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S.C. ^{148 + 280}unemployment agency seeking \$15M for initiative

BY SEANNA ADCOX

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina's unemployment agency is seeking \$15 million for a workforce initiative that officials say will train thousands of people annually for existing jobs.

Details of the initiative Gov. Nikki Haley announced

during last month's State of the State address are still being worked out. But officials say it will help those who don't qualify for the state's decades-old ReadySC training program, which is tied to job-recruitment efforts.

The new initiative, dubbed "Succeed South Carolina," has two parts:

Businesses having trouble finding skilled workers could get a state grant to partner with a local technical college; and eligible people can have their training

paid for by the state, according to the Department of Employment and Workforce, which made its budget requests Tuesday to a House panel.

The worker, however, would have to pay the money back.

"If that single mom wants to get started, we'll pay for her training. And when she gets the job we've trained her for, which she will, she'll pay us back and pay it forward," Haley said in her State of the State. The Republican governor

has pledged to focus on workforce training in her second term.

How that "pay it forward" provision would work is not yet known, but agency officials insist it's a training program, not a loan.

"It's designed around

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INITIATIVE

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creating a skilled workforce for high-demand jobs," said Darrell Scott, chief of staff for the unemployment agency.

The 54-year-old ReadySC, a division of the Technical College System, trains workers for new jobs created by businesses recruited to or expanding in the state. The program is offered as part of businesses' negotiations with Commerce and local economic development groups, involving job and investment commitments. Last fiscal year, the state's technical colleges trained 4,700 workers for jobs at 81 companies through ReadySC, said system spokeswoman Kelly Steinhilper.

"We have always offered training programs through ReadySC to train people who want to work in places like BMW, Boeing, and Continental. It's

been tremendously successful, but we're going to expand it," Haley said in her speech.

ReadySC is not limited by size or industry. Of the 81 companies helped last year, 22 involved training fewer than 51 workers. Generally, half of the businesses that participate in ReadySC involve expansions of companies already in the state, Steinhilper said.

But it is limited to providing the initial workforce of either a company new to South Carolina or an existing company's new product line. Succeed South Carolina won't be limited by Commerce's negotiations, and the individual help is a completely new component, Scott said.

The range of certificates people could earn through the program is still being decided, but examples include welding and commercial driving.

"We want to target the growth industries," Scott said.



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1+148 **Times and Democrat, Orangeburg,
South Carolina, on FOIA reform study:**

State officials make lofty promises when it comes to ethics in government. They tout the transparency of legislative processes, accessibility of records and the openness of public meetings. But these efforts often fall short of providing any real transparency or legitimate hope of rooting out corruption.

That's the depressing bottom line that emerges from the State Integrity Investigation, a first-of-its-kind, data-driven assessment of transparency, accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms in all 50 states. Not a single state — not one — earned an A grade from the monthslong probe by The Center for Public Integrity founded in 1989 by Charles Lewis.

Only five states earned a B grade — New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington, California and Nebraska — from the project, which is a collaboration of the Center for Public Integrity, Global Integrity and Public Radio International.

Among the eight states with Fs is South Carolina, which earned a score of B on lobbying disclosure, B- on procurement, C+ on internal auditing, D- on political financing and F on ethics enforcement agencies, state budget processes, legislative accountability, state insurance commissions, state pension fund management, state civil service management, judicial accountability, executive accountability and public access to information.

What's behind the dismal grades? According to the Center for Public Integrity, the answer is that across the board, state ethics, open records and disclosure laws lack a key feature: teeth.

Addressing that issue with regard to ethics laws is a state priority of South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and key legislators in 2015. Plans in both the House and Senate to allow independent review of accusations



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against lawmakers are on the table again and appear to have a better chance than ever of advancing in light of the corruption case of former House Speaker Bobby Harrell.

But when it comes to across-the-board improvements, as important as any ethics reform legislation is a pending bill that strengthens the state's Freedom of Information Act. The law has taken hits in recent years in the form of court rulings sealing autopsy reports and removing the requirement that a public body operate in public according to a preannounced agenda.

Nothing will ensure better government more than open government. Shining the light of public oversight on politicians and public officials is an amazing elixir for what ails government here or anywhere.

And if lawmakers are looking for reinforcement of the need the strengthen FOIA, we hope they will consider details in the Center for Public Integrity's rating of South Carolina in the category of access to public information.

Do citizens have a legal right of access to information? South Carolina scored 25 percent. To go along with a score of a 100 percent rating on citizens' legal right to government information and records is the practical nature of exercising the right. The state had scores of 0 on the right to appeal if a record is denied, absence of a government institutional mechanism through which citizens can request government records and the absence of an agency or entity that monitors the application of access to information laws and regulations.

Is the right of access to information effective? South Carolina scored 19 percent with grades of 0 on citizens' ability to resolve appeals in a reasonable period time and at a reasonable cost, and the absence of any agency to investigate denial of public information and impose penalties. The state's highest marks (50) came in the quality of responses to FOIA requests and offering reasons for denying an information request.



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148 **Post and Courier, Charleston,
South Carolina, on fixing schools:**

Plenty of obstacles stand in the way of improving schools in the state's poor, rural districts, but in November the S.C. Supreme Court said that the Legislature and the districts must work together to get over them.

On Monday, the court eliminated one big distraction in that process, as it rejected an appeal by state leaders to rehear the case.

Now it's time for legislative leaders to get down to the business of addressing the shameful situation.

Several reform efforts already are underway. Gov. Nikki Haley has included money in her budget to recruit teachers to rural districts that are failing. She also wants to expand a program that coaches children in reading, and to devote \$29.3 million for technology.

House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Hartsville, has established a task force of lawmakers, business leaders and educators to evaluate reforms. Included are representatives of the districts named in the lawsuit.

Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, also formed a committee, to be chaired by Sens. Wes Hayes, R-Rock Hill, and Nikki Setzler, D-West Columbia.

Sadly, neither committee is expected to come up with a comprehensive solution any time soon. And that means the inadequate school transportation, unprepared teachers and substandard education in "educational ghettos" that the Supreme Court decision targets will have to wait.

Educators from the rural districts must also play a big part in the conversation, not just because doing so could help their students but because the Supreme Court so ordered it. The court was critical of school officials as well as the Legislature, saying they have spent money unwisely on administration rather than instruction, on athletic facilities rather than academic enhancements. It also chided small districts for simply blaming the state without exploring on their own such options as consolidation to reduce administrative costs.

The Supreme Court took a stunning 21 years to rule on the case. The plan prescribed by the court needs to be completed with reasonable dispatch.

Meanwhile limited reforms like those proposed by the governor should be implemented in the next school year. Indeed, all involved should be looking for measures that can start giving rural students better access to an adequate education even before the comprehensive plan is completed.



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148 Task force on violence needs to hear many voices

Raise your hand if you have not been selected to serve on Gov. Nikki Haley's new Domestic Violence Task Force of South Carolina.

Hmmm. Just like we thought. We don't see many hands.

In other words, the number of people who are being asked to serve on this panel is big. That's fitting, because domestic violence is a big problem in our state. It's a life-or-death issue. No need to rehash the specifics.

Two heads are better than one, the saying goes. Are 40 heads twice as good as 20? In this case, we hope so.

At least 40 entities will be on the task force, which Haley established late last month. Those entities are heavy on law enforcement organizations, education groups and Cabinet agencies, but the panel also will include a representative of the South Carolina State Board of Cosmetology. That's smart.

We are especially pleased that the task force will include members of faith-based communities and members of the public, including survivors of domestic violence.

Large groups can be unwieldy. We hope every voice has a chance to be heard.

One of the individuals who will serve on this task force is Florence County Sheriff Kenney Boone. Haley has chosen well. Boone is the vice president of the South Carolina Sheriffs' Association. He has spoken effectively on the subject of domestic violence in recent press conferences, hammering home the thought that it will take more than legislative action to reduce the problem.



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"We need a cultural change," he said when the task force was announced. "We need to go a step further, and that's one thing the governor recognized. Thanks to her leadership and her vision, we're able to address this critical issue that's extremely important to our state."

Of course, some legislative action won't hurt.

Haley will head the task force, and her executive order included some good thoughts. For instance, "domestic violence is a crime that most often occurs within the privacy of one's home but is in actuality a crime against the public, destabilizing families, which are the foundational building blocks of our society."

Another good point: "South Carolina is home to countless nonprofit organizations and other government initiatives that exist to prevent and treat the causes and effects of domestic violence, but there is no comprehensive, statewide movement to harmonize these efforts."

The mission of the task force is succinct: "To comprehensively address the cultural issues surrounding domestic violence in the state of South Carolina, including but not limited to social, economic and geographic issues, as well as professional standards and best practices within government and non-government organizations."

The task force will be divided into at least three divisions to study and make recommendations to improve areas affecting domestic violence:

- » The criminal justice system.
- » Services for victims and offenders.
- » Community awareness, education and outreach.

The task force will conduct its work in at least four phases:

- » Surveying and collecting data and information from counties and regions of the state.
- » Identifying specific problems and creating proposed solutions.
- » Implementing or beginning to implement, where possible, approved proposals.
- » Assessing short- and long-term goals for combating and preventing domestic violence in the future.

The divisions will submit reports at the end of each phase. The entire task force will issue a final report no later than the end of this year. At that point, the task force will be dissolved.

This is a good plan. We're eager to see great execution. We need to see results.

Best wishes to all who will be involved in solving a problem that never should have grown this big.

Unsigned editorials represent the views of this newspaper. Editorial board members are Stephen Wade (regional publisher), Don Kausler Jr. (regional editor), Kimberly Brauss (online editor) and John Rains (news editor).



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SC unemployment agency seeks \$15M for initiative

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The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina's unemployment agency is seeking \$15 million for a workforce initiative that officials say will train thousands of people annually for available jobs.

Details of the initiative Gov. Nikki Haley announced last month in her State of the State address are still being worked out. But officials say it will help those who don't qualify for the state's decades-old ReadySC training program, which is tied to job-recruitment efforts.

The new initiative, "Succeed South Carolina," has two parts: Businesses having trouble finding skilled workers could get a state grant to partner with a local technical college. Eligible people can have their training paid upfront by the state, Department of Employment and Workforce Director Cheryl Stanton told a House budget-writing panel Tuesday.

But the worker would have to pay the money back.

"If that single mom wants to get started, we'll pay for her training. And when she gets the job we've trained her for, which she will, she'll pay us back and pay it forward," Haley said in her State of the State. The Republican governor has pledged to focus on workforce training in her second term.

How that "pay it forward" provision would work is not yet known, but agency officials insist it's a training program, not a loan.

As of December, 144,000 South Carolinians were unemployed. But Stanton noted there were 64,000 job openings statewide.

"We're going to look region by region — looking to see what the high-demand jobs are with openings," then arrange for the training that enables people to fill them, she said. "It's a cultural shift for the state of South Carolina."



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148 **Letter to the Editor**
Haley wrong about unions

I have tired of reading the misinformation spouted by Gov. Nikki Haley blasting unions. Haley says unions do not belong in South Carolina. Tell that to every airline pilot and UPS driver that serves our state. Oh, by the way, 100 percent of these jobs are unionized nationwide and perform efficiently, safely and make oodles of money for their companies while making much more money than comparable jobs.

I have been a union member airline pilot for the last 17 years, flying a Boeing 737. I am expected to perform at a high standard in safety and efficiency and am rewarded for it with a \$4.6 million career on the average. Having a union in the workplace ensures efficient management since we are self-policing professionals, a safer operation since our job is never threatened if we feel unsafe taking an aircraft for any reason, and a seniority list associated with a union creates a predictable career path, thus increasing employee morale and loyalty to the company as seniority accrues.

As you know, UPS drivers are not known for being lazy union members either ... they work hard and are paid well. If businesses can have a chamber of commerce, workers should pursue union membership in all professions and the associated power to collectively



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148 DSS leader nominee gets panel's OK

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley's pick to lead South Carolina's embattled Department of Social Services moved one step closer to taking office Tuesday, gaining the first of three legislative approvals.

A Senate panel unanimously advanced the nomination of Susan Alford. If a full committee approves her selection Wednesday, her nomination goes to the full Senate for a vote.

Haley picked Alford, 60, to replace Lillian Koller, who resigned last year amid calls for her ouster. Haley had refused to fire Koller, who resigned a day before the Senate was expected to take up a no-confidence vote on her leadership.

For a year, bipartisan Senate hearings had spotlighted the agency's problems including child deaths, excessive caseloads and turnover. In October, the agency released an improvement plan that included adding 221 child welfare positions this fiscal year.

Alford has warned lawmakers that making substantive changes at the agency will take years. She estimates it could take up to a year to visit department offices in each of the state's 46 counties. On Tuesday, she said she also would make revamping the agency's infrastructure a major priority, assuring senators she would not be timid if executives need to be replaced.

"I've just got to line things up and make sure I've got the right team in place," Alford said. "It's going to be critical for me to have the right leadership in place."

Democratic Sen. Thomas McElveen of Sumter stressed the need for a more seamless communication system, describing the case of several abused children, one of whom DSS had removed from the parents, then considered placing with grandparents who shared a home with one of those parents.

"Here you have adoptions doing one thing, and you have child protective services moving in another direction," McElveen said.

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"It's a real life example."

Alford called that situation "unacceptable," adding that she would seek ways to improve communication within the agency.

If confirmed, Alford said she also wants to develop an efficient way for people to report abuse allegations and overhaul the department's system for protecting vulnerable adults, finding ways to reduce caseloads for workers who handle those cases.

"Adult protective ser-

vices ... is an area that needs a lot of attention," she said. "We've got a lot of work to do."

Since 2007, Alford has been director of The Girls Center at Clemson University.

The research hub for issues like teen pregnancy and poor self-esteem seeks to prevent girls from becoming dependent, arrested or victims of abuse.

Alford was previously at the Department of Juvenile Justice for more than a dozen years in various director roles and served as a director at the state's probation and parole agency.

Title: **County road-use fee must fit the big picture**

Author:

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County road-use fee must fit the big picture

Beaufort County needs road money, but the accumulation of proposed tax hikes needs to be clear.

A Beaufort County Council plan to increase the annual road-use fee merits careful — and slow — consideration.

A County Council subcommittee has already endorsed the idea of increasing the fee from \$10 per vehicle to \$20 to raise about \$3 million each year to pave dirt roads and maintain paved ones. The charge would show up on residents' personal property-tax bills.

If approved by the full council next month, it would mark the first time since 1993 the fee has been increased and bring it in line with what is already charged by neighboring counties.

Why are Beaufort County leaders considering the fee increase now? They say they need about \$3.2 million a year to maintain the current cycle of resurfacing paved county roads every 20 years. And they need another \$42 million to pave about 85 miles of county-maintained dirt roads.

The average cost of paving a mile of dirt road is now about \$600,000 compared to \$340,000 in 1994.

While we certainly believe that road maintenance and improvement is important and that the fee should be increased in the near future, we're not yet convinced that 2015 is the year to ask residents to

open their wallets wider.

Consider:

- County Council will be at least \$2.5 million in the hole at the start of next fiscal year. Talk of a possible tax increase has begun.

- A top priority for the state legislature this session is paying for repairs and improvements to state-owned roads and bridges. Translation: S.C. residents will have to pay more. The state needs an added \$42 billion over the next three decades to meet its infrastructure needs, state transportation officials have estimated.

- One popular idea for raising money is increasing the state's gas tax. Even Gov. Nikki Haley — long opposed to this increase that residents would feel each time they filled up their tanks — has said she would agree to one if it is paired with a decrease in the state's income tax.

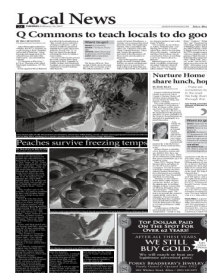
With Haley and so many lawmakers on board, we're banking on an increase.

With Beaufort County residents certain to be hit with tax increases, a fee increase, even a small one, could be overkill.

We urge County Council members to take a wait-and-see approach. They must first know the exact financial impact of any decisions reached by the General Assembly this session. And they also must see whether a county tax increase is needed.

Without these two pieces of information in hand, it's difficult to say whether a 2015 fee increase is a political flub or a timely fix.

Title: **Peaches survive freezing temps**
 Author: BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER mschechter@aikenstandard.com
 Size: 100.75 square inch
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Peaches survive freezing temps

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER
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South Carolina's peach season won't be frozen out despite the cold chill has experienced in Aiken County.

Chris Yonce, of J.W. Yonce & Sons, said peaches are now in the "dormancy" stage, all leaves and no bloom yet, so the arctic blast that swept through the Southeast last week won't affect the crop.

"The low temperatures in the 14 to 18 degrees could damage the crop a little, maybe about 5 to 10 percent of your buds, but overall, we don't think the cold will do anything to them," Yonce said.

"The weather now is OK; actually, it's good to continue to have cold weather longer because it helps keep them dormant."

Yonce & Sons has more than 4,000 acres of peach groves in Aiken, Edgefield and Saluda counties, with the earliest-ripening peaches representing 40 to 45 percent of the grower's total crop. The area, known as "The Ridge," where Yonce & Sons is based, is home to more than 13,000 acres of peach orchards. Statewide, there are 17,000 acres of peach trees.

Yonce said their peach season begins mid-May, and can vary by 10 days depending on how late spring is or how early it gets warm.

"The weather's temperature dictates our start date," Yonce said. "Our critical time is from when things start to bloom to approxi-

mately a 30-day period after bloom."

Last March, temperatures dipped into the high 20s, causing a freeze and damaging the earliest-ripening peach varieties in Aiken and Edgefield counties.

That freeze killed about 30 percent of the 2014 peach crop, causing a reported financial loss of at least \$27 million in the Palmetto State, South Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers told the *Aiken Standard*. Yonce said the damage happened post-bloom, which is a critical

time for peaches.

"It was definitely a setback; we lost almost every peach from the first part of our

season from May to June," Yonce said. "Basically, a third to half of our income got cut off."

Although it doesn't appear Aiken County will reach temperatures and conditions similar to areas on the East Coast, the National Weather Service issued a freezing

rain advisory for the south coast of South Carolina for today.

Yonce reiterated these cooler temperatures shouldn't hurt the crop at all.

Maayan Schechter is the City beat reporter with *Aiken Standard* and started in July. She has a degree in mass communications-journalism from the University of North Carolina Asheville.

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AIKEN STANDARD FILE PHOTO

Larry Yonce, left, of J.W. Yonce & Sons in Johnston, shows Gov. Nikki Haley, center, a freeze-damaged peach tree branch without fruit in May 2014. Looking on is South Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers.

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AIKEN STANDARD FILE PHOTO

Peaches wait to be sold at Dan's Peach Stand next to Tyler's Tire & Auto Center on Whiskey Road.



AIKEN STANDARD FILE PHOTO

Tim Bledsoe cuts into one of the juicy, early season peaches.

Title: **As Kitzman drops out, time to refocus search**
 Author:
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As Kitzman drops out, time to refocus search

A reshuffling of the proverbial deck in the search for a new director of the Department of Health and Environmental Control is likely in the best interest of both the agency and the state.

As the confirmation process unfolded, it became clear selecting Eleanor Kitzman, the hand-picked nominee of S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, was not the best way forward because of her political ties as a Haley campaign donor and her significant lack of experience.

Her potential confirmation was steeped in controversy seemingly from the get-go. Although the department's board previously noted the names of several other potential candidates at one time, no applications were actually requested or received. The board explained in a statement that they felt Kitzman was simply the best person for the job.

While seeking applications for the director's job isn't required by state law, not seeking applications is a definitive departure from past hiring practices for the agency. In 2012, the department's board selected Catherine Templeton after a national search that included a field of 250 candidates.

Templeton served for three years, resigning in January amid some speculation that she may be considering a political campaign in the future. While Templeton had limited background in state environmental and health regulation, she did have a reputation as an accountable public servant after heading the state's Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. As director of the state's

health and environmental agency, Templeton's record appears rather mixed in relatively quick hindsight. She garnered considerable criticism for her agency's handling of a tuberculosis outbreak in Greenwood County in 2013. However, her record did have bright spots. She insightfully spearheaded a statewide obesity initiative and was credited with giving a quick and proactive response in 2013 to the illegal dumping of toxic chemical compounds in sewers in South Carolina's Upstate and in Columbia.

The state will never know whether the department would have been steered in the right or wrong direction under Kitzman, but as her confirmation moved forward, it was becoming increasingly clear the department's board could have done a better job in opening up the application process.

Regardless of the board's intentions, it wouldn't have been a waste of time to have a more expansive search process, particularly one geared toward finding someone with more experience in an agency that involves health and environmental policy.

With Kitzman out of the picture, it would be advantageous for the department's board to truly refocus its search in such a direction.

This is perhaps the state's most complex and unwieldy agency. Finding a suitable director requires a thorough and comprehensive search to pick someone with the skills needed to properly serve the agency.

So far, that due diligence has clearly been lacking.

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

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AP FILE PHOTO

The search for a director for the state's Department of Health and Environmental Control is up in the air after Eleanor Kitzman decided to remove her name from consideration.