

Title: **Legislators Say 2017 Session Will Be About The Money**  
 Author: By Barney Blakeney  
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# Legislators Say 2017 Session Will Be About The Money

By Barney Blakeney

Local state legislators returned to Columbia to start the 2017 legislative session Jan. 3. And though the session will be shorter this year than in the past - the session is slated to conclude May 11 - several say they anticipate getting a lot done.

Senate Dist 42 Sen. Marlon Kimpson said among his major thrusts will be a push to fund school buses for the infamous 'Corridor of Shame', a collective of 36 school districts that border I-95 and which are part of the 20-year-old Abbeville County School District v. the State of South Carolina lawsuit. The

state's legislature has been unresponsive to court orders to adequately fund the districts. He hopes the state will use money awarded from a national settlement with Volkswagen. South Carolina will receive about \$32 million of the \$2.7 billion that will be awarded top states to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions.

Kimpson, whose law firm

Motley Rice LLC was involved with the negotiation of the multi-billion dollar settlement, recently met with Governor Nikki Haley and Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman to propose a plan that designates a substantial portion of the settlement proceeds for new school buses for the school districts in the

Allendale equity funding case. Kimpson said his 2017 legislative agenda will be one of economics. It will be an agenda that includes earned income tax credits for working class citizens, funding to create affordable housing initiatives and a continued focus on procurement policies that enable minority businesses greater opportunities for participation in government sponsored projects. Also, Kimpson said he will focus on gun laws that make it tougher for criminals to get guns, possess them or use them.

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## SESSION... - cont. from page 1

"Money, money, money" is how Rep. David Mack described the focus for the 2017 legislative agenda. Roads infrastructure, busted dams as a result of torrential rains and state employees' retirement pension are problematic issues which have flown below the legislature's radar. And on a more personal level healthcare and funding for rural hospitals will impact unestimated numbers of citizens, he said. And schools funding is the problem that won't go away, he added.

Rep. Robert Brown boldly noted the political buzz kill few elected officials talk about - increasing taxes. South Carolina won't be able to get around increasing its gas tax this year, he said. He anticipates the tax will go up two or three cents. And other subjects too often avoided will have to be addressed, he said, those of increasing greater racial diversity in charter schools and raising the minimum wage.

Rep. Wendell Gilliard said the 2017 legislative session will be a new ball game with a new quarterback after Gov. Nikki Haley leaves Columbia to become the ambassador to the United Nations. One change of plays may be a revived push for state sanctioned video poker, he said. Gilliard said he's going to introduce a bill that would begin instruction in the trades to students in sixth grade. We're not training workers for the manufacturing jobs coming to the state, he said.

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**The 2017 Legislative session was underway Tuesday at the South Carolina State House as lawmakers returned with a number of items on the proposed legislation list.**



Title: **911 tapes of Corley arrest released**  
 Author: BY MAAYAN, SCHECHTER mschechter@aikenstandard.com  
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# 911 tapes of Corley arrest released

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER  
 mschechter@aikenstandard.com

The piercing screams of children begging South Carolina Republican lawmaker Chris Corley to "just stop" is the first 911 phone call Aiken City dispatch received on the night of Dec. 26 from Corley's red-brick Sugar Hill Drive home in Graniteville.

"Please stop it. Just stop. Just stop. ... Dad, please stop," can be heard on the 911 audio recording released Friday by the Aiken County Sheriff's Office to the *Aiken Standard*. "Please stop. Stop. Please stop, Chris. Just stop daddy, just stop. Chris, please stop. Daddy. Please help. Please Chris. Chris."

After several attempts to get, presumably, Corley's wife on the phone, the dispatcher calls Aiken County dispatch, saying, "I had a caller, sounded like children screaming for help and begging for their father to stop."

A second 911 phone call is made to Aiken County dispatch, this time by what appears to be a female family member who lives across the street.

"There's a man threatening to kill himself," the woman tells dispatch. "He hit his wife ... and he's threatening to kill himself. He has a weapon. Yes he does. It's a gun."

In the background, a woman is heard screaming, "Don't get in front of the window."

Corley, 36, was arrested on Tuesday by the Aiken County Sheriff's Office on felony charges of first-degree domestic violence and pointing and presenting weapons at a person after police say he hit his 37-year-old wife and pointed a gun at her, before threatening to kill himself.

He was released from jail Tuesday afternoon on a \$20,000 surety bond, with the condition he cannot contact his wife or possess a gun.

Warrants state Corley, in the presence of an 8-year-old child, did "cause physical harm and injury" to his wife, by "striking her about the head and face with a closed fist and further did, after threatening to kill the victim, point a Smith & Wesson ... handgun at the victim causing her to fear for her life."

The assault occurred at their home on the 100 block of Sugar Hill Drive, according to the police report.

Corley's wife told deputies he was "caught cheating." She said he only stopped assaulting her because he heard kids screaming and noticed blood coming from her head, the report said.

Police go on to report that Corley then went to his car, where he then came back inside and pointed a handgun at his wife, stated he was going to kill himself, then went into a bedroom.

His wife and the children fled to a family member's house across the street, police reported.

Corley told police that he and his wife were arguing because she thought he was cheating on her. He said his wife attempted to strike him in the face with her fist, where he then pushed her off of him.

Corley said during the push, he was scratched on the forehead.

Two in-car videos with audio were also made available to the *Aiken Standard*. One video, in most of its entirety, has no talk-

ing. The second, a little more than an hour, is choppy and the audio largely inaudible.

At least seven minutes into the second in-car audio, a responding officer is heard telling others to "stand down" and that he has contact with Corley.

A cop tells Corley they "can clearly see the mark on your head." Corley tells an officer he doesn't want his wife to go to jail, and also says what appears to be, "I'll go to jail before she goes."

Further into the audio, Corley and the officers inside his home talk about the size of a television and what appears to be an NFL game. An officer also asks Corley how much the fee is for the Homeowners Association.

Sporadically, there is laughter in the background.

At almost the end of the audio, Corley apologizes to an officer that he had to come to his home.

The controversial lawmaker has made headlines before, most notably his passionate defense last year that the Confederate flag stay on the Statehouse grounds, despite South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley's stance that the flag should come down following the heinous mass shooting of nine black churchgoers at the historic Charleston Emanuel AME Church in June 2015.

Then, months later, Corley

caught flack again after he sent a Christmas card to his Republican colleagues that called their morals into question after the Legislature voted to take the flag down.

"May your Christmas be filled with memories of a happier time when South Carolina's leaders possessed morals, convictions and the principles to

stand for what is right," the card read. "May you have a blessed Christmas, and may you take this joyous time as an opportunity to ask for forgiveness of all your sins such as betrayal."

He has also been a consistent supporter of gun rights in South Carolina.

Corley supported the gun reciprocity bill between South Carolina and Georgia, sponsored by Delegation colleague and House Rep. Bill Hixon, R-North Augusta.

Corley also supported the state's domestic violence bill signed into law in 2015, which includes a partial gun ban.

In a sit-down interview with the *Aiken Standard* in 2014, ahead of his first term in office, Corley told reporters he didn't know if the government could completely fix the state's domestic violence issue.

"As far as what we can do as the government, you know, stiffer mandatory penalties," he said at the time. "I don't know that saying you can't have a gun because you get convicted of domestic violence, I don't know if that's going to stop someone from future domestic violence."

The South Carolina legislative session starts in two weeks, with many questioning whether he will be suspended prior to the session's start.

This week, spokeswoman for House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Hartsville, Caroline Delleney, told the media the Speaker was aware of the charges and is monitoring the situation.

"If and when an indictment is issued, the speaker will take the necessary action to comply with the law and maintain the



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dignity of the House of Representatives," Delleney said in a media statement.

Corley is expected in court for his first hearing on Feb. 10.



Title: **Domestic violence advocate calls for Corley resignation**  
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# Domestic violence advocate calls for Corley resignation

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER  
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One of Aiken County's most vocal advocates against domestic violence is calling for South Carolina Rep. Chris Corley to resign following his arrest this week on domestic violence and gun charges.

Corley, 36, who represents Graniteville in the South Carolina House of Representatives, was arrested last Tuesday after police say he hit his wife with a closed fist and pointed a gun at her while two of their three children were present.

The Aiken County Sheriff's Office charged Corley with first-degree domestic violence and pointing and presenting a weapon at a person. Corley could face up to 10 years in prison on charge of first-degree domestic violence and up to five years on the gun charge. There are no minimum sentences for both charges.

Susan Selden, director of the Cumbee Center to Assist Abused Persons, is now calling for Corley to resign from his elected position.

"He should resign. It sets a bad example for him to remain as a legislator while he's being investigated for this," Selden said.

The Cumbee Center, which Selden has been executive director of for 1 1/2 years, not only provides shelter to women and their children who are victims of domestic violence, but also

advocates for social change. The Center also works with men who are victims of domestic violence, but does not offer shelter.

Within the past two years, Selden said the shelter has seen at least 180 victims of domestic violence – not just from Aiken County, but other counties, too.

One of the largest areas that the Cumbee Center serves is the Graniteville, or Valley area, Selden said.

When Selden heard Corley was jailed on a domestic violence charge, she said she was surprised, but not completely shocked.

"He has a little bit of a reputation," Selden said, referring to his news attention when he passionately defended keeping the Confederate flag on the South Carolina Statehouse grounds, despite Gov. Nikki Haley's call to bring down the flag after nine black church goers were gunned down inside of Charleston's historic Emanuel AME Church.

"I am very disappointed, and as a leader, we expect higher standards from him," she said. "Especially, because he voted for these new (domestic violence) laws."

Corley supported the state's domestic violence law that passed in 2015, which included a partial gun ban. The law also has provisions to strip the worst offenders of their gun rights. The most se-

vere crimes carry a lifetime gun ban, with the second-most severe offenses carrying a 10-year ban.

Deputies responded late Monday to Corley's home on the 100 block of Sugar Hill Drive in Graniteville, where Corley's wife told police Corley hit her in the face with his fist and said he was going to kill her while two of her children, both under the age of 9, were in the home, police reported.

Warrants state Corley, in the presence of an 8-year-old child, did "cause physical harm and injury" to the victim, by "striking her about the head and face with a closed fist and further did, after threatening to kill the victim, point a Smith & Wesson ... handgun at the victim causing her to fear for her life."

Corley's wife told deputies he was "caught cheating." She said he only stopped assaulting her

because he heard kids screaming and noticed blood coming from her head, the report said.

Police go on to report that Corley then went to his car, where he then came back inside and pointed a handgun at his wife, stated he was going to kill himself, then went into a bedroom.

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she thought he was cheating on her. He said his wife attempted to strike him in the face with her fist, where he then pushed her off of him.

Corley said during the push, he was scratched on the forehead.

Now, Selden is asking for state lawmakers to step into the limelight and take a stand in combating domestic violence.

"I just think all of our lawmakers need to be proactive against domestic violence and enforcing the laws ... and enact more laws," she said, adding it's going to take more than "talk" to end the epidemic which has plagued the Palmetto State for years.

South Carolina has continually ranked among the nation's most deadliest states for women.

The *Post and Courier's* Pulitzer-prize winning series, "Till Death Do Us Part," which motivated the state's new domestic violence law, documented that more than 300 women had been killed in South Carolina by men over the past decade – about one killing every 12 days.

"It is extremely embarrassing how our state tops year after year. There's so many of us working to combat domestic violence and correct this problem, and now we have a leader that's right in the thick of it," Selden said. "It's an embarrassment to Aiken County."

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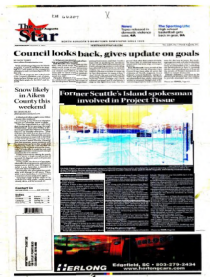


BY TRIPP GIRARDEAU

**South Carolina House Rep. Chris Corley stands in bond court last Tuesday afternoon after he was jailed on domestic violence and gun charges.**



Title: **Former Scuttle's Island spokesman involved in Project Tissue**  
 Author: BY MICHAEL SMITH msmith@aikenstandard.com  
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# Former Scuttle's Island spokesman involved in Project Tissue

BY MICHAEL SMITH  
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Before Scuttle's Island water park, there was Project Tissue.

Project Tissue is the code name originally given to South Georgia Tissue, an Augusta-based company that sought to build a tissue plant in Barnwell County.

First announced in December 2010, South Georgia Tissue planned to invest \$140 million and create 200 jobs within five years, according to the S.C. Department of Commerce.

Nearly seven years later, however, the benchmark hasn't been reached. Besieged by several business-related setbacks, South Georgia Tissue was unable to complete the project.

A different tissue company called Orchids Paper Products later stepped in, though total investment has been trimmed to \$110 million with 134 jobs created.

A 2017 opening is now projected.

Despite delays, missed job benchmarks and mixed economic forecasts, Barnwell County officials insist the tissue plant represents a major investment to a community that's traditionally struggled to land jobs.

"The job impact is going to be very nice for us," said Keith Sloan, vice-chairman of Barnwell County Council. "We won't get all the jobs, but we'll get the bulk of them."

While the projects seem worlds apart, there's

one important thread tying Project Tissue and Scuttle's Island together – Andrew Thompson.

Thompson is the former spokesman for the failed Scuttle's Island water park in North Augusta.

He, along with Florida businessmen Marc Glissman, Mike Friscia and James Harhi, are among former Scuttle's Island associates with extensive business dealings prior to their involvement in the North Augusta project.

Today, they're affiliated with various companies named as plaintiffs in an involuntary Chapter 7 bankruptcy petition filed against Cedar Rock Holdings, LLC, the corporate name for former Scuttle's Island investors.

Cedar Rock has disputed the claims, saying in court documents that Thompson filed the petition "in bad faith," and that the debts listed are either being negotiated or non-existent altogether. It filed a motion to dismiss on Dec. 7, 2016, and a Jan. 25 hearing on the motion has been scheduled.

Thompson has deferred comment on the Chapter 7 proceedings to his attorney Todd Boudreaux of Augusta, who's declined to comment on the litigation.

As for Project Tissue, Thompson agrees it's a major boost to the Barnwell County economy and says he worked hard to keep the plant alive.

## Putting the pieces together

In the months prior to the collapse of Scuttle's

Island, Thompson was the public face of the proposed water park.

He appeared at news conferences, responded to media inquiries and even distributed photos depicting disassembled ride components for the water park. Thompson later separated from the investment group in July.

"I had a specific job that began and it ended,"

Thompson previously told the *Aiken Standard*.

Before speaking on behalf of Scuttle's Island, Thompson was heavily involved in South Georgia Tissue.

Georgia Secretary of State documents identify Thompson as a registered agent and chief financial officer of South Georgia Tissue. Barnwell County officials credit him with keeping the tissue plant alive when it appeared the deal was dead.

The S.C. Department of Commerce first announced Project Tissue in a news release dated Nov. 23, 2010, though the company was initially identified as South Carolina Tissue LLC instead of South Georgia Tissue.

Things went well in the first year.

At a Sept. 20, 2011, meeting, the S.C. Budget and Control Board approved \$35.8 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds for the plant, according to meeting minutes.

Funds were to acquire land, buildings and furnishing. Control board members projected



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## Tissue

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99 jobs would be created within 12 months, minutes show.

The board also approved a request for \$167,085 to help cover \$3.3 million in additional sewer line costs at the S.C. Advanced Technology Park in Barnwell County, where the plant was supposed to be built.

### Setbacks threaten Project Tissue

Behind the scenes, though, South Georgia Tissue faced several obstacles.

Thompson said there were infrastructure challenges and compatibility issues with the original site that made building a tissue plant impossible.

"We had spent a lot of money," Thompson said. "We were disappointed and ready to pack it in." There were also economic and timing issues.

Thompson said Project Tissue fashioned primarily to sell parent rolls, but the global market had been shifting toward a combined production and conversion business model, something South Georgia Tissue wasn't equipped to do.

South Georgia Tissue was fielding offers from other firms interested in a buyout, but nothing materialized.

"The economics weren't there. The timing just wasn't there for us," he said. "At the end of the day we weren't happy with the deals being made. Plus there were some contractions in the market."

By 2014, South Georgia Tissue was preparing to pull out and Project Tissue's future remained in doubt.

Sloan, the Barnwell County Councilman, thinks impacts from the Great Recession played a part as well.

"I wouldn't say I wasn't frustrated, but when you're deal-

ing with raising capital, that's not been an easy thing to do in these years," Sloan said. "It

looked like the project was going to die."

### LLCs receive notices

Between 2010 and 2014, there were also apparent issues with South Georgia Tissue's status with the Georgia Secretary of State. The LLC received dissolution warning notices in 2010 and 2012.

A third notice has since been issued in September 2016, resulting in revocation of the company's certificate of authority on Dec. 7.

Thompson said South Georgia Tissue's registration was allowed to expire this year since there's no longer a need for it.

As for the other notices, they aren't indicative of South Georgia Tissue's viability at the time. He said they were merely administrative matters with no bearing on Project Tissue.

"That's administrative, we didn't care," he said. "A third party handles [registration] for us. Candidly speaking, I don't pay attention to it. We have 11 different things we're doing at the same time. Those aren't critical considerations."

At least three other LLCs received similar notices in recent years: United Tissue Mill, Inc.; Double Capital & Research, LLC; and T-Factor, LLC.

All faced dissolution or were administratively dissolved by the Georgia Secretary of State, public records show.

T-Factor, LLC, the corporate name of Thompson's public relations business, is one of five creditors listed in the Chapter 7 case against Cedar Rock, court records state.

It's also one of two companies in the petition connected

to Thompson; Ocozzio is the other.

Together, T-Factor and Ocozzio account for \$250,000 of \$322,000 in claims filed against Cedar Rock, court records show.

Thompson said the registration issue with T-Factor, LLC was an oversight.

"Thank you for the heads up

on the annual filing," Thompson said. "Someone else normally handles this for us. It was filed and reinstated this morning."

T-Factor's registration was restored Dec. 16, records state.

Robert Anderson, a Chapter 7 trustee with Anderson & Associates in Columbia, and who is not associated with the Scuttle's Island case, has said the dissolution of T-Factor LLC shouldn't have an impact on its participation in the Scuttle's Island bankruptcy case.

"It sounds like a bookkeeping error," Anderson said.

### Back on track in Barnwell

South Georgia Tissue solved its infrastructure issue in Barnwell County by moving from the technology park to the Barnwell County Airport Industrial and Technology Center.

Thompson credits Marty Martin, the former economic development director for Barnwell County, for facilitating the move.

"He saved the game. He was the guy who fixed it all," Thompson said. "He kept the whole thing together and got us from Point A to Point B."

Also helping matters was an offer from Orchids Paper Products, an Oklahoma-based company, to take over the project.

Thompson said Orchids made perfect sense since the Orchids has the necessary infrastructure to produce and convert

paper rolls.

"It wasn't in our wheelhouse to finish it (the plant), but we wanted to honor our commitment to Barnwell County," he said. "They (Barnwell County) were able to negotiate an incentive package for them. It was a marriage of all parties."

Orchids was formally announced in an April 20, 2015, news release from the S.C. Department of Commerce.

According to the release, the Barnwell site is expected to produce between 35,000 to 40,000 tons of paper per year, boosting the company's total production by over one-third. The facility spans about 300,000 square feet.

Local and state officials hailed Orchids as a major success.

"It's another victory for our entire state, and we couldn't be more excited to watch them grow for a very long time," Gov. Nikki Haley said in prepared comments included in a news release.

"With today's announcement that Orchids Paper Products has selected Barnwell County as the location of its first Southeastern operations, rural South Carolina has achieved yet another big victory," added S.C. Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt.

### Economic indicators mixed

As Orchids prepares to ramp up operations in early 2017, its economic performance has been hit or miss.

Between Dec. 22, 2015, and Dec. 22, 2016, shares of Orchids (NYSE: TIS) have fallen about 18.4 percent, from \$30.86 to \$25.18 a share, according to the New York Stock Exchange.

Orchids' stock peaked at \$36.01 a share on July 11, NYSE figures show.

In filings with the Securities



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and Exchange Commission, or SEC, Orchids also reported mixed economic signals.

In the first nine months of 2016, net sales inched upward by about \$243,000 over the same period in 2015, according to an SEC report filed Dec. 14.

Net sales, though, slid sharply in the last three months ending

Sept. 30, falling from \$46.8 million in 2015 to \$39.6 million in the same period this year.

The skid was largely due to decreases in paper shipments, though the SEC report noted there was a 3 percent increase in parent roll production in Oklahoma in preparation for the Barnwell plant opening.

"Parent roll production at

Pryor, (Oklahoma) though 3 percent higher than in 2015, was used in part for the Barnwell, South Carolina start-up and in part to increase finished-goods inventory, thereby foregoing margin we would have received on parent roll sales in favor of margin we expect to gain when we sell this tonnage as converted product," the report states.

"In order to improve upon cash flows, Management is planning to resume the practice of selling excess parent rolls in the fourth quarter."

Orchids has long-term debt of \$124.7 million as of Sept. 30, according to the SEC report.

Much of the new debt is the result of financing the startup of the Barnwell plant. U.S. Bank

is listed in SEC filings as the lender for Orchids.

Sloan acknowledged Orchids' track record hasn't been perfect, but given the scarcity of jobs in Barnwell County, the County Councilman still thinks Orchids will put people to work.

At 5.8 percent, Barnwell County lags behind the state unemployment rate average of 4.9 percent, according to November figures released by the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce.

There are also more unemployed residents than available jobs in Barnwell County.

In November, the County reported 494 people unemployed with only 305 available job openings, ranking the county eighth worst in the state in that category, state figures show.

About one in four – 27.3 percent – of Barnwell County resi-

dents live in poverty, according to U.S. census figures.

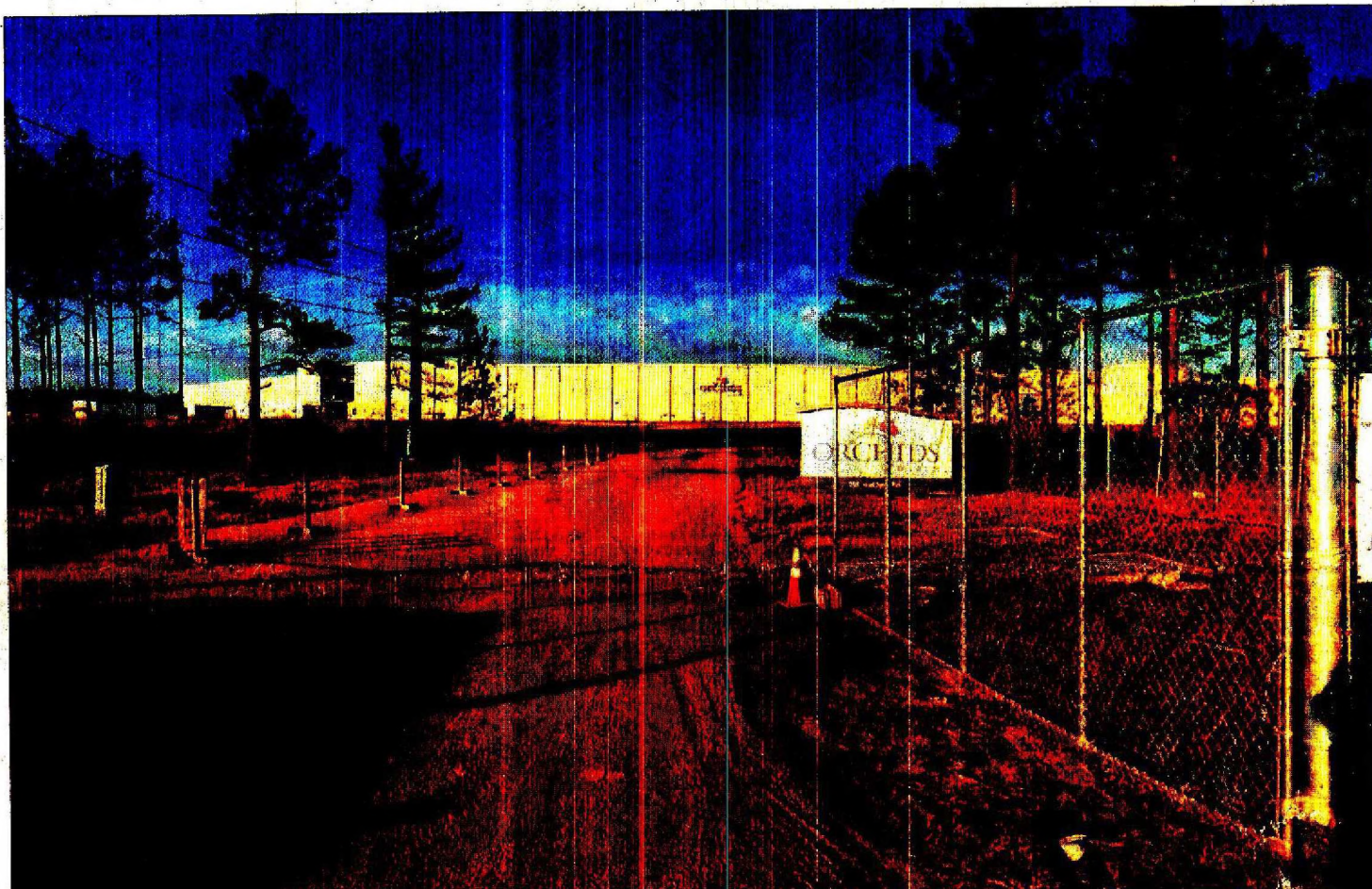
"The job impact is going to be very nice for us," Sloan said. "They're hiring people from the area, and that will have a big impact on us. I'm tickled to death."

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STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL SMITH.

Orchids Paper Products in Barnwell measures 300,000 square feet and is scheduled for a grand opening sometime in 2017. Andrew Thompson, former spokesman for the proposed Scuttle's Island water park in North Augusta, was heavily involved during the tissue plant's early conceptual stages.



Title: **Legal battle over MOX facility at Savannah River Site continues**  
 Author: BY THOMAS GARDINER [tgardiner@aikenstandard.com](mailto:tgardiner@aikenstandard.com)  
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# Legal battle over MOX facility at Savannah River Site continues

BY THOMAS GARDINER  
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The legal saga surrounding plutonium disposition and construction of Savannah River Site's MOX facility began nearly a year ago and will begin a new chapter as the calendar turns to 2017.

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley initiated legal action against the U.S. Department of Energy on Jan. 26, 2016. She sent a letter to State Attorney General Alan Wilson to "initiate litigation on behalf of the state of South Carolina against DOE." That lawsuit is still active.

That letter was generated after the Energy Department failed to meet deadlines and fulfill obligations to the state regarding plutonium currently stored at the Savannah River Site.

Of the approximately 13 metric tons of plutonium stored at Savannah River Site, a little more than half was part of an international agreement to permanently demilitarize plutonium.

In the agreement with Russia, the U.S. pledged to process the material through the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility at SRS. Plutonium processed through the facility would be mixed with natural uranium, creating fuel for commercial nuclear power plants that could not be used for nuclear weapons purposes.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued the original construction license for

MOX in 2005. Lawmakers, including U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., passed legislation requiring the DOE to meet the construction deadline or remove at least 1 metric ton of plutonium from the state for each year beyond the missed construction deadline.

Missing both deadlines, the state lawsuit is trying to get legal enforcement of a \$1 million daily penalty levied against the Energy Department for continued failure to meet those obligations. The penalty caps at \$100 million per year and reached its limit in April.

Since those requirements have still not been met, the tally begins again on Jan. 1, 2017. Each calendar day that obligations go unmet, the state will count against the DOE. The fine could reach its annual \$100 million cap again on April 10, 2017.

U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz penned a letter to Haley in January of 2016, saying the federal department would begin a "dilute and dispose" process to start the journey for plutonium to leave the state.

The DOE announced earlier this year that some material had been processed through that method but listed less than 10kg for a total. Not only has the DOE continually fallen short of

its obligations to the Palmetto State, but more plutonium was

brought into the state in 2016.

In February, a nuclear transportation ship was spotted leaving the Port of Charleston. Later, nuclear watchdog group SRS Watch reported approximately 20kg of plutonium had been shipped to the U.S., and the shipment was confirmed by the Swiss government.

Then in late May, 331kg of plutonium was imported from Japan. Haley sent a letter to Moniz, asking the shipment be rerouted – it was not.

Haley has repeatedly told Moniz and the federal government that South Carolina will not tolerate being treated as a "nuclear dumping ground."

In 2014, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission signed an extension for the MOX construction license, moving the final license deadline to March 2025. In its announcement, the NRC cited several problems that lead to the initial deadline being missed.

The release said, "MOX Services asked for the extension in May after a number of factors delayed construction, including lower than requested annual funding from Congress and delays in the delivery of components and key construction activities."

Congressional funding continues to be an issue for MOX, as National Defense Authorization Acts in the years following

2014 have kept funding at \$340 million – the baseline figure to keep construction alive. That figure does not change for fiscal year 2017.

The lawsuit was heard before a judge in the summer, and Judge J. Michelle Childs issued an initial ruling, but that ruling asked for further justification. The court's decision is whether or not it has jurisdiction in a case involving a monetary claim, as federal monetary lawsuits are typically handled in U.S. claims court. DOE counsel argues the case should be moved.

The South Carolina counsel has submitted a request for reconsideration and the federal response is due by Dec. 31. It is unknown when that response will be available to the public.

According to sources close to the case, Haley's team will start the \$1 million daily counter tomorrow. It is unclear how that may change, if at all, once gubernatorial power is transferred to current Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster.

The McMaster team said it could not comment on policy until after that transfer is complete because of legal concerns.

In a statement released by the Energy Department, a spokesperson said the department would continue construction of the facility as directed by Congress.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SRS HIGH FLYER

**Aerial photo of the MOX facility from November 2016.**



Title: **USC economists predict SC economy strong, stable for 2017**  
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# USC economists predict SC economy strong, stable for 2017

Steady economic gains are expected for South Carolina in 2017 despite the political uncertainty that comes with a new governor and U.S. president. The

gains build on positive growth across most of the Palmetto State's industries and regions, according to University of South Carolina economists at the Darla Moore School of Business.

Doug Woodward, director of research, and Joseph Von Nessen, a research economist, presented their 2017 forecast Thursday (Dec. 8) to more than 150 of the state's business and community leaders at the 36th Annual Economic Outlook Conference (EOC). They reported that the state is poised to build on its existing momentum and to continue generating new jobs and rising incomes for South Carolinians.

They expect job creation -- the single best predictor of economic performance -- to grow 2.6 percent in 2017.

"South Carolina's economy is growing at a healthy pace," said Von Nessen. "And we expect the state to continue to build on this momentum in 2017."

He said the South Carolina's economy also is in the midst of a "paradigm shift," which will bring new challenges for the state in 2017.

"For the last several years our rate of economic growth has been accelerating, but in 2016 it leveled off and is now growing at a constant rate," Von Nessen said. "In addition, the labor market has strengthened considerably. Our unemployment rate has dropped to 4.7 percent. And although this is good news for workers, it

also means that employers are now struggling to find

qualified employees to fill new positions. Going forward, if we want to achieve a higher rate of economic growth, this skills gap will have to be addressed."

Tackling a skills gap will likely be an important part of the next governor's mission.

"Gov. Haley came into office with a priority to generate employment opportunities for South Carolinians during a period of high unemployment following the Great Recession," Von Nessen said. "Lt. Gov. McMaster, by contrast, will likely inherit a healthier economy in which unemployment is relatively low, and a skills gap that prevents many workers from being hired."

The economists said two industry sectors led the broad-based growth in 2016.

The manufacturing sector and the professional and business services sector were the fastest growing industries this year, having driven high-wage job creation throughout the state and supporting high rates of consumer spending.

"We are seeing strong job growth within the professional service sectors as well as within aerospace, automotive and tire manufacturing," he said. "Each of these industries is creating jobs that pay significantly above the state average. In turn, these workers are spending their wages in South Carolina and thus creating additional economic

They also identified the construction sector as a bright spot.

Construction played a key role in South Carolina's economic growth in 2016, especially along the coastal regions of the state. In addition to the overall strengthening of housing demand,

which experienced lackluster growth from 2010 to 2015, the construction industry was propelled by rebuilding efforts going toward repairing damage from the historic 2015 flood.

In fact, Woodward and Von Nessen estimate that more than 20,000 temporary S.C. jobs will have been created in the construction and retail sectors by the time the rebuilding process is completed. They also expect a similar, though smaller, stimulus in the construction industry to occur in 2017 as a result of Hurricane Matthew.

The economists anticipate the size of the labor force to continue to grow in 2017 as job opportunities continue to rise, which implies marginal decreases in the unemployment rate over the next year.

The Moore School forecast outlines an unemployment rate over the next 12 months that will drop slightly from its current rate of 4.7 percent to approximately 4.5 percent. However, total personal income is shown to grow at 4.8 percent in 2017 -- a rate comparable to its growth rate in 2016.

The daylong Economic Outlook Conference also included a keynote address from Boston University economist Laurence Kotlikoff on how the new Trump administration will likely affect the U.S. economy. The two most significant economic impacts of a Trump presidency on the Palmetto State are a possible renegotiation or elimination of trade deals and changes in military and veteran spending. Manufacturing exports and the state's military presence play major roles in the state's economy.

Kotlikoff also addressed the federal budget, debt and other critical issues that will face the new administration in 2017.

The conference also featured presentations on South Carolina's long-run competitiveness by Meghan Hughes Hickman, executive director of EngenuitySC, and Ann Marie Stieritz, president and CEO of the South Carolina Council on Competitiveness.

South Carolina communities at a glance  
 Employment:

In 2016, South Carolina experienced gains in employment across most major metropolitan regions of the state (October 2016 employment compared against October 2015).

The largest gains occurred in Rock Hill (+3.4 percent) and Charleston (+3.2 percent). More modest gains occurred in Anderson (+2.2 percent), Columbia (+2.0 percent), Spartanburg (+1.9 percent), Greenville (+1.3 percent), Augusta (+1.0 percent), Myrtle Beach (+0.9 percent), Darlington (+0.9 percent) and Florence (+0.2 percent). Sumter experienced minor employment losses over the past year (-0.3 percent).

Retail trade:

Retail trade employment in South Carolina saw steady gains throughout 2016 culminating in a growth rate of 1.8 percent as of October 2016 (October 2016 compared against October 2015). Additionally, several regions of the state witnessed more sizable gains. Regions of the Palmetto State with gains in retail trade that exceeded the state average occurred in Spartanburg (+5.2 percent), Myrtle Beach (+2.9 percent) and Charleston (+2.3 percent).