.

According to Summey, a member of the state's Coordinating Council for Economic Develop-

ment wanted to rescind a portion of the \$14 million in incentives that had been promised to Daimler after a local legislator was quoted on a Charleston television station as saying the Sprinter plant was a done deal.

Almost undone?

That legislator was state Rep. Chip Limehouse, R-Charleston.

Limehouse told The Post and Courier that "the words 'done deal' never came out of my mouth" when he spoke with a local TV anchor.

"I told him that I can confirm I've read The Post and Courier's

report that says Daimler is coming," Limehouse said, referring to the newspaper being the first media outlet to report on the deal. "I told him I didn't have any first-hand knowledge."

That, somehow, turned into this: "Charleston state Rep. Chip Limehouse confirms Daimler AG is expected to announce this coming Friday that Mercedes Sprinter vans will be built from scratch at Palmetto Commerce Parkway," according to the station's broadcast.

Enter Hugh Weathers, the state's agriculture commissioner and a

Please see **DEAL**, Page B3

Did loose lips nearly sink Daimler deal?

DEAL from Page B1

member of the Coordinating Council, which approves incentives for employers.

Weathers, basing his information at least partly on the TV report, started raising questions about why South Carolina was getting ready to give \$14 million to Daimler when the manufacturer was coming to North Charleston regardless, according to officials close to the situation.

All of this at a time when Haley and Bobby Hitt, the head of the state Commerce Department, were out of the country on a trip to parts unknown in a confidential effort

to recruit industry.

Summey said the Daimler deal became so shaky that he ultimately called Leatherman, the powerful Republican from Florence who chairs the Senate Finance Committee.

"He said if the state promised the money, it would be there," Summey said, adding that Leatherman's intervention brought everyone back into the fold.

No harm done

When the Coordinating

Council met March 5 — one day before the scheduled Daimler announcement — the members voted to ap-

prove all \$14 million in incentives.

Weathers would only say that he did not attend that meeting. He referred all other questions to Commerce.

Department spokeswoman Allison Skipper said minutes of that meeting won't be ready until the council meets again next week. Even so, Skipper said, any talk that takes place during closed-door sessions — when the incentives are discussed — is exempt from public disclosure.

In the end, everything worked out fine. Volker Mornhinweg, head of Daimler's Mercedes-Benz Vans

unit, showed up as scheduled to announce his company's \$500 million investment in the new plant, to be built in 2016.

And Hitt said he doubts negotiations ever reached the critical stage that some have described, calling such assertions "overly dramatic."

Although he was out of the country and wouldn't say for

certain that the brouhaha didn't happen, Hitt said a cavalier reaction such as rescinding promised incentives "is not characteristic of any member of the Coordinating Council."

Limehouse said Weathers never contacted him and he

Title: **Did loose lips nearly sink Daimler deal?**

Author:

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"never heard anything about" the supposed Daimler donnybrook.

"Daimler came here because they got the best deal possible," he said. "We're glad to have them."

In its early days, economic development officials referred to the Daimler deal only as "Project Unicorn" to keep negotiations out of the public eye.

With all of the who-said-

what and backstage back-and-forth that took place just days before this month's announcement, a Daimler plant in North Charleston could very well have become as elusive as its mythological

code name.

Warren L. Wise of **The Post and Courier** contributed to this report. Reach **David Wren** at 937-5550 or on Twitter at @David_Wren_



DAVID WREN

Industry



FILE/PAUL ZOELLER/STAFF

Volker Mornhinweg, head of Mercedes-Benz Vans, and Gov. Nikki Haley celebrate after revealing the plans for a \$500 million plant that will assemble Sprinter vans in North Charleston.



Title: **Mind your political rhetoric**

Author:

Size: 32.70 square inch

Charleston, SC Circulation: 110289

Mind your political rhetoric

Our community and state have long been justifiably renowned for gracious decorum. But with that reputation for gentility comes the enduring responsibility to repeatedly confirm it.

And unfortunately, some of our elected officials in Columbia have lately violated that admirable standard of elevated demeanor.

Even Gov. Nikki Haley joined the unseemly verbal fray Tuesday when she told a Realtors group:

“Because I know many of you are going to the Statehouse, which I love, just make sure you take a good shower when you leave.”

Did you find that funny?

Well, one man’s — or woman’s — witty barb is another’s degrading affront.

And that collective maligning of the General Assembly by the governor, blithely posted on her YouTube page, understandably offended many legislators.

Of course, Gov. Haley herself was recently the victim of a lowdown — and personal — insult by a state lawmaker.

After she announced her opposition to a \$500 million bond bill two weeks

ago, state Rep. Todd Rutherford, D-Columbia, issued a release calling our governor “a selfish, vindictive narcissist who is more concerned about her own future political ambitions than the state of South Carolina.”

Gee, not only a narcissist but a selfish and vindictive one?

Please, ladies and gentlemen of our Palmetto State political class, start acting like, well, ladies and gentlemen — or at least like grown-ups.

The offenders — and offended — who insist that they have merely responded in kind to intolerable aspersions should know that two wrongs of rash rhetoric don’t make a right.

Nor should we South Carolinians blame this unmannerly trend within our borders on the increasingly venomous vernacular of modern American politics.

Instead, with a deluge of 2016 presidential candidates about to descend on our state, it’s incumbent on us to fulfill a worthy tradition by setting a timely example of polite political discourse.

And that South Carolina obligation is not limited to elective-office incumbents and challengers.

Title: **Director of S.C. probation agency confirmed**

Author:

Size: 7.90 square inch

Rock Hill, SC Circulation: 34688



Director of S.C. probation agency confirmed

COLUMBIA Jerry Adger has officially taken the helm of South Carolina's probation and parole agency.

The state Senate voted unanimously this week to confirm Adger as director of the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services. He was previously inspector general of the state's prisons agency.

Adger's career in criminal justice began in 1977 as a fingerprint analyst at the FBI. During his 23 years at the State Law Enforcement Division, his jobs ranged from special agent to internal affairs. He went on to the Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Corrections.

Adger replaces Kela Thomas, whose last day was Jan. 1. He is among three blacks in Gov. Nikki Haley's 16-member Cabinet.

The agency of 650 employees supervises about 32,000 people.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Title: **Roads top agenda at annual York Co. legislative breakfast**
 Author: By Debbie Abels dabels@heraldonline.com
 Size: 42.93 square inch
 Rock Hill, SC Circulation: 34688



Roads top agenda at annual York Co. legislative breakfast

Local school, business
leaders speak with
elected officials

By DEBBIE ABELS
dabels@heraldonline.com

TEGA CAY "Roads, roads and roads" – with nods to economic development and proper funding for schools – were all the talk Friday when York County business leaders had a chance to bend the ears of their elected representatives.

The state senators, representatives and congressman on the panel for the York County Regional Chamber of Commerce's annual legislative breakfast at Tega Cay's Glennon Center had plenty to say themselves.

State Sen. Wes Hayes, R-Rock Hill, identified the top three issues before the Legislature as "roads, roads and roads," saying all else "pales in comparison."

With three road improvement

plans under consideration – one advanced by Gov. Nikki Haley, another by a House committee headed by state Rep. Gary Simrill, R-Rock Hill, and a third by state Sen. Ray Cleary, R-Murrells Inlet – Hayes



Hayes

said lawmakers will take some action this year, in spite of Haley's threatened veto of any plan that does not include a tax cut.

Haley proposes a gradual reduction in the state income tax rate in exchange for an increase in the gas tax to help pay for badly needed road repairs. Critics say that would not be an equal swap and the state can-

not afford the hit to its revenue that would result.

A bill that would place a \$100 cap on business license fees that cities and counties can impose – something many businesses would support – is likely to die in committee, Hayes said, but lawmakers should



Norman

continue to explore changes to license fees to address the concerns of business leaders.

State Reps. Ralph Norman, R-Rock Hill, and Raye Felder, R-Fort Mill, agreed with

Hayes' prediction, saying the effect of reduced license fees on local govern-

SEE **ROADS**, PAGE 6B

ROADS

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Felder

ments is not clear. They said a step in the right direction on the issue would be to examine how fees are calculated to come up with a fairer and more consistent approach.

Rock Hill schools Superintendent Kelly Pew asked lawmakers about legislation that would expand access to school choice programs, taking it beyond support for children with special needs to include "at-risk" students. She said the term "at-risk" is too vague.

Hayes agreed, saying "at-risk" could include up to 70 percent of the state's students unless it is more narrowly defined, which he expects will happen. He also predicts a battle in the state Senate this year on the expansion of school choice, which many equate to a public-private school debate.

Fort Mill school board Chairman Patrick White told lawmakers that his district is still suffering from the 2006 passage of Act 388, which eliminated property taxes that helped pay for schools in exchange for an increase in the state sales tax dedicated to education. That swap did

not work out well for schools, he said, particularly in high-growth areas like Fort Mill. White estimates his district loses several million dollars a year from this change.

Since Act 388 eliminated certain property taxes, Hayes said, the Legislature almost certainly won't repeal or change it. He hopes alternatives can be found to increase money for schools.

Other issues discussed during the breakfast meeting included:

■ **Transportation** – U.S. Rep. Mick Mulvaney, R-Indian Land, predicted Congress would pass a transportation bill, but state and



Mulvaney

local leaders should not expect that to be the answer to the state's search for money to repair and build highways.

■ **Export-Import Bank** – Congress will likely reauthorize the federal agency that provides financing to businesses that export goods and services to other countries, Mulvaney said, but he is still working to reform it.

■ **Immigration reform** – Linda Dyer Hart, a member of the regional chamber's Tega Cay Area Council,

Title: **Roads top agenda at annual York Co. legislative breakfast**
Author: By Debbie Abels dabels@heraldonline.com
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asked Mulvaney about immigration reform, particularly as it could affect Ireland, which annually has more people wanting to immigrate to the U.S. than there are visas available. Mulvaney said there is talk about making unused visa allotments from some countries competitively available to other countries.

Debbie Abels : 803-329-4042

Title: **There's no pain-free fix for roads**

Author:

Size: 63.39 square inch

Rock Hill, SC Circulation: 34688



There's no pain-free fix for roads

Commentary

Cindi Ross Scoppe

COLUMBIA Funny. It's usually Democrats who think you can get something for nothing. You know, a chicken in every pot, a car in every garage. It was libertarian economist Milton Friedman who had to come along and remind the Keynesians that there's no such thing as a free lunch.

And people sort of seemed to get that.

Then came Gov. Nikki Haley, who promised us for months that she was putting together a plan to patch our pock-marked highways and bolster our deteriorating bridges. And instead she offered us ... a tax cut. Which she called a road-repair plan.

Last week, in a blizzard of interviews apparently aimed at tamping down any traction that could be building for plans to actually fix our roads, the governor told reporters that she would only accept a road-repair plan that was packaged with "a significant" income tax cut. And then, in a jaw-dropping elaboration, she added: "It can't be revenue neutral."

Not to put too fine a point on it, but what the governor is saying is that she will oppose a road-repair plan that does not cut taxes. Massively.

What's next? No legislation to toughen penalties for domestic violence unless it includes a significant income tax cut? No ethics reform unless it includes a significant income tax cut? That makes every bit as much sense as what she's saying.

She didn't stop there. She also told reporters: "We'll let everything fall by the wayside before we allow the people of South Carolina to see a tax increase."

Note what she didn't say. She didn't say, "We'll let everything fall by the wayside before we subject the people of South Carolina to a tax increase." She said "before we allow the people of South Carolina to see a tax increase"

And I know this might seem like I'm playing with semantics, but you know, at some point, words matter. At some point, the governor is acknowledging that there are a lot of people in this

state who want the Legislature to raise taxes to pay for road repairs, because they understand math, and they know that's the only way to catch up after decades of neglect. And the governor is not going to let them see that.

Seriously.

Worse: She's been taken seriously.

Oh, there's no danger that the Legislature is going to pass her pixie-dust plan. Even if the House goes along – and there's some effort to try to appease her with a merely huge tax cut instead of a budget-busting tax cut – the Senate won't.

It's simply too irresponsible, and the Senate rules make it easy for a minority of senators to block something they really hate.

Road repairs? Forget about it

The danger isn't that Gov Haley will succeed in making it impossible for our state to continue providing even the current sub-par level of services. The danger is that her plan will prevent any improvement of our roads.

As I've written before, I'm not certain that our roads ought to be our No. 1 priority. But a lot of people are convinced of that, and the fact is that if they want to improve them, it's going to mean either raising taxes or else making substantial cuts to the rest of government.

And that's the problem with the Haley plan: It pretends – based on absolutely nothing but that pixie dust – that we can have something for nothing. It pretends that we can fill a \$400 million-per-year pothole not by raising taxes by \$400 million but by cutting them by \$1.4 billion.

Seriously.

It's such a nutty idea that reasonable people can react by saying, "Oh, it must be that I just don't understand; there must be some other parts I'm missing, because no one would propose something that insane."

And yet, that is precisely what our governor has done. And she's not backing down.

The governor argues that state revenue increases every year, and that we

can afford to cut taxes by \$1.4 billion a year because state projections show annual state revenue will have grown by \$3.2 billion a year by the time her tax cut is fully phased in, in 2025.

That means we could take all that money out of the budget without having to cut the budget: The total general fund revenue will be \$7.3 billion next year, and with her tax cut, it would be \$8.7 billion in 2025.

Of course, that projection relies on our economy growing at 4.1 percent per year – about the same rate it's grown in the past few years – for the next decade, which certainly is no certainty. But even if state revenue does grow that much, that doesn't mean there wouldn't be cuts. And it doesn't mean services wouldn't be diminished. There would be, and they would be.

There are three general approaches to government budgeting. You can keep providing the same level of services,

you can provide more services, or you can provide fewer services. But those three options don't translate into spending the same amount of money, spending more money or spending less money.

The way to keep government the same size is to limit spending increases to the growth of population plus inflation. That way you can keep paying the bills – just like you keep buying gas and groceries and other necessities – while costs increase. You also can keep providing the same level of services as you have more people demanding those services.

And frankly, if your government is providing all the services that it needs to provide, then you ought to be able to continue to run it on the basis of inflation plus population growth. And over time, that's generally how much revenue grows if you neither raise nor lower taxes. That natural revenue growth, as it's called, is what Gov. Haley is referring to when she says we'll have \$3.2 billion a year more to spend in 2025 than we do today.

But if you don't have that natural revenue growth – if you cut taxes so much

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that revenue remains flat or grows by a much lower rate than population and inflation rather than increasing naturally as the population rises and people make more money and spend more on taxable goods – then every year, the level of service you're able to provide per person shrinks.

Not only are you unable to hire another teacher when you get an extra 30 first-graders in your school, but you can't give any teachers a raise, even to keep up with inflation; so eventually all

the good teachers will leave, or else you'll have to give them a raise, which means you have to reduce the number of teachers even more.

And that repeats throughout the government – fewer Highway Patrol troopers, fewer clerks to process the papers when you want to adopt a child or get a divorce, fewer SLED agents to catch bad guys, fewer case workers to investigate parents who might be abusing their children, and on and on.

That's what Nikki Haley is propos-

ing.

The governor says we'll be able to "absorb" that loss, but she doesn't say how. And here's the best thing, from her perspective: She won't have to say how, not really. Her plan would phase in over 10 years, with the bulk of the cuts coming long after she has left the governor's mansion, spreading her trail of pixie dust behind her.

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