

Title: **Haley endorses Collins**
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Haley endorses Collins

Governor
impressed
by his efforts
in state House

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LIBERTY - When state Rep. Neal Collins first met Nikki Haley, it was during her run for her first term as governor, at a campaign appearance in Anderson attended by just four people.

He came away impressed with what he heard.

"We said if her messages gets across, she can win," Collins told a crowd of about 200

at a fund-raiser reception to kick off his campaign for a second term.

Haley, who has become one of the Republican Party's rising stars since then, traveled to Liberty on Tuesday to endorse him after being impressed with his efforts as a chairman of the freshman class in the House last year.

"You won't see me go to every district, you won't see me

endorse every candidate," she said.

"He's shown leadership, he's shown independence, he's shown courage."

Speaking at the Pickens County School District's Career and Technology Center on the same day it was announced she had been tapped to deliver the GOP response to President Obama's State of the Union Address next week, Ha-

ley touted the state's economic growth and praised Collins for his efforts on several key legislative initiatives.

"He stood right with me every time on ethics reform," she said, and he bucked the status quo in opposing the idea of borrowing \$500 million for roads when the state had a \$1

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Collins

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billion surplus.

She also applauded his efforts during a marathon legislative session over the Confederate flag, another issue they agreed on.

Many of Collins' constituents still are unhappy with his vote to take the flag down from the Statehouse grounds,

with about 20 protesters waving the rebel banner outside the entrance to the venue.

Haley acknowledged the protesters in her remarks, saying, "I want to thank those protesters out there, because my husband and my brother fought for the right for them to protest."

She declined to speak to re-

porters but shook hands and posed for photos with dozens of people afterward.

State Sen. Larry Martin, who attended the event along with other members of the legislative delegation, said he appreciated the governor's tribute to Collins and was happy to hear that she will be delivering the Republican response to the State of the Union address.

"That's not only a terrific honor (for Haley) but it's an honor for our state, and I think it's indicative of the type leadership she's provided in some very tough, tough circumstances that our state has faced in the past year and handled it so well," he said.

Title: **Most doctors will be required to use prescription database**
 Author: SEANNA ADCOX ASSOCIATED PRESS
 Size: 86.8 square inch
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Most doctors will be required to use prescription database

Announcement will go out
in February on mandate

SEANNA ADCOX

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA - Most doctors in South Carolina will soon be required to consult a statewide database of patients' medical history as a way to combat the state's rampant prescription painkiller problem.

The changes will direct any doctor who wants to bill either Medicaid or the state health plan to use the database that's been voluntary since 2008, said Christian Soura, director of the state's Department of Health and Human Services.

Announcements will likely go out in February on the mandate, which starts

April 1, he told The Associated Press.

The South Carolina Medical Association supports the change, but "there will be some doctors unhappy about yet another step thrown into the mix," said its CEO, state Rep. Todd Atwater.

"Some say it will slow me down another minute and half I don't have, but really?" said Atwater, R-Lexington. "Sometimes you have to have a little inconvenience to do the right thing and get some of these opioids off the streets."

Dr. Ryan Hoffman, director of emergency services with Bon Secours St. Francis Health System in Greenville,

said the hospital has been using the Prescription Monitoring System for the past few years and it's been useful in reducing inappropriate prescriptions.

"We do consult it for patients where some concern is raised, whether through behavior, history or presentation," he said, "like if a patient has been in the ER multiple times a year, always with pain complaints."

It also helps patients with legitimate needs, he said, such as the patient who has run out of medication but their doc-

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Doctors

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tor is out of town because it enables physicians to confirm that he's only seeing one doctor and using the same pharmacy instead of "doctor shopping."

"It is a great service to find out if this person is truly a pain management patient getting something regularly," he said. "It's very reassuring."

On the other hand, Hoffman said he's not sure requiring it for every patient is a good idea.

The site is cumbersome to access, eats up a lot of provider time, and is not integrated with St. Francis' medical records system, he said.

"I do know we have a tremendous problem with prescription opiate abuse, but I'm not sure it's necessary for every patient. It takes five minutes to search that database every time you write that prescription," he said.

"And now you're asking the doctor to be in the position of enforcement to some degree without any authority."

Dr. Kevin Walker, director of the division of pain management for Greenville Health System, said the system is "a good

way of gathering information on patients because we do have an epidemic of opioid abuse and use in this state as well as nationally."

Walker said his office consults the system regularly, but agrees that checks probably don't need to be done every time with every patient.

"We have 20 to 25 new patients a day and we do this on every new patient," he said. "We spot check other patients on a random basis."

Because his practice specializes in treating patients for pain, problems such as doctor shopping do surface, he said, but only in less than 10 percent of patients. Other specialties, such as primary care, would find far fewer problems, he said.

Walker said that while he's concerned about legitimate patients not getting the pain medication they need, the system is a way to protect them as well by proving that they aren't getting too many prescriptions.

But even those who are addicted often get that way by seeking help for legitimate pain conditions, he said. So the pro-

gram also offers the chance to prevent serious addiction from happening in the first place.

Dr. C. Wendell James III, chairman of the department of anesthesiology at GHS, said he used to work in another state where doctors had no way of knowing how many prescriptions a patient got until the enforcement division showed up. This system makes much more sense, he said.

"What I see is this system ... will help curb (a patient getting more and more narcotics) quite a bit," he said. "It's a prevention approach, not an enforcement mentality."

The mandate will come three years after Inspector General Patrick Maley recommended it in a report, describing high-prescribers as either motivated by money or naively helping "doctor shoppers."

In response to his report, Gov. Nikki Haley created the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Council, which similarly concluded one year ago that mandating the database's use is

key to combatting abuse of OxyContin, Percocet and other opioids.

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Similar mandates enacted in New York and Tennessee in 2012 resulted in drops of 75 percent and 36 percent, respectively, a year later in patients seeing multiple doctors for the same drugs, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2014 Vital Signs report.

That report ranked South Carolina 11th highest nationwide in prescribing painkillers, with 102 prescriptions written for every 100 people.

"When you look at the impact of other states with similar policies, it's harder to say, 'I don't want to spend another minute or two in front of the computer,'" Soura said of doctors' decreasing resistance.

Technology improvements to the database were critical to gaining their support and — according to officials — the reason for delaying the mandate.

A law passed in June 2014 required pharmacists to report daily on the controlled substances they sell, to ensure the database is regularly updated. But a clause specified that doc-

tors and pharmacists don't have to actually consult it before prescribing or dispensing medicine.

According to the council's report six months later, just 21 percent of South Carolina's prescribers had registered for the Prescription Monitoring Program and few of them actually used it.

Officials say that's partly because registering required filling out paperwork, getting it notarized and mailing the application to DHEC. And only the prescribing doctor had a login to access the database.

Under improvements that went live Nov. 23, doctors can register online and set up an account for a delegate, such as a nurse, to run the queries. The new system also summarizes patients' prescription history, calculates their daily opioid dose and generates an alert if their prescriptions already exceed the recommended amount, said Lisa Thomson, DHEC's drug control director.

The changes were "about making the system user-friendly and not disrupting work flows," said Bryan Amick, pharmacy director at the state's Medicaid agency and a member of the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Council.

South Carolina will join 29 states that require doctors or pharmacists to consult a prescription database in at least certain circumstances. Nevada was the first to do so in 2007. Such a database exists in every state except Missouri, according to the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws.

The decree will affect the vast majority of doctors in South Carolina, though the exact percentage is unclear. About 1 million South Carolinians get their health care through Medicaid, while the state health plan covers more than 460,000 people, when combining public employees, retirees, their spouses and dependents.

Liv Osby contributed to this report

Beginning this spring, most doctors will be required to register and use a state database of patients' prescription history. Here's a look at South Carolina's painkiller abuse problem and current use of the Prescription Monitoring Program:

- » Last fiscal year, 291.4 million opiates were dispensed statewide to 1.2 million patients. Compared to the previous year, that's 18.6 million more opiates to 670 fewer patients.
- » In 2014, at least 487 South Carolinians died by accidentally overdosing on a prescription drug. That's up from 236 in 2013 and 225 in 2012. The state's public health agency doesn't track how many of those were painkiller prescriptions.
- » The database helped lead to 400 arrests last fiscal year. Charges included controlled substance fraud, doctor shopping and prescription forging. Health care professionals made up a quarter of those arrested. The agency doesn't track case outcomes.
- » About 4,300 doctors have registered to use the database. That's little change from last year. However, those registered are consulting it more often. Doctors and pharmacists ran more than 1 million queries on patients in the fiscal year ending June 30. That's nearly 417,000 more than the previous year. The increase follows a June 2014 law allowing them to authorize a delegate, such as a nurse, to run the query for them. The agency didn't breakdown the query numbers by doctors and pharmacists.
- » That law also required doctors to complete two credit hours of training on responsibly prescribing opioids as part of their license renewal. So far, more than 7,500 doctors have done so.
- » The annual operating cost of the more user-friendly database launched Nov. 23 is \$102,000.

Title: **Gowdy kicks off SC's presidential endorsement race**
 Author: ANDREW SHAIN
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Gowdy kicks off SC's presidential endorsement race

ANDREW SHAIN

THE STATE

The major S.C. Republican presidential endorsement race is about to take off.

Last week, candidates fought for backers of former GOP White House hopeful Lindsey Graham soon after the U.S. senator from Seneca left the race. And in previous months, Republican candidates have dotted their campaigns with members of the state General Assembly.

Now one of South Carolina's top Republicans is ready to line up formally behind a candidate.

U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy of Spartanburg endorsed Florida Sen. Marco Rubio on Tuesday in Clinton, Iowa, the first stop of a two-day swing through the first state to choose presidential fa-

vorites, Rubio campaign spokesman Alex Conant said.

The congressman's announcement, along with the shrinking field, should lead to decisions by other powerful

S.C. Republicans, including U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of North Charleston and Gov. Nikki Haley, who have been described as the "crown jewels" of GOP presi-

dential endorsers.

Gowdy's backing could help Rubio with conservative voters in Iowa and South Carolina, where the senator is polling third behind New York billionaire Donald Trump and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, Winthrop University political scientist Scott Huffman said.

Gowdy, a former prosecutor, won over GOP supporters nationwide for his leadership of the special House panel on the Benghazi attack that questioned Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton in her role as secretary of state.

"There's a reason why the first appearance is in Iowa," said Walter Whetsell, a S.C. political consultant who worked for former Texas Gov. Rick Perry's presidential campaign.

And those die-hard conservatives are more likely to go to the polls in the South's first primary on Feb. 20, Huffman said. "Voters who might have bypassed Rubio might give him a second look," he said. "Hard-core Republicans see Gowdy for standing up against the Clinton machine, and people who respect Gowdy for that will pay attention."

Gowdy's endorsement of Rubio has led to speculation about

whether Scott, who polls find is among the state's most popular Republican politicians, will also back the Florida senator.

Scott and Gowdy appeared with Rubio at Upstate stops on Dec. 19 — the first time the pair showed up at an event for an individual White House candidate since the presidential town halls they hosted concluded this month.

The appearance was not a formal sign of support for Rubio, Scott's campaign said.

Scott will not endorse a White House hopeful until after he and House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., host a forum on poverty in Columbia Jan. 9 that will feature seven presidential candidates, Scott's campaign said. Rubio is scheduled to attend the event.

Other top S.C. Republicans whose endorsements could help candidates include Graham and U.S. Reps. Jeff Duncan of Laurens and Tom Rice, who comes from a large GOP stronghold in Horry County, Whetsell said.

The intentions from Haley, perhaps the state's most sought-after endorsement, remain unclear. The governor has mentioned that she might back a presidential candidate but has not offered a timetable.



Trey Gowdy,
R-S.C. Rep.

Title: **Haley to speak in Liberty**
 Author: RON BARNETT RBARNETT@GREENVILLENEWS.COM
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Haley to speak in Liberty

Private reception for donors will follow

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Gov. Nikki Haley is scheduled to speak at a fundraising reception for state Rep. Neal Collins at the Pickens County Career and Technology Center on Tuesday, according to Collins.



Gov. Nikki Haley

Following a private reception for donors of \$1,000 and \$500 at 5:30 p.m., a free general reception will be held from 6-7 p.m., with entertainment and food provided.

Children are welcome.

Haley and Collins, R-Easley, are scheduled to speak.

The Career and Technology Center is at 990 Chastain Road Liberty, Liberty.

Collins, an attorney, is starting the second year of his first term representing District 5.

Title: **Haley to give GOP response**
Author: The Associated Press
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Haley to give GOP response

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley will give the Republican response to a State of the Union address that is sure to include President Barack Obama's plans for tightening gun sales, seven months after both spoke at funerals for the victims of a massacre at a historic black church in Charleston.

House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced Tuesday that Haley will speak for Republicans following Obama's Jan. 12 speech.

The South Carolina-born daughter of Indian immigrants is the state's first female and first minority governor. At 43, Haley is also the country's youngest governor.

"In a year when the country is crying out for a positive vision and alternative to the status quo, Gov. Haley is the exact right choice," Ryan said in a statement.

Haley becomes the third Republican woman ever to give the response.

Title: **Officials continue search for education solutions**
 Author: BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER, DERREK ASBERRY AND
 Size: 71.92 square inch
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Officials continue search for education solutions

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Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles about the upcoming session of the South Carolina General Assembly. Each member of Aiken County's delegation spoke with the *Aiken Standard* for an interview, except for Don Wells, who did not return comment by press time.

South Carolina lawmakers are still trying to find a way to execute the state Supreme Court's decision more than one year after the high court ruled students in mostly high minority, impoverished rural

school districts had not been receiving a "minimally adequate education" – the constitutional standard the court set in 1999.

The 3-2 ruling, which stemmed from a lawsuit brought by rural school districts against the state of South Carolina, requires legislators to take action; however, what kind of action lawmakers should take is up for debate, likely pushing off any action on the matter until the General Assembly's next session.

Sen. Nikki Setzler, D-Lexington, who

Please see **SCHOOLS**, Page 11A

Coming up:

Sunday: Ethics reform

Monday: Infrastructure

Today: Education

Wednesday: Domestic violence

Thursday: Guns

Friday: Body cameras

Saturday: Legislative goals

SCHOOLS

CONTINUED from 1A

serves on a special study committee set to look at what actions the Legislature should take next, said the ruling is a "tremendous issue in this state that needs to be addressed."

"A child's education should not be dependent on where they live in this state," he said. "Each child in this state, regardless of where they live, should be entitled and is entitled to a quality education. Addressing what the Supreme

Court has done is going to require, again, a very bipartisan effort to address the issues, and I think those issues involve early childhood

and we've put early childhood and 4K in place in many of those districts, we call them the plaintiff districts."

Supreme Court ruling

The 22-year-old Abbeville lawsuit ruling initially pinned Senate and House members, even Gov. Nikki Haley, against the

high court, challenging whether Justices could order lawmakers to take action, and take action in a specific timeframe.

Sen. Tom Young, R-Aiken, said at the end of the day, "we have to try to move the ball forward and find a solution – I'm in favor

of that," adding both the House and Senate have set up committees designated to discuss the high court's decision. "We have to find a

solution, and several ideas being considered (include) providing low interest loans to impoverished school districts to address their needs. ... I am hopeful that we will be able to get done before late May or early June. If we don't get it done by late May or

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early June, it's not going to happen in 2016," Young said.

Rep. Bill Hixon, R-North Augusta, said House Speaker Jay Lucas is working with the

Supreme Court on what kind of action to take next, in addition to school funding and ensuring all 46 counties are as "equal as possible."

"The committee has suggestions on how to make things better. Doing it in that timeframe is the problem," Hixon said.

The court's ruling doesn't just raise questions on how to allocate money to these school districts, but also talks teacher retention and facilities, Setzler said.

"I think it involves teacher shortages, getting quality teachers into those districts, retention of those teachers and those teachers salaries," Setzler said. "I think it includes transportation. The districts tell the committee

they can't get bus drivers because they can't pay them enough. They don't have the population and the people to drive the buses. The very first

meeting we had testimony that we have children that are in kindergarten and elementary school who are on a bus, in some cases, an hour and a half in the morning

and an hour and a half in the afternoon. That is horrendous."

Setzler added, "It is ridiculous that we have that situation in the state of South Caro-

lina and then we've got buildings. These buildings are dilapidated. They don't have the resources and the ability to modernize the buildings. They don't have the technology. So it's a whole myriad, again, as we call it a menu of things that we are going to have to do to address those."

Cost of education

State lawmakers, along with facility improvements and teacher retention, will have to also discuss whether to modernize the state's public school funding formula which makes up the base student cost.

"The S.C. Department of Education is seeking \$150 per pupil increase in the base student funding, from \$2,200 to \$2,370 – that's a sizable increase," House Rep. Bill Taylor, R-Aiken, said. "Money alone isn't the answer to our education challenges."

But both Setzler and Young added the funding formula, which hasn't changed since the 1970s, is outdated and needs tweaking.

"Based student cost is currently underfunded probably by \$5

million, so I would absolutely support raising the based student cost but I think that's only a part of it," Setzler said. "I think it's still teacher retention, getting teachers there, technology, all of those things that are important."

House Rep. Bill Clyburn, D-Aiken, said South Carolina is in need of a comprehensive plan from preschool through college and universities.

"We need to reform our funding structure; it's obsolete, it's archaic," he said. "It's something we've been doing for years, and it's not fulfilling the purpose. We need to change our funding formula (this) session and we need to improve. We need to improve with our education system start with our teachers, the salaries need to be updated; and we need

to make sure wherever you live in South Carolina, regardless of what county, regardless of what tax base, every child gets a good quality education."

Taylor said he recently witnessed the efforts of officials in Memphis, Tennessee, where "innovation is turning failing public schools into achieving schools and preparing kids for life."

"And, they do it with far less money than the average South Carolina public school," Taylor said. "If success can happen in Memphis, it can happen here."

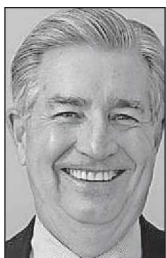
Taylor added lawmakers should also look at charter schools just as much as public schools.

"Charter schools are public schools in every way, yet they receive less per pupil money than traditional public schools," he said. "Despite these challenges, many of the entrepreneurial schools are thriving."

For House Rep. Chris Corley, R-Graniteville, money isn't always the answer.

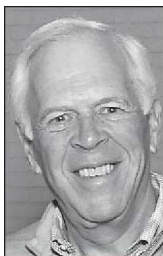
"At some point, we have to stop and understand that throwing money at this problem is not the solution," he said. "The biggest problem that schools in (South Carolina) have is that we are bound to absurd federal mandates. If we were to eliminate or greatly scale back the State Department of Education, create county elections for the position of superintendent and restore some home rule to the individual school districts, I think this would help a great deal."

Christina Cleveland and Derrek Asberry are reporters with the *Aiken Standard*. **Maayan Schechter** is the digital news editor with the *Aiken Standard*.



Setzler

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**Young****Hixon****Clyburn****Corley****Taylor**

Title: **More funding to keep dams safe a good idea**

Author:

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More funding to keep dams safe a good idea

At an additional cost of \$1.8 million per year, it is difficult to envision a rationale for South Carolina to not improve its dam safety program in the wake of last fall's torrential rains that caused nearly three dozen dams to fail.

A bill presented by South Carolina Speaker of the House Jay Lucas would nearly quadruple the budget for the program that's administered by the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, according to a report by *The State* newspaper. The department's current budget is about \$470,000, and it is woefully inadequate.

Unfortunately, South Carolina got irrefutable proof of just how inadequate the program now is. When October's 1,000-year rainfall event dumped more than 20 inches of water on parts of the state, 32 dams failed causing significant property damage and putting lives at risk.

An analysis of the state's dam safety program revealed that the state's network of 2,400 regulated dams is not inspected frequently enough and the staff that does the work is far too small. In addition, too many dams in the state are not being inspected at all.

In a detailed report in November, *Greenville News* investigative reporter Rick Brundrett revealed that DHEC has only 6.75 employee positions dedicated to inspecting all of the state's regulated dams. Unbelievably, that's an improvement from 2005 when only 1.5 full-time positions were in the program. At times, the program's budget has been as low as \$200,000.

The national model calls for dam inspections every year for those structures that pose the greatest risk to life and property if they fail; every two years for the next class of dams, and

every five years for the least risky dams. Brundrett's analysis found that at least a dozen dams that were under emergency order for repairs after the fall's floods had not been inspected in the past five years or more.

Such a lag should not be allowed to continue.

The dangers of a breached dam are far too great for South Carolina not to take this seriously. Although this state has a history of requiring agencies to operate on bare-bones budgets and kicking problems down the road, the need to fix this funding disparity should be obvious.

As DHEC director Catherine Heigel said, "We do have a role at the end of the day to keep people safe."

To their credit, lawmakers appear to readily see that need, as well.

Lucas' bill would expand the office by 13 staff members, allowing them to properly inspect and monitor the state's regulated dams and increase the number of dams that the agency inspects.

It is hard to imagine that this legislation would not get the support it deserves. The total cost to recover from the October deluge exceeds \$1 billion. Certainly only a fraction of that would have been prevented had the dams been inspected more routinely, but it seems worth the relatively small cost to make the dams safer.

Once Lucas' bill is passed, the Legislature and the governor need to follow through with funding.

A spokeswoman for Gov. Nikki Haley acknowledged after the flood that there's a funding gap in the agency and said that there would likely be more money for the program in the executive budget. That needs to happen.

The reality is, South Carolina gets heavy



Title: **More funding to keep dams safe a good idea**

Author:

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rains throughout the year. The 1,000-year rain
might have been a freak occurrence, but it
doesn't mean the state shouldn't be prepared for
the next significant rainfall. Ensuring the state's
dams are properly inspected, and that more of
them are inspected, is simply common sense.
This should be an easy vote, and it should
happen very early in the upcoming legislative
session.

– **Greenville News**

Title: **Newlawmayenable charities tohelp moreSouthCarolina floodvictims**
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX The AssociatedPress
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New law may enable charities to help more South Carolina flood victims

BY SEANNA ADCOX

The Associated Press

A new law written to assist Habitat for Humanity's home-building mission may be a boon in South Carolina's post-flood rebuilding efforts.

The law that took effect New Year's Day allows charities that build or renovate homes for families in need to buy those construction materials free of sales tax. When they passed the exemption overwhelmingly in June, legislators could not have foreseen the benefit to a state ravaged by historic flooding months later.

The measure's main sponsor, Rep. Garry Smith, said he introduced it because it didn't make sense to tax the work of a charity that seeks to build homes and hope in communities.

"Obviously, we had no idea anything like that would happen," Smith, R-Simpsonville,

said of the October storm. "If it does provide some benefit to people who have lost their homes, that's great. Every little bit does help."

Greg Thomas, director of the state's association for 36 Habitat affiliates, called the law's timing "an absolute blessing."

While the state sales tax is 6 percent, local taxes push it to at least 7 percent in most counties.

Eliminating that cost on construction materials will save Habitat between \$2,500 and \$4,000 for each home built. Ordinarily, Habitat affiliates build roughly 100 homes and repair another 100 annually statewide, Thomas said.

"That's extra that could be used for additional repairs on other homes, particularly in this flood period and disaster-response time," he said.

It's unclear how much the law could help flood victims. Other charities didn't know about the exemption when contacted by The Associated Press, though they were eager to learn more.

"No one is talking it up yet," Thomas said.

How the exemption applies may help explain that. The law defines needy as individuals or families making up to 80 percent of their county's median income. In hard-hit Richland County, for example, household income needs to be less than \$39,000; in Charleston County, less than \$41,000; in Clarendon County, less than \$21,200, according to Census data.

"It's almost poverty-level folks, so if you're a middle-

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EXEMPTION

income family with damage, those homes aren't eligible," Thomas said.

For Habitat-built homes, determining eligibility isn't an issue. Since the charity acts as the mortgage company, the family's financials are reviewed before approval. But it's an uncomfortable question for post-flood work, which often involves mold remediation and new flooring, insulation, and drywall, Thomas said.

"Without having a charitable organization ask, 'How much money do you make?' you have to go on

the value of the home and make assumptions," he said.

Flood victims in the 24 counties covered by October's emergency declaration have until Monday to register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for federal assistance. But that aid is limited.

As of Dec. 27, FEMA had inspected nearly 81,300 structures for damage, resulting in \$78 million in approved aid for 26,108 applicants. That's an average of less than \$3,000 per

family. The maximum grant a family can receive is \$33,000, according to the agency.

The One SC relief fund, which Gov. Nikki Haley launched in November, awarded \$500,000 to 13 charities in its initial round of grants announced Dec. 21, with each receiving between \$25,000 and \$150,000. Those charities, including two Habitat affiliates, are providing an additional \$2.5 million total from other sources to rebuild or remove mold from about 350 homes, said

JoAnn Turnquist, president of Central Carolina Community Foundation, which is housing the fund.

The nonprofit is not releasing how much more money has been raised, though Turnquist says people continue to donate. Charities have until Friday to apply for a second-round grant.

"We're hopeful the fund will continue as long as it's needed," she said. "We've been told to prepare for a two-to-three-year recovery period."

Title: **Law might help charities in assisting more victims**
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX The AssociatedPress
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FLOOD OF 2015

Law might help charities in assisting more victims

BY SEANNA ADCOX

The Associated Press

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Eliminating that cost on construction materials will save Habitat between \$2,500 and \$4,000 for each home built. Ordinarily, Habitat affiliates build roughly 100 homes and repair another 100 annually statewide, Thomas said.

"That's extra that could be used for additional repairs on other homes, particularly in this flood period and disaster-response time," he said.

It's unclear how much the law could help flood victims. Other charities didn't know

about the exemption when contacted by The Associated Press, though they were eager to learn more.

"No one is talking it up yet," Thomas said.

How the exemption applies may help explain that. The law defines needy as individuals or families making up to 80 percent of their county's median income. In hard-hit Richland County, for example, household income needs to be less than \$39,000; in Charleston County, less than \$41,000;

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in Clarendon County, less than \$21,200, according to Census data.

"It's almost poverty-level folks, so if you're a middle-income family with damage, those homes aren't eligible," Thomas said.

For Habitat-built homes, determining eligibility isn't an issue. Since the charity acts as the mortgage company, the family's financials are reviewed before approval. But it's an uncomfortable question for post-flood work, which often involves mold remediation and

new flooring, insulation, and drywall, Thomas said.

"Without having a charitable organization ask, 'How much money do you make?' you have to go on the value of the home and make assumptions," he said.

Flood victims in the 24 counties covered by October's emergency declaration have until Monday to register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for federal assistance. But that aid is limited.

As of Dec. 27, FEMA had inspected nearly 81,300 structures for

damage, resulting in \$78 million in approved aid for 26,108 applicants.

That's an average of less than \$3,000 per family. The maximum grant a family can receive is \$33,000, according to the agency.

The One SC relief fund, which Gov. Nikki Haley launched in November, awarded \$500,000 to 13 charities in its initial round of grants announced Dec. 21, with each receiving between \$25,000 and \$150,000. Those charities, including two Habitat affiliates, are providing an additional

\$2.5 million total from other sources to rebuild or remove mold from about 350 homes, said JoAnn Turnquist, president of Central Carolina Community Foundation, which is housing the fund.

The nonprofit is not releasing how much more money has been raised, though Turnquist says people continue to donate. Charities have until Friday to apply for a second-round grant.

"We're hopeful the fund will continue as long as it's needed," she said. "We've been told to prepare for a two-to-three-year recovery period."

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New law may enable charities to help more flood victims

BY SEANNA ADCOX

The Associated Press
COLUMBIA

A new law written to assist Habitat for Humanity's home-building mission may be a boon in South Carolina's post-flood rebuilding efforts.

The law that took effect New Year's Day allows charities that build or renovate homes for needy families to buy those construction materials free of sales tax. When they passed the exemption overwhelmingly in June, legislators could not have foreseen the benefit to a state ravaged by historic flooding months later.

The measure's main sponsor, Rep. Garry Smith, said he introduced it because it didn't make

sense to tax the work of a charity that seeks to build homes and hope in communities.

"Obviously, we had no idea anything like that would happen," Smith, R-Simpsonville, said of the October storm. "If it does provide some benefit to people who have lost their homes, that's great. Every little bit does help."

Greg Thomas, director of the state's association for 36 Habitat affiliates, called the law's timing "an absolute blessing."

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save Habitat between \$2,500 and \$4,000 for each home built. Ordinarily, Habitat affiliates build roughly 100 homes and repair another 100 annually statewide, Thomas said.

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