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Senator: Veto threat no reason to give up

Highway funding bill is on
back burner after vote fails

BY JIM HILLEY
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A veto threat from Gov. Nikki Haley shouldn't prevent the South Carolina Senate from passing a bill to fund the state's crumbling highways, state Sen. Kevin Johnson said Friday.



JOHNSON

"We can't let that stop us," Johnson said. "We have to do what we think is in the best interests of the state, and if she decides to veto, that's on her."

Proponents of the Senate's version of a highway funding bill brought it up for a special order vote

Thursday but failed. That vote would have put the bill on the floor for immediate debate. Instead, the bill will have to wait in line behind other legislation.

"We had an opportunity to prioritize that and couldn't get enough people to vote for it," Johnson said.

The Senate's version of a highway funding bill, S-523, includes a 12-cent increase in the gasoline tax phased in during three years as well as an adjustment for inflation. The bill would increase the maximum sales tax on a vehicle from \$300 to \$600, increase other fees for vehicles and licenses and create a mechanism for the state to transfer some roads to county control.

The bill also lowers some income tax rates.

Haley has threatened to veto any bill that doesn't include a significant tax reduction.

The Multimodal Transportation Plan produced by South Carolina Department of Transportation says the state is facing a more than \$1.4 billion annual funding gap between now and 2040 if

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it wants to maintain and expand its highway system, or at least \$600 million for maintenance and preservation.

None of the bills moving through the Legislature are anticipated to raise more than \$500 million a year.

"It is going to take a lot of money, money we currently don't have," Johnson said. "We are going to have to find a funding source; that's just the bottom line."

Johnson said repairing the roads is the most common topic brought up by his constituents when he returns home.

"People I talk to are willing to pay more for roads," he said.

Johnson said he deals with the problem every day.

"When I go to Columbia every day for session, I am dodging potholes the whole way from Sumter," he said.

"People are traveling, and they are dodging potholes and going to other lanes with other cars. It is a dangerous situation."

It is also an economic development issue, he said.

"A lot of our top business people in the state are saying we have to do something if we are expecting to expand," he said.

He said he thinks there will have to be a compromise.

"In this case, nobody is going to get everything they want, but we have to get a bill passed," he said. "We can't let the threat of a veto deter us."

Johnson said he is concerned about the amount of time remaining to work on the issue.

"In a couple of weeks we are going to be on the state budget in the Senate and once we get on the budget that is all we are going to be dealing with," he said. "If we can't get on this quickly, I'm concerned we will run up against our mandatory adjournment."

The South Carolina General Assembly will adjourn June 4.



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148 Lawmakers optimistic about road funding

BY GAVIN JACKSON
Morning News
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FLORENCE — Pee Dee legislators, Senate and House leaders remain optimistic on the remaining weeks of the first year of the 121st legislative session with transportation infrastructure funding bills starting to gain traction despite increased rancor from the governor, some of which is still reverberating in Florence.

Senate President Pro Tem Hugh K. Leatherman Sr., R-Florence, said Friday that a roads bill which moved out of his Senate Finance Committee last week is a significant step forward just in time for his committee and the Senate to work on the \$6.9 billion general fund budget the House approved March 18.

"I think we've had a good first half of the year," Leatherman said. "The next issue will be fixing our roads. That's what people are telling me — they're telling me, 'Fix our roads,' and they say, 'Well, it takes money' and 'Put on whatever fees you need to.'"

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Roads

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The bill would raise the gas tax by 12 cents over three years, and the tax would be pegged to the inflation rate. There's also a fee increase on driver's licenses and vehicle registration. It has hit resistance in the Senate already, but Leatherman is still confident.

"We got that bill out of Senate finance with a very strong vote, and frankly, it's further along than what I thought it would be at this time in the first session," Leatherman said. "That just tells me people are talking to various senators and saying that they want the roads fixed."

And it indicates that legislators are not worried about a veto from Gov. Nikki Haley. Neither the Senate nor the House plan directly mirrors hers, which would raise the gas tax by 10 cents and reform the S.C. Department of Transportation while cutting the income tax from 7 percent to 5 percent over a decade — a move that would remove \$1.8 billion from the state budget.

"I'm not concerned with vetoes," Leatherman said. "I deal with what's in the best interest for the people of this state and pass the bill out. Those who have input in it do what they want to, but the Senate's business is to do what the Senate believes is best."

Similar sentiments were expressed by House leaders.

The bill would generate around \$800 million a year of revenue for roads, close to the \$1 billion the state says it needs over the next 25 years.

Rep. Phillip Lowe, R-Florence, said the House roads bill that came out of Ways and Means, a committee he sits on, would lower the state gas tax by 6 cents, raise the wholesale tax on gasoline by 6 percent and increase vehicle sales tax. It would also provide a small, annual \$48 tax break.

The plan would generate about \$400 million a year, but a compromise would be needed with the Senate's to override the likely

veto from the governor. Lowe estimates that the magic number for a compromise, veto-proof bill would be generate around \$600 million annually for roads.

"It's difficult for any Republican to talk about a tax increase for roads, but I've never heard people scream louder than they have this year," Lowe said. "When I go around town to groups, it's surprising to hear the number of people that are willing to have a tax increase just to solve the road problem."

Lowe said people can stomach it better knowing that the money will go directly to roads.

Freshman Rep. Roger Kirby (D-Florence) said the bill is a good start, but he wants to see more money put toward secondary roads.

"Farm-to-market roads is where I see the real long-term issues," Kirby said. "They provide connectivity just like major roads do. Even with them not being in the equation, it's still a first step toward working toward longer-term solutions."

Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Darlington, praised the work on the roads plan and the House Judiciary Committee's moves on a domestic violence bill. Both are major goals for Lucas in his first term as speaker.

"The Judiciary, and Ways and Means committees have completed their work on roads plans and domestic violence legislation," Lucas said in a video address. "These two items are first on the list to address whenever we return from our break. I'm hopeful that we will continue to work with governor to pass these needed reforms to move the state forward."

A mild-mannered lawyer from Hartsville, Lucas continues to work with the governor despite reported friction between the offices. That friction was evident Wednesday when Lucas rebuked Haley for her "middle school insults" after she joked to members of a trade group Tuesday that after leaving the Statehouse they should "take a good shower."

"I believe the comments of the governor were below the office of the governor," Lucas said.

"These are serious times with serious issues."

Lowe said that Lucas continues trying to work with all members and that his comments Wednesday gave him more respect in the House.

"I think the other day when he spoke, I think it solidified him a bit with House members," Lowe said. "You could see the House was happy to see Jay take up for the House."

Kirby believes the move is unifying support in the House; something that might come in handy in overturning a veto, which needs two-thirds support.

"It's created a very strong sense of unity, from what I can see in the House," Kirby said. "If anything, it will make us more productive moving forward."

This comes two weeks after Haley's speech to the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce in which she told the audience that several local senators were obstructing ethics reform. Leatherman called her recent comments "childish."

"She said I didn't support ethics reform. I think what she's referring to is that I voted for an ethics bill that she didn't want, so that means I'm against her," Leatherman said. "She gets pretty loose with the facts sometimes."

Leatherman said he looks forward to debate on a large ethics bill sent by the House earlier in the session. There are other, smaller ethics bills that Lucas pushed for as a way to prevent the collapse of a bigger bill under its own weight.

Haley also criticized House lawmakers over a \$500 million bond bill or legislative "wish list" that was ultimately derailed days after it came to light in early March. Leatherman said such a measure may not be entirely dead in the Senate.

"I'm not sure there will be a bond bill," Leatherman said. "I'm willing to look at it and once we get a chance to see what's in the budget. I've always supported bond bills when there are needs. I think we have lost some windows of opportunity with interest rates being at some of

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their lowest levels ever since I've been in the Senate."

The bill featured several educational and workforce development items, including \$7.5 million for Francis Marion University for a business/education school building, \$1.5 million for Quick Jobs Pee Dee at Florence Darlington Technical College and \$50 million to address the state Supreme Court's ruling on education funding equity in the state.

At a meeting last week in Dillon, Rep. Terry Alexander, D-Florence, said an overhaul of the education funding formula was needed, as were changes in transportation and salary increases to address a court ruling on school funding.

"The longer we wait to do something the worse it's going to become," Alexander said Friday. "This is a 21-year-old case, and we're still trying to figure it out."

Meanwhile, Alexander and several colleagues have praised legislative action to assist South Carolina State University.

"I'm glad to see the body, collectively, wants to do something, which is a good thing," Alexander said. "No one wants to see it close on the House or Senate side."

The Senate adjourns for spring recess at the end of business Wednesday and returns with the House on April 14.

That's the same day as the special election for S.C. House District 63 in Florence. Florence attorney Jay Jordan won the Republican nomination in a three-way Feb. 24 primary. He faces no Democratic opposition and would be sworn in to replace former Rep. Kris Crawford a week after the election.



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148 State unemployment rate stays at 6.6 percent

FROM STAFF REPORTS

COLUMBIA — The South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce reported Friday that the state's unemployment rate stayed at 6.6 percent in February.

Around the Pee Dee, Florence, Darlington and Dillon's counties unemployment rates didn't grow by more than a half percentage point. Florence stayed at 7.5 percent unemployment. Marion County (11.8 percent) rose from being ranked fourth in January, to second out of 46 counties. The Florence Metropolitan Statistical Area rose 1.6 percent over a year ago.

Nationally, the unemployment rate decreased from 5.7 in percent in January to 5.5 percent. The report also said the estimated number of employed people increased from January by 10,432. The labor force also grew marginally by 0.5 percent.

February's seasonally adjusted, nonfarm payroll employment reached 1,988,100, setting a record high for the

second time this year. By industry, the most prominent increase occurred in leisure and hospitality (+4,000), with other gains in construction (+2,500), professional and business services (+1,700) and government (+1,400). Declines were reported for the trade, transportation and utilities; financial activities; and information industry sectors.

Compared to a year ago, seasonally adjusted, nonfarm jobs were up 62,800, with no declining industries during this period.

"The record-breaking trend continues as the number of South Carolinians working in February climbed to historic levels, and the labor force hit record numbers," said Cheryl M. Stanton, executive director of the Department of Employment and Workforce. "With the help of Gov. Haley's SucceedSC initiative, we can expand upon this record-breaking trend by preparing workers for high-demand jobs and filling our state's more than 70,000 current openings."

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148 When tax cuts might become bad policy

It's almost a given at the Statehouse that if you're Republican, you're for tax cuts. It's just an assumed part of the political playbook — the same document that includes the think-tank-generated mantra that scores of legislators embrace to get elected — to oppose tax increases.

This tax worldview creates a limited policy framework with which lawmakers can operate to deal with the challenges of government. When tax hikes are off the table and tax cuts are always on the table, what can a state rely on for new revenue as the price of everything rises? Economic growth — or some clever scheme — then makes new revenue look like anything other than an across-the-board tax (hence, the explosion of "fees" fueling state government).

So as an academic exercise, let's challenge the notion of tax cuts. Is there a point when there can be just too many?

The discussion has relevance now because of big policy discussions going on in Columbia. Gov. Nikki Haley, who seems to have never seen a tax she likes and who has slammed more borrowing to pay big needs even though she has backed a billion dollars of borrowing, wants more money for roads. But she says she won't approve extra taxes on gas unless there is a commensurate cut in income taxes. In other words, in a time when much of state government is funded at levels from a decade ago and hasn't recovered from the effects of the Great Recession, she wants to cut revenue even more and shrink general



Andy Brack
Statehouse Report

government, which would be so draconian that services taxpayers expect would just have to go.

Meanwhile, the state Senate is backing a plan to pay for billions of ignored road needs with extra gas-tax money without Haley's tax cut. (Haley says she'll veto that plan.) And two House members say the whole tax system needs to be reformed by eliminating \$2 billion of annual special-interest tax breaks to fuel needed investments in roads and schools.

But back to the question at hand. Just as it becomes unhealthy to stop eating food (you become anorexic), is it unhealthy to continue to cut taxes, year after year, election after election?

National analysts Katherine Barrett and Rich Greene say the tax-cut question is a "tricky game" for states. In a new article for the Council of State Governments, they challenge the notion that tax cuts always lead to improved state economies. Just look at the 20 states with the highest state-local tax burdens, they say. Six are in the Tax Foundation's top 10 New Economy Index, which highlights states likely to have continuing economic health. On the other hand, Kansas, which had some of its largest tax cuts in history in 2012, continues to reel from the



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effect of lost revenue. Predicted “growth” just did not trickle in.

Barrett and Greene say businesses obviously will locate in states that offer low taxes — just as long as services are good. But they won’t move to or remain in a state where tax cuts impede services that businesses need, such as good roads to truck goods to market. And they won’t go where inconsistent tax policy yields fluctuating, unpredictable bills.

“Growing in a state isn’t just the function of putting up offices or factories. It requires filling those buildings with men and women who can do the necessary jobs without tons of expensive training and retraining,” Barrett and Greene write. “The kind of educational system that builds such a workforce isn’t cheap. And it’s primarily paid for by tax dollars. So, the moment that tax cuts require reducing the quality of K-12 or higher ed, the less competitive a state becomes.”

So listen to the message: When tax cuts slash into the marrow of education — as would happen if roads are fueled by a revenue-neutral cut in income taxes — legislators risk making South Carolina less competitive, which means fewer jobs, less growth and a tougher time for everybody.

There is no free lunch to pay for a decade of bad decisions that underinvested in education and roads. If South Carolina wants to move forward, leaders need to be more flexible on tax policy.

Andy Brack is editor and publisher of Statehouse Report. He can be reached at brack@statehousereport.com.

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174 + 148 Thumbs up to dancers supporting a great cause

Thumbs up to the dancers who will be the star attractions Tuesday night when The School Foundation holds its big event — “Dancing with the Stars” — at the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology Center on the Florence-Darlington Technical College campus.



The “celebrities” have been working for weeks with their “dance professionals.” They should be commended for this commitment of time.

To perform on a stage in front of approximately 750 people takes courage, but it's all for a great cause. Last year, this event raised

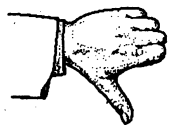
approximately \$190,000 for The School Foundation, which supports public education in the area via large and small grants to Florence School District 1 classrooms.

Thumbs up to the United Way of Florence County, which is winding down its second Biggest Loser competition. The first contest was a big success in 2015. We understand plans for a 2016 competition already are in the works. Congratulations to all of the 72 participants who have competed in the 10-week journey to a healthier lifestyle. Winners will be announced Thursday. Cash prizes will go to the individuals with the greatest percentage of pounds and the most inches lost, but as Stephanie Navarro, the community resource manager at United Way of Florence County, noted from the start, the real prizes are lower blood pressure, increased flexibility, the creation of sustainable fitness and nutrition habits, and the ability to run around with children and grandchildren.



Thumbs down to the litter and trash that we see on roadsides and in empty lots in our community. It's time for a little spring cleaning. What can you do? You can help clean up Timrod Park from 10 a.m. to noon today. It is one of three events Keep Florence Beautiful is hosting as part of the annual nationwide “Great American Cleanup.” Other

Keep Florence Beautiful events are scheduled from 10 a.m. to noon April 25 at West Florence High School and from 10 a.m. to noon at South Florence High School. Keep Florence Beautiful events are open to businesses, school groups, churches, civic groups, athletic teams and any other individuals or



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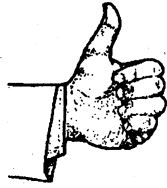


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groups that wish to participate.

Thumbs up to C. Morrison Farish, who was given the 2015 William Weston Distinguished Service Award on Thursday in Columbia by the USC School of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics. Farish was an instrumental force in the establishment of the Durant Children's Center and was chairman of its Medical Clinical Advisory Council until his retirement and subsequent move from Florence. He is now president-elect of the board of directors of the Dorchester Children in Crisis Center in Summerville. He is missed in Florence.



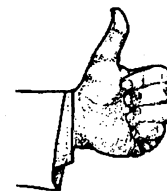
Thumbs up to the Pee Dee Coalition for the role it will play in April, which is Sexual Assault Awareness and Child Abuse Prevention Month. Events include Spring into Safety, a free, family-friendly community event from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Boys & Girls Club of Florence, 310 Roughfork St. From 5-8 p.m. April 14, Chipotle Mexican Grill will donate 50 percent of its proceeds to the Durant Children's Center if patrons tell the cashier they are supporting the cause.



Thumbs up to the House Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force for coming to the Pee Dee on Monday for a meeting at Dillon Middle School. In the wake of a Supreme Court ruling last fall in favor of poor, rural districts, a plan must be shaped for educational reform throughout the state by next year. It was a good idea for members of the task force, including new South Carolina Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman, to come to a region that needs help. It was good to see that time was provided for public input. The challenges are big. We've heard about the problems for years, but solutions have been lacking. We're counting on smart people to figure out how to make good education available for all children in South Carolina.



Thumbs up to the South Carolina Senate and House, which aren't letting Gov. Nikki Haley's threats of a veto stop them from putting plans together to get more money for the state's decaying roads and bridges. The plan passed Wednesday by the Senate Finance Committee raises the gas tax by 12 cents over three years, ties additional increases to inflation and increases the fees on driver's licenses and vehicle registration.



The plan passed Thursday by the House Ways and Means Committee would lower the state gas tax by 6 cents and raise the sales tax on fuel by 6 percent. It would raise an additional \$400 million per year for roads. Haley still wants to raise the gas tax by up to 10 cents, reform DOT and substantially cut the state's income tax. Her plan ultimately would remove \$1.8 billion from the state budget, while the House's tax-cut plan would cost about \$50 million because of an income tax cut of approximately \$48 per year for most taxpayers.

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



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South Carolina Bill Would Put Hemp Program Into Full Effect, Nullify Federal Ban in Practice

COLUMBIA, S.C. (Mar. 25, 2015) – In 2014, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley signed S.839 into law, authorizing the growing and production of industrial hemp within the state. Last week, a bill was filed in the state Senate to put this new law into practical effect and nullify the federal ban on the same, in practice. Introduced by State Sens. Tom Davis (R-Beaufort) and Paul Campbell (R-Berkeley) on March 17, Senate Bill 559 (S.559) would set

up a licensing process for industrial hemp production, ensuring that planting and harvesting can start taking effect like they are in other states.

South Carolina is one of five states – alongside Colorado, Oregon, Tennessee and Vermont – that have already passed similar measures to legalize industrial hemp without federal permission. Farmers in SE Colorado started harvesting the plant in 2013, and farmers in Vermont began

harvesting in 2014, effectively nullifying federal restrictions on such agricultural activities. On Feb. 2, the Oregon hemp industry officially opened for business and one week later, the first license went to a small non-profit group who hopes to plant 25 acres this spring. The Tennessee Agricultural department recently put out a call for licensing, signaling that hemp farming will start soon there too. Experts suggest that the U.S. market for hemp



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is around \$500 million per year. They count as many as 25,000 uses for industrial hemp, including food, cosmetics, plastics and bio-fuel. The U.S. is currently the world's #1 importer of hemp fiber for various products, with China and Canada acting as the top two exporters in the world.

During World War II, the United States military relied heavily on hemp products, which resulted in the famous campaign and government-produced film, "Hemp for Victory!"

But, since the enactment of the unconstitutional federal controlled-substances act in 1970, the Drug Enforcement Agency has prevented the production of hemp within the United States. Many hemp supporters feel that the DEA has been used as an "attack dog" of sorts to prevent competition with major industries where American-grown hemp products would create serious market competition: Cotton, Paper/Lumber, Oil, and others. Early in 2014, President Barack Obama signed a new farm bill into law,

which included a provision allowing a handful

of states to begin limited research programs growing hemp. The new "hemp amendment" ...allows State Agriculture Departments, colleges and universities to grow hemp, defined as the non-drug oilseed and fiber varieties of Cannabis, for academic or agricultural research purposes, but it applies only to states where industrial hemp farming is already legal under state law.

Applicants would have to follow the procedure outlined in the bill to receive a license including:

- (1) a set of classifiable fingerprints and written authorization permitting the criminal history record check...
- (2) documentation certifying that the seeds obtained for planting are of a type and variety compliant with the maximum concentration of tetrahydrocannabinol adopted by federal law in the Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. 801, et seq.; and
- (3) documentation providing the location and acreage of all parcels

sown and other field reference information as may be required by the department.

Licensees under S.559

must prove that they have "adopted methods to ensure the legal production of industrial hemp" including destroying or reusing all industrial hemp byproduct that is not put on the market along with details record-keeping that indicates compli-

ance with all of the bill's provisions.

The Division of Regulatory and Public Service Programs would regulate industrial hemp licensing under S.559. Licenses would be valid for two years from the date they are issued. Licenses could be invalidated by the department if false statements were made on an application form or if the licensee refused to comply with

the bill's provisions.

South Carolina has already overstepped the bounds of what is permitted by the feds. With S.559, South Carolina can take steps to make their industrial hemp program viable, and fully unleash the cash crop to bring prosperity to the state.

Aiken Senators Shane Massey and Tom Young serve on the full committee.



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April Fools!

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PALMETTO PRIDE ANNOUCES STATEWIDE ART CONTEST WINNERS GOVERNOR HALEY TO PRESENT AWARDS AT STATE HOUSE

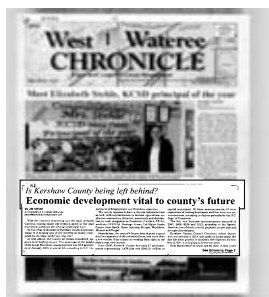
Columbia, SC (March 26, 2015) – PalmettoPride has announced its statewide Litter Trashes Everyone elementary school art contest winners. Winners will be formally presented with their awards by Governor Nikki Haley at the State House on April 23, 2015.

The purpose of the art contest is to teach the students about the effects of litter and encourage positive behaviors in a fun and creative way.

Midlands Region Winner is Gage Morris, a 5th grade student at Byrd Elementary in Graniteville. (artwork pictured above at left.) Congratulations.



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Is Kershaw County being left behind?

Economic development vital to county's future

By JIM TATUM

*C-1 (Camden, S.C.) senior staff writer
jtatum@chronicle-independent.com*

With the economy recovering and the state of South Carolina touting major job creation gains in the past four years, questions are arising at the local level.

To wit: what is the state of Kershaw County's economy today, is it reaping any of the benefits so loudly trumpeted by the state, and if not, why not?

At first glance, the county, all things considered, appears to be holding its own. Five years ago, at the height of the Great Recession, unemployment was 10.5 percent; as of January 2015 it was at 6.8, according to S.C. De-

partment of Employment and Workforce statistics.

The county appears to have a diverse industrial base as well, with representation in textiles, agriculture, appliances, automotive, chemical, metalwork and distribution by such companies as Suominen, Covidien, TB Kawashima, INVISTA, Prestage Farms, Cal-Maine Foods, Canfor, New South, Haier America, Hengst, Weylchem, Mancor and Target.

Nonetheless, the county's future does depend a great deal on expansion of the industrial base, and more than a few wonder if the county is receding from sight in the state's rear view mirror.

Since 2006, Kershaw County has seen 17 announcements representing 1,479 jobs and \$392.23 million in

capital investment. Of these announcements, 13 were expansions of existing businesses and four were new announcements, according to figures provided by the S.C. Dept. of Commerce.

The four new business announcements occurred in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2012, according to the figures. However, one of those initially projected no new jobs and no capital investment.

Kershaw County Council Chairman Julian Burns, who was elected in 2014, has made no bones about the fact his main priority is economic development; he also has said he is only going to serve one term.

Still, Burns believes much can be done in four years

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Economy

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-- if everyone works together to develop a common vision and a plan to achieve it.

Burns says The county appears to have much to offer, including a natural setting, good positioning on transportation networks, human capital, a good history of adaptation and past performance, schools, recreation and tourism with enlightened funding ideas, and engaged leadership.

"I don't see Kershaw County as a great place -- I see it as 'the' great place," Burns said during a recent Camden Business Alliance event. "We are well-run -- we're in the black -- we are open for business."

That said, Burns believes Kershaw County is missing out on new industry opportunities, and such opportunities are key

to the county's future.

"We need to figure out what we're doing wrong and fix that," he said.

For Burns, one important aspect of the equation is good customer service. The county needs to take care of its existing industrial customers first, even as it courts new business prospects. And the way to do that is to find out who they are, then find out what they want and get it to them, Burns said.

To that end, Burns has been seeking out and meeting with industry leaders. The No. 1 thing they currently want is a trained, ready workforce, he said. That's where partnerships with Central Carolina Technical College, Kershaw County School District and its Applied Technology Education Campus, and other such entities come into the equation.

As to attracting new business, "move-in" ready industrial sites and other such infrastructure are important to

those efforts, Burns said. The county is working on that side of the equation as well, he said.

So what does Kershaw County have to offer and what does it need to put into place? What are industries looking for and what do they seem to be seeing? Most importantly, why have they chosen to go elsewhere, assuming they ever considered coming to Kershaw County.

Those questions have multifaceted answers, say those involved in such activities.

According to S.C. Department of Commerce spokeswoman Allison Skipper, companies seeking to locate in South Carolina do take into consideration a number of different criteria depending on their needs.

As far as the industry recruitment process goes, the commerce department is the lead agency, but works within the scope of Gov. Nikki Haley's "Team South Carolina" approach, Skipper said. The players involved are at literally all





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levels, from the state to regional economic development alliance offices to local economic development offices and business groups.

Kershaw County Administrator Vic Carpenter said the county works closely with commerce and the Central South Carolina Alliance to promote Kershaw County locations. Among other activities, the economic development office keeps site location consultants informed of Kershaw County products and advantages, presents up-to-date information necessary for site location decision making, including information on product, utility, labor force, education, and quality of life, he said.

All told, Kershaw County has eight business/industrial park sites in various stages of construction; three industrial buildings are also currently available. Four of the industrial parks are move-in ready; the fifth will be as soon as a

water line is extended to the site, Carpenter said.

According to the Kershaw County Economic Development Office's website, Kershaw County sits at about the mid-point between New York City and Miami, Fla., within 24 hour access to more than 70 percent of the U.S. market.

Kershaw County is centrally located in the state, which gives it a number of advantages, including easy access to the port of Charleston and the cities of Columbia, Greenville, Spartanburg, and Charlotte, N.C. There are three interstate interchanges on I-20 with industrial park sites and buildings located adjacent to those interchanges; I-26, I-77, and I-95 all are within a 45 minute drive.

These advantages are pieces of the county's future economic development puzzle. In the next installment of this series, we will explore some of the missing pieces to that puzzle.

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148 State House OKs Grand Jury to investigate human trafficking

BY ROB COTTINGHAM

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State Attorney General Alan Wilson finally got his wish for more help in combating human trafficking.

On Tuesday, the S.C. State House finalized legislation that would allow the State Grand Jury to investigate cases of human trafficking in South Carolina.

Wilson applauded the adoption of the Conference Report on S. 196, which provides tools to investigate human trafficking.

The bill garnered unanimous support in both chambers and has been a top priority for Wilson, who said the legislation is urgently needed by prosecutors and local law enforcement.

"This is a major step forward to combat human trafficking in our own backyard," Wilson said. "This provides prosecutors and local law enforcement with a new weapon in the fight against modern-day slavery. Thanks to the authorization provided by this bill, human trafficking cases can now be sent to the State Grand Jury

and are no longer restricted by local jurisdictional boundaries.

"The hunt for offenders can go anywhere in South Carolina where the investigation leads. Local law enforcement has told us, 'they can't stop finding human traffickers.' Now, we have



Wilson

a much better chance of bringing them to justice."

On Jan. 6, before the 2015 legislative session began, Wilson was joined by numerous legislators,

law enforcement officers, prosecutors, victims and community advocates at a news conference to highlight the need for the bill.

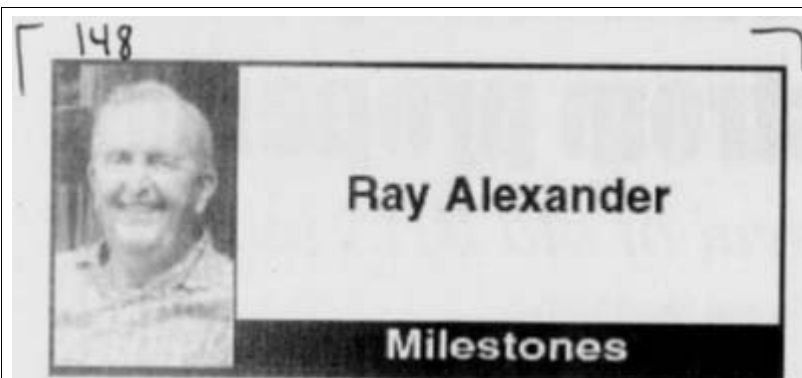
The bill was passed by the Senate on Feb. 4 and by the House on Feb. 11. The chambers exchanged amendments and drafts of the legislation before developing the final conference report last week.

"The General Assembly's ability to accomplish this significant piece of legislation before recess was enabled by the hard work of dozens of legislators and would not have occurred with-

out the leadership of Senate Judiciary Chairman Larry Martin," Wilson said, "along with the statesmanship of Senators Brad Hutto and Wes Hayes and the efforts of House Speaker Jay Lucas, House Judiciary Chairman Greg Delleney, along with Representatives David Weeks, Ralph Kennedy, Rick Quinn, and Eddie Tallon."

The State Grand Jury will be able to look into human trafficking cases as soon as the measure is signed into law by Gov. Nikki Haley.

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Please repair our roads!

There was a time not long ago when South Carolinians took pride in their public roads. After all, we are in sixth place in the entire nation regarding active public road miles. Things have changed in the last decade. Now we have numerous potholes, miles of rough pavement and sometimes poor drainage.

What has happened? The root cause of these conditions is simple: lack of adequate funds for good repair work, much less money for repairing entire stretches of heavily traveled highways. We're talking about million dollar per mile stuff, or often more, where road beds have to be included along with drainage problems.

Allowing for inflation, what has caused our state to be so short on funds for highways? Here are the answers to that haunting question: The eternal griping taxpayers, our "fearful of being elected again" politicians – from city councils to the governor's office and our highway engineer "brass" that may tend to "sugar coat" things a little too much for the whining politicians.

We need to take a "rolled up sleeve" approach to some weighty problems, if left alone, will only get much worse. So we must generate additional tax highway funds at the gas pump, auto sales, tires, auto repairs and required items for those repairs. This is asking a lot for those who must drive to work, to sports events, the vacationer and the medical folks. However, to include everyone in this new road taxation plan, those who show taxable income must also suffer along with the rest of us.





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Gov. Haley says, "Only so far."

I want to thank "Gentleman Jim" Eicher for furnishing me with some Associated Press material regarding what our governor's office is willing to do about highway repair funds in our state. More than a dozen years ago, he and his wife Sherry (who is somewhat of a tax expert herself) moved to Lee County from Ohio.

Because of where Jim came from, I always tried to tease him about being a Yankee transplant. Then one day, he corrected me on his genealogy, in no uncertain terms. "Look," he said. "I was born in Ala-damn-bama, so remember that." Yes sir, I won't forget it.

Now to Gov. Nikki Haley. Gov. Haley warned and reminded lawmakers last week she won't approve just any proposal to get more money to fix South Carolina roads. She said she will veto any plan that doesn't provide some sort of tax cut.

"We'll let everything fall to the wayside before we allow the people of South Carolina to see a tax increase," she said. It's nice to know how you feel about our roads, Governor. Was the 2 percent state income tax cut you mentioned just for the top money bracket people? Hopefully, your 2 percent state income tax cut proposal was for all taxpayers not just the top drawer taxpayers.

The pending Iran deal

As the U.S. and other world powers scramble to finalize a deal to constrain Iran's nuclear ambitions by March 31, the United Nations' reported Tehran had failed to supply information that would prove its nuclear program was intended for peaceful purposes. The Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had replied to only one of a dozen inquiries about the "possible military dimensions" of its nuclear activities. Tehran has also refused to let international inspectors examine its Parchin complex, where the regime is suspected of carrying out high explosive tests linked to a possible nuclear-weapons program.

Even if an agreement is reached in the coming days, it will lack the crucial element – a written accord signed by the Iranians. The U.S. wants specific concessions including inspections and numerical limits on centrifuges.

Iran is pushing for a vague statement of "understanding," with a final deal to come in June. If Tehran refuses to get specific, President Obama will either have to walk away from the table or try to sell Americans on a "deal" that really isn't a deal at all. Is Obama willing to gamble the world's security on the irrational hope that Iran will someday change for the better? It ain't gonna happen, partner.