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Students get a day off from classes now, but will pay for it later

By SCOTT POWELL
Ledger Staff Writer
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While Cherokee County students enjoyed a snow holiday Friday, they will have to make up the missed school day.

Gov. Nikki Haley signed a

state law last May requiring all school districts statewide make up at least three snow days be-

fore any school days can be forgiven. This requirement took effect for the 2015-2016 school year and applies even if districts already have makeup days built into their school calendars.

Days missed because of inclement weather will be made up in Cherokee County schools Feb. 12, March 7 and March 25, according to the school district's calendar. State law requires students attend

school for 180 days.

Local schools were closed

Friday ahead of a winter storm which dumped four to six inches of snow and a half-inch of ice on Cherokee County.

The sun melted the wintry mix on most main roads Saturday afternoon. However, the National Weather Service

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Snow

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cautioned black ice on secondary roads could lead to hazardous driving conditions again once temperatures drop Sunday night.

Cherokee County School District notifies parents about school closings and delays through its "Alert Now" instant emergency message system. The decision to cancel classes is publicized on area television and radio stations.

The district's inclement weather policy is to make an announcement about school delays and closings by 6 a.m. on a school day, Cherokee County Superintendent Dr. Quincie Moore said. Weather-related school closing decisions

are made after consulting weather reports, evaluating the conditions of secondary roads and determining whether schools can be safely operated.

"The decision needs to be made early in order to make transportation arrangements," Moore said. "Every reasonable precaution will be taken to assure students' safety and welfare. Decisions regarding school schedule changes are made only after careful consideration of all information available to us and always with the safety of children in mind."

Please do not call school officials, radio or television stations. Moore said it is important these telephone lines remain open in case of emergency.



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Feed mill coming to site in Joanna

Cobb-Vantress, Inc., a leading poultry research and development firm and subsidiary of Tyson Foods, Inc., will begin construction on a new feed mill in Joanna early in 2016, with completion planned towards the middle of 2017. The \$22 million investment is expected to create about 12 new jobs.

The state-of-the-art mill will supply feed to Cobb's grandparent breeder farms in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, as well as a great grandparent farm in Georgia. Based on current needs, the mill will produce around 1,200 tons per week using the latest technology for pathogen reduction including a 'hygieniser' for heat treating the feed ingredients before pelleting. Additionally, environmental controls will regulate air flow to prevent cross contamination.

"We want to ensure that we have a long-term internal feed supply that will give us complete control over the consistency and quality of the end product. This is Cobb's third feed mill in the U.S., the others being in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and in Albany, Kentucky. With the completion of the Joanna feed mill, we will internally produce all of our feed supply for pedigree operations through to grandparents," said Cobb-Vantress, Inc. Director of World Technical Services Dr. Steve Bolden.

"Always good to have a new business locate in Laurens County. We welcome you," said Joe Wood, chairman of Laurens County Council.

"Agri-business has long been a staple of the South Carolina economy as well as Laurens County's. Cobb-Vantress' investment in our community further illustrates just how important agriculture is to our State and Community. We wel-

come them to Laurens County

and look forward to a long and prosperous relationship," said Laurens County Development Corporation Chairman Stan Bryson.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley said, "It's always exciting to see a company make the decision to invest and create jobs in one of our rural communities. Cobb-Vantress' \$22 million investment further proves what we have known for a long time - that the Team South Carolina approach to building an elite workforce and a competitive business environment is working, and that's a reason to celebrate across the state."

"The Palmetto State has long been known as a leader in the food processing and distribution industries and today's announcement only adds to that rich tradition. We welcome Cobb-Vantress to South Carolina and look forward to watching them succeed here for many

years to come," said Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt.

Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers said, "We are proud that Cobb-Vantress has chosen to locate its feed mill in South Carolina. Not only will the mill provide more jobs for a rural area, it will also add value to the poultry industry, our top agricultural commodity, and increase marketing opportunities for corn and soybean farmers."

Cobb-Vantress, Inc. is establishing operations in Laurens County.

\$22 million investment expected to create 12 new jobs.

Construction on the plant, which will be located in Joanna is expected to be completed toward the middle of 2017.

Based on current needs, the mill will produce around 1,200 tons per week.

Those interested in joining the Cobb-Vantress team, should visit the company's careers page online.

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Domestic violence takes center stage; solicitor, others back enhanced penalties

By Vic MacDonald

Editor

In early 2015, Eighth Circuit Solicitor David Stumbo said, "Domestic violence has plagued our community for too long."

The year became a time of doing - not just talking.

Stumbo established the Eighth Circuit Domestic Violence Task Force, of law enforcement, rescue shelters, clergy and other key community members to address issues of domestic violence.

Stumbo used to work in the SC Attorney General's Office, and SC Attorney General Alan Wilson spoke at Stumbo's investiture as the chief prosecutor for this, four-county region of South Carolina.

Stumbo stood Jan. 14, 2015 with Wilson, state lawmakers and victims' advocates at a rally just minutes before the start of the General Assembly session at the Statehouse, and they said, "Enough is enough."

At that event - the Domestic Violence Call to Action Rally - Wilson said, "We don't need to be a society that allows you to get 5 years for beating your dog, but only 30 days for beating your wife."

The Eighth Circuit Solicitor's Office 2015 Year End Report

also says:

"The event included a poignant visual of red and blue silhouettes representing the men and women killed by domestic violence in South Carolina.

"This was the first time the Attorney General's Office has

used the silhouettes outside of the annual Silent Witness Ceremony. These silhouettes were held by law enforcement officials, members of the Attorney General's office and victims' advocates.

"These silhouettes surrounded the following individuals who stood with Attorney General Wilson and others at the event."

One of those silhouettes represented 19-year-old Emily-Anna Asbill, of Clinton, who was strangled. The Solicitor's Office secured two convictions and prison terms in connection with her death.

Stumbo and others, including House Speaker Jay Lucas, that day stood in support of Senate bill S. 3, which gave prosecutors new tools in combatting domes-

tic violence. These include:

- new charging options;
- enhanced charges for aggravating factors;
- enhanced penalties for repeat offenders.

peat offenders.

Gov. Nikki Haley signed the legislation, approved by the SC Senate and House, that grew out of Senate bill S. 3. The bill signing took place in June.

In addition to addressing domestic violence, the Solicitor's Office 2015 Year End report also details "Justice Tempered with Mercy." It describes the Solicitor's Office programs for Pre-Trial Intervention, Juvenile Arbitration, Drug Court, Worthless Check Court and Veterans Court.

PTI deals with 483 offenders, keeping them on a track to have their charges expunged.

Juvenile Arbitration deals with 278 offenders, giving them - as children and teens - a chance to not have a criminal conviction on their records for the rest of their lives.

The report says in 2015, 821 checks were processed, netting nearly \$200,000 recovered for worthless check victims in the Eighth Judicial Circuit.

(The complete Eighth Circuit Solicitor's Office 2015 Year End Report is linked in an article on The Clinton Chronicle's website MyClintonNews.com under Breaking News.)



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Dramatic moment. To show a jury how a homicide has been committed, according to the prosecution's theory, Solicitor Stumbo simulates a ligature strangulation to Eighth Circuit Solicitor's Office Investigator Walter Bentley. This demonstration was during a 2015 trial in the main courtroom of the Laurens County Judicial/Services Center. - File photo



A brighter Christmas. Social service agencies in the Eighth Judicial Circuit receive Christmas presents for deserving children from Pre-Trial Intervention clients, who make donations as part of their required community service. - Photo provided

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Williamsburg County

SC DOT officials say road repairs on the way

BY DIANNE POSTON OWENS
 Editor, The Weekly Observer
 d Owens@florencenews.com

NESMITH — Williamsburg County roads needed help long before October's flood washed away some of them, along with their bridges, leaving crevices and ravines 20 feet or more deep and wide.

Williamsburg County resident Lecretia Pressley told state

lawmakers during a public forum in Friendship United Methodist Church, and the lawmakers agreed with her, that something has to be done to bring the state's roads back up to par.

For Pressley, like most at the meeting, her usual 10-minute commute to the church was extended by 20 minutes because the McCottry Bridge on Battery Park Road over the Black Mingo River, a major route for area

travelers, is still out. That road is one of two still closed in the county, needing significant repairs before being reopened.

The other bridge, the smaller of the two, the St. Mark Bridge on the Old Georgetown Highway near Indiantown, crosses over Boggy Swamp.

If all goes well, said Richard Livingston, Williamsburg County

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The McCottry Bridge near Nesmith in Williamsburg County washed out during the flood in October 2015. The road closure prohibits easy access through the county.



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Repairs

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S.C. Department of Transportation representative at the meeting, preliminary work will begin in a few weeks and be complete in June for the Battery Park Road bridge and April or May on the other.

Representatives Carl Anderson and Cezar McKnight, and Sen. Ronnie Sabb, agreed that though it feels as if it is taking a long time to complete repairs, the county's condition is not unique in the state, and work is being done.

More than 200 people assembled at the church to listen to the lawmakers discuss the problem of inadequate roads in the county and state.

"It took 30 years to create this problem," McKnight said. "It'll take time to get us back out of this mess."

Williamsburg County Council member W.B. Wilson (District 2), who sponsored and coordinated the meeting, said his constituents are suffering and he wanted to spotlight the plight of the road-weary travelers. He said he wants to make sure richer counties in the state are not getting their roads repaired at the expense of his county.

Anderson distributed a letter he received on Jan. 21 from the transportation department's chief engineer for operations, Andrew Leaphart, saying there are still 50 roads closed

in the state. The Battery Park Road bridge, he said,

will be a full replacement and is under contract with United Infrastructure. The bridge on Old Georgetown Highway, he said, is "being expedited by SCDOT and ... will be constructed by SCDOT's in-house bridge crew..."

And while money is allocated to repairs, Sabb said, upgrading the roads is not in the budget.

"For that we need a recurring source of funds," McKnight said.

"The roads were a disaster before the disaster happened," Patricia Burroughs said. The potholes on Roper Woods Road, another heavily traveled secondary road maintained by the county, is filled with potholes and the repairs don't last long, she said.

"We're here to tell you we do understand," Anderson said, adding, "You're so close. Two miles to where you want to be and you have to go 12 to get there ... We understand your frustration."

"This is an enduring crisis," Sabb said. "You have to understand, we have to keep going through this crisis ... But sometimes a calamity can bring a blessing."

Sabb said he is hopeful the state's lawmakers will discuss increasing the state's road tax to better fund road and bridge projects. That idea was never fully discussed during last year's session.

y North Carolina and l, Georgia, McKnight said, it index their state tax to h the cost of gasoline at the

e pump. That system seems n to work in their states, he g said.

d "I don't want you to think y I'm here making excuses," e Sabb said. "I'm just here telling you it's going to take time to go from a washout to a new bridge ... Your suffering is not lost on us. But I'm not going to lie to you."

He said "flood relief," for farmers as well as roads, has become a priority issue for lawmakers.

"SCDOT is working on this as fast they can," Sabb said. "We don't want our ambulances to have to take the long way around ... we understand public safety."

Livingston said the state is seeking FEMA reimbursement for repairs, but FEMA does not pay for upgrades. When those are done, the state or county incurs that cost. Cost to repair the McCottry Bridge will be \$3.4 million, he said. And it'll take at least \$750,000 to repair the Old Georgetown Highway. There are two other county bridges slated for repair, Livingston said, one on Turkey Creek Road and another on Mingo Chandler Road.

"We had that money allocated before the storm," he said.

Gov. Nikki Haley prof-fered a gas tax increase, if it was coupled with a cut in the state's income tax, Sabb

said. He'd like to see the increase, but isn't sure the cut is needed. The state's legislature is likely to begin its 2016-17 budget process in March.

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Guest column

Annual National School Choice Week celebrates student success

BY MARY CARMICHAEL,
ORAN SMITH, ELLEN WEAVER
AND SARA WHEELER

All children deserve an education that meets their needs and allows them to reach their full potential, regardless of income or ZIP code.

This is why every year, millions of Americans come together during the last week of January to celebrate a powerful, growing movement to equip every student to succeed. This year, National School Choice Week began Sunday and will feature over 16,000 events around the country.



Carmichael



Smith



Weaver



Wheeler

In South Carolina, Gov. Nikki Haley has proclaimed it "South Carolina School Choice Week," and with more than 200 events taking place in our own back yard, we're looking forward to the opportunity to celebrate high-quality educational options that are empowering students to achieve their dreams.

On Wednesday, several thousand of our fellow South Carolinians joined in Columbia with S.C. Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster, S.C. Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman and other elected leaders to celebrate the difference that personalized education options are making in the lives of Palmetto State students.

National School Choice Week is also the perfect time for parents and students to learn more about the wave of choices that are growing in South Carolina and around the country. Whether a parent wants to explore traditional public, public charter, magnet, private, online or home education options, it's the perfect time to get a jump start on the coming school year before summer comes and many schools and programs reach capacity for the 2016-17 school year.

But what if your student has already found the perfect educational fit? Why would you celebrate National School Choice Week? It's simple: This week also is a chance to spread the word to your neighbors and the community at large about what your great school has to offer.

Members of the Williams family love their Lexington



District 5 magnet school, sharing that “Spring Hill has all the pieces Tyler needs.”

“We completely fell in love with our school,” say the Washingtons, who send their two children to Meeting Street Academy, an innovative Charleston school providing world-class private education at an affordable price.

CityYear Corps member Jeorgie Hicks found incredible fulfillment drawing on his personal experience to encourage students at Hyatt Park Elementary, a traditional public school in Columbia, saying, “You can’t put a price on mentoring. Everyone needs that advice, everyone needs that friend.”

The hands-on flexibility of virtual schooling is just right for members of the Jacobs family, who believe, “It’s best for you to know where your child really is.”

“It’s exciting to see them meet their potential!” exclaim the Woods, a Midlands family that home schooled two biological daughters and now does the same for five adopted children.

For members of the Hollingsworth family, South Carolina’s new Exceptional Needs Scholarships means they have found “peace of mind: the right place for Cody,” their grandson with special needs who is now thriving at Hidden Treasure Christian School in Greenville. And the Lisinskis found the personalized focus their twin boys needed at Carolina Voyager Charter School, a STEM-focused school in Charleston, where “the boys now get the attention that they deserve.”

These stories of real students from a wide variety of backgrounds are what inspire the work we do to make sure that every student in South Carolina has a shot at the same kind of education success.

Please join us to celebrate National School Choice Week. Thank a teacher, visit a school or attend an event, and learn more about the growing effort to expand high-quality, personalized education options for every Palmetto State child at MySCEducation.org.

Mary Carmichael is the executive director of the Public Charter School Association of South Carolina. Oran Smith is the president and CEO of the Palmetto Family Council. Ellen Weaver is the president and CEO of the Palmetto Promise Institute. Sara Wheeler is the president-elect of Magnet Schools of America.

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148 Bill aims to train students, unemployed for available jobs

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina would pay for high school students and the unemployed to train for jobs available locally under legislation that overwhelmingly passed the House.

The bill approved 106-5 Wednesday expands dual-enrollment opportunities for high school students so they can take courses that count toward their diploma and a technical certificate or an associate degree. It also provides scholarships to the state's unemployed so they can train for a job in their area.

Ways and Means Chairman Brian White, the bill's sponsor, said South Carolina's future depends on all businesses, whether they're being recruited to the state or have been here for decades, being able to hire locally. The goal is to match training with businesses' workforce needs.

"If we can't do that as a state, we need to pack up our tent and head home. We'll be dead in the water. This is something vastly needed," said White, R-Anderson.

Before the vote, the state's business, school and agency leaders filled the Statehouse lobby to show their support.

Although the state's unemployment rate stood at 5.5 percent in December, about 124,000 people are still out of work despite 60,000 job openings statewide,

Gov. Nikki Haley said.

"There is no reason we can't connect the dots," she said, touting the businesses recruited to the state during her tenure. "Those jobs don't mean anything if it's not our South Carolinians getting those jobs. ... We need to make sure everyone who wants a job gets a job."

The cost of the "Pathways Initiative" is unclear.

Several counties are piloting the program this year with \$5 million from the state. White said more money is needed but the amount will be part of the budget debate.

The legislation creates a council to coordinate all workforce training offered by various state agencies. Its responsibilities will include surveying businesses to determine their hiring needs and working with technical colleges to fill in any gaps.

The council would also dole out tuition scholarships for adults who need schooling to get a job, as well as grants to pay for books they can't otherwise afford.

State schools Superintendent Molly Spearman was among those applauding the legislation. Earlier this month, she asked legislators to pay for dual-enrollment classes. Students often must pay out of pocket to take a technical college course, which poor students can't afford, she said.



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148 Thumbs up and down to Haley and her speech

Thumbs up to S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley for her state of the state speech — in general. She did well summarizing

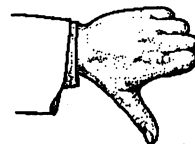
extraordinary 2015 events in South Carolina. She choked back tears when talking about the church massacre in



Charleston. She spoke well of the nine victims, particularly Sen. Clementa Pinckney. She spoke movingly of the three survivors. She talked about the challenges of the so-called 1,000-year flood. She continued to stress a need for ethics reform that we want to see. Her off-script move to see where senators

stand on the issue was ... interesting. She asked all senators who support her calls for greater disclosure of who pays lawmakers and for independent ethics investigations of legislators to stand. It was hard to tell how many senators stood. Haley then said the state finally can see what a vote on ethics reform in the Senate would look like. She pitched ideas for education reform that were much like her 2015 thoughts, but those thoughts about incentives for teachers to work in poor, rural districts are solid. Her comments about the state's domestic violence epidemic were spot-on, particularly acknowledging that the problem can't be fixed by legislation alone. She highlighted the fact that her executive budget includes additional prosecutors and that she is extending the task force that she put to work last year. Wisely, she made no mention of the Confederate battle flag coming down in front of the Statehouse. But we didn't like everything ...

Thumbs down to Haley for singing the exact same tune that she sang last year about a plan to fix crumbling roads and bridges in South Carolina. We'll sing the same



tune that we sang last year as well. We don't like the fact that Haley is continuing to tie strings to her support for a much-needed increase in the state's low gas tax. She wants to reform the S.C. Department of Transportation. She

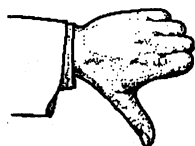
wants to decrease our state income tax. This isn't a road plan. Let's call it what it is: a tax-reform plan. The tax swap looks revenue-neutral at best. If the economy swoons again, the result could be dire for the state budget. Let's raise the gas tax now and see if revenue surpluses continue for the next few years before we consider a drop in the state income tax. We're not opposed to SCDOT reform, but that shouldn't be tied to the plan to raise money that is needed regularly to fix roads. If Haley would be willing to cut these strings and end her threats of vetoing any bill that doesn't meet her three conditions, who knows? Maybe a powerful Pee Dee senator would accept her push for eth-



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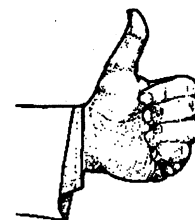
ICS reform.

Thumbs down to the S.C. legislator who introduced a bill that would require journalists to register with the secretary of state. He's a Republican representative from Laurens County who will go nameless here, because this clearly is a publicity stunt about his Second Amendment arguments. Is he not aware of the First Amendment, which guarantees five freedoms, including free of the press?



This bill will go nowhere, but it sends a message that some legislators aren't completely dedicated to solving the pressing problems that we have in the state. What a shame.

Erik Marechal, the board chair-elect of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Pee Dee Area, wrote to give a thumbs up to the Longleaf Fund of Foundation for the Carolinas and especially to the Rev. Will Malambri of Central United



Methodist Church. "Technology and the utilization of it as a resource is essential in the 21st century, especially for our children," Marechal wrote. "Young people who will soon take their place in the working world to support themselves and their families must have a solid understanding and hands-on experience with current hardware and software. As all of us know, it can be an expensive proposition to stay up-to-date in the world of IT. Boys & Girls Clubs of the Pee Dee Area recently received an exceptionally generous grant from the Longleaf Fund of Foundation for the Carolinas, which will update the equipment at two of their clubs and add mobile technology for greater programming flexibility. This equipment will be used daily by 400 club members in Florence and Lake City." Malambri recommended the Boys & Girls Club as an organization both worthy and in need of technology funding, according to Marechal. Thanks to both the foundation and Malambri, Marechal wrote, "members at the Florence and Lake City Boys & Girls Clubs will have access to a variety of online programs and basic software that will help them in their school work, and in preparing for their roles as 'productive, responsible and caring citizens.'"

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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SC Statehouse Reports 2016

Committee work and State of the State address

**Rep. Craig A. Gagnon,
 District 11--SC House of
 Representatives
 January 27, 2016**

There was lots of activity in the State House this week as we continued the early stages of the legislative cycle and heard from the governor in her annual State of the State address on Wednesday evening.

My Republican colleagues and I were happy to hear the governor's support for many of our priorities such as education reform, infrastructure improvements and ethics reform.

Echoing Governor Haley was the Republican leader of the House, Bruce Bannister (R-Greenville): "This week we heard from Governor Haley's heart. Our caucus appreciates her positive message and optimistic tone. Governor Haley mentioned education reform, fixing our roads and bridges, and ethics

reform. House Republicans have led on all three issues in the House, while the Senate has refused to act. With Governor Haley's help, perhaps we will see movement in the Senate chamber on these important issues facing our state."

Among other important issues, the governor also highlighted the tragedies our state encountered over the past year. The flood of 2015 was the worst natural disaster since hurricane Hugo. My colleagues and I have heard from flood victims across the state over the past months, particularly farmers who in some instances saw their entire crops disintegrate and fields ruined under standing flood waters. Agribusiness represents one of the largest industries in South Carolina and if you know a farmer, you may know that one year with no yield can be the difference between having the resources to plant again

next year and closing the doors. We continue to look for conservative solutions for these farmers and others affected by the flood, and I will update you as we move forward.

Finally, as is typical in January, much was done in our House committees. Once a bill is introduced, it must go through legislative committees before they come to the House floor for an up or down vote. We tried to spend as little time as possible on the floor this week so they could have time to get their work done.

As always, it is an honor and a privilege to serve you in Columbia again this year. If you need help navigating state government, or have any thoughts or concerns about what we are doing, please do not hesitate to contact me in Columbia (803) 212-6934 or at home (864) 366-4112 or via email (craigagnon@schouse.gov).