

Title: **ALSO . . .**

Author:

Size: 9.45 column inches

Columbia, SC Circulation: 128564

**ALSO . . .**

●Americans bought new homes in June at the fastest pace in more than eight years, a sign that a solid job market and low mortgage rates are bolstering the economy. The U.S. Commerce Department said new-home sales rose 3.5 percent last month to a seasonally adjusted rate of 592,000, the best level since February 2008.

●Carolina Metal Castings, a provider of aftermarket metal castings, is expanding operations in Jasper County, according to Gov. Nikki Haley's office. The project will create 13 jobs.

●Under Armour's second-quarter profit fell 57 percent as the sporting-goods maker took a hit from the bankruptcy of one of its largest customers and increased spending to fuel its sales growth. Net income dropped to \$6.34 million from \$14.8 million a year earlier. The company, which supplies sports uniforms for USC, also was hit by \$23 million in impairment expenses related to the liquidation of the Sports Authority Inc.

The Associated Press contributed.

Title: **Haley appoints Coleman as county auditor**
 Author: By Cory Engle News Editor
 Size: 37.51 column inches
 Laurens, SC Circulation: 7825



Haley appoints Coleman as county auditor

By Cory Engle

News Editor

Facing no opposition in the November general election, former County Councilman Jim Coleman was appointed as Laurens County Auditor last week by Governor Nikki Haley.

Coleman received his appointment from Haley last Monday and began working the following day, filling the position left vacant by the retirement of former Auditor Sally Lancaster last November.

Coleman won the Republican nomination for Auditor over his former fellow councilman David Tribble in June, and with no Democratic or independent candidates on the ticket, and no petition candidates filing by the July 15 deadline, Haley appointed Coleman to fill Lancaster's unexpired term.

In the week since he took

office, Coleman said he has been learning the ropes and getting ready to prepare tax bills, which his office will send out in October. Fortunately, he said he feels his previous experience in Laurens County government has given him a running start.

"It's a long process but I'm familiar with a lot of things that go on here," Coleman said. "Having been through the other side, I'm very familiar with the process and I know most of the people over here. It's been very pleasant so far. There's a great staff and they already have a system set up."

Coleman was officially sworn into office at County Council's regular meeting last night. For photos and more on that meeting see this week-end's *Advertiser Extra*.

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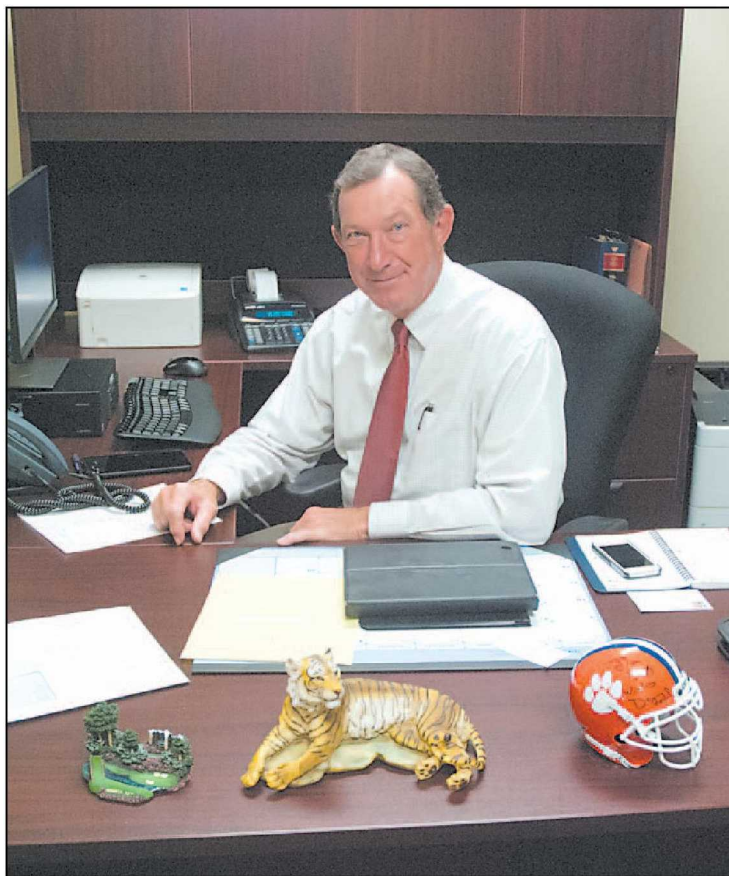


Photo by Cory Engle

ON THE JOB — A week after his appointment as Laurens County Auditor, Jim Coleman is quickly getting familiar with the office and staff. A former county council member for over 20 years, Coleman said his past experience in county government has helped him hit the ground running.

Title: **Guests get a peek at Yanfeng's automotive supply plant**
 Author: By Cory Engle News Editor
 Size: 220.1 column inches
 Laurens, SC Circulation: 7825



Guests get a peek at Yanfeng's automotive supply plant

By Cory Engle

News Editor

Guests got a unique glimpse into one of the county's biggest automotive suppliers last week when Yanfeng Automotive Interiors opened its doors during an official ribbon cutting celebration on Wednesday.

Yanfeng acquired the Faurecia plant on International Boulevard in Fountain Inn on July 1, with the promise to invest about \$71 million and to expand the 365,000-square-foot facility by an additional 100,000 square feet, adding 35 new jobs. Wasting no time, Yanfeng has already begun work on that expansion, as business and government leaders observed last week.

"We're good at making things in South Carolina and we're good at

making them in a quality way," said Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt, who represented Gov. Nikki Haley's office at the ceremony last week. "Companies like Yanfeng could operate anywhere. It's a huge company that has the capability to make choices ... and they chose to invest here in our people in South Carolina."

Formerly known as "Project Rain Boots" in FILOT agreements, Yanfeng will continue to manufacture the interior components for BMW that Faurecia made in the past. Items coming off the assembly line at the Fountain Inn plant include interior door panels and dashboards in a variety of colors and materials

that are then shipped to the BMW plant in Greer.

Laurens County Development Corporation Executive Director Jon Coleman said that while the investment and expansion are great news, the best part is that Yanfeng's acquisition of the Faurecia plant saved about 500 jobs that would have been lost had the plant closed its doors.

"This announcement saves 500-plus jobs in Laurens County," he said. "That's what makes it such a big deal for us."

Steve Bushong, Vice President of Operations at Yanfeng, said the move to purchase the Fountain Inn plant fits well with the company's new foray into automotive interiors. Formed in July 2015, Yanfeng

Interiors is a partnership between Johnson Controls and Yanfeng Trim Systems, a subsidiary of Huayu Automotive Systems, making it the largest supplier of automotive interiors in the world. Based in Shanghai, the company has over 90 manufacturing plants worldwide and employs over 28,000 people.

"It was a very good joint venture that was brought together with significant synergies and significant capabilities that we're excited to bring to Fountain Inn and BMW," Bushong said. "We believe that this facility will be a benchmark facility for us and a true world-class plant in North America."

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Photo by Cory Engle

GROWING INDUSTRY — County Council Chair Joe Wood, right, talks to an employee about the new expansion at Yanfeng Interiors, already well under construction just three weeks after the company acquired the plant from Faurecia.

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Photo by Cory Engle

PANEL DISCUSSION — Officials with Laurens County, the State of South Carolina and BMW take a peek at interior door panels that will be shipped to Greer soon after the ribbon cutting at Yanfeng Automotive Interiors last week.



Photo by Cory Engle

PLOTTING A COURSE — An efficient production line starts with a solid plan and engineers at Yanfeng make sure every step is clearly defined before the first stitch is sewn.

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Photo by Cory Engle

HARD AT WORK — A Yanfeng employee uses a spray booth to apply coatings to components that will be used in door panels. Yanfeng acquired the plant in Fountain Inn earlier this month, saving over 500 jobs that could have otherwise been lost.



Photo by Cory Engle

ON THE LINE — Visitors walk among dashboards of varying colors that are bound for the BMW factory in Greer during a tour of the Yanfeng plant in Fountain Inn last week.

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Photo by Cory Engle

WHAT'S IN A NAME? — Since the plant was acquired by Yangfeng on July 1, most bins on the production line still say Faurecia and the dashboards inside haven't changed much as workers install components such as cockpit panels and airbag harnesses before shipping the dashboards off to Greer, where they will be installed in new BMWs.

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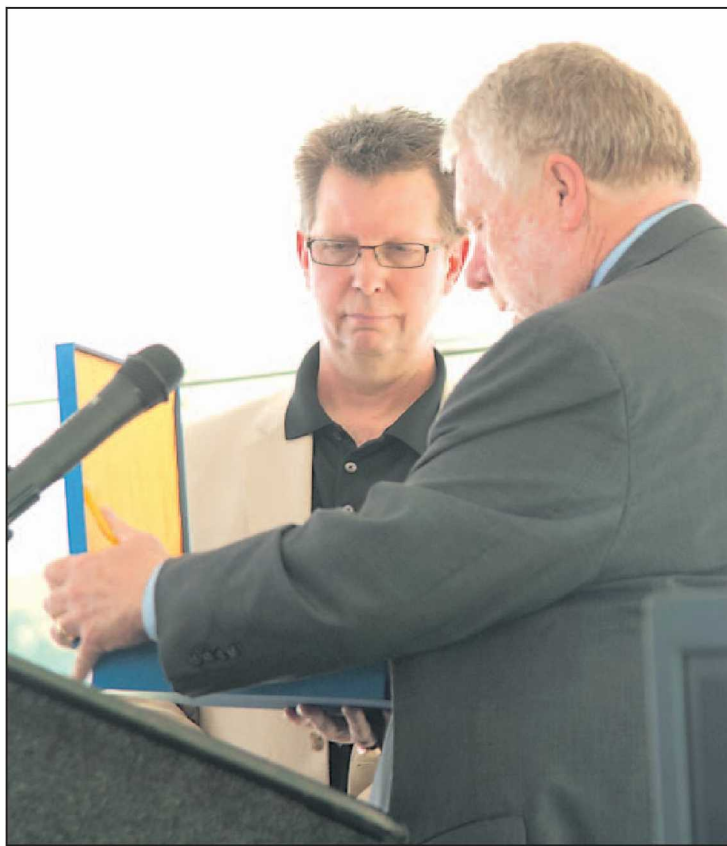


Photo by Cory Engle

WELCOME TO S.C. — Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt, right, presents Yanfeng VP of Operations Steve Bushong with a golden plate commemorating the company's first plant in South Carolina.

Title: **Election officials certify McCormick County Council petition candidate**
 Author: By CONOR HUGHES chughes@indexjournal.com
 Size: 16.58 column inches
 Greenwood, SC Circulation: 16494



Election officials certify McCormick County Council petition candidate

By **CONOR HUGHES**
 chughes@indexjournal.com

Timothy White has been certified as a petition candidate for McCormick County Council after turning in 103 signatures, election officials said Tuesday.



TIMOTHY WHITE

White, 49, is challenging incumbent Charles Jennings, a Dem-

ocrat and current council chairman, for the District 4 seat.

White, a small business owner in McCormick, said he was inspired to run when Gov. Nikki Haley visited the county and encouraged people to get involved with local government.

During a luncheon in November, Haley said "the problem with McCormick is you need new county leadership" and explained why the state Department of Commerce rescinded a \$1.2 million grant awarded to the county to build a spec building.

"I want to help McCormick become more business friendly," White said.

White said he wants to help the county use its natural resources, such as Lake Russell, more effectively.

White and his wife, Cynthia, have an 18-year-old daughter, Michelle.

Election officials are still certifying two other Lakelands petition candidates — LeRoy Martin, who is running for McCormick County sheriff, and Willie Callahan Jr., who is running for Abbeville County sheriff.

Title: **South Carolina Legislative Update**
 Author: By S.C. Rep. Bill Taylor, R-District 86
 Size: 86.64 column inches
 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



South Carolina Legislative Update

By S.C. Rep. Bill Taylor,
 R-District 86

Dear Friends:

The 121st regular session of the South Carolina General Assembly drew to a close last month. After a brief time for reflection, I want to take this opportunity to report on successes and disappointments from the past two-year session. Overall, a great deal was accomplished. Here are some major highlights.

Funding road improvements

After two years of contentious debate, the House and Senate passed legislation to begin funding the needed repairs to our dangerous roads and bridges. We significantly reformed SCDOT and allocated \$4 billion in state dollars for road repairs and to fix the nearly 400 dilapidated bridges around the state. All this was done with no tax increase!

Aiken County's roads and bridges

Aiken County will see an additional \$84 million in road resurfacing projects, including five miles of Interstate 20 from the Savannah River to Exit 5. The proposed bridge replacement program would target 22 structurally deficient bridges in Aiken County.

Ethics reform

At the last moments of the session, the Senate finally joined the House agreeing to ethics reform that would stop what some say "is like having the fox guard the hen house." The ethics reform would no longer allow legislators

to investigate themselves; that would be done by professional investigators at the independent S.C. Ethics Commission. A second ethics bill that won approval calls for all public officials in the state to reveal their sources of private income, allowing citizens to better see potential conflicts of interest.

CWP reciprocity

With much work by Aiken County legislators, legislation was approved allowing reciprocity for Concealed Weapon Permit (CWP) holders between South Carolina and Georgia.

County: Aiken

Veterans tax break

We approved legislation giving retired veterans a state income tax break. With this, South Carolina will be viewed as far more "vet friendly" and be able to compete with neighboring states in attracting retiring vets. Most retiring vets establish second careers and contribute greatly to our economy.

Guaranteeing vets in-state tuition

We fought for legislation that grants in-state tuition rates to active duty military and their dependents. Previously, active duty military personnel who have been stationed in South Carolina did not receive in-state tuition rates.

Shorten Legislative session

For 20 years, the House put forth bills calling for the shortening of the legislative session. (We have one of the longest in the nation – January to June every year.) Those bills always died in the Senate. This time, they passed their own bill to shorten the session by three weeks, and the House quickly agreed with a unanimous vote. The governor signed the bill.

Eminent domain

This is a big win for residents of Aiken County and elsewhere in the state who have been trying to keep a pipeline company from using the powers of eminent domain to acquire private property. The legislation disallows eminent domain powers by pipeline companies for the next three years.

Farmers, we've got your back

One day after Gov. Nikki Haley vetoed the bill to aid farmers devastated by the October flooding, the House overrode her veto 112-2. The Senate followed the next day. When the governor chose to turn her back on farmers and agriculture, we legislators knew we had to have their backs. Agriculture is S.C.'s No. 1 business, and family farms are the backbone of agriculture.

Fixing poor schools

The General Assembly adopted four bills that address an Abbeville lawsuit. One es-

tablishes the skills and knowledge all high school students should have upon graduation. Others call on the State Department of Education to monitor and assist struggling school districts and to create an Office of Transformation within the State Department of Education to assist with leadership and teaching practices in struggling districts.

Criminal Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence reform was a priority this session. We passed legislation giving law enforcement the necessary tools to reverse this pattern of domestic abuse in our state.

Protecting life

A bill that would ban abortions in South Carolina after 19 weeks was signed into law. The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act shortens the current state limit on abortions from 23 weeks to 19. Seventeen other states have passed similar measures.

Right to Try Act

This legislation authorizes physicians to prescribe certain promising experimental treatments to terminally ill patients who have considered and exhausted all other treatment options currently approved by the FDA.

OK to pray

We made revisions in keeping with particular court rulings governing the way in which a deliberative public body may invite religious leaders to offer voluntary public invocations at its meetings.

Teaching the founding principles

Our public school students will now be required to study the founding principles that shaped the United States. The required instruction must at least include the Federalist Papers, the structure of government, the role of the separation of powers and the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution.

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Civics education initiative

Currently, immigrants seeking U.S. citizenship must take the U.S. Citizen Civics Test containing 100 basic questions about American history and government. Surveys show 92 percent of immigrants pass this test, while only 4 percent of American high school students can do so. This legislation requires the same test to be administered each year to high school juniors throughout the state to ensure they are armed with the basic facts they need to be the informed and active citizens that our state and nation needs.

New deer hunting tag system

A new deer hunting tagging system was enacted, requiring hunters to tag every deer taken in the state. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources will issue eight doe day

specific tags and three buck tags with the purchase of a S.C. hunting license for in-state residents.

There were disappointments

I have fought hard to win passage of the Article V Convention of States (COS) legislation, but progress is being blocked by a powerful House committee chairman and Democrats in the Senate.

Secondly, the Freedom of Information Act bill I have championed for six years will bring more transparency to government at all levels nearly won final approval, but it was blocked by a rookie senator. It's wrong that one senator (who you don't elect) has the power of the governor to basically veto legislation. The Senate needs to change its archaic rules that allow this.

I have learned the legislative process takes

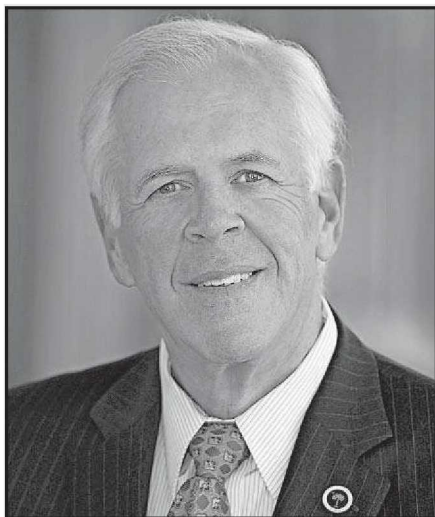
patience and perseverance; I'll redouble my efforts next session on both these critically important bills.

Thank you

It is an honor to serve you and your family in the General Assembly. If you ever find yourself in need of assistance navigating state government, or if you have ideas on issues to improve our state, don't hesitate to contact me.

I am committed to being your "Strong Voice and Effective Leader" in my service to you. My email is Bill@TaylorSCHouse.com and my phone is 803-270-2012.

I also invite you to sign up for my Legislative Newsletter at www.TaylorSCHouse.com so you can stay up-to-date on legislative actions.



Title: **Some National Guards soldiers now armed to fight terror attacks**
 Author: BY JEFF WILKINSON jwilkinson@thestate.com
 Size: 48.82 column inches
 Myrtle Beach, SC Circulation: 61238



Some National Guard soldiers now armed to fight terror attacks

Some soldiers at each armory have concealed weapons

Soldiers undergo training with State Law Enforcement Division

BY JEFF WILKINSON
 jwilkinson@thestate.com

Some South Carolina Army National Guard soldiers can now carry concealed sidearms at local armories to protect themselves and others from terrorist attacks.

Guard commanders, with the approval of Gov. Nikki Haley, have initiated a program that allows authorized soldiers to carry concealed sidearms in all of the state's 65 armories. Previously, Guard soldiers were not allowed to carry weapons while at work, even if they had state permits.

The action stems from the 2015 terrorist shootings at a recruiting center and Naval Reserve center in Chattanooga, Tenn., that killed four Marines and a sailor.

"We felt we were lacking the ability to immediately defend ourselves," said Brig Gen. Roy McCarty, South Carolina deputy adjutant general. "We would certainly much rather not have to be facing this situation. But it was a necessary level of protection until regular authorities get on the scene."

Some civilians might think soldiers and other service members carry weapons regularly. The opposite is true, unless they are deployed in a combat zone or participating in training or other missions where weapons are authorized.

Most soldiers in the course of their daily duties don't carry weapons.

Live weapons are considered incompatible with training and work, unless specified, because of the possibility of accidents.

The soldiers authorized to carry weapons have been trained by the State Law Enforcement Division and participate in joint training exercises with local law enforcement. They carry 10mm Glock 40 pistols, the same type used by many police forces.

From two to seven soldiers are authorized to carry the concealed weapons in each armory, depending on the number of personnel assigned to the post. An armory that supports a brigade-sized unit, like Anderson,

will have more armed soldiers than a small armory like Allendale, which hosts a detachment, said S.C. Guard spokeswoman Lt. Col. Cindi King.

The soldiers carry weapons underneath their camouflage tops, so even their co-workers won't know who's authorized.

The weapons are carried secretly "so they won't be identified as the initial target," McCarty said. "It's as low-profile as we can make it."

The program began last year. The Guard has kept the program generally quiet until inquiries were made by The State. About 90 percent of the state's 65 armories have armed soldiers, with the rest joining soon, McCarty said.

"As much as we would like people to be aware of this program ... we don't want the public to feel like the National Guard is armed among them every day," he said.

Haley said last year she authorized soldiers to carry weapons because "there

exists a threat of violence to National Guard members and facilities" in general. However, to date no specific or imminent threats have been identified, said Haley spokeswoman Chaney Adams. Haley's husband, Michael, is a captain in the National Guard.

The aim of the program is for those specially trained soldiers to protect themselves and other soldiers from a shooter until local law enforcement arrives. The program also institutes other measures like identifying safe rooms.

"Law enforcement could get there in a matter of minutes," Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott said. "But in a situation like that, it's not minutes but seconds that count."

Richland County is arguably more heavily impacted by threats of attacks against the military than any other county in the state. It is home to Fort Jackson — the nation's largest basic train-

SEE ARMORIES, 7A

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FROM PAGE 3A

ARMORIES

ing base; McCrady National Guard Training Center; McEntire Joint National Guard Base; S.C. National Guard headquarters; and several national guard armories, Lott said.

The sheriff said the department holds joint training with at least one installation

about every month.

“We understand that the police and the military are being attacked just because they wear a uniform,” he said. “We would be derelict in our duty if we didn’t defend against this.”

Maj. Gen. Robert E. Li-

vingston Jr., South Carolina’s adjutant general, said arming soldiers is one step to protect installations and personnel, and others may be considered. “This is a continuing evolution in our ability to protect those who protect our citizens,” he said.

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SEE GUARD, 6A

GUARD

FROM PAGE 1A

sources specialist at the Guard headquarters in Columbia – don't carry weapons.

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SGT. TASHERA PRAVATO

S.C. National Guard soldiers train at SLED to carry small arms on military installations.

Title: **Clyburn, Benjamin to address Democratic convention**
 Author: BY AVERY G. WILKS awilks@thestate.com
 Size: 43.71 column inches
 Myrtle Beach, SC Circulation: 61238



Clyburn, Benjamin to address Democratic convention

Six South Carolinians will speak at Democratic gathering

S.C. Democratic Party chair: 'There's a lot of talent in this state'

South Carolinians will talk about unity, the "new South" and the impact of electing a female president

BY AVERY G. WILKS
awilks@thestate.com

COLUMBIA

The inspiration for Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin's speech this week at the Democratic National Convention came long before he accepted an invitation to pick up the microphone in Philadelphia.

Last July, Benjamin introduced his oldest daughter to Hillary Clinton during a campaign stop at a

West Columbia church. He then watched as the 10-year-old discussed politics with one of the most influential women in the world.

"It was really a wonderful opportunity to see the look of hope and aspiration in my daughter's eyes," said Benjamin, whose speech Tuesday will center on children and the

impact of the United States electing its first woman president.

Benjamin is among at least six South Carolinians who will speak at the nominating convention for Clinton, representing a state that is punching above its weight in the number of convention speakers.

Of the more than 60 speakers announced Thursday, nine were

SEE CONVENTION, 6A

CONVENTION

FROM PAGE 1A

from California and six were from New York. But four were from South Carolina, a state with a much smaller population.

"The role that South Carolina played in the presidential primary, in terms of really vetting the candidates, in pushing the candidates, I think that's been acknowledged," said S.C. Democratic Party Chairman Jaime Harrison, who also will speak at the convention. "There's a lot of talent in this state."

"And Secretary Clinton has promised me that her goal is that she is going to focus on Southern strategy, a Democratic Southern strategy, so that she starts to build

this bench of talent all across the South. I'm glad that she has looked upon South Carolina as a place where she can find that talent."

U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-Columbia, and former state Rep. Bakari Sellers also will speak at the convention.

So will Felicia Sanders and Polly Sheppard. The two survivors of the Emanuel A.M.E. Church shooting in Charleston last summer will speak on Wednesday.

Clyburn, the highest ranking African-American in Congress, said his speech would follow the theme "stronger together."

He said his speech, and the Democratic convention itself, will be a stark contrast

to last week's GOP convention, which some Republicans complained was marred by negativity and party fractures.

"What you'll see is a party united and dedicated to making this country stronger," Clyburn said. "You will not see us turning on each other. You'll see a whole lot of indications of us turning to each other. We as a party believe that all of us bring certain experiences to the process and we are better off as a people when we draw upon those experiences to develop policy and move forward."

Harrison said he plans to lay out his own vision for the "new South," a phrase Republican S.C. Gov. Nikki

Haley has used to describe a region with improving race relations and economic opportunities.

Harrison, the first African-American to lead a major political party in South Carolina, said his vision includes a government that offers care and opportunities for every South Carolinian.

"That's the key part, to make sure that we continue to create opportunity so that people can succeed, so that they can realize the American Dream," Harrison said.

Part of that vision already has been realized, Harrison said, adding his son will not grow up seeing the Confederate battle flag flying on State House grounds.

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2016 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

Clyburn, Benjamin to address Democrats' convention

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SEE DEMS, 7A

MORE INSIDE

DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz will step down, following the furor over leaked emails, **4A**

Your guide to watching this week's Democratic convention, **7A**

What S.C. delegates will be doing at the convention, **7A**

DEMS FROM PAGE 1A

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He said his speech, and the Democratic convention itself, will be a stark contrast to last week's GOP convention, which some Republicans complained was marred by negativity and party fractures.

"What you'll see is a party united and dedicated to making this country stronger," Clyburn said. "You will not see us turning on each other. You'll see a whole lot of indications of us turning to each other. We as a party believe that all of us bring certain experiences to the process and we are better off as a people when we draw upon those experiences to develop policy and move forward."

Harrison said he plans to lay out his own vision for the "new South," a phrase Republican S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley has used

to describe a region with improving race relations and economic opportunities.

Harrison, the first African-American to lead a major political party in South Carolina, said his vision includes a government that offers care and opportunities for every South Carolinian. "That's the key part, to make sure that we continue to create opportunity so that people can succeed, so that they can realize the American Dream," Harrison said.

Part of that vision already has been realized, Harrison said, adding his son will not grow up seeing the Confederate battle flag flying on State House grounds.

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CONVENTION GUIDE

Your guide to watching this week's Democratic National Convention:

MONDAY

Session starts: 3 p.m.

Theme: "United Together"

Speakers include: U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and First Lady Michelle Obama

TUESDAY

Session starts: 4 p.m.

Theme: "A lifetime of fighting for children and families"

Speakers include: Former President Bill Clinton, the keynote speaker; the Mother's of the Movement, the mothers of slain African-Americans; and Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin

WEDNESDAY

Session starts: 4:30 p.m.

Theme: "Working Together"

Speakers include: President Barack Obama and

Vice President Joe Biden. The two will address the "high stakes in this election and how Hillary has the experience and steadiness to bring people together to tackle the big challenges and get results," according to the Democratic National Committee website.

Also, Felicia Sanders and Polly Sheppard, two of the three survivors of the Emanuel AME Church shooting in Charleston

THURSDAY

Start: 4 p.m.

Theme: "Stronger Together"

Speakers include: Chelsea Clinton, the daughter of the nominee, and Hillary Clinton, who will accept her party's nomination. Clinton's address will center on "her belief that we are stronger together and that America is at its best when we work together to solve our problems."

Title: **Clyburn, Benjamin to address Democrats' convention**
 Author: BY AVERY G. WILKS awilks@thestate.com
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SC DELEGATES' WEEK

Highlights of what S.C. delegates to the Democratic National Convention will be doing in Philadelphia:

MONDAY

8 to 9:30 a.m.: Breakfast with the Louisiana dele-

night recap

WEDNESDAY

8 to 9:30 a.m.: Breakfast with the Louisiana delegation

THURSDAY

gation

10 p.m. to 2 a.m.: Southern states dinner

TUESDAY

8 to 9:30 a.m.: Breakfast with the Louisiana delegation

11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.: Palmetto State lunch
10 p.m. to 2 a.m.: Mid-

8 to 9:30 a.m.: Breakfast with the Louisiana delegation

FRIDAY

8 to 9:30 a.m.: Breakfast with the Louisiana delegation

SOURCE: S.C. Democratic Party



Clyburn



Benjamin

Title: **Public input paradox in Williston District 29**

Author:

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EDITORIAL

Public input paradox in Williston District 29

We're not picking on Williston School District 29 by seeking evaluations conducted of former Williston-Elko Principal Joel Mitchell, who's facing a felony assault charge.

In early June, we requested copies of Mitchell's employment records so Barnwell County taxpayers can have a better understanding of how the school district they fund operates.

While we wait, we've run into another roadblock.

The *Aiken Standard* requested to address the principal evaluation issue during the "public participation" segment of the board's July 19 meeting. Our objective was to restate our request for the records and distribute supporting documentation.

Williston 29 denied our request because we didn't provide enough notice. The district requires the public to submit requests to speak three business days in advance, creating a paradoxical policy that can never be met.

The S.C. Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, requires public bodies to provide 24-hour notice of all public meetings. This includes special meetings, such as the one Williston 29 conducted July 19.

The *Aiken Standard* received notice of the 6 p.m. July meeting at 9:57 a.m. July 18, about 32 hours ahead of time.

In doing so, Williston 29, followed the law but isn't following common sense by building a three-day public input bubble.

Neither we nor the public can be heard until the August meeting.

There is no FOIA requirement governing public input, but most allow it because they value the public's participation in the democratic process.

Some require advance notice, usually within 24 hours; others let you sign up within 30 minutes of the meeting's start. Many invite members of the public to step up to the microphone.

In the case of Williston 29, the three-day rule shuts the public out of commenting on any agenda item for a month.

Our beef with Williston 29 isn't a press issue. At last week's meeting, there was a business item concerning increases in school lunch costs, a matter impacting all students, parents and teachers in Williston public schools.

The board voted to increase student lunch prices by 10 cents a meal for students and 25 cents for adults. The public may or may not have wanted to weigh in, but the three-day rule prevents them from speaking altogether.

They, like us, will have to wait until August to weigh in on a vote taken in July. By then it's a done deal.

We later confronted school officials about this public input paradox. We also pointed out because the July 19 meeting was a "special board meeting," it would make the public even less likely to know about it.

Dr. Missoura Ashe, the district's superintendent, responded by saying that it was

announced during the June board meeting that there would be a special meeting in July.

We weren't at the June meeting, so we can't say how many people heard about the special July meeting. About 20 were at the July 19 meeting, mostly consisting of school district staff and journalists.

It should be noted the *Aiken Standard* requested to receive meeting notifications on July 7. There was no effort to notify us of the "special meeting" until July 18, 11 days later.

While no laws were broken, Williston 29 demonstrated disinterest in publicizing the special meeting.

What if a taxpayer requested to receive meeting notifications on July 7 as we did? Would they also have to wait 11 days to learn about a special meeting?

Before leaving, we provided supporting documents to Dr. Ashe and Board Chairman Russell Overton.

We gave them copies of *Burton v. York County Sheriff*, an appeals court case saying there's no presumption of privacy for public officials in the performance of their duties.

We also provided copies of Gov. Nikki Haley's veto message from May 27, which struck down a bill that would've shielded teacher evaluations from public disclosure.

Meantime, we will keep pressing for the evaluations. After all, Williston 29 taxpayers paid for documents as well as the salary of the principal being evaluated.