

## VOICES

## THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

## Push forward on state tax reform



**DeWayne Wickham**  
Columnist

## Responsible black fathers deserve attention

Comedian Chris Rock has a routine in which he criticizes people who want credit for doing something they're supposed to do.

He notes that some men brag, "I take care of my kids."

Then he aims his signature biting wit at such paternal chest-beating: "You're supposed to, you dumb (expletive). What do you want, a cookie?" Well, as it turns out, a lot of men DO want a cookie. After years of being pummeled by media reports of abusive husbands and deadbeat and otherwise neglectful dads, many men are understandably upset by all the negative attention.

They don't deny that some guys are unfit jerks when it comes to parenting. They just wish good dads — and most fathers are just that — got more media attention than someone like Desmond Hatchett.

He's the 29-year-old black man in Knoxville, Tenn., who received worldwide news coverage for fathering 21 children with 11 women.

Hatchett also can't keep up with his child support payments. That's a shame. Black fathers have been hit particularly hard by the media's focus on people like Hatchett — and by its failure to note the good things most black fathers do.

Two years ago, Ed Gordon, a journalist and divorced father, created "Daddy's Promise," an organization that celebrates the relationship between black fathers and their daughters.

Last week, he and his group held a father-daughter dance in New York City with national celebrities in attendance. But the event got scant news coverage.

Later that day, "100 Black Men," a national organization that works to improve life in black communities and strengthen black families, held its annual gathering in the Big Apple. It, too, drew a long list of celebrities, but not much coverage.

These black men deserve at least a cookie — and that's no laughing matter.

I know their anguish because I, too, am a black

The law that could lay the groundwork for comprehensive tax reform in South Carolina was far from perfect when it was hastily approved Tuesday following a miraculously quick agreement by a legislative conference committee. Still, what some tax-reform supporters are calling a "half-loaf victory" is far better than nothing, and Gov. Mark Sanford should sign the bill into law.

South Carolina has a broken tax system. Over the years lawmakers have enacted tax cuts and special breaks with little thought other than for silencing the loudest squeaky wheel.

The slapped-together tax system now is one that is very narrow and has very high rates,

according to business groups that have supported comprehensive tax reform. The preferred tax system, obviously, is one that is extremely broad and that has low rates.

What came out of the Legislature Tuesday is a watered-down version of the concept that started off giving a tax study committee some real authority and unfettered access to every corner of this state's tax system. The compromise bill gives the committee the ability only to make recommendations. The original concept would have been better because the committee's recommendations would have been binding unless lawmakers had been willing to reject the entire package of reforms.

The revised legislation

also does not allow the tax study committee to consider recent exemptions on owner-occupied residential property. This effectively puts a major part of Act 388, the disastrous legislation that passed in 2006, off limits. That's the most disheartening change because this law was filled with mischief and has seriously damaged the tax system.

Act 388 gave huge tax breaks to wealthier homeowners in high-growth areas, penalized businesses and renters who are shouldering an extra burden, and left schools more dependent on the unstable and unpredictable sales tax.

South Carolina needs a tax system that is more efficient and fair. The current system makes it

more difficult for our state to compete with other states that rely on tax codes that spread the responsibility more evenly and, overall, at lower rates.

The 11-member Tax Realignment Commission that will be created by this new law will have until March to study the adequacy, equity and efficiency of the state's revenue structure and come back with recommendations.

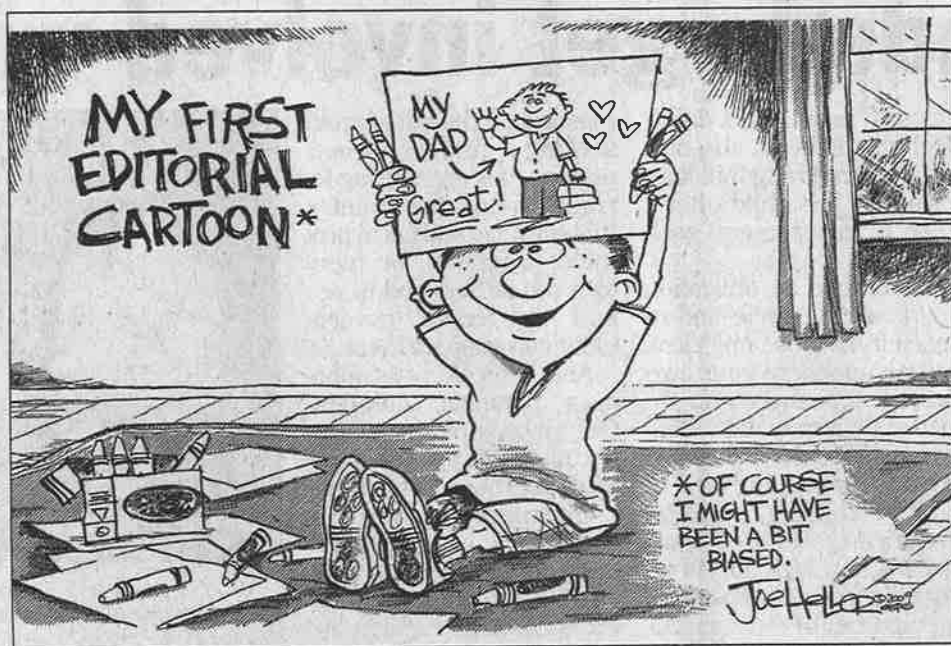
This tax study commission can help South Carolina start looking at ways to make the tax system more equitable and reliable. And even with the outright ban on tinkering with recent property tax changes, the tax review group could possibly make suggestions, at least indirectly, concern-

ing other taxes or groups that were affected by the 2006 law.

Gov. Sanford should make sure this tax reform committee can start its work immediately by signing into law the bill that was passed Tuesday. Otherwise, the Legislature cannot consider his veto until January.

Granted, South Carolina doesn't need one more tax study that will sit on a shelf. However it desperately needs to fix a broken tax system that hurts businesses, creates glaring inequities among different groups of taxpayers, and leaves our state and local governments more exposed to the vagaries of economic cycles. The new law creates an opportunity for beginning to fix the tax system.

## LETTERS



### What a difference a dad makes

The South Carolina Parenting Opportunity Program (SCPOP) provides education and resources to unmarried parents about the benefits of establishing paternity (legal fatherhood). In addition we provide training and resources to every hospital in South Carolina with a birthing facility to help them comply with federal and state laws that require them to give parents an opportunity to voluntarily establish paternity in the hospital when their child is born (using a paternity acknowledgment affidavit, it is not a DNA test). We also offer very low cost DNA testing for those who are not sure.

In South Carolina 49

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A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

percent of all children are born to unmarried parents. Studies show that children who do not have a father in their life have exceedingly higher likelihood of participating in high risk behavior. The best statistical indicator that an unmarried father will be involved in his child's life is if he establishes paternity (if he establishes paternity in the hospital he is twice as likely to be involved in his child's life than if he establishes paternity later on, according to "Fragile Families Study," Princeton University).

We want to raise awareness about the importance of establishing paternity in the state of South Carolina.

Tom Dalik  
Columbia

The writer is the senior outreach representative with the South Carolina Parenting Opportunity Program with the state Department of Social Services.

miums paid, but it would be funded by taxes, which the government would collect and pay to the providers. Providers would be privately owned and operated, do their medical work and present their bills that would be paid in a lump sum monthly, not individually, which would streamline the administrative area. Each person could choose their own physicians and hospitals, and physicians could make the medical decisions.

Canada has such a program which, according to these doctors, works well. Everyone has heard there is a huge wait in Canada for some types of treatments. This may be because Canada spends only about half of what is spent in the United States on medical care. If we choose to spend what we spend now, our benefits would be greater and the wait less.

Please go to

## THUMBS UP, THUMBS DOWN

### Camp Courage gets a boost

Thumbs Up to Clement's Kindness, a charity devoted to helping the families of children with cancer, for a generous donation of \$500,000 to Camp Courage. This is a summer camp for children diagnosed with cancer and blood disorders. Camp Courage has been held at Camp Greystone in North Carolina for a couple of weeks a year, but a permanent home for this special camp is being created at the Pleasant Ridge Conference and Retreat Center under construction in northern Greenville County. The Greenville Hospital System has committed \$2 million to the project, and the Clement's Kindness gift puts the funding total close to \$1 million. George Maynard, GHS director of development, was quoted as saying the camp will be "one of the premier therapeutic parks in the United States." Clement's Kindness is named in memory of Clement Haynsworth, the late son of the charity's founders, Knox and Priscilla Haynsworth.

### Woodworkers Guild honored

Thumbs Up to the Greenville Woodworkers Guild for all the great work it does every year in our community. The Guild got quite an honor earlier this month when it was awarded the 2008 Community Craftsman Award — a national award by the Minwax division of Sherwin-Williams. With the award came a check for \$5,000 to further the group's charitable work in the community and another \$1,000 in Minwax products to be used at the Guild's Education Center, according to Wayne Comstock, the group's president. About 600 men and women participate in the Guild and donate thousands of hours of work each year making items for local charities such as Habitat for Humanity, A Child's Haven and the Center for Developmental Services. Greenville Woodworkers earned this national grand prize specifically for building wooden office cabinetry and holiday toys for The Meyer Center for Special Needs Children.

### Helping people with their taxes

Thumbs Up to the United Way of Greenville County and the 81 volunteers who worked with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program this year. This effort is part of the United Way's attempt to help people become more self-sufficient. This particular program offers free income tax preparation for low-to-moderate income workers who often can get bigger tax refunds if they have help doing their taxes. The United Way estimates that the volunteers provided 3,322 hours of work.