

Title: **State jobs are jobs, not gifts for friends**

Author:

Size: 54.56 square inch

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■ WHAT OTHERS SAY

State jobs are jobs, not gifts for friends

The following view, compiled by the Associated Press, is the opinion of the newspaper represented and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Index-Journal.

South Carolina, on the Department of Health and Environmental Control:

Gov. Nikki Haley's botched end-run to put a friend in charge of South Carolina's health and environmental protection agency must be used as a teachable moment.

It is a "how-to" manual on bad governance, with one redeeming chapter. The state Senate, thank goodness, raised so many questions and exposed so many weaknesses in the candidate that she withdrew her nomination.

The state thereby avoided having someone in charge of the Department of Health and Environmental Control whose only qualification was being a close personal friend, political ally and campaign contributor to the governor.

We call it an end-run because the selection was made secretly, with virtually no vetting. The former director resigned, and four days later the DHEC board, all handpicked by the governor, announced her replacement. No one else was considered. The chosen candidate then went to work as a \$74-per-hour temporary employee prior to being confirmed by the Senate.

The vagaries of this process were put into perspective in a column by our colleague in Columbia, Cindi Ross Scope:

"Imagine a company with 3,600 employees spread across the state, doing highly specialized work that can have multimillion-dollar and even life-and-death consequences if it isn't done right. The CEO tells the board she wants to resign but agrees to keep it quiet and wait until a replacement can be found.

"The board chairman gets a call from a friend who suggests a friend for the position. ... This

candidate has no experience or knowledge about any of the many highly technical areas of the company's business. She has run a handful of large companies, but at least twice she left under questionable circumstances. In between, she has moved around a lot, holding down 10 jobs in the past 21 years — five of them since 2005 alone.

"But she does well in the interview, and so without considering any other candidates — without so much as even asking her for references — the board of directors hires her."

How could this possibly happen?

Political appointments are a problem. In this case, both the board that oversees DHEC and its top administrator were picked by the governor for political reasons. There were no checks and no balances in-house. Thankfully, the Senate did its job by asking hard questions, some of which pointed out Eleanor Kitzman's attendance at a Texas fundraiser for Haley.

A teachable moment for the governor should be that she cannot rule by fiat.

A teachable moment for the Senate is that it is going to have to devote much more scrutiny to all people appointed by this governor to direct a state agency. Citizens, taxpayers and DHEC employees deserve a strong system of checks and balances to control good-old-boy politics.

A teachable moment for the DHEC board is that the Senate, which gives a lot of deference to boards and the governor in their nominees, is going to pay attention to the process and see that it is done responsibly.

And a teachable moment for the state is that we need basic professional requirements to fill

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That needs to be fixed.

— Feb. 27, *The Island Packet*, Hilton Head Island

Title: **Haley's DHEC blunder**
 Author: The(HiltonHead)IslandPacket
 Size: 20.77 square inch
 Rock Hill, SC Circulation: 34688



Others' views

Haley's DHEC blunder

The (Hilton Head) Island Packet

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And a teachable moment for the state is that we need basic professional requirements to fill certain jobs. It is ludicrous that someone could be in charge of public health with zero background, education or credentials in the field.

That needs to be fixed.

Title: **Jenny Sanford wants to lead state agency**
 Author: By Cassie Cope and Sammy Fretwell The State
 Size: 33.32 square inch
 Greenville, SC Circulation: 113473



Jenny Sanford wants to lead state agency

She calls DHEC post
a logical one to seek

**By Cassie Cope
and Sammy Fretwell**

The State

Former South Carolina first lady Jenny Sanford has applied for the vacant job as director of the state Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Sanford said she is looking to get back into the workforce, adding the DHEC post was a logical position to seek.

Sanford said she sent a resume to the state's health and environment agency within the past week. She said she has not heard back from the agency.

Sanford is also a longtime supporter of Gov. Nikki Haley.

Another longtime Haley supporter, Eleanor Kitman, recently withdrew from consideration for the DHEC job, which pays about \$150,000 a year, after a Senate screening

committee questioned her lack of qualifications and her ties to the governor.

Haley had championed Kitman's candidacy for the job. But the governor's office said Thursday it had not asked Sanford to apply for the DHEC post.

"Jenny Sanford has been a great friend to the governor and, more importantly, to South Carolina," said Haley spokeswoman Chaney Adams.

"The governor is thrilled that she wants to again serve our state, in whatever capacity that ends up being."

When Sanford was asked if anyone had encouraged her to apply for the DHEC job, she replied she had "not consulted

with anybody about my employment."

Sanford contributed a total of \$1,000 to Haley's 2010 and 2014 bids for governor. She could have given up to \$7,000.

DHEC has received 32 applications for its director's position, said spokeswoman Cassandra Harris.

The board still is receiving applications and will not provide the name of or information on any applicant, she said.

The agency's board plans to nominate a new director by May 1 so the Senate can conduct confirmation hearings before the Legislature ends in June.

"Once the board's personnel committee reviews the appli-

cations, interviews will be conducted and finalists will be brought to the board for consideration," Harris said.

State senators, who must confirm a new DHEC director, reacted to news of Sanford's application Thursday with caution.

Sanford divorced then-Gov. Mark Sanford in 2010 after he publicly admitted to having an affair with an Argentine woman.

The Sanfords have four sons. Jenny Sanford said she has more time to devote to a job now because only one is still at home, and he is in high school.

She said DHEC isn't the only job opportunity she is weighing. She said she also is looking at positions in private industry.



FILE PHOTO

Former first lady Jenny Sanford wants to run the state's health and environment agency.

Title: **Obamaspeaksto1,200atS.C. town hall**

Author: By Jamie Self and Andrew Shain jself@thestate.com, ashain@thestate.com

Size: 96.56 square inch

Rock Hill, SC Circulation: 34688



Obama speaks to 1,200 at S.C. town hall

President: We may never know all about Ferguson

By JAMIE SELF AND ANDREW SHAIN
jself@thestate.com, ashain@thestate.com

COLUMBIA President Barack Obama fielded one tough question at his town hall meeting at Benedict College Friday.

Why did U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, who was in the audience, decide not to prosecute a white police officer in Ferguson, Mo., for shooting and killing Michael Brown, an unarmed black man?

Casually pacing along the stage with his sleeves rolled up, Obama said the federal government had a role to play in that incident only if there had been a "miscarriage of justice."

In the Brown case, the Justice De-

partment found the state's decision not to prosecute Officer Darren Wilson was fair, he said.

"We may never know exactly what happened" in the events leading up to the shooting, Obama said.

But Wilson, "like anybody else who is charged with a crime, benefits from due process and a reasonable doubt standard," the president continued.

"If there is uncertainty about what happened, you can't just charge him anyway because what happened was tragic."

The question came from a Univer-

sity of South Carolina student – one of about 1,200 Democratic Party activists, students and youth volunteers, mostly African-Americans, who were invited to see the president at the historically black college Friday.

Benedict senior Tiana Cox, an honors student active in community service, introduced Obama, who returned to the Palmetto State for the

SEE **OBAMA**, PAGE 4A

Inside

More from President Obama's visit:
10-year-old steals the spotlight, 4A

OBAMA

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first time since his 2008 Democratic primary victory.

Obama's visit came on the eve of his trip to Selma, Ala., on Saturday for the anniversary of that city's infamous violent response to civil rights protesters 50 years ago.

His visit also followed closely the U.S. Department of Justice's release of a report saying the Ferguson police department had a culture of racism that targeted blacks.

Obama said the report exposed an "oppressive and abusive situation" in Ferguson that "systematically was biased against African-Americans in that city who were stopped, harassed, mistreated, abused, called names, fined."

But Obama said what happened in Ferguson was not typical.

Praising law enforcement in South Carolina and elsewhere, Obama said, "The overwhelming number of law enforcement officers have a

really hard, dangerous job, and they do it well and they do it fairly, and they do it heroically.

"And we need to honor those folks, and we need to respect them, and not just assume that they've got it all or they're doing a bad job."

Mostly upbeat in his message, Obama encouraged young people to serve their communities through volunteering and activism.

"It was young people who stubbornly insisted on justice, stubbornly refused to accept the world as it is, that transformed not just the country but transformed the world," he said of the youth who fueled the civil rights movement decades ago.

Young people should be "wildly optimistic" about their futures, he said..

"(T)oday, right now, you are more likely to be healthier, wealthier, less discriminated against, have more opportunity, less likely to be caught up in violence than

probably any time in human history," he said.

The president also touted positive news about the nation's falling unemployment rate, released Friday.

But more work is needed, he said.

The jobless rate for African-Americans, he said, is falling faster than the overall unemployment rate, "which makes sense because it went up faster too during the recession. But it's still too high."

When the meeting ended, people scrambled over chairs to the center of the gymnasium for a chance to greet the president before he left.

Earlier in the day, Obama also received a warm welcome to the Palmetto State from a usually harsh critic.

Republican Gov. Nikki Haley and Democrat Obama shared an extended handshake on the Columbia Metropolitan Airport's tarmac after Air Force One landed.

Obama mentioned the weather and his return to his

wife's home state, and Haley touted the state's economic growth and praised the quality of its workforce, said Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin, who greeted the president with Haley and Democratic U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn of Columbia.

Before heading to Benedict, the president made a stop at West Columbia's Brookland Baptist Church, an influential African-American church.

There, about 100 diners cheered him as he glided from table to table, shaking hands and posing for photos.

Obama appointed the daughter of Brookland Baptist's senior pastor, the Rev. Charles Jackson Sr., as a special adviser in the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency in 2012.

One woman at the church was determined to give the president a hearty hug.

"She's hanging on, won't let go," Obama said, laughing.

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Author: By Jamie Selfand Andrew Shain jself@thestate.com, ashain@thestate.com

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KIM KIM FOSTER-TOBIN

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin, left, and Gov. Nikki Haley were among the officials who greeted President Barack Obama on Friday at Columbia Metropolitan Airport.



TRACY GLANTZ - tglantz@thestate.com

U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., talks with President Barack Obama at Mays Arena on the Benedict College Campus on Friday.

Title: **Murder suspect extradited to York Co.**
 Author: Fromstaffreports
 Size: 41.07 square inch
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Murder suspect extradited to York Co.

Charlotte man charged in October deaths of Lake Wylie couple

From staff reports

YORK After fighting extradition for more than a month, one of two accused killers in the shooting deaths of a Lake Wylie couple at their home in October is now in jail in York without bond.

Malcolm Jarrell Hartley, 21, was extradited on Thursday and served two warrants for murder. The Charlotte man was taken from the Mecklenburg County Jail, where he had been since Jan. 29, to the York County Detention Center.

In a short court hearing before York County Magistrate Richard Watkins, Hartley was told of the charges and was qualified as indigent, so he will receive a public defender, according to records at the York County Clerk of Court.

Charlotte prosecutors say Doug London, 63, and Debbie London, 61, were gunned down Oct. 23 to keep Doug London from testifying against three alleged gang members charged with the May robbery of the couple's Charlotte mattress store.

Brianna Johnson, 19, of Concord, N.C., also has been charged with two counts of murder and is

represented by the 16th Circuit Public Defender's Office. Because of a potential conflict, it is likely that Hartley would be assigned a lawyer next week from a list of private appointees.

Johnson has been in jail in York since her arrest in January. Both could face the death penalty if 16th Circuit Solicitor Kevin Brackett decides to seek it.

On Friday, Brackett declined to speak about the case and whether his office would seek the death penalty. He said he appreciated the cooperation of federal and state authorities in both South Carolina and North Carolina in getting Hartley to York to "face justice."

Brackett used a governor's warrant signed by both Gov. Nikki Haley and N.C. Gov. Pat McCrory to extradite Hartley, and deputies and prosecutors in both York County and Mecklenburg County worked on the extradition, he said.

"All these agencies were helpful in getting us to this point where we could return Mr. Hartley to South Carolina to face these charges," Brackett said.

Although a North Carolina prosecutor said last month that Doug London was killed to keep him

SEE **SUSPECT**, PAGE 4A

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SUSPECT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

from testifying, Brackett again declined to say what the relationship is between Hartley and Johnson and the three Charlotte men – including one who is an admitted Bloods gang member – charged with the mattress store robbery.

Jamell Cureton, 22, his brother Nana Adoma, 19, and David Lee Fudge, 21, all face federal interstate robbery and weapons charges. Police have said Doug London shot Cureton during the robbery attempt. After the Londons were killed in October, federal authorities joined York County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg police in the investigation of the killings.

John Strong, FBI agent in charge for North Carolina, has declined to go into detail about the killings but acknowledged the robbery and killings he described as a “horrendous act” were connected.

Cureton and Adoma were

in jail at the time of the killings, but Fudge, the admitted gang member, already had pleaded guilty to being the getaway driver and was on probation. He was re-arrested on the federal charges in January.

Cureton’s jail cell was searched by FBI agents Jan. 12, and agents found pictures of a federal judge, a North Carolina judge and a Charlotte prosecutor. Federal officials tightened security afterward, and Hartley and Johnson were arrested Jan. 29.

The three robbery suspects remain jailed without bond in Charlotte. Each has a federal court hearing scheduled for March 16, but their lawyers have asked for a postponement. They have not been charged in connection to the killings.

However, legal experts have told The Herald that the case appears to be a “classic conspiracy” and that anyone connected with the plot to have the Londons killed could face charges up to and including murder.



Hartley

Title: **Mercedes Vans to build \$500M assembly plant**
 Author: By Bruce Smith Associated Press
 Size: 35.49 square inch
 Greenville, SC Circulation: 113473



Mercedes Vans to build \$500M assembly plant

By Bruce Smith

Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON—Mercedes-Benz Vans will build a new assembly plant for its Sprinter vans in South Carolina, investing a half-billion dollars and creating 1,300 jobs, the company announced Friday.

The company said the plant will allow vans to be more economically produced

for the growing domestic market. It will manufacture them under the Mercedes-Benz and Freightliner nameplates.

Last year the company, a division of Daimler AG, sold almost 26,000 Sprinters in the United States, second only to sales in Germany.

“Given the future growth in the North American market, it simply does not make sense to supply customers with imported vehicles,” Volker Mornhinwig, the head of Mercedes-Benz Vans said at a

See VANS, Page 4A

VANS

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news conference at the existing Daimler assembly plant.

The announcement brings another major assembly plant to the South where the footprint of the auto industry continues to grow.

The company's existing South Carolina operation re-assembles Sprinter vans that are made in Germany, disassembled and then shipped to North Charleston. The process is used because of high duties on importing finished vehicles.

Construction of the new plant begins next year on a 200-acre site adjacent to the existing facility. Mornhinwig would not say when production would begin or how many vans the plant would produce. About 80 percent of Sprinter vans are sold to commercial businesses.

While 140 workers are currently employed at the existing plant, that number will increase by 60 later this year when the company be-

gins selling its new mid-sized Metris domestically. The vans will be assembled in Spain, disassembled and sent to South Carolina for reassembly.

Mornhinwig said the company looked at sites in three states and two in Mexico before settling on North Charleston for the new assembly plant.

He said the decision hinged on the local workforce, a supplier network and infrastructure, including the nearby Port of Charleston. The plant is about 20 miles from downtown Charleston.

State incentives include job development credits and a \$14 million grant for property improvements.

Gov. Nikki Haley, who is strongly anti-union, said the state's pro-business climate and non-union workforce were also important. The existing plant is not unionized.

“What we do with our companies is say take care of those who take care of you,” she said. “The associates like that direct rela-

tionship that they have with their employer. They don't want that middleman.”

Seven states in the South each now have more than 70,000 people employed in the industry, according to the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Jobs range from assembling vehicles and manufacturing parts to working at dealerships.

In South Carolina, with its BMW assembly plant in Greer, that number is approaching 60,000.

Mercedes-Benz was among the first companies to open an assembly plant in the region and its Alabama factory has been in operation nearly two decades.

Mornhinwig says the industry in the region “has a very solid foundation” with other plants following and the development of an extensive supplier network.

Access to markets and infrastructure is key, he said. “It's a huge amount of money you can throw out of the window if you are in the wrong place,” he said.

Title: **[onor progress through action**
 Author: By MEG KINNARD • The Associated Press
 Size: 123.69 square inch
 Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



Honor progress through action

Obama delivers message to SC crowd

By MEG KINNARD • The Associated Press

In his first trip to South Carolina since his 2008 election, President Barack Obama told a crowd at a historically black college that young adults should honor the achievements of previous activists through service and commitment to bettering themselves.

"Do not get cynical about what's possible," Obama told a crowd of more than 1,000 at Benedict College in Columbia. "There are no excuses not to put in the effort."

Please see **ACTION** on 7A

SELMA MARCH

President Barack Obama spoke in South Carolina on the eve of his trip to Selma, Ala., where he and other dignitaries will mark

the 50th anniversary of the "Bloody Sunday" march. Events will honor those civil rights protesters who were beaten at the Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama

River on March 7, 1965. opportunities her parents' generation marched to achieve. **1C**

MORE INSIDE: In Selma, Rep. Terri Sewell, the first black woman to represent Alabama in Congress, battles for op-

ACTION

Continued from 1A

Obama spoke on the eve of a trip to Selma, Ala., to commemorate the 50th anniversary of civil rights protests there. He discussed initiatives including My Brother's Keeper, his 1-year-old program to improve the lives of young minority men, and City Year. Several dozen participants in that AmeriCorps program sat together in their trademark red jackets.

"Ultimately I want this to be about all of you. Young people in this country in general make me optimistic," Obama said. "I'm proud of you, but we've got

a lot of work to do."

This is Obama's first trip to South Carolina since the 2008 primary campaign in which he and Hillary Rodham Clinton fiercely fought for the state's black voters. Now, South Dakota and Utah are the only two states Obama hasn't visited.

Introduced by a Benedict senior, Obama entered the college gymnasium to a standing ovation and thunderous applause.

"It's been a while since I've been here in South Carolina. It's been too long," he said. "This is a good thing for me get out of

Washington and talk to normal folks."

After his opening remarks, Obama took questions from the audience on topics including the Keystone XL pipeline and education affordability, telling the audience that his and his wife's student debt was at one point greater than their home mortgage.

"Let's make community colleges free," Obama said. "It's very hard to find a well-paying job without some form of higher education."

He also discussed the U.S.

Justice Department's recent decision not to charge Darren Wilson, the white former Ferguson, Mo., officer who shot Michael Brown, with federal civil rights charges in the death of the unarmed black teen, while also finding patterns of racial profiling, bigotry and profit-driven law enforcement and court practices in the St. Louis County suburb.

"You can't just charge him anyway just because a situation was tragic," Obama said. "It was an oppressive and abusive situation."

Title: **[onor progress through action**
Author: By MEG KINNARD • The Associated Press
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Accompanied by Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., and Attorney General Eric Holder, Obama was greeted at the Columbia Metropolitan Airport by Gov. Nikki Haley and Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin. He also greeted and shook hands with a crowd of guests who waited an hour for Air Force One to arrive.

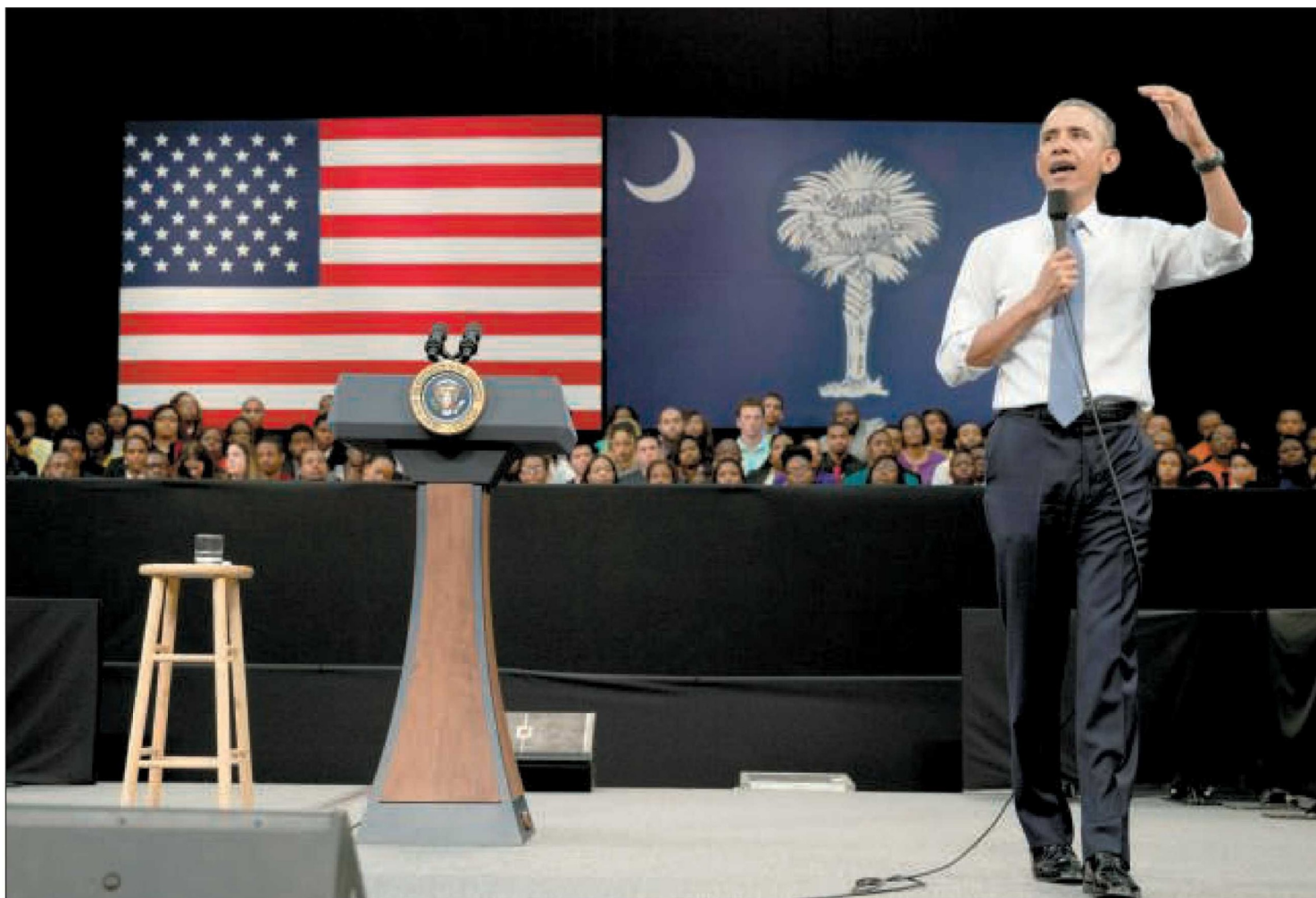
Before going to Benedict, Obama stopped at West Columbia's Brookland Baptist Church — home to one of the state's largest black congregations — and joined about 100 others at a buffet lunch, posing for photos and shaking hands with diners.



CAROLYN KASTER • The Associated Press

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin and South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley greet President Barack Obama upon his arrival Friday at Columbia Metropolitan Airport.

Title: **[onor progress through action**
Author: By MEG KINNARD • The Associated Press
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President Barack Obama participates in a town-hall meeting Friday at Benedict College in Columbia.

CAROLYN KASTER • The Associated Press

Title: Imagine a ticket of Rubio-Haley**Author:****Size: 8.06 square inch****Columbia, SC Circulation: 128564**



Imagine a ticket of Rubio-Haley

Marco Rubio for president, Nikki Haley for vice president, and Democrats jumping off bridges. The start of the race would be the finish line. Marco would speak common sense to Hispanics in their own language while Nikki Haley would give millions of women a share in the sense of pride that the women of South Carolina already enjoy. Apart from her success as governor, she's a girl, and there isn't much girl left in Hillary Clinton.

The race would start and run as a team with Marco and Nikki being everywhere all at once. Party affiliation would be played down as common sense — for which there is no viable opponent — would be the central theme and the main ingredient in every proposal.

And the Democrats will be jumping off bridges.

DAVID HUCK
Prosperity

Title: **Obama's visit 'an honor' for youth leaders**
 Author: BY JAMIE SELF AND CASSIE COPE jself@thestate.com ccope@thestate.com
 Size: 51.30 square inch
 Myrtle Beach, SC Circulation: 61238



Obama's visit 'an honor' for youth leaders

BY JAMIE SELF
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COLUMBIA | Jeorgie Hicks says the challenges facing South Carolina's at-risk youth give them a one-in-four shot of graduating high school.

"I wanted an opportunity to help eliminate that statistic," said Hicks, a 25-year-old Benedict College graduate who said it will be "an honor" to attend a town hall-meeting with President Barack Obama at his alma

mater Friday.

Not all South Carolinians are so pleased with the president's return to the Palmetto State for the first time since he won the state's 2008 Democratic primary.

"We'll probably be trolling him on Twitter," said Grace Kerley, president of the University of South Carolina College Republicans.

Obama's visit comes just two days after the release of a Winthrop Poll showing that more than half of South Carolinians – a deep-red state – disapprove of the Democrat's performance.

Obama can expect some pushback during his visit, but not any formal protests, said Kerley, a 20-year-old public relations student. "We don't think it's necessarily appropriate to go out there and give him any-

thing other than a warm welcome."

Representatives from youth leadership groups – including the Urban League, Upward Bound and City Year – have been invited to the president's 2:15 p.m. speech at Benedict.

Benedict grad Hicks hopes to tell the president, who plans

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OBAMA

From Page 1A

to talk about youth leadership at the historically black college, that Columbia needs more volunteers.

Hicks mentors at-risk students in Columbia as a volunteer with AmeriCorps' City Year program. The students he helps are a lot like he was when he was younger, he said.

A lot of them do not have the guidance they need to navigate the "challenges and temptations" that can throw them off track.

"Here in Columbia, we face a challenge" – more children in need of help than there are mentors to help them, Hicks said, adding he hopes to relay that message to the president.

Republican Gov. Nikki Haley will deliver the official welcome to South Carolina to the president, meeting him at the airport when Air Force One lands

in Columbia just before noon.

"We are proud of the people and the successes of our state and look forward to President Obama seeing and experiencing those successes first-hand," Haley said in a statement.

Other Republicans were less diplomatic Thursday.

The fact Obama has not been back to South Carolina since 2008 is shocking, said S.C. GOP chairman Matt Moore.

"Each president has his or her priorities, and I think they're reflected in his absence," Moore said. "South Carolina is a place where his policies are not warmly received."

Moore said Obama's address to Benedict students should answer questions about issues facing young Americans, including, "Why is the American Dream so far out of reach for young people?"

Kerley agreed.

"They should absolutely ask him about why young people are faced with these economic circumstances under the Obama Administration," she said.

For some Columbia residents, however, Obama's visit is a welcome chance to reconnect with the president.

J.T. McLawhorn, president of the Columbia Urban League, said the president's visit will have a "positive impact" on S.C. residents, "particularly those who worked so hard on his primary election."

Obama "basically had an army" working to help him win

the 2008 Democratic Primary. Then, he vanished. "Somehow people felt they were put on the sidelines," McLawhorn said.

That could be because Obama has been criticized harshly in public by a few South Carolinians, McLawhorn added.

Obama's Friday visit "means, in essence, that we've

turned a corner on that (criticism), and the president understands that those harsh statements are not representative of all people in South Carolina," McLawhorn said, adding he hopes the president talks about his plans for "closing the economic gap."

Jahmaun Sessions, a senior studying political science at the University of South Carolina, said the opportunity to meet the president Friday is going to be "amazing."

"I've been anticipating this day all week," the Anderson native said.

As an African-American interested in activism and, one day, running for office, Sessions said he wants to ask the president why he moved from grassroots activism to politics.

Sessions also said he might ask Obama why it took him seven years to return to South Carolina.

Title: **Obama's visit 'an honor' for youth leaders**

Author: By JAMIE SELF and CASSIE COPE jself@thestate.com, ccope@thestate.com

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THE PRESIDENT IN S.C.

Obama's visit 'an honor' for youth leaders

GOP student:
'We'll probably be
trolling him on Twitter'

By JAMIE SELF and CASSIE COPE
jself@thestate.com, ccope@thestate.com

Jeorgie Hicks says the challenges facing South Carolina's at-risk youth give them a one-in-four shot of graduating high school.

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rack Obama.

Not all South Carolinians are so pleased with the president's return

SEE **OBAMA** PAGE **A8**

THESTATE.COM

Look for details

of traffic tie-ups and other developments from the president's visit Friday

OBAMA

FROM PAGE **A1**

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'IN COLUMBIA, WE FACE A CHALLENGE'

Representatives from youth leadership groups – including the Urban League, Upward Bound

and City Year – have been invited to the president's 2:15 p.m. speech at Benedict.

Benedict grad Hicks hopes to tell the president, who plans to talk at the historically black college about youth leadership, that Columbia needs more volunteers.

Hicks mentors at-risk students in Columbia as a volunteer with AmeriCorps' City Year program. The students he helps are a lot like he was when he was younger, he said.

A lot of them do not have the guidance they need to navigate the "challenges and temptations" that can throw them off track.

"Here in Columbia, we face a challenge" – more children in need of help than there are mentors to help them, Hicks said, adding he hopes to relay that message to the president.

'PROUD OF THE PEOPLE'

Republican Gov. Nikki Haley will deliver the official welcome to South Carolina to the president, meeting him at the airport when Air Force One lands in Columbia just before noon.

"We are proud of the people and the successes of our state and look forward to President Obama seeing and experiencing those successes first-hand," Haley said in a statement.

Other Republicans were less diplomatic Thursday.

The fact Obama has not been back to South Carolina since 2008 is shocking, said S.C. GOP chairman Matt Moore.

"Each president has his or her priorities, and I think they're reflected in his absence," Moore said. "South Carolina is a place where his policies are not warmly received."

Moore said Obama's address to Benedict students should answer questions about issues facing young Americans, including,

"Why is the American Dream so far out of reach for young people?"

Kerley agreed. "They should absolutely ask him about why young people are faced with these economic circumstances under the Obama Administration," she said.

'PUT ON THE SIDELINES'

For some Columbia residents, however, Obama's visit is a welcome chance to reconnect with the president.

J.T. McLawhorn, president of the Columbia Urban League, said the president's visit will have a "positive impact" on S.C. residents, "particularly those who worked so hard on his primary election."

Obama "basically had an army" working to help him win the 2008 Democratic primary. Then he vanished. "Somehow people felt they were put on the sidelines," McLawhorn said. That

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could be because Obama has been criticized harshly in public by a few South Carolinians, he added.

Obama's Friday visit "means, in essence, that we've turned a corner on that (criticism), and the president understands that those harsh statements are not representative of all people in South Carolina," McLawhorn said, adding he hopes the president talks about his plans for "closing the economic gap."

'ANTICIPATING THIS DAY ALL WEEK'

Jahmaun Sessions, a se-

nior studying political science at the University of South Carolina, said the opportunity to meet the president Friday is going to be "amazing."

"I've been anticipating this day all week," the Anderson native said.

As an African-American interested in activism and, one day, running for office, Sessions said he wants to ask the president why he moved from grassroots activism to politics.

Sessions also said he might ask Obama why it took him seven years to re-

turn to South Carolina.

But, Sessions added, he understands the president's absence. "His chances of winning the electoral votes here was slim to none."

Reach Self
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OBAMA IN COLUMBIA

President Barack Obama's schedule for his visit to Columbia Friday includes only an invitation-only town hall meeting with youth leaders at Benedict College. But there might be

more. The president's schedule also includes a 2½-hour window between his landing at Columbia Metropolitan Airport and the start of the town hall.

11:50 a.m.: Arrives at Columbia Metropolitan Airport

2:15 p.m.: Participates in a town hall meeting at Benedict College

4 p.m.: Departs from Columbia Metropolitan Airport

