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**Domestic
Violence**

"This needs to be a cultural change that starts with us asking questions about ways to change what isn't working."



— Florence County Sheriff Kenney Boone

Task force continues prevention research

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
Morning News
jlloyd@florencenews.com

FLORENCE — Since Gov. Nikki Haley set up a statewide task force this year to examine criminal domestic violence in South Carolina, appointed members, including officials in the Pee Dee, have taken steps to unravel what they say is an embedded cultural problem.

The task force has about 40 members, who will have until the end of the year to make recommendations on ways to remedy the state's domestic violence problem. South Carolina is reportedly ranked second in the nation for the number of women killed by men in domestic relationships.

Task force members from across the state are assigned to several subcommittees, including the law enforcement, prosecutors, judicial, victims' services, data collection and analysis subcommittees. The task force's duties have two phases. Phase 1 involves data and information collection; Phase 2 will identify problems and propose solutions.

Florence County Sheriff Kenney Boone,

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Violence

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vice president of the South Carolina Sheriffs' Association, is a member of the task force's law enforcement subcommittee.

He said his subcommittee members have been compiling data from agencies across the state, such as sheriff's offices, municipal police departments, the State Law Enforcement Division, South Carolina Probation and Parole, South Carolina Department of Public Safety, the Department of Juvenile Justice and 911 centers.

"We've put out a survey to law enforcement agencies across the state, and we're asking questions that will give us data that we feel is necessary for legislation," Boone said. "This needs to be a cultural change that starts with us asking questions about ways to change what isn't working."

The 30-question survey asks agencies whether they have specific protocols when handling domestic violence cases and whether there are guidelines in place for after a domestic case is reported.

Boone said collected data will reveal how domestic incidents are reported, handled and then tracked at the local level and within state agencies. He said that to successfully prevent domestic violence, there needs to be accurate data to include all types of domestic abuse, not just incidents that fit the current, flawed definition.

"I think when we get this information back, it'll help get what we need to start making some recommendations that will lead to change," Boone said.

"One thing we have to do is teach our boys that it's not OK to hit a girl, and we have to teach our girls that it's not OK to be hit. That goes both ways, and it starts with us addressing the underlying problems."

South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson, also a member of the task force, has been one of the state's most vocal proponents of criminal domestic violence policy reform in Columbia.

"We currently live in a state where you can beat your dog and get five years, but beat your wife and get 30 days," Wilson said. "That does not adequately represent the values we have as citizens of this state."

He said prosecutors currently have two choices when pushing for conviction for first-time offenders in criminal domestic violence cases: a high and

aggravated felony assault charge, with a one- to 10-year sentence or a 30-day misdemeanor.

"The current domestic violence statutes are old and antiquated," Wilson said. "There are two extreme penalties for that type of crime. We all know there's a lot of criminal domestic conduct that can happen between those two extremes, so there needs to be additional tools to better penalize offenders."

Wilson said one change he'd like to see is a system that bases the penalty on the type of harm caused by the offender, rather than the number of times someone has committed the offense.

He said a high and aggravated offense would get the offender between zero and 20 years in prison; if great bodily injury occurs, that could mean between zero and 10

years. A second-degree offense with moderate bodily injury would be a misdemeanor bringing a zero to three-year sentence; and a third-degree offense would mean any type of injury occurs.

Wilson said another aspect advocates are pushing for is the inclusion of additional penalties if a domestic violence crime is committed in the presence of a minor. He said other amendments would include extra time if the offender strikes a pregnant woman, prevents someone from making a report or is a habitual offender.

"This is not a 'one and done' proposition," Wilson said. "Every year, we need to address a different component of domestic violence until we see some cultural changes. In four or five years, we may be readdressing some of the same issues because we'll know how to better implement the law. You can never stop talking about this issue."

He said the focus at present seems to be on changing penalties, policies and legal definitions, which is positive but there also needs to be a focus on prevention, education, victim treatment and other aspect that are not typically at the forefront of conversation.

"We can't address the entire topic at one time. It's impossible when you have a problem that's so widespread," Wilson said. "We have to recognize that this task force isn't a cure-all for domestic violence; it's just a component. If we can put something together this year and get it passed, that's great, but we can't sit on our laurels and do nothing after this."

The task force will hold its Phase 1 meeting May 14 in Columbia.

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NATIONAL GUARD

Crumbling buildings

Millions of dollars needed for Pee Dee's aging armories

BY GAVIN JACKSON
Morning News
gjackson@florencenews.com

PEE DEE — Foundation cracks in Timmons-ville, a crumbling roof in Heming-way and outdated electrical system in Florence are just a few of the reasons con-

ditions at some National Guard Armories in the Pee Dee are in poor condition, while just one in the area, Marion, is ranked good.

There are 67 armories, or readiness centers, as the S.C. National Guard calls

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PHOTOS BY GAVIN JACKSON / MORNING NEWS

Maj. Marty Hanks points out peeling paint at the Hemingway Readiness Center, which supports a detachment of the 1178th Forward Support Company in the S.C. National Guard. The facility was built in 1956. There are 11 S.C. National Guard armories in the Pee Dee. Below: Drainage is a problem at the 59-year-old readiness center, which houses a substantial number of vehicles in its motor pool.





Armories

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them, scattered around the state with 11 in the Pee Dee. There is deferred maintenance at all of the Pee Dee readiness centers that are part of a \$30 million backlog statewide.

Colonel Andrew Batten, construction and facility management officer with the S.C. Army National Guard, said that the average condition at those readiness centers is poor and can affect Guard objectives.

"The backlog is pretty significant stuff, building components, heating and air, so if we're able to address a good amount of those items through a bond issue, then we can spend more of our money on maintenance and preventative maintenance to extend the life of those systems," Batten said. "The problem now is we don't have adequate funding to address the backlog and do preventative maintenance, so we end up having to do the most urgent things first."

Batten said that if \$15 million in funds were secured as part of a \$236.7 million bond bill, it would make substantial headway in addressing major system failures since the \$15 million would be matched by federal funds.

That would give the Guard a chance to get ahead of its problems, instead of jumping to them.

"Typically, there are more federal funds available than we can make use of because we have no matching funds," Batten said. "This would open up quite a bit of matching funds from the government and accelerate a lot

of projects."

Upgrades like new windows, HVAC systems, kitchen appliances and new roofs are in place at readiness centers in the Pee Dee, but visiting those facilities with Maj. Marty Hanks and Capt. Jay Sirmon on a recent afternoon makes it clear that the S.C. National Guard is putting money toward major problems, but is unable to afford a lot of the preventative maintenance.

"Our soldiers are resilient and stay focused on the mission and do what they need to do to get the mission done," Batten said. "They're pretty innovative and making the best of what they have, but at some point it becomes untenable and could affect readiness at some points."

Batten said a study commissioned by Congress to assess conditions of state National Guard readiness

throughout the country found that South Carolina's conditions ranked toward the bottom.

Information from the study will assist in the consolidation of armories in the state to 50 eventually.

"The proposal is that a major construction program will be established in approximately 2017-18 to provide the capital investment funding to repair and/or replace many of our readiness centers," Batten said. "That's going to be a long process. I think the estimate is we build approximately 10 new regional readiness centers, but that would be over a period of 15-plus years. So there's going to be numerous facilities that we're going to need to keep in inventory."

The state's current 67 readiness centers have an average age of 36 years. Some, like Hemingway,

built in 1956, have reached historic status, making facility improvements even more cumbersome because of state historic preservation requirements.

More than \$30 million

Even with a backlog of deferred maintenance reaching \$30 million, Hanks, who works under Batten and with Sirmon, said that doesn't include such aesthetic items as dilapidated entrances, ceiling tiles, flooring and bathroom fixtures that are original to the buildings and substandard.

"They funded whatever they're going to fund, and whatever they didn't roll over to the next, so we have a list of capital improvement projects that have been submitted to the legislature," Hanks said. "So what we're trying to do now is attack it a different way and do a complete facility."

The Marion Readiness Center, home to the 4th Battalion 118th Infantry Regiment, is the best facility in the Pee Dee. Built in 1978, it has a new roof, windows, HVAC and kitchen appliances. The unit received direct federal aid after serving certain qualifying missions.

"This is where we'd like our facilities to be at," Hanks said walking in the open drill hall. "There's some things we need to do; we need to redo the bathrooms, just modernize. But that wouldn't be on our list considering all the other issues we have. We'd like to be in a place where we say, 'This is a dated latrine; let's upgrade it or replace it.'"

In Florence, home to the 51st Military Police Battalion, the need is clear from the outside.

The parking lot is crumbling, the entrance is

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s ragged and much of the
o inside is worn.

t "I think it potentially
p could affect recruiting,"
7 Hanks said. "When you
1 have a person that's inter-
i ested in being a soldier in
7 the South Carolina Guard
1 and they walk into a fa-
- cility that's in the current
- state that some of them
- are, the question in their
- mind may be whether they
- want to join an organiza-
- tion that maintains their
- facilities at this state."

f During a walk around the
p complex, Sirmon noticed
p the 43-year-old facility's
p electrical panel was a Fed-
p eral Pacific Electric compa-
p ny model. Federal Pacific, a
p common manufacturer in
p the 1950s through 1980s,
p is no longer around after
p a lawsuit found the pan-
p els posed significant risk
p of fire because of defective
p components that did not
p meet UL standards.

"This is bad news on
commercial and residen-
tial," Sirmon said. "There's
problems with the break-
ers, the breakers falling out,
not tripping like they're de-
signed to, which obviously
creates a fire hazard. When
we find them, we put in

work orders to get them re-
placed, but again it comes
down to a funding issue."

Upgrading that panel
isn't part of that \$30 mil-
lion capital improvement
list, but Hanks says it will
be added.

While the Florence Read-
iness Center might burn
down if a breaker fails to
trip, part of the Timmons-
ville Readiness Center
exterior may fall off soon
because of foundation
problems.

Sirmon said the Guard is
still investigating the foun-
dation problem, which
could be a result of ground
settling. Regardless of the
cause, the cost estimate to
stabilize the foundation is
hundreds of thousands of
dollars.

"The rule of thumb is
about a quarter of an inch,
and you can see it sur-
passes that," Sirmon said
about the visible cracks.
"The structure itself, the
skeleton is steel, but it's

not good having this."

Hanks said the Guard
will put attention toward
the issue soon since it was
recently discovered.

Timmons ville is home to

the Palmetto Regulators of
the 133rd Military Police
Company.

A lack of space is just as
much an issue as condi-
tions are at readiness cen-
ters. Current facilities total
1.76 million gross square
feet, but 4.67 million gross
square feet are needed to
meet current demands.

Hanks said readiness
centers serve as places
for troops to gather and
train, house equipment,
administrative functions
and even host private
events. During disasters,
the troops stage at the fa-
cilities and may even have
to live there if conditions
require.

In Williamsburg County,
the 59-year-old Heming-
way facility is home to a
detachment of the 1178th
Forward Support Com-
pany and some 70 soldiers.
It's also a portrait of a
readiness center just hang-
ing on. It features original
single-pane windows, a
roof in need of repair, no
dedicated female facilities
and an unsecure server
room door that stays open
to prevent overheating.

"You might say 'You're





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here just for Saturday and Sunday, and you don't spend the night; what's the big deal?' Well, it limits them on doing physical training ... we typically do PT, then shower and go into the drill day," Hanks said, noting that the unit's 15 female soldiers only have one shower. "The soldiers are here because they want to support their communities, but it's hard when you come to a facility like this to have pride in your facility."

A facility like Hemingway may be consolidated, possibly into its Myrtle Beach counterpart in the future. New regional readiness centers would be larger for multiple units to train out of and be more efficient. Officials said major reinvestment dollars will be distributed based on a facility's future use.

"We're going to prioritize that funding to our most critical facilities," Batten said. "But also the heavier investments being put into the ones we know that we're going to retain for the long term."

Funding future

The budget approved by the House that goes before the Senate this week has \$2 million allocated for armory operations from the general fund. With federal and other funds, that number bumps up to \$4.5 million for the readiness centers under the purview of Adjutant General Bob Livingston.

If two-thirds of the Senate approves the bond bill, which also includes \$221 million for higher education, then it would still need House approval and the governor's signature, the latter of which it won't get.

Gov. Nikki Haley has made it clear that she would veto the bond bill.

In January, Haley requested \$500,000 in recurring funds for "maintenance

of regional armories" in her proposed budget included and \$2.1 million in one-time money for maintenance. Haley didn't mention the armories or higher education in a speech at the S.C. GOP convention Saturday, but reiterated that the legislature should use some of the \$400 million in new revenue instead of debt to address the problem.

"Running up the credit has never been who we are or what we do; we don't run up debt in South Carolina. No more debt," Haley said to an applauding crowd. "Now the Senate is coming up with a bond bill; now they are trying to raise the debt again."

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh K. Leatherman Sr., a Republican from Florence, received a 16-5 vote of support for the bill in the committee. The bill goes before the full Senate this week along with the budget. Leatherman said "the need is there" for the "education and defense bond bill."

The \$15 million for readiness centers and higher education funding were the only two aspects that survived the House of Representatives' proposed \$500 million bond bill, which lost support shortly after it was introduced in March.

If additional funding doesn't come, officials say they'll make do with what they receive, make incremental headway on the backlog and continue to address problems as they arise.

"We've gotten a lot of positive support; there's no doubt that the state legislature supports the Guard and they want to put our soldiers in the best facilities that the state can afford," Batten said. "I think it's just a matter of balancing priorities within the state."





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Pee Dee area National Guard Armories	
<i>Pee Dee National Guard armories ranked by condition</i>	<i>Pee Dee National Guard armories ranked by condition and space requirement average</i>
Falling	Falling
Dillon	Hemingway
Poor	Hartsville
Florence	Dillon
Timmonsville	Bennettsville
Hemingway	Kingstree
Bennettsville	Timmonsville
Hartsville	Poor
Cheraw	Florence
Fair	Marion
Kingstree	Mullins
Mullins	Darlington
Darlington	Good
Good	Cheraw
Marion	



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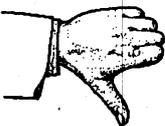
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Let's make day of giving big success in Pee Dee

The Big Day is almost here. For the past three months, we hope you have been reading about the Big Give Pee Dee. In two days — Tuesday, that is — the region-wide designated day of giving arrives. The Eastern Carolina Community Foundation is the organizing agency for the 24-hour online initiative that will benefit 52 participating nonprofits. Thumbs up to those who already are prepared to contribute. We strongly urge everyone to dig into pockets, wallets and bank accounts to help those who help others. Big gifts and modest ones will be appreciated. With a minimum donation of \$25, anyone can be a philanthropist on this day. Beginning at midnight Tuesday, donations can be made at biggivepeedee.org. The Eastern Carolina Community Foundation offices will be open for refreshments and fun Tuesday at 154 W. Evans St. Volunteers will be happy to assist anyone who needs help making a donation on a computer. Other community foundations across the nation will carry out their own day of giving simultaneously. We hope the big day is a big success.



Thumbs down to gridlock in Columbia. There's tension between the governor and the S.C. Senate. There seems to be some division within the Senate, even within the



Republican Party. As a result, some bills have stalled. The road plan seems to have come to a screeching halt. A 26-19 vote on Thursday was "an indictment of the entire Senate," Sen. Joel Lourie, a Columbia Democrat, told the Senate. "I'm ashamed of what we did today," he said. "I think it's a very sad day for the Senate. It's a sad day for South Carolina." There's open talk of private discussions going on. We need sunshine. If senators can't agree among themselves on a plan, how are they going to get agreement from representatives in the House, which has passed its own plan that is far different than the one the Senate is considering? Even if somebody could wave a magic wand and get the two chambers to agree on something — anything — the bill almost certainly would be vetoed by Gov. Nikki Haley, and there would seem to be no chance of overriding that veto. So the roads that are in such shameful condition are just going to crumble some more. Lawmakers need to hear from constituents, who need to deliver a strong message that inaction is completely unacceptable.

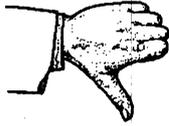
Thumbs down to the body camera bill that the Senate





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passed Wednesday. The bill gives police far too much power to withhold the videos from the public. A version that we hoped everybody could live with came out of committee and was sent to the floor, but amendments sent the bill in the wrong

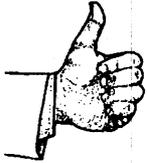


direction. Transparency lost out to privacy.

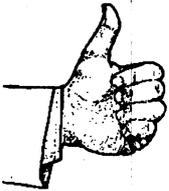
Thumbs up to Duke Energy, which announced Thursday that it will dig up 4.2 million tons of coal ash from two locations at its Robinson Nuclear Plant just outside Hartsville. Duke plans to store the ash in a new onsite landfill. The ash is now stored in an inactive, unlined basin, where the ash reaches down 18 feet into the groundwater.



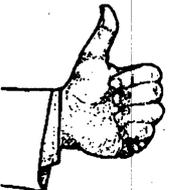
Thumbs up to the United Way of Florence County for recognizing Mike Skarupa on Wednesday at the organization's annual luncheon and awards celebration. The PGBA president and CEO received the prestigious Ashpy P. Lowrimore Award, named for a community-minded banker who gave generously of his talents and time. Skarupa exemplified everything that Lowrimore stood for, said E.J. Newby, president of the United Way of Florence County. We're pleased to hear that the United Way of Florence County is only \$20,000 away from reaching a goal of \$1.2 million for this year's campaign.



Thumbs up to ArtFields, which will wrap up its third annual, nine-day extravaganza today in Lake City. The \$110,000 in prize money will be awarded this evening. This is your last chance to experience something that has to be seen to be believed. The quality of the art that has been on public display in 39 public venues has been impressive. The spirit in the community has been special.



Thumbs up to the person who returned a lost wallet, an act that has restored a reader's faith. "Moral fiber is the capacity to do what is right, no matter what the circumstance," wrote Carolyn Howard of Florence. "In the world today, there doesn't seem like there's much of that going on anywhere. But on April 16, one kind and honest soul changed my outlook and has given me hope. Thank you to the woman who found and turned in my wallet (fully intact) at the Florence Walmart on Beltline Drive. Please know that your integrity has restored my faith in humanity. I am so very grateful."



Thumbs up, thumbs down is a regular feature of the Morning News and appears each Saturday on our Opinion page. We seek nominations for both good and bad deeds from our readers. Send nominations to us by email at letters@florencenews.com. Be sure use the word "thumb" in the subject and include a contact number. Thumbs can also be mailed to us c/o The Morning News, 310 S. Dargan St., Florence, S.C., 29506.



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Letter to

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Pass the domestic violence bill

I'm pleased that our state legislature is continuing to engage on the critically important issue of domestic violence prevention in our state. Just last week, the House passed its version of a domestic violence bill, HB 3433, and last month the Senate passed its own domestic violence prevention bill, S3. I want to thank Speaker Jay Lucas for his leadership on this issue and for supporting a bill that will help protect domestic violence victims across the state.

South Carolina's domestic violence survivors have waited too long for their fellow South Carolinians to come together and help protect victims of abuse. Between 2007 and 2011, women in South Carolina

were twice as likely to be shot and killed by their intimate partners as the average American woman, and the rate is increasing. And a lot of that is due to the fact that the presence of a firearm in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be shot and killed.

I urge our legislature to follow in the footsteps of Speaker Lucas' leadership and continue its critical work on domestic violence by acting quickly to send the strongest domestic violence prevention bill possible to Gov. Nikki Haley's desk. The lives of countless women and children across the state depend on it.

MINISTER BUQUILLA ERVIN-CANNON
Florence