

PAMELA J. BROWNING, Publisher || RICK NELSON, Editorial Page Editor  
CINDI ROSS SCOPPE and ROBERT BEHRE, Editorial Writers

## Editorial

# SC budget plan delivers \$50K starting pay, but not for teachers

The idea of “defunding police” was never taken seriously in South Carolina. Although activists in Charleston and a few other cities called for such a move, it was dismissed out of hand. At the Statehouse, it was never even considered — and not just because Republicans so overwhelmingly dominate state government. Democrats didn’t propose it.

So any suggestion that S.C. Republicans are pushing back against a defunding movement in favor of super-funding police in next year’s state budget has more to do with political posturing than reality. What House budget writers are actually doing is taking important steps to make it easier for SLED, the Highway Patrol and other state police agencies to fill vacancies, which in turn is forcing local police agencies throughout the state to increase their salaries to compete for officers. And all that is making it more likely that we will increase the caliber of police at both the state and local levels.

It’s a sensible idea that should appeal to law-and-order types as well as people who are concerned that we have too many cops in South Carolina who shouldn’t be cops.

As the police chief in the tiny Hampton County town of Estill, Chauncey Solomon, told The Post and Courier’s Seanna Adcox: “If you pay your officers well, not only are you going to get officers, you get well-qualified officers. When you don’t pay well, that’s when you get officers who are more likely to get into not-so-good things. You get what you pay for.”

But raising the starting salary for state law enforcement officers to a minimum of \$50,000 raises an obvious question: What about teachers?

If that \$50,000 starting salary sounds familiar, that’s because it’s identical to the goal Gov. Henry McMaster has set and legislative leaders have embraced for starting pay for teachers — by 2026. Next year, under the Ways and Means Committee budget pro-



**First-year teachers would make a minimum of \$42,500 next year under the budget proposal being debated this week in the S.C. House.**

posal the House is debating this week, the minimum pay for first-year teachers will go up \$2,500, to \$42,500.

Like police, teachers are essential to a well-functioning society. As with law enforcement, we have underpaid teachers so much and for so long that we have a deepening shortage, with officials increasingly coming up short on enough bodies to fill the positions. As with law enforcement, teachers are leaving the profession for a lot of reasons that have nothing to do with the pay — but low pay makes it a lot easier for them to move on.

Budget writers brag that this year’s salary increase for teachers represents a 33% raise for beginning teachers over six years — which is really impressive, at least until you compare it to the starting pay for state police. Lawmakers increased the pay for law enforcement officers by an average of 15% last year, and are proposing another 15% this year. SLED salaries went up 31% last year and are set to go up another 15% next year, to a minimum of \$58,000 — which is about \$3,000 more than the average pay for all teachers will be next year.

This massive difference in pay comes in spite of another thing teachers have in common with law enforcement: If you make do without enough people or with people who aren’t up to the job, the consequences can be devastating; they might not be life-ending, but they certainly can be life-al-

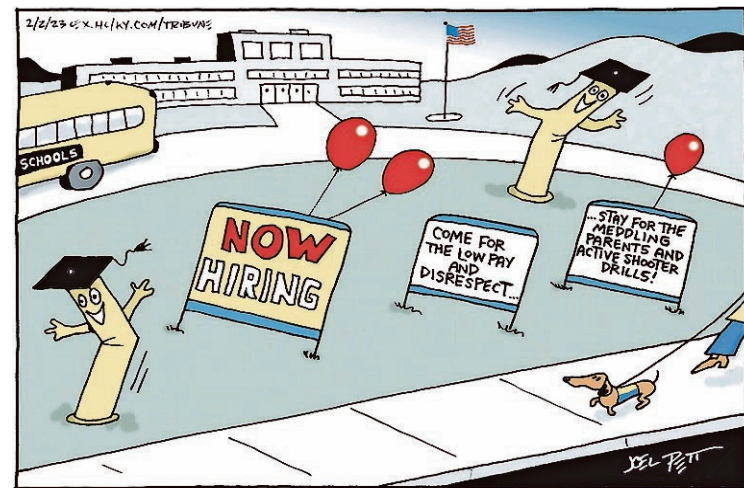
tering — and not in a good way.

As appreciative as most teachers are that the Legislature finally seems committed to increasing their salaries, it’ll be difficult for them not to get the message that our lawmakers consider police to be much more important than teachers.

If you’re a budget writer, the reason for this discrepancy is easy: The state law enforcement workforce is only a small fraction the size of the state’s teacher corps, so it takes a lot less money to raise police pay to \$50,000 than to do the same for teachers: \$30 million for police compared to about \$1 billion for teachers.

That’s essentially the same reason lawmakers gave huge pay raises to statewide elected officers and huge backdoor raises to judges — even though we have no trouble filling those positions, for which people spend huge amounts of money and time campaigning — while doing little to nothing to raise pay for teachers, law enforcement, social workers, dam inspectors, nurses, mental health counselors and other critical positions for which we couldn’t find enough people to do the job.

But simply because it’s easier to raise pay for a smaller group of workers doesn’t mean it’s smart policy. What it means — particularly until they come up with other ways to convince teachers to stay in the classroom — is that lawmakers need to work harder to figure out a way to raise teachers’ pay faster.



## Letters to the Editor



FILE/ANNA SHARPE/STAFF

**Gregorie Ferry Towns was the first attainable housing development in Mount Pleasant. The townhome complex has 36 units.**

### Enact zoning for hubs

Recent negative comments about Mount Pleasant’s approach to affordable housing seem to lack some fundamental information.

I was a member of the steering committee that worked on the 2019 Comprehensive Plan.

The plan places major emphasis on attainable housing; and for the first time actually requires it in residential development within hubs.

These hubs, planned throughout the town, also fulfill goals of work, live, play. They are to be located on transit routes to reduce traffic.

Unfortunately, the zoning to establish hubs is not yet enacted. But then criticisms are also arriving midstream.

Prior to the moratorium, the large proliferation of apartments did nothing to contain prices. Quite the opposite.

This system produced all luxury dwellings with exceedingly high rents. To make matters worse, these higher rents ended up raising baseline rents for everyone else.

We really need to disavow ourselves of the oversimplified notion that simply increasing supply will reduce prices. Simple economics says this only ever works if demand stays the same.

This does not apply to Mount Pleasant or any other highly popular area.

The demand for the town is increasing. It also comes largely from outside, so there is no realistic end to it.

Our previous attempts to out-supply this ever-growing demand made us increasingly crowded — and increasingly expensive. We’ve already tried that version.

Rather than maligning Mount

Pleasant Town Council members who are upholding this plan and representing residents, please encourage the town to complete the zoning that would establish attainable housing.

LUCY GORDON  
Mount Pleasant

### Murdaugh’s lesson

Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic priest and philosopher, warned us to “resist the beginnings.”

Perhaps the lesson from the Alex Murdaugh saga, for all of us, is to do just that: Resist the first time, the first puff or injection, the first pilfering of something that does not belong to us, the first time we are tempted to cheat on our spouses.

The story of Murdaugh began with the first time he reached the edge of the slippery slope.

In “Schindler’s List,” a young German lieutenant struggles with his conscience when he is told to shoot a Jewish prisoner. His superior says the first time is the hardest, after that it becomes easier.

The lesson is for all of us, not just professionals who fail to resist the beginnings. It is for high school students and middle-age family members, for politicians the first time they are tempted and for journalists who focus on entertainment rather than presenting the facts.

Aquinas was spot on. Resist the beginnings.

THOMAS N. FRISBY  
Summerville

### Show item’s origin

Like many other Americans when given a choice, I often prefer to purchase items manufactured in the United States.

Until the purchase is made, especially online and until the item arrives, one frequently cannot determine the country of origin.

If all vendors were required to prominently display in ads or specifications the country of manufacture, then the buyer could usually decide whether or not to purchase items from a specific foreign country.

DAVID FLESHMAN  
Charleston

## Commentary

# Medicare needs to be saved, but we lack political will

BY MEGAN MCARDLE

In American politics, there is no greater applause line than promising to save Medicare from the filching, reckless mismanagement of the other party. Almost everyone is in favor of saving Medicare. So it’s not surprising that President Joe Biden has chosen to sell his new budget this way. “Let’s be clear about another key point of my budget,” he told an audience in Philadelphia last week. “I guarantee you I will protect Social Security and Medicare without any change. Guaranteed. I won’t allow it to be gutted or eliminated, as MAGA Republicans have threatened to do.”

The problem is that Biden isn’t actually doing anything substantive to save Medicare at all. He doesn’t need to save it from “MAGA Republicans,” because the party lost interest

in substantial reforms years ago, after discovering that any major change to the program was politically toxic.

Nor does he need to save it from the other imaginary problem of trust fund exhaustion. The trust funds are an accounting fiction that are practically irrelevant because politicians don’t dare cut Medicare in any significant way. If the exhaustion of the trust fund threatens services for seniors, no matter which party is in charge, Congress will step in with an emergency spending bill to transfer more money from the general fund, and the president will happily sign it.

Unfortunately, there’s no political will to fix the actual problem, as Biden’s proposals

themselves indicate. Consider that the only major delivery-side reform the administration could come up with was a proposal to force price cuts on the pharmaceutical companies that just delivered us from the worst ravages of an unexpected pandemic (not to mention real revolutions in other treatment areas, from cancer to hemophilia). Consider too that pharmaceutical spending actually accounts for a relatively small share of our medical spending, roughly 10%; it is not possible to balance Medicare’s books entirely on the backs of drug companies. As Marc Goldwein of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget points out, drug cuts are “politically easy, but there are tons of money in hospitals and these Medicare/Medigap insurance plans. That’s where most of the real money is.” But

even pharmaceutical cuts are pretty much DOA. “We just did drugs,” says Goldwein; any new cuts will be the ones that couldn’t get through a Democratic Congress the first time. And that is the proposal that has been (correctly) hand-selected as the most politically palatable remaining option. This is also true on the tax side: Once again, the administration is concentrating its proposed tax hikes on corporations and people who make more than \$400,000 a year. Raising taxes on the top 1% is understandably popular, given that they take home about 22% of national income. But they also pay 42.3% of income taxes already. By 2033, under current law, federal spending is projected to be 25% of GDP, while revenue is on track to be roughly 18%. Mathematically, we can’t close our budget gap, much less fund the larger gov-

ernment Democrats want, entirely by hitting the same small pool of taxpayers over and over. To solve our actual problem, politicians are going to have to get serious in the face of serious blowback. Taxes will have to be raised on people who make less than that \$400,000-a-year threshold. Delivery reforms will have to be undertaken in more-controversial areas, such as those Medicare Advantage plans. And, unfortunately, those changes will need to be used to fund what we’re already doing, rather than diverted to some popular new spending idea. Using Medicare reforms to fund new spending like Obamacare has already used up some of the easiest trims. We can’t afford to lose any more.

Megan McArdle is a columnist for the Washington Post Writers Group.



McArdle