



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? The \$9 billion failure of two nuclear reactors under construction in South Carolina and the fallout for electric ratepayers in the state.

Date(s) of publication? July 30, 2017 (Better protections for ratepayers), August 4, 2017 (Clean up nuclear disaster), March 7, 2018 (The opposite of prudent), March 23, 2018 (Make shareholders share cost), April 1, 2018 (Go ahead and slash SCANA rates), April 26, 2018 (Compromise on rate cut)

Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Above 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.) Ed Buckley started writing editorials raising the alarm about two nuclear reactors under construction in Fairfield, S.C. in 2015. Since then, the project increasingly ran behind schedule and over budget before it was finally abandoned last summer.

Now, millions of South Carolina residents face the prospect of paying off the \$9 billion project over the next six decades unless legislators, state regulators, courts and law enforcement officials are able to act on their behalf.

With less than two weeks left in this year's legislative session, it's unclear what -- if anything -- will be done by the state Legislature this year to provide electric customer relief. But so far, regulatory and legislative efforts are underway to right the situation and several legal investigations have been initiated.

The nuclear debacle is likely to remain a contentious issue throughout the summer and into the 2018 House and gubernatorial elections.

OPINION

The Post and Courier
Founded in 1803

PAMELA J. BROWNING, Publisher
MITCH PUGH, Executive Editor
CHARLES R. ROWE, Editorial Page Editor

Sunday, July 30, 2017

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Letters to the Editor

I-526 problem

It is not often that Brian Hicks is wrong in his general perception of a problem. But in his July 26 column he shows a lack of understanding of the I-526 problem on Johns Island.

Brian's descriptions of the problems and their apparent solutions may be good for James Island but definitely do not apply to Johns Island. For most of Johns Island our evacuation route is down Main Road to Savannah Highway and south to Walterboro.

This is not going to change with the completion of I-526. With or without I-526, we still will need the changes at Highway 17 and Main Road. This is even more critical than it appears on paper since this intersection floods in situations that fall well short of hurricane status. So the idea that the I-526 completion will alleviate the Main Road problem is entirely false.

The final conclusion: We must fix the Highway 17 and Main Road intersection, both for traffic control and independent flooding situations.

So don't be tricked into favoring the I-526 project thinking it solves the Main Road problem. They are distinctively different and have different solutions.

LARRY WIESSMANN
*Seabrook Island Road
Johns Island*

Misguided citizens

It seems that every day, I see letters in The Post and Courier criticizing not only President Trump but also several of our local representatives for their desire to cut or eliminate funding for entitlement programs.

What these citizens don't seem to realize is that our country is in severe debt to other countries that will take decades to pay back, and every nickel spent on unnecessary programs simply adds to that debt.

It seems that every time our debt ceiling is close to being hit, Congress declares an emergency session to raise the debt ceiling. Well, a ceiling is just that, an upper limit that should not be breached in order to keep the problem from getting worse. A ceiling that is continually raised is like not having a ceiling at all.

Even a balanced budget doesn't solve the problem, as it is a short-term, this-fiscal-year-only effort to restore a modicum of rationality to our spending habits.

Ultimately, what's the solution? While it would be difficult for many citizens, our government at all levels — local, state and federal — would need to bite the bullet, eliminate entitlements and give-away programs, and focus on

paying down the debt. Only truly needed programs should be funded.

The most important of these is education, as children represent our future. Funding for education should be adequate to include funding for fine arts, as that is another path for students to succeed.

Secondly, necessary repair, upkeep and expansion of our infrastructure should be a priority, as these services are needed by everyone.

Next, we should adequately fund our law enforcement and emergency services personnel, as they provide safety and security in our homes and on our streets.

Last but not least, our armed forces need to be provided for, as they are our defense from foreign incursion.

While I didn't support him in the primaries, I feel that President Trump (regardless of social media gaffes) has the best interests of the country at heart and deserves the opportunity to work though his agenda.

DAVID M. PENDINO
*Comiskey Park Circle
Summerville*

No basketball?

I was a little shocked and disappointed to read in the July 26 sports section that the College of Charleston and The Citadel won't be playing each other during the 2017-18 basketball season. Why? A very good question that needs a real answer for both team's fans.

"The dates we talked about this year, it just didn't work out," said C of C basketball coach Earl Grant.

Citadel coach Duggar Baucom commented, "We will explore options to play in the future, but nothing is signed at this time."

I find it extremely hard to believe two long-time rivals with campuses 2.5 miles apart could not agree on a date to play one game in Charleston. There's got to be more to it than that, but that's just my opinion.

I don't go to many basketball games, but one I always try to attend is C of C and The Citadel. It's not UNC and Duke but it's a darn good rivalry and a game both team's fans love to attend.

Hopefully, the rivalry that started in 1901 will continue next season and every season thereafter. Both schools' players, students, alumni and the Charleston community deserve to have the opportunity to see the two crosstown colleges play each other every year.

CHARLES THOMPSON, JR.
Board Member
S.C. Athletic Hall of Fame
*Colony Drive
Charleston*

Smith wins Golden Pen award

L.R. Smith of Charleston wins the Golden Pen award for May for her letter, "Last stronghold," a nostalgic look at what she describes as "the last dive bar in Mount Pleasant." Ms. Smith works as a bartender at the unnamed bar which she described as "the last of the Mohicans, the last stronghold of the eclectic crowd, the last semblance of what this town looked like 30 years ago."

"There is no 'kid's menu,' no worry about offending your inherent sensibilities," she wrote. "We do not cater to the politically correct." The bar is a place where "the low mix with the 1 percent, black with white, Democrat with and Republican. Polar opposites imbibe in fellowship and harmony and alcohol. Everyone is subject to our credo, 'Be Nice, Be Good, Or Be Gone.'"

Ms. Smith views the establishment as a hometown vestige of a friendlier past that is quickly being supplanted by an upscale, expensive and trendy commercialism throughout the metro area.

"This is not the Charleston I grew up in. Its charm has been exploited and changed into something unrecognizable, and it hurts to watch," she wrote. "The new Mount Pleasant is not our champion ... We're viewed as an eyesore, an inhibitor of growth, and are poorly thought of, much like a house of ill repute — rough, a place known as harboring the last of the town's undesirables."

Golden Pen winners are invited to an annual luncheon with the editorial staff.

The Post and Courier 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. All letters are subject to editing. Publication is discretionary. Letters should be addressed to: The Editor, The Post and Courier, 134 Columbus St., Charleston, S.C. 29403. Email to: letters@postandcourier.com.

Editorial



SCE&G/PROVIDED

An aerial view of the V.C. Summer construction site in Jenkinsville, where two nuclear reactors are being built.

Better protections for ratepayers

With two new nuclear reactors billions of dollars over budget, years behind schedule and in danger of being abandoned entirely, one would think that SCE&G would be reeling financially, far beyond even the dramatic stock dip its parent company SCANA suffered on Friday. At least that would be the case for any company that so spectacularly bungled a multi-billion dollar investment.

But SCE&G is not a normal company. And according to numbers released late last month, investors earned a healthy 9 percent for the year ending March 31.

In other words, SCE&G has so far remained comfortably profitable despite the fact that the perpetually problematic construction of two new reactors has reached such a level of crisis that the company may be forced to quit the project entirely.

Part of the problem is that unlike most businesses, SCE&G has an incentive to spend as much money as possible regardless of whether increased expenditures are actually needed or wise.

That's because the state Public Service Commission (PSC) regulates the

percentage of return on investment the company can earn, but not the actual dollar value. Right now, SCE&G is allowed to earn up to a 10.25 percent return on common equity.

Ten percent of a multi-billion dollar nuclear reactor investment is a lot more than 10 percent of a \$250 million natural gas plant, so the utility has an obvious financial motive to go big rather than playing it safe.

Worse, in 2007, the state Legislature passed an incredibly misguided piece of legislation that removed any remaining barriers to that perverse financial incentive to spend more money by forcing ratepayers to shoulder all of the financial risk involved in massive new capital projects.

The Base Load Review Act means that SCE&G can charge customers up front for financing costs related to the new nuclear reactors — and any future generating projects — and keep charging them well into the future even if those new plants never generate a single watt of electricity.

And given the bankruptcy of the nuclear project's chief contractor Westinghouse, that looks like a very real possibility. SCE&G and project part-

ner Santee Cooper are expected to announce in the next few days whether or not they will complete the reactors.

Already, SCE&G customers pay nearly 20 percent of their monthly bills to finance construction on the new reactors. They're going to keep paying more no matter what — either for a few billion dollars in construction costs if the projects are abandoned or for as much as \$20 billion if they're completed.

Meanwhile, SCE&G shareholders can probably expect the same roughly 10 percent return every year while ratepayers suffer.

A bill currently before the Legislature would amend the Base Load Review Act to hand greater regulatory power to the PSC and remove some of the financial risk ratepayers currently bear. Lawmakers should speed its passage, especially if SCE&G decides to ditch the reactor plan and build something else instead.

The door should be closed to any similar mistake.

Utilities should know that their top responsibility is to the ratepayers of South Carolina, and build generating capacity with customers — rather than profits — in mind.

Editorial

I-526 action fails transparency test

Charleston officials traveled up to Columbia on July 20 in hopes of getting the I-526 extension off the dime, but instead got what amounted to a brush-off and a rain check from the State Infrastructure Bank. So Charleston County Council filed a lawsuit on Thursday in hopes that the state Supreme Court will revive the moribund project.

Certainly, county officials now have the SIB's attention, though bank members might have reason to wonder whether the lawsuit is really necessary, in view of their repeated reviews of I-526 over the years. Even so, they should ponder the consequences of their own high-handedness in bringing it about.

Meanwhile, Charleston County residents have reason to wonder exactly how this lawsuit came to be and when. And why there was no public review or discussion, or a public council vote as required by the state Freedom of Information Act.

The fact that County Council members took it upon themselves to take action in closed session was pretty high-handed, too.

County Council contends that the SIB is in breach of contract, and should now have to pay the entire cost of the \$750 million project.

The I-526 extension has been lingering on life support for years due to broad opposition from the public and an ever-rising project cost that presumably would have to be borne by the county.

Indeed, council itself has hardly been unanimous in its support for the project, as reflected in its 2016 decision to exclude it from the project list for the county referendum on a half-cent sales tax for transportation.

Sen. Hugh Leatherman, a SIB member, cites that decision in his insistence for a more tangible local contribution to the disputed road funding package, as noted by columnist Ron Brinson on our Commentary page. Certainly, council advocates of the project would have included the extension among the projects to be funded, had they expected that it would bolster the referendum.

But opposition to the project — the most controversial local project ever — would more likely have scuttled the referendum. So council wisely includ-

ed only those projects that would encourage voter support. Those included road improvements to Main Road on Johns Island and West Ashley, with a flyover for the main congestion point at U.S. 17.

That's really what County Council should be focusing on, in its effort to improve traffic congestion. Instead, it has decided to pursue the I-526 chimera one more time.

Maybe the lawsuit will bring clarity to the issue, as Council Chairman Vic Rawl stated. Maybe it will encourage the SIB to listen to local governments more closely in the future to avoid such dramatic conflict.

It should generate enough criticism to convince council to provide the requisite public transparency in the future. As council waits for a resolution to this lawsuit, it might encourage public confidence by giving greater attention to other, less intrusive road projects that will have to be built, whether or not I-526 ever comes to pass. Indeed, the voters already have effectively told council to stop fixating on I-526 and get moving on other, less controversial improvements.

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Editorials

Clean up nuclear disaster

Electric utility customers were thrown for a loop and as much as \$9 billion was effectively removed from the South Carolina economy on Monday, when Santee Cooper and SCE&G announced that they would abandon construction on two new nuclear reactors in Fairfield County.

Ten years of work were wasted. Two billion dollars in financing costs paid for by everyday South Carolinians vanish into thin air. More than 5,000 workers are suddenly out of a job. Billions in sunk construction, labor and materials costs must still be accounted for.

And that economic disaster, roughly equivalent to a hurricane, could continue to play out in slow motion for the next 60 years if state regulators, the Legislature and Gov. Henry McMaster don't step in to mitigate the impact to the greatest extent possible.

It would be unconscionable to require Santee Cooper and SCE&G customers to continue paying decades into the future for mistakes and misjudgments in which they played no part.

State lawmakers and Mr. McMaster have started working on how to make it right. Over the coming weeks and months, they must provide solutions to minimize the burden on ratepayers and prevent similar meltdowns in the future. The Legislature bears much of the responsibilities because of its ill-considered Base Load Review Act, which was approved in 2007.

There is a lot more blame — and need for accountability — to go around. The state Public Service Commission (PSC), the agency charged with representing the public interest in regulating utilities, will soon

play a critical role in determining the extent to which SCE&G can be held financially responsible for its share of the failed nuclear project. If commissioners determine that the utility acted imprudently, customers should be spared the brunt of paying for its mistakes.

At the very least it is obvious that SCE&G proceeded with the project despite increasingly concerning signals regarding its practical and economic viability.

Santee Cooper does not have PSC oversight, so state leaders must act to protect its ratepayers from devastating rate hikes, now and in the future. The current system of governance of this quasi-state agency clearly failed to work on behalf of its customers in this matter, and its board and administration should be called to account by the state's chief executive and the Legislature.

But the Legislature's chief priority must be a reform of the Base Load Review Act. That law allowed SCE&G to spend billions of ratepayer dollars, potentially avoid almost all economic responsibility for failure and turn a tidy profit in the meantime.

Of course, the BLRA would also have saved customers billions had the nuclear project been completed on time and within budget. But ratepayers should not be held responsible for project overruns. And regulators should have been provided greater oversight.

This week, South Carolina lost not just the future cornerstone of a cleaner energy future, but what could have been a massive portion of its future economy. Lawmakers, regulators and Gov. McMaster are right to treat it like the disaster it is and work on a comprehensive response.

Chill, but no freeze on Russia

Russia's winter weather, known as "General Winter," is famous for having defeated Napoleon and Hitler, among other foes. Press reports this week make it sound as though Russian President Vladimir Putin is now putting the big chill on his relations with the United States, cutting the size of our diplomatic mission to Russia by nearly two-thirds and seizing properties used by our embassy.

The new chill in U.S.-Russian relations is likely to last a while. But it is not yet a freeze. Much will depend on how Russia implements Mr. Putin's orders and how much Russia needs our good will to prosper. Right now our government has little reason to extend its hand.

The chill has its origins in Russian cyber attacks and other efforts to mess up the 2016 presidential elections by exposing Democratic Party secrets, smearing Donald Trump and probing the electronic files of state voting organizations.

On Dec. 30, 2016, then-President Barack Obama by executive order added new sanctions against Russia for its interference in our 2016 elections. He placed five organizations, including the two top Russian intelligence agencies, and four individuals under sanctions mainly forbidding financial transactions with them. He also expelled 35 Russian diplomats and seized two properties used by the Russians in New York and Maryland.

These sanctions came on top of 2014 sanctions against Russian individuals and organizations involved in the seizure of Crimea from Ukraine and the armed separatist campaign in the Ukrainian region known as the Donbas. In 2015 sanctions were imposed against Russian organizations and individuals involved in cyber warfare against the United States.

At the time President Putin chose not to retaliate, a decision hailed by president-elect Donald Trump, who had made no secret of

his desire for better relations with Russia. But last month Congress enacted, by veto-proof majorities, a bill that requires President Trump to enforce the Obama sanctions and impose new ones designed to prevent the financing or provision of goods, services and technology to the Russian energy industry, including pipelines serving Western Europe.

As soon as President Trump announced that he would sign the bill — and he did so on Wednesday — President Putin struck back with his order to reduce employment at American diplomatic missions by 755 and close at least two facilities used by the U.S. mission to Russia.

This was, in part, a delayed reaction to President Obama's December sanctions. The reduction from 1,210 employees to 455 would bring the size of the American mission to Russia down to the current size of the Russian mission to the United States.

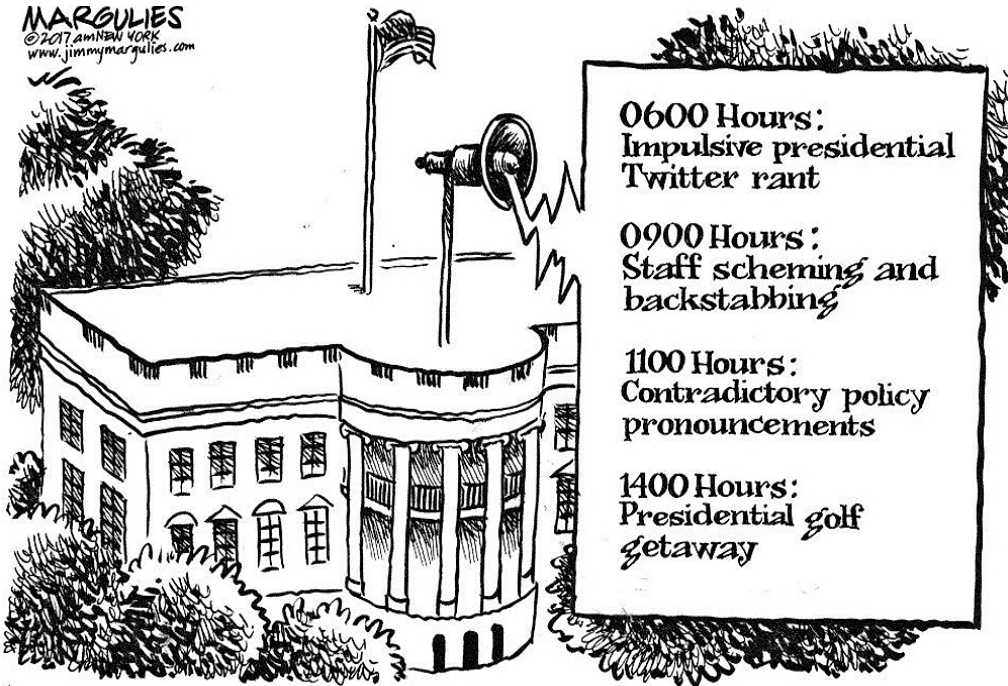
But depending on how it is implemented, the new ceiling could force a more drastic cut in the U.S. mission, one that would risk U.S. retaliation.

Since about three-fourths of the 1,210 people employed by the U.S. mission to Russia are Russian nationals, it is likely that at least three-fourths of the 755 people who must be dropped from the mission's rolls will be Russians.

But that would still lead to the expulsion of nearly 200 Americans diplomats compared to the 35 expelled by President Obama. That would slash the current strength of Americans in the U.S. mission by nearly two-thirds and severely curtail U.S. diplomatic and intelligence activity in Russia. There would be immediate calls from Congress for the U.S. to reciprocate.

It is not clear that Mr. Putin wants to go that far.

In the long run, Russia will be best served by minimizing friction with the United States and moving away from its confrontational policies.



GENERAL KELLY IMPOSES MILITARY DISCIPLINE

Letters to the Editor

Reactor option

If you look up transatomic power on the internet, you will find a discussion of nuclear reactor designs that are sub-critical (meltdown not possible) and that use "spent fuel" of the type stored at the Savannah River nuclear storage site in Aiken.

I'm not a nuclear engineer, but I wonder if the V.C. Sumner site north of Columbia could be used for development of this type of reactor with U.S. government funding? Just an idea, but something that could be very valuable to South Carolina, and indeed for the planet in that use for spent fuel would reduce the problem of nuclear waste.

WILLIAM A. JOHNSON
*Serotina Court
Mount Pleasant*

Offshore energy

Inspiring. That's what I would call an Aug. 1 letter to the editor titled "Energy security." The executive director of the American Petroleum Institute took her valuable time to explain to us in the Lowcountry that "seven in 10 South Carolina voters support offshore energy development."

I was unaware of that. But, I believe it's because the poll was conducted by no less an authoritative figure than the American Petroleum Institute itself. Really.

They incorporate words like "diversity" and "security" and, well, it just made me proud to be a South Carolinian.

GEORGE SPAIN III
*Hudson Street
Folly Beach*

Fire testing

A recent letter, "Do more testing," from the Carolina Ready Mixed Concrete Association calls for fire tests of mass-timber construction panels, which have already been completed. In addition to years of testing that have taken place in Canada and overseas, five additional fire tests were completed on cross-laminated timber (CLT). Interestingly, representatives from the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association were present and witnessed the promising results.

In conjunction with the International Code Council, American Wood Council and U.S. Forest Service Forest Products Laboratory, the five tests were completed on a full-scale, multi-story mass timber apartment building in May and June of this year. The tests ranged from unsprinklered to sprinklered, exposed CLT and CLT covered with gypsum wallboard. The results of each test showed CLT, even when exposed, maintained fire resistance.

The Mount Pleasant hotel is an innovative design that incorporates CLT and meets the South Carolina building codes. Not only is mass timber safe, it is the only renewable structural building material. Wood is sustainable, easy to build with and provides hundreds of thousands of American jobs.

Mass timber structural systems represent the first significant challenge to concrete and steel in more than a century, so perhaps it's no surprise to see the letter from a competing industry. However, spreading misinformation about fire safety is dangerous and does not serve the public interest.

DR. PATRICIA A. LAYTON
Director, Wood Utilization + Design Institute
*Harris Smith Building
Clemson*

Street races

I do not live on Hunters Ridge Lane in North Charleston but am there frequently. It is an absolute racetrack in both directions. If ever there as a candidate for speed bumps, this is it.

PATRICK W. SULLIVAN
*Marion Avenue
Summerville*

Listen to the bells

The bell ringing at Mother Emanuel continues to be amazing and continues to teach us. Our favorite times are when the bells are ringing to the song "Let There Be Peace on Earth." There is so much anger everywhere; we see it every day we drive somewhere.

If you're not able to enjoy the bell ringing, we hope you'll take the time to listen to the lyrics. "Let peace begin with me ... let this be the moment now ... the peace that was meant to be."

We can be the change we need to see simply by how we treat each other each day. Thank you, Mother Emanuel.

PAM KUSMIDER
TED KUSMIDER
*George Street
Charleston*

Foot-dragging

Why would anyone want to complete I-526? Could it be to avoid the heavy traffic on Highway 17, or to help solve some of the traffic flow problems caused by no central way to get off John's Island, or maybe just to save time and not be backed up on one of the many two-lane roads on Johns Island? Or could it be something as silly as a safe and faster way to get off the island in case of an emergency — like a major hurricane and the flooding that comes with such disasters?

To some, those reasons are not good enough to complete the I-526 project. Some are still claiming the integrity of "the island," which is the silliest of reasons, because if you've been to Johns Island lately, you know there is a subdivision behind every live oak and a strip shopping center either being built or on the drawing board.

For someone who lives south of the Highway 17 and Main Road interchange, until the first stage of I-526 extension is complete, this intersection will continue to be South Charleston's Ashley Phosphate Road. Twice daily, traffic is backed up past the

railroad overpass on Highway 17 and, like it or not, the folks going to Kiawah and Seabrook islands will be bumper-to-bumper on a two-lane road for 15 miles daily.

I'm not a betting person but I'd wager that once completed, the users of this new road will be asking: "Why did it take so long to get this road completed?" The answer is simple, in Charleston, we don't do anything in a timely manner; just ask the folks who were opposed to the James Island Expressway.

Oh, how I miss Sen. Glenn McConnell and Rep. Bobby Harrell.

CHARLIE LYBRAND
*Cloudmont Drive
Hollywood*

Traffic problems

Robert Behre wrote a nice article in reference to the lack of vision, foresight, and leadership on the I-526 project completion.

But he failed to mention the reasons for failure are Coastal Conservation League (Dana Beach), the former State Infrastructure Bank Chairman Vince Graham, and the fictitious traffic counts.

The vocal minority continues to crush the needs of the majority. This situation has been epitomized by the attempted takeover of a lane on the West Ashley bridge from car traffic.

We have a traffic problem. Bike lanes will not provide relief. Zoning is the way to control growth, not stopping road development. We missed that boat also.

Visit Johns Island's new apartment world and you will realize that small roads do not stop development. The old Nix 526 did not work there, and it is obsolete now.

Mount Pleasant wisely widened Johnny Dodd's Boulevard and it is still very crowded. The state and county have widened I-26 and I-526 in the North Charleston-Summerville corridor. Still crowded. The S.C. Department of Transportation report of 2008-2016 says the only real heavy increase in traffic count is over the Ravenel Bridge. Huh? What are they counting?

I ran the numbers from the SCDOT traffic count in West Ashley and, according to my math, there is only a minor increase in West Ashley over the last eight years. No way!

Two long-term County Council members have both said that the DOT figures are inaccurate. Let's get a grip on the problem before it explodes.

The decline of Citadel Mall is directly attributed to the failure to complete the last loop of 526.

Charleston County, "we have a problem."

We have failed to execute the plan. "Those who fail to plan, plan to fail." We have already taken many steps down the road of myopia; I pray that we can turn the tide before we all sink in the quagmire.

Don't Nix 526, Fix 526.

BELK DAUGHTRIDGE
*Lowndes Street
Charleston*

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Editorials

The opposite of prudent

So much for being prudent. SCANA and Santee Cooper agreed in 2008 to move forward with construction on two new nuclear reactors without a final design, with an estimated price tag of more than \$10 billion, which would eventually nearly double.

The Westinghouse design was new and untested, as evidenced by the multiple revisions — including as late as 2011 — the company submitted to the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Westinghouse knew that design issues might be a problem, according to correspondence from its CEO Danny Roderick obtained by two environmental groups and detailed in a Post and Courier report on Tuesday. But Westinghouse officials pushed back when SCANA and Santee Cooper started to raise concerns about delays and cost overruns almost immediately after construction began in 2013.

The same emails suggest that Westinghouse, SCANA and Santee Cooper kept customers and shareholders — and state regulators — in the dark.

In the meantime, both utilities proceeded to periodically and substantially raise rates in order to pay for a project they knew was likely to go over budget and fall behind schedule — if they could complete it at all.

In fact, customers are still paying those higher rates, more than eight months after the reactors were abandoned.

And SCANA and Santee Cooper officials expect customers to continue to pay for decades until they recoup their \$9 billion wasted investment.

Where to even start?

It is frustrating that Santee Cooper and SCANA couldn't finish the reactors. It is maddening that they expect customers to pay for something they will never use.

It is baffling that two South Carolina utility companies would consider it appropriate to collect ratepayer money for such a massively

expensive first-of-its-kind reactor project, for which problems multiplied.

It is disturbing that Westinghouse was allowed to market an untested design not just to Santee Cooper and SCANA but to several other customers around the world, including Georgia Power, which continues to spend billions on two reactors in Georgia.

It's also worth noting that not a single one of the eight Westinghouse AP1000 reactors around the world has been fully switched on yet. Only one — in China — is complete. All have run at least three years behind schedule so far.

And it is simply astounding that Westinghouse, SCANA and Santee Cooper withheld vital information from regulators, lawmakers, their investors and the ratepaying public for years even as the nuclear project spiraled further out of control.

None of this is prudent, under even the most generous interpretation of that word. And that matters.

State legislators, Gov. Henry McMaster, regulators and law enforcement officials are looking into the nuclear debacle. But the most critical component in determining the impact on electric customers will be the so-called "prudence clause" in the 2007 Base Load Review Act.

SCANA can only continue to recoup costs for the reactors if those costs are determined to be prudent. Clearly they weren't, and from almost the very beginning.

Santee Cooper, for better or for worse, is not covered by the BLRA. Protecting that utility's customers will likely prove more challenging, and could involve its sale to the state's electric cooperatives or a private company. Any decision must put customers first.

In the meantime, the investigations and policy proposals will continue. But it is increasingly clear that while many words could be used to describe the V.C. Summer nuclear mess, "prudent" is not one of them.

Cautious opening to N. Korea

Is the offer by North Korean dictator Kim Jung-un to hold talks with the United States on denuclearization a real concession or does it point to yet another round of fruitless talks?

The only way to find out is to sit down with Mr. Kim and see what happens.

Talks of some kind are clearly on the horizon and should be welcomed. Mr. Kim invited South Korea's President Moon Jae-in to meet with him in April at Panmunjom, the site in the Demilitarized Zone that has traditionally been the location of talks on the 65-year-old Korean War truce.

That could be a mixed omen. It is neutral ground, but a place where North Korean negotiators have a long history of unyielding insistence on their own objectives, which include the expulsion of U.S. troops and the unification of Korea under northern auspices.

Nevertheless, President Donald Trump should cautiously welcome an opportunity to meet with Mr. Kim under the right circumstances. On Tuesday, in response to the positive news about the new openness from North Korea, Mr. Trump tweeted, "Possible progress being made in talks with North Korea. For the first time in many years, a serious effort is being made by all parties concerned. The World is watching and waiting! May be false hope, but the U.S. is ready to go hard in either direction!"

Reiterating the current U.S. position, a senior member of the Trump administration told The Wall Street Journal, "We are willing to engage North Korea to emphasize our position that the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is non-negotiable."

But it is far too soon for the administration or the world community to relax the policies of maximum economic pressure and military preparedness that have apparently led to the dramatic change of tone by the North Korean government.

The North Korean promise to suspend nuclear and missile tests during the talks, as reported by the South Korean government, is both welcome in itself and a hopeful sign that real progress can be made toward a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. But it does not signal that North Korea will stop making nuclear warheads.

Chung Eui-yong, the top national security adviser in the South Korean government who led a high-level delegation to Pyongyang this week for talks with Mr. Kim, reported Tuesday that the North Korean leader said he had no use for missiles and nuclear weapons "as long as the military threat to North Korea is eliminated and the security of the regime is guaranteed."

But it would be foolish to think that Mr. Kim is indeed ready and willing to surrender the nuclear capabilities his country has sacrificed so much to attain. Instead, President Trump, the United Nations and the governments of Japan and South Korea have to find out whether Mr. Kim's conditions are acceptable.

For example, what if he insists on the removal of U.S. forces from South Korea? Or what if Mr. Kim laughably proposes mutual nuclear disarmament between North Korea and the United States?

In several sets of talks with Pyongyang over the past 30 years the United States has offered security guarantees to North Korea, but they have never been enough for the North Korean regime.

Although the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations achieved agreements with North Korea to end military nuclear activities, North Korea subsequently repudiated them, leading Robert Gates, Defense Secretary under presidents Bush and Obama, to say, "I'm tired of buying the same horse twice."

The lesson? Don't relent until you get what you want in verifiable form, and don't accept half-measures that leave North Korea an out.

THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF



Letters to the Editor

Flood of problems

Reading your front-page article about flooding on Johns Island, I thought I should have written it. James Island has suffered by the same process: Bring in dirt after you destroy the woods and build up the low land.

I expect to be flooded in the next major rain, and that has not happened since moving here in 1967. During the last heavy rain a couple months ago, the retention pond ran into my yard. By contrast, we had no water during or after Hugo.

We were flooded a couple years ago because the drainage pipe behind the house broke.

When the trees leave, the water seeks some place to go, hence we have flooding. We must stop building until we can handle the water.

When will Charleston County wake up and step in?

DOROTHY COLEMAN
Highwood Circle
James Island

Rivenbark column

Thank you for bringing Celia Rivenbark's column to The Post and Courier. She is so refreshing and reminds me of the way Kathleen Parker used to write before she became so acerbic.

The irritating trend at the checkout counter that Celia mentioned is getting bothersome, if not boring. The people who use the trite phrases probably don't even read the newspaper, so they will never get the message that their intrusive attempt at courtesy is annoying.

Waiters, now called servers, also can be annoying as they proclaim that the hamburger I just ordered is "awesome." The Grand Canyon and the oceans are awesome, but a hamburger doesn't rival those works of God. That I want to pay for my hamburger with a credit card is not "perfect" as the server says. Roses are perfect, Jesus is perfect, but my credit card is just a credit card and does not rise to perfection.

Celia Rivenbark is indeed a fine humorist and her contribution to the newspaper is refreshing.

MIKE WEST
Ashmont Drive
Wando

Mental illness

It is agreed that our country needs to put some controls on who buys modern, semiautomatic pistols and guns, but that would not have stopped the recent slaughter in a Florida school or at Emanuel AME Church here in Charleston.

I read years ago that some person or institution said that no country would ever attack us because American citizens are the largest army in the world — everybody has some kind of gun or guns. We would not want to change that image.

The massive ownership of guns in our country is not the problem. We need a system that discovers, controls and confines these people, copycats, who premeditate killings.

Each time, emails and social media, school conflict, or

domestic and family violence point to the fact that these people are seriously disturbed. Their focus is on killing, and bragging about it is another plea for help — and often we don't recognize that.

Many states, including South Carolina, had a state insane asylum. This became politically incorrect — demeaning to its citizens who were institutionalized.

It is time to look at this system again. We need to get these people off our streets and see if they can be rehabilitated. No hospital, no mental health unit, no family services, no group can handle the confinement of these people. It is up to the state of South Carolina.

When someone decides they want to kill people, they will get a weapon to do it. No gun, law or organization (including the FBI) that ignores the signs of insanity will solve the problem. We can't stop social media or the copcat mentality, but we can pay attention to the signs and report disturbed people to authorities as they must be taken off our streets.

If the state had a place for them to go for rehabilitation even families in stress might see the value of committing one of their own. Unstable people will always be with us. If we did something about them, then their guns would not be a problem.

THOMAS E. THORNHILL
Fairway Drive
Charleston

Voices of reason

It is time for all of us to listen once again to our teachers. From elementary through graduate school their voices of reason and knowledge have served us exceptionally well.

I submit that the dedicated women and men who teach us are already armed with minds and hearts that are committed to students and to the joy and substance of learning.

Ego, greed and the love of power motivate many politicians and virtually all corporate lobbyists and their clients. It should not be difficult for us to choose sides in this gun debate.

CERMETTE CLARDY JR.
Carolina Boulevard
Isle of Palms

Meteor crater

Years ago some scientists looked at a map of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico and noticed a circular area and later determined it was a meteor crater. They and others theorized that the mineral content of the meteor was dispersed to a layer on much of the Earth, and that the calamity led to the end of most dinosaurs. This theory is now well accepted.

Not long after that, I studied other coastlines to see if any other such areas might exist. One area that stood out was Bull's Bay on the S.C. coast. This area is unique in that it does not have large rivers emptying into it like most other large bays and harbors on the coast.

Another area of interest to geologists has been the Carolina "bays" found near the northern S.C. coast. These small elliptical depressions

are generally oriented in a north-northeast direction and are noted for their rare plants including some carnivorous ones.

The currently accepted theory is that they were formed by ocean currents. That explanation made little sense to me. Bull's Bay is also oriented in a NNE direction.

My theory is that Bull's Bay was formed by a meteor impact and the Carolina "bays" are smaller impact zones formed by chunks of the disintegrating meteor. This meteor was probably a more soluble mineral than in the Yucatan and may not have caused an explosion or left residue.

When people accept my theory, please give me credit.

FRED WEICKHARDT
Rehobath Road
Cottageville

Noted doctor

I was engrossed in the fine write-up of the many accomplishments of Dr. Catherine McCottry, a Charleston ob/gyn specialist who died Feb. 7 at age 98. Seeing her photos and reading Mary Katherine Wildeman's interviews with friends and relatives, I kept thinking what a wonderful woman of professional attainment.

It was gratifying to read that The Post and Courier had reported her story long before her death as well as when she was 87. Hopefully, her daughter, Tammy, and DeAnna Cheek, both now doctors because of McCottry, will complete their book about this momentous life.

A pioneer for women and a 1945 graduate of the Howard University College of Medicine, she began her practice with segregated Charleston waiting rooms in 1952.

More lives like this exemplary one deserve celebration and recognition.

MARTHA F. BARKLEY
Shadowcreek Court
Charleston

Fine too high

It was reported that an Uber driver was fined \$1,000 for picking up a passenger on King Street during the restricted period of 12:30 a.m. to 3 a.m.

I am an Uber driver and I'm aware of the restrictions. I always thought the rumor of the fine being \$1,000 was a joke.

On a Friday or Saturday night, it's chaos on King Street, and the ban is needed. But \$1,000? According to Google, the highest fine in South Carolina for a moving violation is \$237.

Let's get real, Charleston. I think \$250 would be fair. [Editor's note: The ticket in question was reportedly reduced to \$250.]

PAUL KRECHMAN
Jasmine Court
Summerville

Clarification

The Sunday editorial "Learn from flooding mistakes" stated that FEMA "helped buy out dozens of homes" in West Ashley last year. FEMA has agreed to the buyouts, but the process has not yet been finalized.

The Post and Courier 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. All letters are subject to editing. Pen names are not allowed, and anonymous letters will not be published. Publication is discretionary. Letters should be addressed to: The Editor, The Post and Courier, 134 Columbus St., Charleston, S.C. 29403. Email to: letters@postandcourier.com.

The Post and Courier

Founded in 1803

PAMELA J. BROWNING, Publisher
MITCH PUGH, Executive Editor
CHARLES R. ROWE, Editorial Page Editor

Editorials

Make shareholders share cost

The numbers are startling. If nothing changes, the average SCE&G customer will have to pay about \$7,430 over the next six decades for two nuclear reactors that will never generate power. Under a proposal from Dominion Energy — which is seeking to buy SCE&G parent company SCANA — that cost would be slashed to \$2,773 over two decades, according to paperwork filed this week with state regulators.

That’s more than a 60 percent decrease. But it’s still not a good enough deal.

Even under the Dominion proposal, customers would be expected to pay not just for the concrete and steel that went into the failed reactors, but for a guaranteed quarterly 10 percent return for shareholders. That’s simply unacceptable.

Investment is, by its nature, risky. Sometimes investments make money; sometimes they lose it. In the case of the two V.C. Summer reactors, the investment was an incredible flop — to the tune of more than \$9 billion.

Were SCANA any normal company subject to market realities, its investors would have had to eat that cost. They would have lost spectacular sums of money. But SCANA is decidedly not a normal company and, under South Carolina law, ratepayers are on the hook instead — at least to the extent that SCANA can prove its expenditures on the reactors were “prudent.”

And that qualification matters a lot. It could be the difference between customers owing \$10.3 billion (the full cost of the reactors plus financing expenses) or \$0.

Multiple reports and corporate communications obtained by Post and Courier reporters and environmental groups Friends of the Earth and the Sierra Club suggest that many of SCANA’s decisions regarding the reactors were anything but prudent. In fact, it appears that utility officials misled state lawmakers, regulators and investors early and repeatedly even as they realized the project was falling apart.

Several ongoing investigations — in-

cluding criminal ones — are likely to conclude that significant costs were imprudently incurred, meaning that SCANA should not be able to pass them along to customers. That could easily turn out to be a better deal for ratepayers than the offer on the table from Dominion.

But no matter what happens, SCANA shareholders should be expected to share the burden. There simply cannot be any guarantee that an investment will continue to generate a healthy return even when a project fails so badly. It’s not the way free markets work.

Nevertheless, SCANA shareholders earned \$120 million in dividends last year alone, all paid for by the ratepayers, as The Post and Courier reported today. They’ve made about a half-billion dollars in return on the money collected for the nuclear project so far.

In fact, the total value of SCANA dividends has increased by about 50 percent since 2009, when the nuclear project got underway. That’s because the more money state-regulated utilities spend, the more money they make. A 10 percent return on a \$9 billion nuclear facility is a lot bigger than a 10 percent return on, say, a \$100 million natural gas plant or a \$10 million solar farm.

But those economics hurt customers, who end up paying higher rates even when cheaper alternatives are available.

No one is asking shareholders to pay for the nuclear disaster. At the least, however, they should accept that the return on their investment will be significantly lower for the foreseeable future — say 0.5 percent instead of 10 percent — just like customers might have to pay elevated bills for decades. It’s not losing money; it’s just not making as much of it.

That’s the minimum that can be expected in the wake of one of South Carolina’s largest-ever economic disasters.

It’s good to know that the Dominion offer would save SCE&G customers quite a lot of money compared to the status quo. But it’s still worth holding out for a better deal — particularly one in which shareholders share the burden.

Let locals rule on plastic bags

Someone must have whispered “there’s a great future in plastics” to South Carolina legislators pushing a bill that would keep local jurisdictions like Mount Pleasant from banning plastic bags, polystyrene food containers and other troublesome disposable products.

How else to explain the state overreach?

The American Progressive Bag Alliance, which represents plastic bag makers, including Hartsville-based Novolex, spent more than \$30,000 on lobbying in the Palmetto State last year with the goal of halting plastic bag bans. That may be good for bag-making businesses, but it’s bad for South Carolina in more ways than one.

“Local governments and citizens should have the right to address local problems, like plastic pollution, with local solutions,” says Emily Cedzo of the Coastal Conservation League.

Usurping local control is one thing. But the long-lived plastic bags are another. They are a prime source of litter and an environmental hazard that endangers a wide range of wildlife, especially in coastal areas. And they are rarely recycled. Yes, they’re cheap, but only in the short term.

More than 200 U.S. municipalities have painlessly learned to live without them. Consumers either carry reusable bags

with them or pay a few cents extra for traditional paper bags.

The bill aimed at halting local bag bans, introduced by Rep. Eric Bedingfield, R-Greenville, and House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Darlington, is being sold as a way of standardizing commerce to prevent local governments from interfering with business.

But that argument doesn’t hold water when the product — one that isn’t sold but given away — is ultimately harmful to the environment and toxic to wildlife.

While the bill would not affect bans enacted before Jan. 31, such as those in Folly Beach, Isle of Palms, Surfside Beach and Hilton Head Island, it has the potential to undo Mount Pleasant’s pending ban and to stop any others statewide.

Cities, counties and towns wouldn’t even get a say in the matter, and that would effectively stifle grassroots efforts to ban plastic bags or other similar single-use items. Silencing citizens at the local level simply goes against the grain of democracy.

The bill, already approved in the House and being debated in the Senate, should be rejected. Not only is it an assault on home rule, but protecting the environment is more important than protecting an industry that foists upon us a product many of us don’t want.



Letters to the Editor

‘We hear you’

We had the privilege March 14 to witness hundreds of students walk peacefully from their classrooms, carrying flowers, colorful signs and baskets full of delicate hand-made paper cranes.

The young woman who made the cranes said that she had written the name of a dead student on each one. The students ranged from gangly young men in sweatpants and backward baseball caps, to individuals with shaved heads or purple hair, to a young dancer or drama student in perfectly applied stage makeup.

One young woman draped herself, sandwich-board style, in a sign that listed the repugnant litany of school shootings in the past months and years. Other signs students carried read from the serious “No more silence, end gun violence” to the tongue-in-cheek: “Algebra Not Arms.” The more vocal among the crowd shouted rhythmic call and response chants, “Tell me what democracy looks like,” and then others answered back, “This is what democracy looks like.”

I loudly applaud all of the students, teachers and administrators across the United States who walked out of their classrooms to raise their voices against gun violence. I would like to tell them: We hear you. With your eloquent vocal opposition you have expressed ideas that go against the mainstream’s pitiful apathy regarding the killing of our fellow human beings. You have awakened the activist in yourselves and found that your voice is powerful. I hope you will continue to speak out when you see injustice and use your collective conscience to protect the weak, befriend the friendless and notice the isolated and angry.

From now on, people will look at you differently. Some may try to force you back into line by calling you “truant,” “hardheaded” or “rabble-rouser.” But know that your presence and voice inspire many and make our country a better place.

HAYDEN D. SHOOK
Regatta Road
Charleston

Student protest

I don’t think a day goes by without wondering when and where the next mass shooting will take place. Some bar, theater, shopping mall, church, a school. And how many dead? How many people left in a cloud, a fog, about a loved one lost forever?

Recently I caught one of the TV newscasts that showed high school students leaving their classrooms to protest gun violence, and how there were more than 3,000 student protests throughout the nation and one in front of the White House.

These students have certainly gotten everyone’s attention, at least until the 6 o’clock news when we learn perhaps of another Amtrak train skidding off the rails or six skiers lost in an avalanche in the French Alps.

I saw on the internet that

there are in the United States about 58 million young people 18-24 years old. It was estimated about 6.8 million are 18-year-olds, high school seniors.

Hey kids. You are not kids any more. You can serve in the military, get married and vote. You can get things done — not by walking out of a classroom but into a voting booth. You are almost 7 million strong and, if you were to add in the 19-year-olds, I’ll bet close to 10 million.

Do you know what could have been done in the last presidential election with those numbers? Do you realize what you can do in the remaining seven months before the November midterm election? Do you know what the freshman class at the College of Charleston can do alone? Your decision.

CHRISTINE EBEL
Emerald Forest Parkway
Charleston

‘Mr. Joe’

I am heart-broken by the loss of Joe Manigault. He was a role model, a friend, loved one and an amazing person to everyone who knew him.

When I was growing up and hanging around my family’s seafood dock on Shem Creek, I spent a lot of time around Joe. He was always positive and happy. I remember him yelling my name every time I saw him, then he would come and give me a big hug and ask me how I was doing.

Once the school year started and shrimping season slowed down, he would be in the elementary school I attended along with my sisters.

I find that I can’t sleep thinking about our loss. He might as well have been a part of my family for how long he had been around us. He might be a part of everyone’s family who knew him, because of how great he was.

My heart breaks for his family and friends. He and his family did not deserve this, not in a million years. This man would give you the shirt off his back during a blizzard. He was always helping, loving and serving the Lord in any way possible.

As I wipe the tears from my eyes, I will always remember this loving man and will miss him until we meet again one day. I’m sure when it’s time, I’ll hear him yelling my name as I walk up to the gates. He will be there to give me a big hug once again.

Until then, Mr. Joe, I love you and miss you.

MATTHEW HOWARD
King Point Court
Lexington

Recycle

While we’re waiting for the single-use plastic and Styrofoam ban to go into effect in Mount Pleasant, let’s do all that we can to protect our environment as if the ban were in effect right now.

Take your recycling bags into the grocery store and drug store, so you can say “no thanks” to plastic at the check-out counter. (I keep six in my car at all times).

Recycle your plastic newspaper wrappers. Use your county blue recycle bins to their ultimate capacity.

Tell your carry-out food providers that you sure wish they’d switch to compostable materials. (Five Loaves and Verde use only compostable materials). Donate or try to resell items that you might typically leave out for the trash pickup. We’re in a “throw away” world, so let’s try to show some more respect to our environment.

Remember: reduce, reuse and recycle.

PAT SULLIVAN
Plantation Court
Mount Pleasant

Bike bridge

What a coincidence that The Post and Courier reports the failure to secure a grant for a bike and pedestrian bridge across the Ashley River, and that a similar bridge fell in Florida, killing four and injuring nine.

Once more we must be careful what we ask for, because we often get more than we ask for.

If a pedestrian/bike bridge is built, let’s make certain that it is more than adequate.

JOHN C. GODFREY
Kracke Street
Charleston

Protect ratepayers

I am tired of hearing how ratepayers are being threatened to pay for the failed, over-budget nuclear project. SCE&G failed its customers, and knew it years beforehand, yet they continued.

The only people I see who are trying to defend and protect the ratepayers are Gov. Henry McMaster and a few members of the House of Representatives.

When the next election rolls around, I am going to vote against every politician in office unless they pull together and protect us — the ratepayers. Protect the people who put you in office.

If you fail to make your car payments or house payments, who do you think is going to help you and get nothing in return? Nobody.

Politicians, protect the ratepayers you were elected to protect or get voted out of office next time.

Time has run out for you to take a stand.

EDWARD ALMERS
River Oak Court
Moncks Corner

Cause of sea rise

Sea level rise is caused by the melting of the ice at the polar regions of the earth. This is in turn caused by the insulating layer of greenhouse gas around the earth. This comes from the burning of fossil fuels.

The concentration of CO2 is now over 400 ppm. Experts say the level of CO2 must be reduced to 300 ppm or less. Energy sources such as natural gas and nuclear must be expanded.

BILL AUSTIN
Bowman Road
Mount Pleasant

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Letters to the Editor

Real estate bungle

I read the March 23 article about the old Navy hospital disaster, and I am moved to express my outrage and bewilderment. How did this happen? The reasons appear to be many.

It would appear that most of Charleston County Council and the city of North Charleston simply lacked the ability to see the whole picture, the pitfalls as well as the many potential positives.

It is easy to look back with 20/20 vision. However, it takes a wise and prudent person with good judgment to look into the future and make smart, long-term and sometimes tough, responsible decisions.

I would like to commend Councilman Joe Qualey for voting against the county leasing the Navy hospital from the developers. In fact, Qualey was the only council member who voted against the lease. He has demonstrated time and time again to be thoughtful, deliberate and a strong leader on County Council.

I also would like County Council to pass a rule that no member can sign any binding document without it being reviewed by the county's attorney. As a real estate broker myself, there is zero chance that my clients or I would sign a document with such monumental consequences without having our attorney review it. This leads to the question: Did the county's attorney, Joe Dawson, review this document before Mr. Pryor signed it?

The \$33 million that was just lost by taxpayers, roughly \$85 for every person in Charleston County, is inexcusable. Mr. Pryor and several of the County Council members should consider resigning. They should certainly be voted out in the next election at a minimum.

This is not a molehill, but rather a disaster the size of Mount Everest.

ERIC A. DRAPER
Broker in Charge
Charleston Real Estate Group
Folly Road
Charleston

Energy efficiency

The March 20 editorial "SCE&G has other energy options" correctly states that improved energy efficiency is one of the most cost-effective pathways to reducing energy consumption, eliminating wasteful and unnecessary investments in centralized generating capacity and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Energy efficiency is also a social justice issue.

Thousands of low-income residents in the Charleston region spend more money on electricity than on mortgages, rent, food or anything else. They are living in leaky homes with no insulation and inefficient electric heaters and air conditioners.

Many are elderly homeowners who cannot afford to weatherize their homes or replace old equipment. Others are renters living in homes owned by investors who have no incentive to improve energy efficiency.

Low-income people are the most hard-hit victims of the 18 percent added charges on our electric bills for the failed V.C. Summer nuclear project.

Energy efficiency also provides an opportunity to meet two sets of needs at the same time. The Sustainability Institute in North Charleston hires and trains at-risk youth to do home energy audits and in the trades required for weatherizing homes. The institute also has provided the same training opportunities

to veterans.

In over 40 homes per year, graduates of the program perform energy audits, seal openings, install insulation and replace lighting with energy-efficient LEDs, all resulting in lower energy bills and greater economic security for low-income and elderly residents. At the same time the program helps people rebuild their lives by training them in building trades and the "soft" skills needed to succeed in work and life. Learn more at www.sustainabilityinstitutesc.org.

With the right investment, programs like this could be scaled up to reach many more people.

An expanded statewide program of this type would have greater return on investment than a new electrical generating plant, especially considering the benefits to low-income residents and people in need of training and employment. It also would reduce South Carolina's share of carbon dioxide emissions, which are contributing to sea level rise and more extreme weather patterns.

MARK GOULD
Ashley Avenue
Charleston

Rapid transit

Thanks to North Charleston Councilman Ron Brinson for elevating a solution to our city's rapid transit challenges that was buried under "high/prohibitive cost alternatives."

Great cities are marked by exceptionalism. It is this exceptionalism that has marked Charleston throughout its history with great leaders and humanism.

One of the more critical issues challenging our continued exceptionalism is affordable, efficient rapid transit. Perhaps geography presents the greatest hurdle in addressing this challenge. The lure of our city also is a blessing and a curse.

Exceptionalism requires strategic vision and a significant amount of risk tolerance. Light rail systems in major cities have rarely seen fare revenue cover operating costs, much less the cost of construction. Subsidies are the standard and are typically absorbed through local taxation.

However, according to a nationally renowned city planner, there are significant benefits such as the reduction of traffic congestion, reduced pollution, a means of transportation for our economically challenged citizens, and a benefit that cannot be ignored — increased property values and economic development that is uniquely inherent to rapid rail development.

As David Sheehan, featured in the article, noted, we have a physical path available now in old rail beds, power line corridors, and public rights-of-way. Looking ahead, those paths may not be available. That same view into the future shows only escalating challenges attributed to traffic congestion, parking and parking costs. At best, these will be constant irritants and, at worst, diminish the quality of life as well as the cultural attraction of Charleston.

To bypass formal consideration of this alternative seems shortsighted and not consistent with the visionary traditions of our city. The regional study commission proposed by Councilman Brinson would present a vibrant and vital vehicle for that consideration. At what cost exceptionalism?

MARK HETTERMANN
Indian Street
Mount Pleasant

Editorial



PATRIOTS POINT FOUNDATION/PROVIDED

Shown in a rendering, the National Medal of Honor Museum is planned at Patriots Point on the Mount Pleasant waterfront, but funding remains a challenge.

Let museum 'rise to the symbolic'

Architect Moshe Safdie is optimistic the "star" he wants to land in Mount Pleasant will win over town leaders and that his design for the Medal of Honor Museum will speak to visitors in a way that draws them into the realm of symbolism.

Sadly, however, Mount Pleasant planning officials remain mired in the technical, turning up their noses at the world-renowned architect's striking modern design because it would exceed the town's 80-foot height limit. Town officials should take a broader view of what would be a national landmark and of what the newly named Medal of Honor Museum CEO Joe Daniels called "the sacred mission of the institution."

"We want to reach out to the public and realize that we could have done a better job of that in the past," Mr. Daniels told The Post and Courier on Thursday.

In a presentation themed, "Can we rise to the symbolic?," Mr. Safdie recently told a Charleston audience what inspires him is "design by nature or design in nature," explaining that he strives to create buildings that fit their setting. Quoting one of his mentors, architect Louis Kahn, he said he aspired to "Let the building be what it wants to be."

Because the Medal of Honor Museum site is dominated by the aircraft carrier Yorktown, he chose a "robust," pentagonal battleship-gray design built of cast concrete that could withstand a hurricane and provide a counterbalance to the Yorktown's might, rising out of marshy lowlands to roughly the same height as the carrier's control tower.

The Medal of Honor itself was his inspiration to make the five pillar-like galleries that constitute the building rise to form a five-pointed star, inset with a star-shaped

skylight-roof that would flood the cavernous galleries below with natural light. A star-shaped chapel would be connected to the main building by a bridge. Another bridge connects the museum to several low-slung, grass-roofed buildings landward that would serve as an entrance hall and offices.

Mr. Safdie acknowledged needing to prevail on Mount Pleasant officials to grant a variance to its height limit. He said the museum would rise only about 115 feet above the site's high ground, just slightly higher than a nearby apartment building. For the time being, he said he didn't want to think about a "Plan B" and that in similar situations "in almost all cases, once we're into it, we succeed."

And let's hope Mount Pleasant town officials can see past their self-imposed limitations to embrace the monument the museum wants to be.

Editorial

Go ahead and slash SCANA rates

Don't hold back. The state Legislature can proceed with confidence that efforts to shield SCE&G customers from unreasonably high electric bills won't seriously harm the company financially or risk South Carolina's economic development.

That's the message in a recently released study commissioned by the state Senate that found SCE&G parent company SCANA could safely absorb the impact of lower rates — a 13 percent cut or more — by simply shutting off quarterly dividend payments to shareholders.

Right now, SCE&G ratepayers pay 18 percent of their monthly electric bills toward SCANA's two abandoned nuclear reactors at the V.C. Summer site outside of Columbia. A 13 percent cut, while not sufficient to completely undo that burden, would save the typical customer about \$19 per month.

It's certainly worth pursuing a substantial rate reduction in the short-term while multiple legal challenges and investigations into the reactor debacle continue.

Indeed, the state House already voted overwhelmingly for a full 18 percent cut in January. But the Senate reasonably pumped the brakes.

At the time, a rate cut was seen as a risky move. A separate, earlier report found a roughly 35 percent chance that cutting rates would bankrupt SCANA — not exactly an imminent threat, but a significant risk for such a critical driver of the state's economy.

If that report, commissioned by the state Office of Regulatory Staff, a watchdog agency, was a yellow light for lawmakers, the most recent report is a bright green one.

Disappointingly, the Senate hesitated again on Thursday, delaying a final vote



ZACK WITTMAN/SPECIAL TO THE POST AND COURIER

Recently sold cranes in Davenport, Florida. The cranes and trucks include several machines left over from South Carolina's abandoned V.C. Summer nuclear project, which were shipped to Florida to be auctioned off.

on a bill that would cut rates by 13 percent until after lawmakers return later this month after a week of vacation.

In question is whether to slash the full 18 percent or go with the more modest recommendation in the report. Lawmakers should pursue the largest cut with the lowest risk.

SCANA makes about \$444 million per year in charges related to the two abandoned reactors. The company paid shareholders about \$350 million last year, including \$120 million specifically related to the reactors.

There's no reason that money can't go to customers rather than shareholders. And SCANA has other options, including cutting costs and borrowing money, to make up for lost revenue. Bankruptcy would be a choice, not an inevitability.

Besides, shareholders can and should forgo a return on their investment — or at least accept a substantially smaller return — while lawmakers and regulators determine how to recover from the nuclear

debacle in a way that protects SCANA customers and keeps their lights on.

The Senate report, from Washington, D.C.-based firm Bates White, agrees. "A cut in the dividend payment is consistent with the financial principle that equity investors (shareholders) explicitly take on the financial risk of the corporations in which they invest," it explains.

Nobody is asking shareholders to lose money, but simply to not make much more of it for a little while. That's more than a fair request given that customers have faced steadily higher bills for almost a decade, not to mention the unthinkable prospect that they will be forced to continue doing so for six decades to pay for nuclear reactors that will never generate power.

There are still lots of questions to be answered before pursuing a long-term solution to protect SCANA ratepayers. But in the meantime, lawmakers should go ahead and cut rates by at least 13 percent. SCANA won't like it, of course, but it certainly won't go bankrupt.

The Post and Courier 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. All letters are subject to editing. Publication is discretionary. Letters should be addressed to: The Editor, The Post and Courier, 134 Columbus St., Charleston, S.C. 29403-4800. Email to: letters@postandcourier.com.

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Editorials

A crane used at the failed V.C. Summer Nuclear Station project was sold at auction for a fraction of its cost.



FILE/STAFF

Compromise on rate cut

Of course SCE&G electric customers should have their rates cut to save them from continuing to pay 18 percent of their monthly bills toward two nuclear reactors that will never be completed.

It's understandable that Gov. Henry McMaster has threatened to veto legislation that doesn't cut the full 18 percent related to the abandoned reactors. It's not surprising that the state House voted Wednesday to reject a Senate plan that would have cut just 13 percent of customers' bills.

"By allowing SCANA to continue to collect money from hardworking SCE&G ratepayers for a failed and fraudulent nuclear project, the Senate is sending a clear message that it prioritizes big business over South Carolina families," House Speaker Jay Lucas said in a statement after the vote.

"It defies logic, it defies common sense and it defies good faith to require the people of South Carolina to pay for something that they're not going to get — particularly after they've been paying for it for years," Gov. McMaster said.

There is truth to both statements. But Mr. McMaster, Mr. Lucas and state representatives would do well to consider that a 13 percent rate cut is much better than no rate cut at all. And Wednesday's House vote raises that troubling possibility.

Besides, the Senate number isn't arbitrary. It's based on a study that showed that the Legislature could temporarily cut as much as 13 percent of SCE&G customers' bills without risking the financial health of its parent

company, SCANA.

And as righteous as it might feel to slash rates by as much as possible, it's a risky proposition. South Carolina residents and businesses depend on reliable electric power. Bankrupting SCANA could throw the state's economy into chaos and lead to higher rates for customers in the long run.

That doesn't mean ratepayers don't merit a full rate cut eventually — and possibly additional measures to refund the money they have already paid toward the failed reactors.

But it would be more sensible to leave that to state regulators, law enforcement and the courts, all of which are investigating the matter. They will have the final say on the prudence and legality of the reactor project and the way it was managed. Any rate cut imposed by legislation would almost certainly be only temporary.

The rate cut question will now go to a conference committee, in which three representatives and three senators will attempt to hash out their differences and come to an agreement. There are seven days left in the legislative session. Time is of the essence.

Indeed, customers have already paid 18 percent of their bills toward the failed project every month for nine months since the reactors were abandoned last summer. A rate cut is desperately needed before the next bills are sent out.

The state Legislature has accomplished little concrete reform this year with regards to one of South Carolina's largest-ever economic disasters. It would be another disaster if the legislative session were to end without a compromise that cuts customer bills without unduly risking the state economy.

Immigration legislation needed

The Trump administration suffered another setback to its efforts to enforce immigration law on Tuesday when a federal judge blocked a pending order that would end protections from deportation for individuals brought to this country illegally as children. The judge also ordered the administration to process new applications for the program known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

President Trump last year gave notice that he was giving Congress time to enact legislation properly redefining the legal status of the "Dreamers" before ending protections for them.

However, Congress has failed to act. And there is no indication that a plan is likely to pass in the near future.

On Tuesday, the judge gave the Department of Homeland Security 90 days to explain the legal and constitutional basis of Mr. Trump's order to suspend the DACA program.

Assuming that DHS can successfully defend the decision to cancel an Obama-era order widely viewed as usurping the role of Congress in setting immigration policy, the judge's order may be only a temporary setback for Mr. Trump.

But there are other setbacks as well. Last week a federal appeals court said the Justice Department could not deny federal funds to Chicago despite that city's refusal to cooperate fully with federal immigration agents.

The court rightly said only Congress had the power to impose such punitive action. It let stand a national injunction against the

Justice Department effort to withhold federal grants to cities and jurisdictions that don't comply with immigration enforcement.

The Chicago case highlights the frustration the administration faces in trying to enforce immigration law in so-called "sanctuary cities," and states like California, that have passed ordinances designed to shelter illegal immigrants.

The failure of Congress to enact a new immigration law that would fix a broad array of immigration problems, including the critical question of enforcement of immigration law, has been a disgrace for years. And as the two recent court rulings show, legislative fixes are only becoming more urgent.

Meanwhile, the immigration enforcement battle is being fought on other fronts.

Federal courts have upheld a Texas law prohibiting sanctuaries for illegal immigrants. The South Carolina Senate, with the backing of Gov. Henry McMaster, wants the state to certify that South Carolina cities are enforcing federal immigration law. Two southern California counties, Orange and San Diego, have joined a federal lawsuit against a California law that limits state and local authority cooperation with federal immigration enforcement activities.

All of these are thorny issues that affect the lives of millions of people.

But the larger concern must be effectively securing our national borders and resolving the status of millions of illegal residents. And only Congress can do this. The longer it irresponsibly dawdles, the more complex this already divisive challenge will become.

SHENEMAN



Letters to the Editor

Security hub

Recently, the first two of 12 Air Force F-35 Joint Strike Fighters arrived in Okinawa, Japan. It's exciting to realize that South Carolina, specifically the Lowcountry, is playing an important role with the F-35.

As these next-generation stealth aircraft bring new capabilities to allied forces, the Lowcountry has become a hub for international pilot training.

Seventy-five American, British and Italian F-35 pilots have been trained at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. One of those graduates has been deployed to fly an F-35 in Japan. This training facility offers state-of-the-art full mission simulators to provide a realistic training environment and prepare pilots to be mission-ready.

The Lowcountry also is home to a training squadron of F-35B pilots known as the "Warlords," and the Marine Corps plans to add a second training squadron and two operational squadrons. There are about 30 F-35B aircraft deployed to Beaufort today, and the number is projected to rise to 70. As the F-35 program grows, we are seeing economic benefits including \$30 million in direct and indirect economic impact, supporting 350 jobs.

The F-35 is essential to maintaining the security of the United States and our allies. As a retired Air Force captain, a retired state treasurer, and as someone dedicated to economic development and job creation in South Carolina, I am proud our state and region are playing a tremendous role with these game-changing military aircraft and the brave pilots who fly them.

CONVERSE CHELLIS III
Parkwood Drive
Summerville

Propaganda

I read the article about Planned Parenthood's recent procurement of property in West Ashley. No amount of fresh paint is going to change what they do there. They were delirious with joy about how they are able to infiltrate more of South Carolina with their propaganda supporting family health issues such as abortions and vasectomies.

Why do you fight so hard and vehemently to save trees, whales, seals and other animals, but you won't fight to save babies?

LUE CHEVERIE
Hopeman Lane
Mount Pleasant

Energy policy

After the past year's nuclear plant fiasco and last month's rejection of a solar energy bill, one might wonder about South Carolina's long-term energy strategy. At the national level, energy policy has become a hyper-partisan issue, with Democrats predicting doom and gloom if we don't wean ourselves from fossil fuels while the Republicans want to make coal great again.

A nonpartisan initiative called the "Risky Business Project" provides convincing evidence that American busi-

nesses face large and unacceptable risks from climate change.

Mitigating those risks will require a large-scale shift away from fossil fuels and toward up-front capital investments in clean energy technologies. The private sector is very capable of achieving this dramatic shift. What's missing is a clear and consistent public policy and regulatory framework.

While the current administration has chosen to ignore the consensus on climate science, there will be an inevitable, belated political realignment. Unfortunately, U.S. industry is at a significant disadvantage in not having a time frame for transitioning to a low-carbon energy future.

The tide is beginning to turn. Groups like the Climate Solutions Caucus, which now has 72 members in the House of Representatives (36 Republicans and 36 Democrats), are driving toward depoliticizing the issue of climate change.

The Citizens Climate Lobby is advocating for putting a price on carbon emissions that starts at \$35 per ton and increases \$10 per ton per year for 20 years.

Such a program would give the market a clear signal with minor near-term impacts but a significant and predictable basis for long-term investments in our energy infrastructure.

TIM OOLMAN
Jeny's Street
Daniel Island

In the know

I like to know what I'm getting when I buy food in restaurants and grocery stores.

I'd also like to know what I'm getting when I vote for a gubernatorial candidate. That's why I will not consider a candidate in the June 12 primaries unless I know the name of the candidate for lieutenant governor.

Considering that people vote absentee in many cases, I hope primary candidates will announce their running mates as soon as possible.

LARRY LIBATER
Carriage Lane
Charleston

'Project Zebra'

The recent AP article about Elizabeth City, N.C., rejecting a Russian World War II monument is missing key information. The monument would memorialize a top-secret collaboration called "Project Zebra."

Project Zebra was arranged by Roosevelt and Stalin to train 300 Soviet soldiers in Elizabeth City. Those airmen were then dispatched to the Atlantic and Pacific theaters, where they destroyed numerous Nazi U-boats and Japanese submarines without losing a single plane.

In the end, Project Zebra was more than a successful mission. The Soviet and American teams shared experiences that created and cemented genuine bonds of trust and mutual respect. Only one year ago, as the article notes, the City Council voted unanimously to accept

the monument. Reversing that now due to "the current climate" strikes me as small-minded, cowardly and disrespectful.

The monument belongs in Elizabeth City, and its leaders need to take a page from this bit of hidden history. They shouldn't throw the American trainers under the bus with the courageous pilots who pulled off their missions without a glitch.

CAROL OROPALLO
Ashley Avenue
Charleston

Rich vs. poor

Re the April 24 column "Social Security growing more generous, not less."

I don't have to read the National Review to know what it's about if it's representative of senior editor Ramesh Ponnuru's view of poor people. Thank goodness for the recent letter to the editor reminding us that most people aren't rich and don't think like Mr. Ponnuru.

When an average retiree receives \$16,848 a year in Social Security, and many receive less, it makes you wonder. I would think people with adequate income to live on once did not have that income and can relate to those who don't.

Mr. Ponnuru may come from a different mindset where poverty is seen as a way of life, nothing more.

JOAN HOYTE
W. Liberty Meadows Drive
Summerville

Sour grapes

As a former New Yorker, I read with dismay the comments made by the writers of a letter about their dissatisfaction with the 9/11 memorial. It appears they and many others who were grievously touched by that awful day were not well served by New York due to the many interests vying for prominence.

Their warning to the citizens of Mount Pleasant and Charleston "not to find themselves in a similar situation" should be heeded. And the lessons they learned can be taken into account when it comes to how competing interests go about shared projects.

New York is one of the greatest cities in the world. However, its skyline and image have changed much. Ideas and interests related to memorials and to development act almost like a locomotive, running over anything in its path.

It is evident that whenever there is an imbalance between developers and communities bad things can happen.

Charleston should be cognizant of New York's shortcomings when it comes to engaging in "development." Progress is great, but failing to take into account the wants and needs of citizens prevents them from relating properly to the meaningful places they all share.

RICHARD UJVARY
Waterlily Way
Summerville

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