



Title: **Graham's 2016 consideration complicates SC picture**
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Graham's 2016 consideration complicates SC picture

Lays groundwork for potential run

By **Bill Barrow**
 and **Philip Elliott**

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina voters often think of themselves as presidential tie-breakers, enjoying their prime role as the next to cast ballots after Iowa's caucuses and New Hampshire's primary.

But what if there's a ringer in the race?

The state's senior senator, Republican Lindsey Graham, is flirting with running for president, an idea some initially saw as so unlikely that many thought his longtime Senate buddy John McCain was joking when he mentioned it the first time.

Graham is serious, launching a campaign-like

organization and starting to lay the groundwork for a bid. He



gave a well-received speech to Sen. Lindsey Graham the influential Republican Jewish Coalition last week in Washington. Next week, he is scheduled to visit California to meet with donors and then head to Iowa.

His potential entry into the race has put his state's political talent into a holding pattern. As they wait for Graham to decide

whether to run in a state carried by every GOP nominee since 1980, with Mitt Romney's loss to former House Speaker Newt Gingrich in 2012 the lone exception, they're debating among themselves whether he can—or should—mount a campaign.

"Everything's kind of frozen here right now, waiting to see what he'll do," said Warren Tompkins, a longtime Republican operative who ran South Carolina campaigns for President George W. Bush and Romney in 2012.

Added Tompkins' sometimes adversary, Richard Quinn, who ran McCain's 2000 campaign in the state: "I've been with (Graham) since he ran for Congress in '93, and whatever Lindsey does this cycle, I'll be in his corner."

Such loyalty shouldn't be viewed as a harbinger of Graham coasting to an easy win in South Carolina, however. Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack was one of the first candidates to enter—and then leave—the 2008 campaign, and Romney, who owns a vacation home in New Hampshire, came up short that same year in his adopted state's primary.

South Carolina is deeply conservative in the "up-

state" around Greenville and Spartanburg, less so near the state capital of Columbia, with a coastline that's home to thousands of retirees and members of the military who have moved from elsewhere, bringing their brand of GOP politics with them.

"When you come to South Carolina and win, it means you've checked off all the boxes: social conservative, fiscal conservative, strong defense, all of it," said Katon Dawson, a former state party chairman who backs former Texas Gov. Rick Perry in 2016.

Graham has not faced a serious challenge on his home turf in years. Dawson, who ran a super PAC that helped Graham easily dispatch a bevy of tea party challengers on his way to an easy re-election last fall, summed up the challenge: "Can he get folks here at home to look at him as something bigger than a senator?"

Graham has said he plans to assess his viability outside South Carolina, suggesting he will not run if he can't raise money and establish a network of support in Iowa and New Hampshire.

"I know him pretty well, and I don't think he would

get into this if he weren't giving it serious thought," Quinn said. "He would do extremely well in South Carolina, and I think he would exceed expectations elsewhere."

A fierce critic of President Barack Obama's foreign policy, Graham could have his biggest impact in forcing his Republican rivals to discuss foreign policy and military affairs. Vague assessments of foreign threats, such as that posed by Islamic State militants, will not be sufficient in head-to-head debates with Graham, who is a skilled debater after years of appearances on the television networks' Sunday political talk shows.

Graham's potential entry into the race may have stalled the state's talent from taking sides in the presidential sweepstakes for the moment. But the rest of the large GOP field is eager to contest the state.

Perry has made several trips to South Carolina. Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie all helped their South Carolina colleague, Nikki Haley, raise money for her successful re-election campaign last year.

Title: **Does it take a lawsuit to get reform in S.C.?**
 Author: BY WARREN BOLTON Columnist
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Does it take a lawsuit to get reform in S.C.?

BY WARREN BOLTON

Columnist

The director of one of the advocacy groups that sued S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley and the Department of Social Services, or DSS, said they aren't seeking damages; they just want the state to fix the broken system that has been allowing children to be killed and abused.



Bolton

I know what you're thinking: It shouldn't take a court challenge. Why not just ask the legislature and governor to reform DSS?

Good thinking. That's the way our government should work. But, unfortunately, that's not the way we do things in South Carolina.

Too often in the Palmetto State, if you want leaders to reform poorly performing, poorly funded and poorly supported agencies and services, you've got to sue.

Our republic might be a government of laws, but our state is governed by lawsuits.

For years, that's been the sad and shameful remedy. South Carolina's leaders are notorious for engaging in neglect and foot-dragging rather than taking bold or even moderate steps to address glaring, ruinous conditions that threaten this state's people and quality of life.

If they do act, it's often in

such an incremental fashion that you're reluctant to celebrate. Then you embrace it, realizing that's about as good as it gets.

Or you sue.

It ought not be that way, but it is, which is why we've seen one frustrated group after another sue to bring change.

That's what's at the heart of the federal class action lawsuit filed against DSS last month by the national advocacy organization Children's Rights, the S.C. Appleseed Legal Justice Center and Columbia attorney Matthew Richardson.

"We are tired of the Band-Aid approach," Appleseed's Sue Berkowitz said. "DSS has had numerous problems for decades, and they have been reported by LAC – the Legislative Audit Council – and the agency has not taken the steps to protect the children under their care."

Among other things on a long list of grievances, the lawsuit alleges that Haley and DSS are responsible for drastic foster home shortages, excessive caseloads for agency workers and a failure to provide children with basic health care.

The lawsuit is but the latest aimed at getting good government for South Carolinians through the courts because of our failed legislative and executive leadership.

Prisons and schools

Around the same time the DSS lawsuit was being filed, the state's prison system was agreeing to set aside several million dollars to help im-

prove the treatment of mentally ill inmates in its care, as part of the settlement for a 10-year lawsuit.

The agreement between the Department of Corrections and the nonprofit Protection and Advocacy for People With Disabilities came a year after a judge ruled the agency is failing to care for mentally ill prisoners.

Circuit Judge Michael Baxley ruled early last year that the state long has treated mentally ill inmates poorly and ordered it to clean up its act.

The ruling wasn't surprising. For years, our state's "lock 'em up and throw away the key" approach led to unacceptable neglect, as legislators passed laws that increased the inmate population without providing sufficient funding to help Department of Corrections officials deal with overcrowding, rehabilitation and inmate care.

The neglect prompted the 2005 lawsuit that led to Judge Baxley's ruling, in which he said treatment given to South Carolina inmates suffering serious mental illness is so substandard that it's unconstitutional.

Believe it or not, Corrections initially wanted to appeal the ruling but decided to negotiate a resolution after Bryan Stir-

ling took over as new prisons director.

While all of these conditions that have prompted outside forces to seek legal remedies to bring reform are inexcusable, the fact that the state fought for decades to keep from offering quality education to all students is among the most unconscionable.

As 2014 came to a close, the state Supreme Court finally ended a two-decades-old lawsuit over the issue.

Frankly, the poor districts seeking relief never should have had to sue state leaders, whose job is to provide an education for all of our children.

But having seen generation after generation of students neglected, they saw no alternative.

We all know our state hasn't offered a quality education to all students. We all know that what ZIP code you live in dictates the kind of schools you attend. We all know that we need to better educate our children in order to provide businesses and industry with a steady flow of competent workers.

Yet, the legislature failed – or maybe refused – to do the right thing and take steps to ensure that students had access to quality schools no matter where they live.

Instead of putting money and energy into exploring ways to improve schools, lawmakers paid lawyers to fight the lawsuit seeking to improve kids' educational

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opportunity.

In November, the Supreme Court ruled 3-2 that South Carolina failed to provide children in poor, rural districts with the adequate public education required by the state's Constitution.

Instead of recommending specific actions, the court ordered lawmakers and the school districts to craft a plan to address problems such as weak rural tax bases, aging facilities and the difficulty of recruiting quality teachers to rural areas.

The Supreme Court allowed this case to languish far too long. Yet even after it finally ruled in favor of the school districts, the governor and others sought to get the court to rehear the matter. Really? That's how backward we are in South Carolina.

Yes, Gov. Nikki Haley had led the charge last year to begin making changes

that would aid poor school districts. But while that was a positive step in the right direction, it was a small one. The court pointed out the obvious in saying the state and the districts have much work to do. Why not just move on and let your actions speak rather than continue a fight that, if you won, would undermine your supposed good intention?

And juvenile justice

Finally, you might recall that the Department of Juvenile Justice at one time had become a warehouse for young offenders, a place where youths not only learned to become hardened criminals but were exposed to outrageous abuse.

Things were so bad that in 1990, attorney Gaston Fairey filed a lawsuit on behalf of six juveniles alleging chronic mistreatment.

In 1995, U.S. District Judge

Joe Anderson placed the Department of Juvenile Justice under court supervision and urged the agency to correct problems. But reports of juveniles being physically or sexually assaulted by other youths or staff continued.

While the directors bore much of the responsibility for improving conditions, the governor and the Legislature provided little leadership and support in pushing for change.

It wasn't until 2003 – 13 years after the lawsuit had been filed – that change came. That's when then-Gov. Mark Sanford selected Bill Byars, a former family court judge, to head the department.

Byars made it a priority to improve the conditions at the agency and, more importantly, to have a positive impact on the lives of juveniles.

He outlined improvements and went to work on them,

gaining the admiration and backing from Fairey.

By the end of 2003, Judge Anderson lifted his 1995 order, saying the Department of Juvenile Justice had made dramatic improvement.

But why did that take a lawsuit? And why so long? What is it about South Carolina that we can't get some of the most important things right unless we're forced to?

We'll spend hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars in legal fees fighting against changes that are needed to improve the present and future of our state and its citizens.

You'd think we'd have learned by now, right? Don't count on it.

Warren Bolton is an associate editor with *The State* newspaper in Columbia and can be reached at wbolton@thestate.com.

The *Aiken Standard* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must be signed and should carry the writer's address for publication and a daytime telephone number for verification purposes. Letters should not exceed 400 words. Those exceeding the word count will not be published. All letters are subject to editing for length, clarity, libel and good taste. Pen names are not allowed, and anonymous letters will not be published. Publication is discretionary. Letters associated with an organized effort involving candidates or causes will not be published. Letters should be addressed to: Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 456, Aiken, SC 29802 or email to letters@aikenstandard.com.

Title: **Lack of panel independence casts a doubt on real reform**
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 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



EDITORIAL

Lack of panel independence casts a doubt on real reform

Comprehensive ethics reform in the South Carolina legislature might as well already be put on life support.

Sure, that's a glass half empty look at the situation as it stands, but actions by the S.C. Senate last week have thrown an unneeded curveball into what was supposed to be one of, if not, the top priority of lawmakers.

It seems some legislators are perfectly content with the fox-guarding-the-henhouse mentality surrounding legislative ethics complaints after a half-baked amendment was attached to what was a quality reform bill being moved forward by S.C. Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens.

The real crux of any push for ethics reform in the state needs to be the creation of an independent panel outside of the General Assembly to investigate legislative ethics complaints. That's not the way it is now, and that doesn't seem to be changing anytime soon.

Martin's bill, which included language establishing such a panel, was effectively undermined by a misguided amendment introduced by S.C. Sen. Luke Rankin, R-Horry.

Rankin's amendment created a new panel, but one that still contained legislators. That kind of action misses the point of real reform. It's clear that not all of those lawmakers who voted for the measure on Wednesday voted for it solely because they want to keep this fox-guarding-the-henhouse set up in place. While passing a comprehensive ethics reform package needs to be a priority, there's an understandable mentality of wanting to move the measure forward in order to begin tackling other pressing needs such as infrastructure and education funding.

The political wedge on this issue was unfortunately driven even deeper by S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, who actually took to Facebook to name those lawmakers who, in a roundabout way, voted against independent investigations by supporting the passage of the amended legislation. That's painting with

too broad of a brush. However, the actions of senators such as Rankin, and S.C. Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, who even asked what, if anything, was wrong with the state's current ethics law, were rather absurd. Keeping the handling of ethics investigations in the hands of the lawmakers themselves should cast a cloud of doubt over the public's trust toward lawmakers, especially those who adamantly fight to keep the system the way it is.

Martin's bill was thankfully rallied around by S.C. Sens. Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, and Tom Young, R-Aiken. Both have advocated for comprehensive ethics reform, and should be commended for their efforts.

Rankin, the chairman of the S.C. Senate Ethics Committee, noted that he felt the Senate has done its job when it came to ethics, noting that it's "hard to point to senators protecting senators." He added that there has "never been a problem in this Senate, ever." Such a statement rings of too much complacency with lawmakers pushing to establish a new and needed way of investigative ethics complaints. Having a majority of legislators sitting on an investigate panel makes no sense. Even having a minority is a difficult pill to swallow.

Thankfully, the S.C. House is taking a more piecemeal approach toward ethics reform that hopefully will result in at least some positive steps toward greater legislative oversight.

However, the real heart of such reform – an independent investigatory panel – appears to be on life support. Those lawmakers that ultimately blocked such an idea send a clear message that they want a government that serves their own interests rather than those of the public.

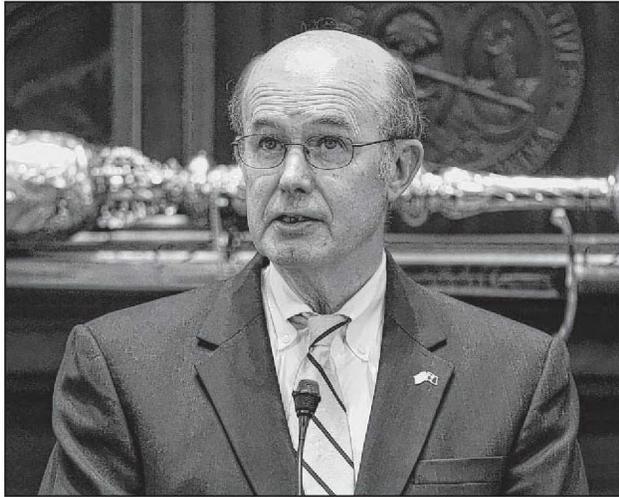
Let's hope as these efforts move forward that a completely independent panel is put back on the table so South Carolina can have truly comprehensive ethics reform.

Title: **Lack of panel independence casts a doubt on real reform**

Author:

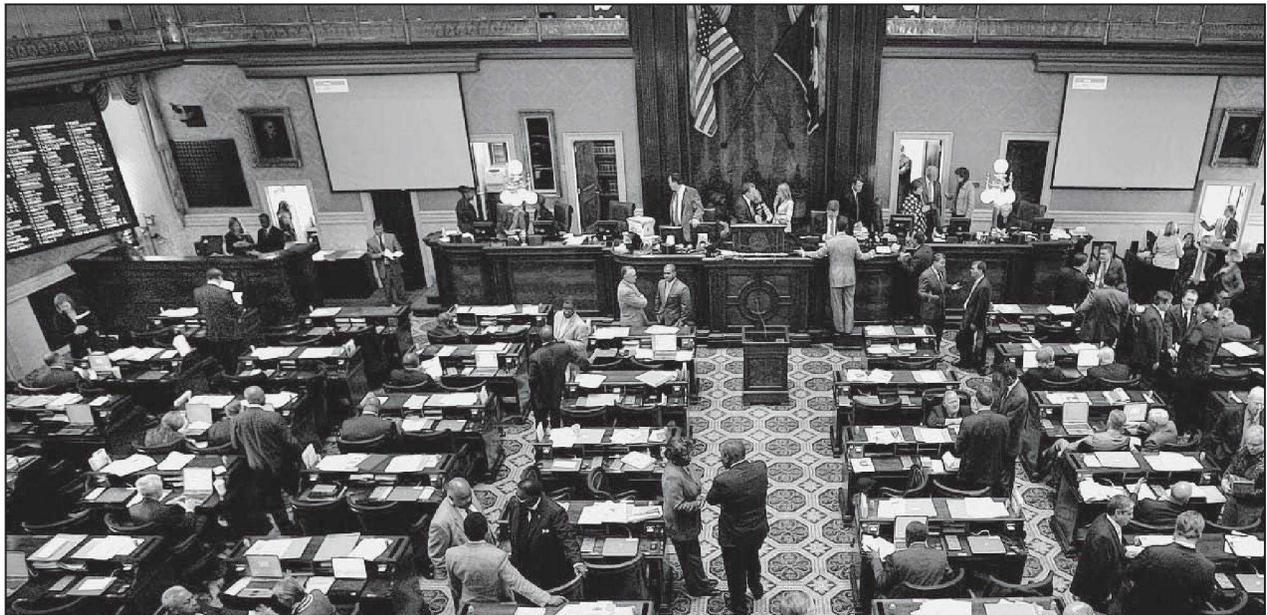
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AP PHOTO BY RAINIER EHRHARDT

S.C. Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, speaks during a joint session of South Carolina legislature on Feb. 4 at the Statehouse in Columbia.



AP FILE PHOTO

The S.C. House has already passed some reform related to the state's ethics law, but a debate in the S.C. Senate last week has raised questions over whether any comprehensive changes will be approved by the legislature.



Item
Sumter, SC
Circ. 19018
From Page:
3
1/29/2015
67039

148

Haley's pick to lead DSS says changes will take years to make

COLUMBIA (AP) — Gov. Nikki Haley's pick to lead South Carolina's Department of Social Services told lawmakers Wednesday that she wants to see firsthand the challenges faced by caseworkers throughout the state.

But, in the first of several confirmation hearings, Susan Alford also said it will take years to make substantive changes at the troubled agency.

"I don't have magic dust," Alford told the Senate General Committee.

A year's worth of bipartisan Senate hearings investigating the agency's problems focused on child deaths, excessive caseloads and turnover. In October, the agency released an improvement plan that included adding 221 child welfare positions this fiscal year.

On Wednesday, Alford said she wants to visit each county, assess its needs and hear why caseworkers leave the agency.

Saying that she viewed caseload and employee turnover as two of the agency's biggest problems, Alford told senators that she'd combat both by using her experience in probing the department's "ground game" in the county-level offices.

"Unfortunately, what a lot of people try to do is just Band-Aid and treat symptoms," Alford said. "It's not enough to just drive caseload numbers down."

In her first year as director, Alford said she would plan to spend at least one full day visiting each of the state's 46 counties, meeting local law enforcement, solicitors, guardians and caseworkers to get a sense of that area's situation when it comes to caring for children.

But Alford warned lawmakers not to levy criticism if they don't see drastic improvements in the next year or two.



Item
Sumter, SC
Circ. 19018
From Page:
1
1/29/2015
67039

Military adds \$19.3B to S.C. economy, study says

Report shows Shaw contributes \$2B annually

BY SUSANNE M. SCHAFER
The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — The U.S. military pumps \$19.3 billion into South Carolina's economy each year, according to a new report released Wednesday by Gov. Nikki Haley's military advisory panel.

The study by economists at Darla Moore School of Business at University of South Carolina said the state's military community supports 152,812 jobs that provide \$8.6 billion in labor income for state residents.

The report said more than half those jobs are in the private sector, with an average annual income of \$56,105.

"This report reinforces that our overall military footprint — from our active bases to the Reserve to our military retirees — is a vital part of the state's economy," said Bill Bethea, chairman of

the Military Base Task Force. "Recognizing this link, our task force has worked hard with our elected officials on new legislation to ensure that South Carolina continues to be a military-friendly state, and we're heartened by the progress on these initiatives."

The study said the \$19.3 billion figure represents the dollar value of all goods and services produced in the state that can be attributed to the military community

Joint Base Charleston is the largest contributor at \$7.4 billion. It is followed by the U.S. Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center-Atlantic in Charleston at nearly \$3.7 billion. Fort Jackson in Columbia and Shaw Air Force Base near Sumter both contribute \$2 billion, the report showed.

Under the report's definition, South Carolina's military community includes

the eight major military installations, members of the National Guard and Army Reserve, as well as more than 600 defense-contracting firms and nearly 58,000 military retirees residing in the state.

Bethea has said his panel wants to improve on South Carolina's reputation for being friendly to the military and wants to convince lawmakers to exempt military retirees from state income taxes. He argues that this will increase the number of retirees attracted to the state and thereby grow the economy.

During the last legislative session, a bill exempting military retiree pay from the state income tax passed the House but came up too late for the Senate to vote on it.

The South Carolina Board of Economic Advisors has said the tax generates at least \$22 million a year in revenue.





Item
 Sumter, SC
 Circ. 19018
 From Page:
 1
 1/29/2015
 67039



U.S. AIR FORCE / SENIOR AIRMAN JENSEN STIDHAM

The 20th Operations Support Squadron air traffic control tower pierces the night sky at Shaw Air Force Base on Tuesday. The tower provides airmen with visibility of both runways, providing aircraft and vehicles the clearance to land and drive safely. According to a new report from Gov. Nikki Haley's military advisory panel, the U.S. military pumps \$19.3 billion into the state's economy each year. Shaw contributes \$2 billion, the report says.

Jasper County Super Washington looking ahead

148

Sarita Chourey school-equity lawsuit. part of our state," said the Then-superintendent

Sarita Chourey
Morris News Service
COLUMBIA

Despite the absence of anyone from Jasper County appointed to serve on a statewide education-reform panel, the district chief expressed confidence in its membership Monday.

"All of the representatives for the task force are good choices," said Jasper County School District Superintendent Vashti Washington.

"All of them have had experiences over the years with small rural districts. They understand the complexities of educating children in rural settings."

She offered one wish, however: "Career and Technology centers play a critical role in preparing students for economic development, particularly for Jasper, Hampton and Allendale. Hopefully this topic will become center stage."

This month the Supreme Court rejected the request by Republican Gov. Nikki Haley and Republican-led House and Senate for a rehearing of the historically significant

school-equity lawsuit.

In November the Court ruled that South Carolina's political leaders had failed to provide a minimally adequate education to poor, rural school districts. The 21-year-old lawsuit ultimately centered around eight impoverished districts, a list that included Jasper County School District.

In his statement Monday, House Speaker Jay Lucas a representative from the Pee Dee, said he submitted the request for a rehearing of the case "primarily because the court did not provide enough clarity on how to proceed in its ruling," according to a statement.

Lucas said the court's decision "further confirms the dire need for comprehensive education reform."

"In light of the Court's decision to deny a rehearing, I am hopeful that the House Education Task Force will immediately begin its work to develop a robust strategy that ensures every child is given access to the best possible education in every

part of our state," said the House Speaker. "These five representatives from the Abbeville v. State case will provide significant insight and help create standards that put our state back on a path towards excellence."

The representatives from the lawsuit are: Wanda Andrews, superintendent of Lee County School District, David Longshore, former superintendent and current consultant for Orangeburg County Consolidated District 3, Terry Peterson, senior fellow at the College of Charleston and former chief counselor to U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, Rick Reames executive director of the Pee Dee Education

Center and former deputy superintendent of Florence County School District and John Tindal, superintendent Clarendon County School District 2 and former chair of the State Board of Education.

Court records contain disturbing testimony by the Jasper's staff, which took place more than 10 years ago.

Then-superintendent William Singleton said during a direct examination that science teachers could not conduct basic lab experiments, due to unsafe ventilation, that teachers had to bring in roadkill to illustrate biological processes, and that some students would sit through a four-hour roundtrip bus ride to school. Teachers were frequently sickened by mold in the buildings, ailing electrical circuitry presented a hazard, and certain classrooms were plagued by snakes, a situation that could lead to bites or even heart attacks, warned Singleton.

When asked who removes the snakes during emergencies, he said the custodial staff.

"Everybody is running away from them," said the Jasper County superintendent.

A teacher at West Hardeeville Middle School testified that she paid her own children \$10 to clean her classroom each payday, because the school was unable to hire enough custodians to do it.

Jasper County
Sun
Ridgeland, SC
Circ. 1950
From Page:
5
1/28/2015
65216



The News
Kingstree, SC
Circ. 4587
From Page:
1
1/28/2015
64159



148 Musier takes reigns as sheriff

By **Michaele Duke**
Staff Reporter

Citizens have a new sheriff. Dudley Musier was elected Williamsburg County Sheriff in the January 20, general election. Musier defeated three opponents in a December primary. Sixteen write-ins were counted in the general election, as well as 26 undervotes, which mean the voter did not properly designate a choice on the ballot.

Only 1,793 or 8.4 percent of registered voters cast their votes in the general election, as opposed to 17 percent in the primary where Musier won by a landslide, garnering 76.48 percent of the votes. Once sworn in, Musier will serve out the remainder of the term that expires in 2016.



Musier

Since September 2014, voters went to the polls four times; the Senate District 32 race, House of Representatives District 101, Sheriff's Primary, and Sheriff's General. Sitting in his new office Musier said he is happy it's over and now it's time to move on. "It's been a long road and I am excited. I'm ready to move on," said Musier. "The individuals here have put in a lot of hard work and they continue to work diligently to cover the county."

The elections were the result of a September 19, guilty verdict handed down to former Williamsburg County Sheriff Michael Johnson. In January 2014, Johnson was indicted on one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Governor Nikki Haley appointed John Bartell to serve as interim sheriff.

The sheriff's first line of duty will be to address the safety of the citizens. "We have a rash of break-ins that must be addressed," said Musier. "That's a major concern of mine. And the drugs." Musier said abuse of prescription medications is a growing problem and one the Sheriff's Office will combat through initiatives such as awareness campaigns. "We're going to be very combative on the drug problem that we have here. We know we're not going to solve the problem but we're going to try and slow it down."

Musier plans to address Williamsburg County Council where he will appeal to council to look at the understaffed and minimally paid staff. "I'd like to see the pay come up to par with comparable counties," said Musier. "I'm not going to be asking for anything that's not necessary. I just need the equipment, staffing and the

PLEASE TURN TO **MUSIER, 3**





The News
 Kingstree, SC
 Circ. 4587
 From Page:
 3
 1/28/2015
 64159



Crime, drugs top sheriff's priority list

MUSIER FROM PAGE, 1
 financing to do what we need to do to move this county forward as far as law enforcement is concerned."

Musier will work with a knowledgeable staff and one that is rather unique.

It is believed that the Williamsburg County Sheriff's Office is the only office in the state, and possibly the nation, to have two former sheriffs on staff. Jack McCrea, who has been employed with the office since 2011, served as Williamsburg County Sheriff from 1993 to 1999 and Bartell will stay on in an administration position.

Musier has served five years with the Williamsburg County Sheriff's Office as

chief deputy. He is a retired South Carolina Highway Patrol Sergeant.

While at the SCHP, he was a member of the Multi Accident Reconstruction Team and a member of the Drug Interdiction Team, and worked with the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Sheriff's Race Write-ins

- Everett Moore - 3
- Homer Floyd - 2
- Kevin Gowdy - 2
- Joey Phillips - 1
- Lawson George - 1
- Brian Tisdale - 1
- Easton Lane, Jr. - 1
- Robert Baker - 1
- Walter Phillips - 1
- Mondreyl Pressley - 1
- Robbie Morris - 1
- Sandy Thompson - 1

148
**Representative Hayes
Discusses This Year's
Legislative Agenda**

Dillon Herald
Dillon, SC
Circ. 5278
From Page:
1
1/27/2015
63114



**By Representative
Jackie E. "Coach" Hayes**

The 121st session of the General Assembly officially convened on January 13, opening with an atmosphere of general optimism and enthusiasm. Members have been talking about positive change, as we have a new House Speaker, Darlington Representative James H. "Jay" Lucas. Speaker Lucas has called for a new beginning, promising greater transparency, openness and accountability.

The 124-member House this year has 46 Democrats, 77 Republicans and one vacancy (Rep. Kris Crawford, R-Florence resigned in December). I am still on the Ways and Means Committee, which will be responsible for drawing up a state budget proposal for the next fiscal year. We have already started meeting with state agency officials to learn about their financial needs.

I am looking forward to serving on a new task force this year that will recommend ways to improve education in rural counties, such as Dillon County. Speaker Lucas this week appointed me to the House Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force, which will be made up of legislators, educators and business leaders.

The task force will help carry out a November directive by the state Supreme Court, that told state lawmakers to work with schools to come up with improvements. It ruled that the state has failed to provide children in poor, rural districts with at least a "minimally adequate" public education, as required by the S.C.

Constitution. Attorneys representing Gov. Nikki Haley and the General Assembly have asked for a rehearing. The original lawsuit, brought by rural school districts, was filed in 1993.

Besides education reform, other issues on our legislative plate this year, include the following:

Ethics Reform

A comprehensive ethics reform bill failed in the General Assembly last year. However, there are renewed calls for ethics reform, as former Speaker Bobby Harrell pleaded guilty to criminal ethics charges in October. Speaker Lucas expects the legislature to consider at least 15 measures to address ethics reform, rather than one massive bill. You can expect to see the legislature

debate how to change the process for investigating ethics complaints against legislators and state officials, requiring members to disclose more sources of income, and clarifying what constitutes a campaign finance violation.

At the House organizational session last month, members approved changes to the rules that govern the operation of the House. Some of the changes include new term limits for the House Speaker and Speaker Pro Tempore, a new requirement for the Speaker to consult with majority and minority political party leaders when making appointments to conference committees, a requirement that House committees and subcommittees take roll call votes (recorded votes) on legislation, and new procedures for hiring House staff to increase accountability.

Road Maintenance

The General Assembly will be considering long-term strategies for ensuring our bridges, highways and roads are repaired and maintained. Some proposals include transferring responsibility of additional roads to counties, expanding the state's infrastructure bank, increasing the state gas tax and diverting money from the sales tax on cars. The state highway system is the fourth largest in the nation. More than 47 percent of the roads are said to be in poor condition, and more than 1,600 bridges have been declared deficient.

Domestic Violence

Currently, the penalty for domestic violence is determined by the number of times a person has committed the crime. The state's attorney general and the state law enforcement community are calling for a tiered system of penalties based on the severity of harm cause to a victim, as well as increased penalties for committing a crime in the presence of a minor or while a victim is knowingly pregnant.

*

The Legislature meets in Columbia on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from January to mid-June. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at 803-734-3099, at 333C Blatt Building, P.O. Box 11867, Columbia, S.C. 29211 or call me at home at 843-774-6125, at 240 Bermuda Road, Dillon, S.C. 29536. My email address is JackieHayes@schouse.gov.

Title: **'A turning point'**
 Author: By JOSH LEDERMAN The Associated Press
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'A turning point'

The likely veto by President Obama of the Keystone bill will create a rough road for passing any legislation.

By **JOSH LEDERMAN**

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A looming veto by President Barack Obama of a Republican-championed bill foreshadows a key question for the White House: whether the president and Republicans can find areas to work together, even as Obama strikes down many of their top priorities.

Since Republicans won full control of Congress three months ago, Obama has issued a flurry of veto threats to Republican bills. Obama hasn't had to make good on those threats, but now a bill forcing approval of the Keystone XL pipeline is headed to his desk.

Although Obama's intentions to reject the Keystone bill are well known, the veto nevertheless marks a turning point in Obama's presidency, as he braces to fend off an onslaught of GOP attempts to reverse actions he has taken.

"This upcoming veto could serve to crystalize the situation

on Capitol Hill," said Jim Manley, a former top adviser to Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid. "Either Republicans are going to have to figure out a way to compromise, or they're not going to be able to get anything done the next two years."

That's critical, Manley and other Democrats said, because Republicans eyeing the 2016 elections need to show they can govern successfully when in power.

The Keystone bill, passed by the House on Wednesday on a 270-152 vote, capped weeks of debate on an infrastructure project that Republicans declared their top priority after they took control of Congress. A group of 24 Republican governors wrote to Obama on Thursday urging him not to veto the bill.

Although it has been six years since the oil pipeline was proposed, Obama has said the U.S. is still determining whether it's in the national interest. He

vowed to veto any attempts by lawmakers to usurp his authority to make the call.

Republicans, emboldened after having passed a bill they never could get through a Democratic-run Senate, planned a triumphant signing ceremony at the Capitol today. Yet GOP leaders were expected to wait to send the bill to the White House until after lawmakers return from their recess later this month.

That way, when Obama vetoes the bill, Republicans will be on hand to blast the president for mixing a project they say will spur jobs and economic growth.

"The more public attention it gets, the better," said Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., a staunch Keystone supporter.

White House officials haven't yet decided whether Obama will veto the bill in private and announce it in a simple statement, or whether he'll do it publicly

in grander fashion, a move that would show defiance against Republican attempts to undercut him. During his administration, President Bill Clinton took that approach when he vetoed a tax-cut bill in the Rose Garden, serenaded by a brass band.

"For us, this is not filled with a lot of drama or anticipation because the president's views on this are well known," White House press secretary Josh Earnest said in an interview. "We're mostly interested in not letting these areas of disagreement become obstacles for working together with Congress on other issues" such as trade, tax reform and a war powers resolution.

Republicans too seemed eager not to let their Keystone poison opportunities to cut deals with the president in other areas. They pointed to a bill addressing suicide among veterans — it passed with broad bipartisan support and Obama signed it into law Thursday.

Title: **'A turning point'**
Author: By JOSH LEDERMAN The Associated Press
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HALEY, MCCRORY TO OBAMA: DON'T VETO

The governors of North and South Carolina are among top Republicans imploring the president not to veto a bill to build the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory on Thursday signed a letter asking President Barack Obama not to follow through on his threat to veto the measure.

The letter was signed by 24 Republican governors who say the pipeline would create thousands of jobs and strengthen the United States' relationship with Canada.

On Wednesday, the Republican-controlled Congress approved a bill to construct the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Neither the House nor the Senate has enough votes to override a veto, the first of many skirmishes between the Democratic White House and Congress on energy and environmental policy.

Title: **State cannot afford to put DSS on hold**

Author:

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**OTHER VIEWPOINTS**

State cannot afford to put DSS on hold

A yearlong, in-depth investigation of DSS is warranted, but some problems need to be addressed now.

Gov. Nikki Haley's pick to lead the state's Department of Social Services has the right idea in proposing a comprehensive review of operations at every DSS office in the state. But, if approved by the legislature, she should act right away to address some pressing problems that already are well documented.

In one of what are likely to be several confirmation hearings, Susan Alford said she wants to visit each county, assess its needs and hear why caseworkers leave the agency. She told the Senate General Committee that caseload problems are closely associated to turnover, and she plans to address both by using her experience to probe the department's "ground game" at the county level.

During the daylong county meetings, Alford said she would meet with local law enforcement, solicitors, guardians and caseworkers. She especially hopes to get a sense of how each of the state's 46 counties is handling its responsibilities to care for children.

Alford, 60, appears to have the experience to tackle the job. She has been director of The Girls Center at Clemson University since 2007, a research hub for is-

suess such as teen pregnancy and poor self-esteem. She also worked at the Department of Juvenile Justice for more than 12 years in various director roles and served as director of the state's probation and parole agency.

Alford would replace Lillian Koller, who resigned last year amid calls for her head from members of both parties. Haley was slow in realizing that Koller was in real trouble, attributing the criticism to election-year politics,

but Koller resigned a day before the Senate was due to take up a no-confidence vote on her leadership.

Alford said making substantive changes at DSS could take years. She warned lawmakers not to start criticizing the agency if they don't see drastic improvements in the next year or two.

Certainly the agency's operation deserves an in-depth evaluation. Alford no doubt is on the right track in trying to get at the root causes of high turnover rates. Once she's identified why so many people leave the agency, she can begin to seek remedies. But Alford does not have to start from scratch. The Senate already has produced an improvement plan after a year's

worth of bipartisan hearings investigating child deaths, excessive caseloads and turnover.

Among other things, the plan, released in October, calls for adding 221 child welfare positions this fiscal year.

Many of the agency's problems, especially regarding child welfare, have been common knowledge for years. A federal class action lawsuit was filed Jan. 12 against Haley and DSS, saying a lack of health care and other basic services is endangering children in the system.

The complaint alleges Haley and DSS are responsible for drastic foster home shortages, too many cases for workers and a failure to provide children with basic health care. The lawsuit also alleges that child maltreatment while in foster care is not adequately investigated, and inaccurate data masks a much higher rate of abuse and neglect than the state reports to the federal government.

In light of the seriousness of the allegations, action should be taken right away. Children who aren't getting proper care can't afford to wait years for a change.

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