

COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XXXIX No. 13

Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ September 10, 2020

50 cents

Moratorium on drilling sparks questions of timing

BY CHARLES SWENSON
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Opponents of oil and gas production off the South Carolina coast said they have tried to get support from Sen. Lindsey Graham for five years.

But they were skeptical this week about his support for President Trump's decision to extend a moratorium on leases until

2032.

"My view has always been that offshore drilling, when it comes to South Carolina, should be decided by South Carolinians – the legislature and the governor," Graham told reporters at an online press conference Wednesday, a day after he joined the president in Florida for the announcement about the moratorium.

"Clearly Sen. Graham doesn't understand," said Peg Howell, a leader of Stop Offshore Drilling in the Atlantic. "This is clearly a political maneuver."

In 2012, Graham introduced a bill to open up the Outer Continental Shelf off South Carolina to oil and gas leases. The bill would have allowed the state to control leases from 10 to 50 miles. No drilling would have been allowed

up to 10 miles.

SODA was formed locally to oppose plans to include the area in the federal government's periodic review of leases.

The Obama administration decided in 2016 to keep the area off limits. The Trump administration reopened the review the following year.

Since then, the state legislature has adopted measures that

prevent the permitting of oil and gas infrastructure along the coast.

Local governments, including the town of Pawleys Island, have joined a suit in federal court trying to block permits that would allow seismic testing for oil and gas. And during that time, Howell said, Graham has not supported the state's efforts to block

SEE "DRILLING," PAGE 2



Pilot family photo

John Pilot served for 30 years in the Army.

THE LEGACY OF 9/11

K2

Afghan war veteran sees health impact from toxins

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Immediately after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the United States government set up a base in Uzbekistan near the border with Afghanistan to launch strikes against the Taliban and al Qaeda.

Nineteen years later, 75 percent of the more than 10,000 servicemen and women who served at the Karshi-Khanabad base have died or been sickened by illnesses directly linked to their time there.

John Pilot of Litchfield is one of the survivors of K2, which is the nickname of Karshi-Khanabad.

Pilot was a major in the Army while stationed at K2 from June to November 2002. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2012.

"I suspected immediately it was from K2," he said.

According to a 2015 study by the Army, military personnel who served at K2 are 500 times more likely to develop cancer.

Pilot also suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and diminished lung capacity.

Near the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. chose K2, which was an abandoned air base, for Camp Stronghold Freedom.

"They had to find someplace quick. It was basically any place in a storm to set up," Pilot said. "Probably someone didn't do their homework."

By the end of November 2001, **SEE "K2," PAGE 4**

EDUCATION | Back to school

As district prepares to go hybrid, virtual teachers begin online term

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Although it looks like the majority of Georgetown County students will be back inside classrooms in the next couple of weeks, more than 3,000 are learning virtually from home until the end of the first semester in January.

More than 130 teachers are leading the students through this semester-long virtual experience, although they will teach from their classrooms, not their living rooms.

Jessica Mueller joined the virtual program because the district needed more teachers and asked for volunteers.

Not having her fourth-graders with her in her Waccamaw Intermediate School classroom is one of the hardest things about the experience, she said.

"I don't even know what that's going to look like, or feel like or be like. It already seems so different," Mueller said. "It will probably take a good month or so for everybody to get into a rhythm and get into the swing of things."

Mueller and the school's other fourth-grade teachers worked together on lesson plans and are using each other's videos to cut down on the workload.

"We're trying to collaborate and make it as easy as possible," Mueller said. "We're kind of taking it day by day. It's a whole new world."

Rick Gehrman has been using online platforms like Google Classroom, Google Meet, Quizlet and Padlet in his seventh- and eighth-grade social studies classes at Waccamaw Middle School for years.

"We have to learn how to use those exact same tools in the **SEE "SCHOOLS," PAGE 3**



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Brice Ellis is the first student to check in as Jessica Mueller adjusts the camera for her virtual classroom. Below, Mueller and Scott Cook welcome students online for the first day of school at Waccamaw Intermediate.



PAWLEYS ISLAND | Mayor under fire

Apology draws new wave of criticism



Mayor Brian Henry and his wife, Sassy, at a press conference last week in the dining room at Sea View Inn.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

An apology from Pawleys Island's mayor for a Facebook post that was condemned for racist language and led to calls for his resignation brought a new wave of criticism last week from people who said he had nothing to apologize for.

Both sides focused their attention on Mayor Brian Henry's business, Palmetto Cheese, threatening to boycott the product, which is the nation's leading brand of pimento cheese.

The town received more than 60 comments through its website and social media pages, according to information obtained through an open records request. Most were negative, including some from people who described themselves as visitors and said they would not be returning.

The town also received comments on social media managed on its behalf by the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce. The social media managers stopped posting for five or six days after the mayor's post.

But the mayor also got support, including from some who have ties to the island. They said he had done nothing wrong. Some said they would be buying more Palmetto Cheese.

SEE "MAYOR," PAGE 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



A tree falls, a whale rises: A new exhibit at the S.C. Maritime Museum began when Hurricane Dorian toppled an oak tree. **SECOND FRONT**

Highway 17: Site of popular nightclub that burned in 2002 will remain vacant a little longer. **PAGE 8**

Sports: It's a whole new ballgame as boosters cope with pandemic. **PAGE 16**



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