

>> [Click here to log in](#)

Search   >> [Advanced Search](#)

[Charleston Business Journal](#) > [April 8, 2002](#) > [News](#)

## Port expansion sparks new round of controversy



[E-Mail This Article](#)



[Printer-Friendly Version](#)

By Keith F. West,

**Charleston Regional Business Journal**  
**04/08/2002**

To opponents of port expansion on Daniel Island, it seemed as though the Legislative Audit Council brought long-awaited vindication. After four years of politically charged debates over the South Carolina State Ports Authority's plans to build a terminal on the Cooper River side of the island, a council report dated March 19 declared that a site in Jasper County near Beaufort was a "realistic alternative" to the SPA's Daniel Island site. With that statement, political eulogies for the Daniel Island site began flowing from the State House.

"This may be the fatal blow," Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell (R-Charleston-Dorchester) told the Associated Press. "The Daniel Island option was already in trouble, but this report is pretty much like what the iceberg was to the Titanic. It's going to sink it."

Port officials disagree. "The Jasper County site is not the answer to the terminal expansion questions facing the Port of Charleston," says Bernard Groseclose, CEO of the SCSPA. "In the long run it will primarily benefit the Port of Savannah."

John Hassell, president of the Maritime

Association of the Port of Charleston and incoming member of the SCSPA board, concurs. "While the association supports a private initiative to build a port terminal on Jasper County, we believe that the ultimate beneficiary of this development will be the Port of Savannah. The expertise is in Savannah: the longshoremen, stevedores, harbor pilots and maritime executives are located in Georgia. The bottom line is that Georgians will take home the jobs, not South Carolinians."

The Jasper County alternative has entered the 2002 gubernatorial campaign. Republican candidate Jim Miles, currently South Carolina's secretary of state, issued a statement backing the Legislative Audit Council report, stating that Jasper County is "desperate for jobs" and that the site would provide an economic boom for an impoverished region. Miles points to average annual per capita income statistics in Jasper County of \$18,719, nearly \$5,000 below state averages and \$10,000 below the national median.

An unforeseen twist in the port debate came in late March when Sen. Hugh Leatherman (R-Florence) proposed an amendment to S 0926, erasing the bill's original purpose to request permits for preliminary work on Daniel Island, in favor of developing up to 800 acres on the southern end of the former Charleston Navy base as a container cargo port terminal.

Leatherman's amendment produced an outcry in North Charleston; Mayor Keith Summey and his City Council vehemently oppose the establishment of a port terminal on the former base. To complicate the issue further, issues of Home Rule, upheld by federal appellate courts in 1999, enter the Navy Base port picture, as local zoning laws would be exempt from state projects in Leatherman's amendment. In the legislation, the General Assembly would have a free rein over local governments for building state infrastructure projects. Despite the political fallout, port industry insiders privately concede that the measure will pass in the General Assembly.

“The Leatherman amendment would effectively kill the Daniel Island option, should it be passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor,” adds Hassell. Newly elected Sen. John Kuhn (R-Charleston-Berkeley), officially neutral on the port debate, was coolly received by his North Charleston constituency in an April 1 public hearing. To date, only Sen. Robert Ford (D-Charleston) has endorsed the Daniel Island site.

The audit council report comes after intensive political lobbying by industrial and port-dependent industries looking to resolve the expansion issue before the 2002 legislative session adjourns. The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce has issued public statements supporting the construction of new port facilities in the Charleston area. With another round of environmental impact studies and pre-construction permits pending, the painstaking process of port development will prolong the debate another six years into the future.

“For the most part, the Daniel Island debate is a dead issue,” says Larry Young, the Charleston-based vice president of SSA. “We’re going to move forward with the support of much of the General Assembly in South Carolina.”

[SUBSCRIBE](#) | [REPRINTS](#) | [CONTACT US](#)

© 2004 Copyright Setcom, Inc., All Rights Reserved.  
Phone: 843-849-3100 Fax: 843-849-3122

powered by  
*i*production