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Loss of federal money small part of S.C. road-funding woes

By JEFFREY COLLINS
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The amount of money South Carolina gets from the federal government for roads has dropped since 2008, but that is only a small part of the funding problems for a crumbling highway system.

Figures compiled by The Associated Press show the total amount of money the state has received from the Federal Highway Trust Fund dropped by nearly \$43 million, or more than 6 percent, during the five-year period ending in 2013, the latest year for which numbers were available.

Lawmakers trying to figure out how to get more money toward roads said that is still a significant amount — enough to maybe add an extra lane to 15 or 20 miles of interstate or repave a lot of secondary roads.

But there were bigger problems.

Road funding has never matched the state's growth with a gas tax that remained unchanged for nearly 30 years while road construction prices have risen considerably and vehicles are burning a lot less fuel.

The management of the Department of Transportation has come under fire too for relying on political pressure instead of objective rankings

to decide what gets built and repaved and what doesn't.

South Carolina was the tenth-fastest growing state in population over the past decade, and road spending went up 28 percent in that time. But 32 other states increased road funding at higher rates from 2003 to 2013.

Lawmakers have promised to do something to get more money to roads this session as business leaders have increased pressure by warning South Carolina's economic growth could slow down if congestion increases while the condition of the highways decreases.

"South Carolina has enjoyed unprecedented growth. We just haven't kept up with the infrastructure," said Rock Hill Republican Rep. Gary Simrill, who was put in charge of the House's efforts to improve highway funding.

The House is grappling with two ideas. Simrill was in charge of a committee that met for months in 2014, coming up with a proposal to lower the gas tax, which is paid by retailers, while raising the sales tax on fuel, which is paid by wholesalers when they buy in bulk. That combined with other revenue would raise an additional \$400 million for roads.

A proposal by Gov. Nikki Haley would raise the state's gas tax by 10 cents. But she

has said she will only support it if lawmakers pass a reduction in state income tax rates over 10 years that would roughly match the gas tax increase.

Both Simrill's and Haley's proposals have been introduced in the House, and Simrill hopes the House can get back to talking about them by the end of the month.

Meanwhile, the Senate may have different ideas. While the governor and House have focused on the \$400 million that DOT Director Janet Oakley says is enough to keep roads in their current condition, some senators think that's not enough. The DOT has said it would take \$1.5 billion extra a year to get the all the state's roads to good condition by 2040.

"Does this Senate want to put a Band-Aid on it, or fix the problem?" asked Sen. Ray Cleary, R-Murrells Inlet, who has lead his chamber's efforts to solve the problem.

Earlier this month, Cleary held a Senate committee's first hearings on what to do about roads.

There are a number of different bills in the Senate with solutions ranging from tolling Interstate 95 at the bridge over Lake Marion to borrowing money to expand interstates to figuring out a way to raise the gas tax, but only charge out-of-state residents.



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148 Haley: Task force's mission is urgent

BY SEANNA ADCOX

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley told members of her domestic violence task force Tuesday to take the problem personally, saying if their effort fails, people die.

The Republican governor led the first meeting of the group she created last month to come up with recommendations for stemming South Carolina's generational cycles of domestic abuse.

She told more than 40 people gathered at the Department of Juvenile Justice that their task involves evaluating how people respond to victims, not how the victim thinks.

"Part of changing the culture is to stop trying to figure out how the victim thinks. We're never going to fully understand the victim because we don't live in their shoes," Haley said during the 30-minute meeting. "It's not about why; it's about our response."

The group's final report is not due until Dec. 31. But Haley laid out deadlines calling for interim reports due over four phases.

South Carolina has long ranked among the nation's worst states in violence against women.

"If you think you don't know anyone involved in a domestic violence situation, you're not being honest with yourself," Haley told the group. "We have no option to fail, because if we fail, someone dies."

The task force's members represent wide-ranging fields, including law enforcement, courts, churches, health care, social services and cosmetology.

Domestic violence survivor Elizabeth Gray said she endured years of abuse from her ex-husband before getting

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away through the help of Sistercare in 2010. He was arrested just once — for breaking a restraining order — despite 13 police reports and more than 30 incidents, she said.

“There are a lot of cracks in the system,” said the West Columbia mother of two, who’s on the task force and hopes more survivors share their stories with the group. “It’s very easy to get into an abusive relationship. It’s very hard to get out.”

Haley created the task force after legislators advanced their own proposals for curbing the problem. Haley reiterated her stance Tuesday that no legislation will solve it.

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted overwhelmingly last month to advance Chairman Larry Martin’s bill to the Senate floor for debate. A House study committee, created last August, introduced its proposal last month. Both bills would create

tiered penalties for abusers, giving prosecutors more options.

Martin’s bill also seeks to prevent known abusers from having easy access to guns. He thinks that’s critical to reducing the state’s dismal death statistics, saying lawmakers have studied the issue to death over the last decade, and it’s time to get serious.

Under Martin’s proposal, an abuser could not possess a gun while under protective orders, and those convicted of domestic violence could not possess a gun for a decade after their sentence is served. Some first-time offenders could undergo counseling to avoid that penalty.

The ban is already federal law, which would require federal prosecution. State and local law enforcement can’t enforce it without a corresponding state law.

More than 36,000 people annually report a domestic violence incident to law enforcement agencies across South Carolina, according to the state attorney general’s office.

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Survey shows 3 districts have computers for every student

SEANNA ADCOX
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina's Education Oversight Committee is evaluating the technological divide between school districts as the state moves to online end-of-year testing for every school, agency director Melanie Barton said Monday.

Just three school districts report having a computer, laptop or tablet available for every student. Those districts — Spartanburg 3, Spartanburg 7 and York 2 (Clover) — represent

less than 4 percent of South Carolina's 81 districts.

Barton's agency plans to release results of a survey on districts' technological capabilities later this month. Beginning in 2017, students must take high-stakes, end-of-year

tests online.

To prepare, legislators committed last year to spending about \$30 million annually for three years. Gov. Nikki Haley's budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year includes the second installment.

Newly elected state schools Superintendent Molly Spear-

man is requesting up to \$350,000 of that in 2015-16 to hire employees who could travel around the state providing technological expertise. That's particularly needed in rural areas that can't afford to hire their own technology staff,

she said.

"That would really help as we move to a more digital environment," Spearman said.

The full, \$90 million commitment — distributed based on districts' poverty rating — is expected to bring all districts

online, not buy every student a computer. Some districts have been able to use local property taxes to provide students with personal tablets. In 2011, Lexington 1 became the state's first district to assign all high school students an iPad.

Without separate funding for devices, Barton said, "My greatest fear is, the divide will become even more pronounced."

She said the technological inequities will play a big role in lawmakers' discussions about the state Supreme Court's ruling last fall that the state's piecemeal education funding system denies opportunities to students in poor, rural districts. Her agency is assisting the study committee that House Speaker Jay Lucas appointed to come up with recommendations on fixing the system.

"Without separate funding for devices, my greatest fear is, the divide will become even more pronounced."

MELANIE BARTON
Agency director



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Colonial Life Arena. — *Chris Trainor*

148 Judicial Election Causes Concern

A lawmaker's husband defeated a 16-year incumbent in a controversial judge's race in the General Assembly. Bill Funderburk, husband of state Rep. Laurie Funderburk, defeated incumbent Carolyn Matthews for a seat on the Administrative Law Court. There are no laws barring the spouse of a lawmaker from being elected to such a judgeship. Still, some legislators, along with Gov. Nikki Haley, saw Bill Funderburk's candidacy as a conflict of interest. — *Chris Trainor*

Medicaid Has Expanded Anyway

For the past two years, State House prognosticators have been whispering that once the 2014 elections were over, South Carolina might bend and accept federal Obamacare money and expand the state's large Medicaid program.

Everyone who won election in November is now ensconced in a state office, and those prognosticators' crystal balls have shattered. The whispering has shrunk to a muffled sigh.

The deafening quiet in South Carolina has spread, even as the state's current Medicaid program continues to expand and 28 states have some form of Obamacare.

Three years ago, the federal government made an enticing offer to states: They would get a massive 10-to-one match of federal funds if they fell in step with Obamacare for its first three years.

Republican Gov. Nikki Haley led the charge against accepting the expansion of "free money" and "federal entanglements." She has argued that while the front end of the agreement looked like a bargain, once the state footed the entire expansion bill in coming years, it could break the bank.

Democratic leaders, such as House Minority Leader Todd Rutherford (D-Richland), have called for the federally led expansion of the state Medicaid's program, saying it was a deal too good to pass up and that federal money meant for South Carolina's expansion would flow to other states if it didn't take the deal.

Health economists, like Lynn Bailey, said Haley could set a precedent by accepting the federal expansion dollars and use the resulting economic benefits to help pay for schools and roads.

Big, Bigger and Bigger Still

In January 2012, the state's Medicaid program — which provides care for the poor, young, old, some pregnant women and those with certain disabilities — had roughly 905,000 participants, including partial and full members.

Twelve months later, that number grew to 986,000 participants, according to a spokesman from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the state agency whose sole job is to oversee Medicaid in South Carolina.

That's a 9 percent increase in a single year. In January 2014, the number grew to just over 1 million participants, a 4 percent increase over the year prior, and a two-year growth rate of 13 percent.

In October, the most recent month's statistics the agency has reconciled, the number of participants had grown yet again, this time to 1.18 million. That represents a growth of nearly 300,000 residents — close to a 25 percent surge since 2012.

The state spent \$1 billion more on Medicaid and DHHS over a three-year period, according to numbers provided by the agency.

- In the 2013 budget, which includes state and federal funding, the agency received a little over \$5.9 billion.

- In 2014, the budgeted amount grew to \$6.5 billion, a 10 percent increase in a year.

- In the 2015 budget, DHHS, and by extension Medicaid, received roughly \$6.9 billion, a 15 percent increase over three years.

Bottom line: Even without Obamacare's federal match, South Carolina's Medicaid program grew by nearly 300,000 participants and \$1 billion dollars over a three-year period.

Everybody's Not Like South Carolina

South Carolina is far from the only state in the South trying to find its way in the changing Obamacare landscape.

Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear, a Democrat, decided early on there were benefits beyond moral responsibility in agreeing to expand that state's Medicaid program via Obamacare.

A Beshear spokesman pointed to an analysis from PricewaterhouseCoopers that outlined how Kentucky could end up paying more in the long run in penalties to businesses and other costs if it did not participate in Obamacare.

Additionally, Beshear has held that expansion would increase jobs and boost worker productivity through reduced sick days and more comprehensive health care and early interventions.

Already Expanded

Looking at the growth of Medicaid rolls and budgets over the past few years, it could be argued that South Carolina has already expanded its program, without Obamacare.

A DHHS spokesman this week claimed part of the uptick could be blamed on the increased demand for public health care brought on by the Great Recession and its still-lingering effects.

But health economist Bailey reads the agency's numbers differently, saying the devil was in the details. She said that former DHHS Director Tony Keck did a more than commendable job in improving the Medicaid enrollment process. In turn, that led to more people finding they qualified for the program.

Additionally, Bailey praised Keck's efforts in increasing the number of children covered by Medicaid. Thus, the "angel in the details" was, according to her, Keck's commitment to public health care as evidenced by his making sure more of those who did qualify were enrolled.

What's next? Most of the people we talked with over the last two weeks don't see this as much of an issue for the time being. **it**

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no role in such decisions.

148 **Two road funding bills introduced**

COLUMBIA — Two
different bills to get more

money to South Carolina
roads have been intro-
duced in the state House.

One bill is the idea of
a special House panel
that would lower the
state's gas tax and raise
the sales tax on fuel. That
bill was written by Rock
Hill Republican Rep. Gary
Simrill and started with 64
sponsors including House
Speaker Jay Lucas.

The second bill is Gov.
Nikki Haley's proposal to
raise the gas tax 10 cents.

That bill was introduced
by Greenville Republican
Rep. Tommy Stringer and
started with 36 sponsors
including Majority Leader
Bruce Bannister.

Haley says she can only
support that tax increase
if lawmakers lower the
state's personal income
tax rate by 2 percentage
points.

Both bills would raise
about \$400 million a year.

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more information.

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**Democrats critical of
Haley tax proposal**

COLUMBIA — Democratic legislators say Gov. Nikki Haley's plan to cut income taxes by \$9 billion over the next decade is nothing but a tax hike for more than a million South Carolinians.

House and Senate Democrats urged Haley on Thursday to stop holding infrastructure funding hostage to a proposal they say benefits the wealthy and forces cuts in government services.

Haley says she supports increasing the gas tax 10 cents to pay for roads, but only if legislators cut the top income tax bracket 2 percentage points over 10 years.

State economic advisers say that will reduce revenue by \$1.8 billion yearly once fully implemented. They project 1.1 million taxpayers would see no benefit because they would see no gain from the income tax reduction.

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Haley, Spearman attend education OEC luncheon

Laura Caskey

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PAGELAND - Central High School played host to a gubernatorial gathering on Jan. 29.

Central was the site for the third Olde English Consortium (OEC) Principals' Luncheon of the 2014-15 school year.

The meeting, "Right After The Election & Inauguration: A Conversation with South Carolina's Newly Elected Governor and State Superintendent of Education," was a professional development and networking opportunity for school principals in the Olde English District, which includes Chesterfield, Lancaster, Chester, Cherokee, Fairfield and York county schools.

In addition to a lunch, provided by Central High, guests were treated to visits and educational motivation from two newly-elected state officials: State Superinten-

dent of Education Molly Spearman and Governor Nikki Haley.

The governor and superintendent arrived shortly after noon and took to the stage to address any concerns education in the state may have.

Wendy Folsom, principal of Jefferson Elementary School, helped to organize the event, and the officials were joined on the stage by Central High student body president Matthew Terry.

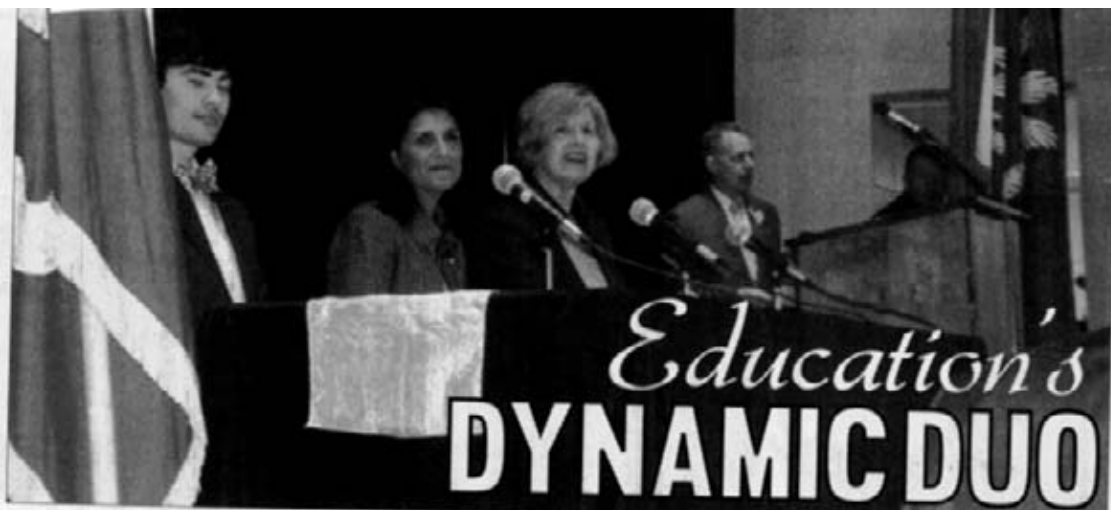
Governor Haley - who arrived to Pageland by flying into Pageland Airport - was the first to speak and promised more focus on education in her second term.

"I think of last year as the year of education in our state," Haley said.

"We are going to work even harder to make 2015 the same. The conversation we have in Columbia should always be, 'How do you support your teachers?'"

Haley explained her new rural teacher incentive program, outlined in this year's state budget, which encourages a sense of community in rural areas.

In the plan, teachers at various levels who commit to teach in high-turnover rural areas would be compensated by the state.



From left, Central High School student body president Matt Terry, S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman and Olde English Consortium Executive Director Dr. Michael Fanning sit on stage during the OEC's Principals' Luncheon at CHS on Jan. 29. Below, a large group of principals from the OEC gather for the professional development luncheon.

photos by LAURA CASKEY/lcaskey@thelancasternews.com

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A student starting college to become a teacher could have his or her tuition paid for the state by agreeing to teach in a high-turnover district for four years; a teacher who has finished college could have his or her student loans paid off by committing to teach in a high-turnover district; a new teacher (in the first five years of teaching) could get a salary bump by going to a high-turnover district; and teachers with more than five years of experience could go to grad school at the state's expense if he or she taught in a high-turnover district.

"Kids need to feel a sense of community in their education," Haley said, explaining the thought process behind the new plan.

Following Haley's speech, Spearman addressed the crowd. She told educators that Haley's vision encouraged her to run for the position in the department of education.

"It is my goal to bring the urban and rural districts of South Carolina together to work as one," Spearman said.

She received multiple rounds of applause from the principals when discussing her "common sense" approach to education.

"I can't complain about the department of education any more because it's in my hands.

"We've got to get better and be more of a service agency. We are working on using common sense. Let us know what doesn't make common sense and we will fix it," Spearman said.

Spearman said her department would fight federal regulations placed on school

fundraisers, allowing more things to be decided on the local level.

She also said she would make sure her department was more accessible and reachable than it has been in the past, with herself and leaders attending the meetings of educational groups across the state.

The department will work to build bridges in the community with churches and volunteers to get more people involved with schools.

"There are people out there who want to help our public schools. We need to have a volunteer coordinator on the state level who can emphasize that for us," Spearman said.

The two officials also answered a selection of questions chosen by event moderator and OEC Executive Director Dr. Michael Fanning.

The questions ranged from summer learning laws to changes in educational standards to the state's "Read to Succeed Program."

Both the governor and the superintendent showed a willingness to work together in the years to come to shape South Carolina's education.

"In order for education to work in our state, the governor has to have a right-hand superintendent at the department of education. We will hopefully be able to bring reasoning to all of this madness. Molly is fantastic and stability will come with her," Haley said.

Contact reporter Laura Caskey at (803) 283-1158 or follow on Twitter @LauraTLN



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FOOD COMPANY TO INVEST \$4.6 MILLION IN CHESTER COUNTY

Haddon House adding 55 jobs in Richburg

Landmark News Services

RICHBURG – Apparently, “BB” is code for “Bigger Business.”

Haddon House Food Products, the largest privately-owned distributor, importer and exporter of specialty, natural, organic, ethnic and kosher foods, is expanding.

The company is investing \$4.6 million to expand its operations in Chester County and expected to create 55 new jobs.

For a while, this project was code named “Project BB” in discussions by Chester County officials.

Founded in 1960 and headquartered in Medford, N.J., Haddon House offers and maintains an inventory of more than 20,000 food products.

In addition to the company's Richburg facility, Haddon House operates its other major distribution center in Howell, N.J. Collectively, the two facili-

ties encompass more than 1,000,000-square-feet of warehouse space.

for open positions may contact sbradley@haddonhouse.com. For more information on Haddon House Food Products, please visit www.haddonhouse.com.

The Coordinating Council for Economic Development approved job development credits related to the project.

“It is the continued support of Chester County, the great State of South Carolina and our deep respect for the fine people of Richburg which provides the ongoing desire to continue expanding our Richburg, South Carolina Distribution Center,” said Haddon House Food Products Chief Executive Officer David Anderson, Sr.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to service our customers from such a fine facility while developing additional employment opportunities for Chester County residents.”

Governor Nikki Haley said while the new industry additions are exciting, expansions of existing manufacturers are just as important to the state's economic well being.

“It's always exciting when new businesses choose to come to South Carolina, but it's a real reason to celebrate when we see one of our existing companies like Haddon House Food Products makes the decision to continue growing here,” Haley said.

“We congratulate Haddon House on announcing their second expansion in Chester County in only three years, and look forward to watching them succeed here for many years to come.”

S.C. Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt said the Palmetto State has always been known for great food, and said the thriving food processing and distribution industries are an

ties encompass more than 1,000,000-square-feet of warehouse space.

To expand its Chester County operations, Haddon House is constructing an addition to its existing facility. The addition will feature an expanded freezer distribution building.

Located at 578B L&C Distribution Park in Richburg, the nearly 30,000-square-foot expansion will allow the company to continue to meet the needs of new and existing customers throughout the southeastern United States and Caribbean as the frozen foods sector continues to grow at an unprecedented rate.

Construction is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2015.

Hiring for the expanded freezer distribution building will be ongoing.

Those interested in applying

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extension of that.

S.C. Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers said "because of commitments like this, agribusiness has continued to be South Carolina's number one industry" and he pledged support Haddon House's investment in Chester.

Chester County Supervisor Carlisle Roddey said the announcement shows the county is doing a lot of things right.

"We thank Haddon House for another vote of confidence by choosing to expand here in Chester County for a second time since 2012," Roddey said. "Chester County continues in its efforts to create a pro-business atmosphere that is attractive to our existing industrial partners."

Chester Development Association Chairman Brian Singleton called Haddon House "a great company" respected throughout the food industry.



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SC HOUSE 63 FORUM

Candidates talk medical marijuana, taxes, roads

BY GAVIN JACKSON
Morning News
gjackson@florencenews.com

FLORENCE – It is two weeks until the S.C. House District 63 Republican primary, and on Monday evening, the three candidates fielded a dozen questions on everything from how they would address medicinal marijuana to funding infrastructure if elected to the vacant seat.

The candidate event was hosted by the Florence County GOP and moderated by Chairman Richard Skipper, and it didn't bring out any new rhetoric among the three who have all run for office before, though only Robby Hill has been elected.

The event did bring out roughly 100 people to listen to Hill, a Florence City councilman and entrepreneur, property management company owner Elijah Jones and attorney Jay Jordan as they made their case for a seat that former Rep. Kris Crawford first won in 2006.

The candidates agree that S.C. Attorney General Alan Wilson should

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continue to fight against gay marriage, despite it becoming legal last year when a federal court overturned the state's constitutional amendment. They all support S.C. Rep. Alan Clemmons, R-Horry, and his proposed "Second Amendment Education Act" that would teach students, in all schools for three weeks, about the right to bear arms. All candidates agree on school choice.

Here are the candidates' takes on other issues they would face during their term.

Do you support Governor Haley's proposed income tax cut and gas tax increase for road improvements?

Jones: Absolutely, I support income tax reduction. We're one of the highest in the area, and that hampers business growth and investors coming to our state. Am I for the gas tax? I don't have enough information available to me to know that we need to increase taxes to keep our roads and infrastructure up. ... Before I could vote to increase gas tax, I would want to prove to my constituency that we had cut every other piece of waste in government before we were going to increase revenue.

Hill: I think it stays true to one of the primary tenants of government. Our gov-

ernment should provide public safety, education and essential infrastructure like our roads, and we know we're failing in a lot of these areas, and we've got to do better. If we raise the gas tax as the governor has suggested in her plan, which I like, we have to ensure it's a use tax; it's a fair tax; it taxes people who use our roads and guarantees money to be spent only to improve our roads.

Jordan: I hate taxes. I feel like we're overtaxed at every level of government. It's a fact of life. But we have to face facts as well. We have a real problem on our hands, \$40 billion shortfall over the next number of years in our roads system, and it's a problem that's going to impact us on various levels. ... One of the ways we attract new jobs and industry is having good roads and infrastructure, and we're fall-

ing behind in that grossly. ... I like the heart of Gov. Haley's plan.

Other than increasing the gas tax, do you have an alternative proposal for providing funds to improve roads and bridges?

Jordan: If you buy a car, you pay a \$300 tax, and 50 percent of that goes to roads, the other 50 percent goes to the general fund, or I as refer to it, where tax dollars go to be wasted. I think it makes sense, as a starting point, to let's take the entire amount, all \$300,

and put it toward roads. ... Here's the bottom line: There's not a magic pill.

Hill: Maybe helping to fund cities and counties that might want to take over maintenance of more roads, that's something I'd like to look into in the Statehouse. I know local government is closest to the people, has an opportunity to work hard, and of course we have to reform the Department of Transportation. So maybe there's a way to leverage lo-

cal government and DOT reforms.

Jones: I think we need to look at the system as a whole. I would be in favor of putting new projects on hold until we can get our road system into decent shape, because as was mentioned earlier, that's directly relevant to our economic development. If our employees can't get to work, who's going to invest here?

Do you support the legislation of marijuana for medical purposes?

Jordan: This is a tough question, because there are a lot of people dealing with medical issues. ... I tell people I'm not a doctor or a Democrat when people ask me healthcare questions. ... If we can see empirical data that shows there's a benefit for patients, we're not doing any favors if we





don't explore every alternative. I don't think we should decriminalize or legalize.

Hill: What I'm for is working with our research universities ... in partnership with our medical community, much like we're headed down that path already to study how we can use our medical professionals to take advantage of marijuana-derived products to treat our South Carolina citizens. It starts with agriculture. We need to work with our ag department and grow it locally.

Jones: I believe looking at some data and seeing the useful effects would have to be done as part of due diligence before a vote was cast. I would like to see the numbers of individuals who are addicted to prescription drugs that are already being administered and prescribed for

the same issues medicinal marijuana may be used for. ... Anything we can do to look at alternatives that provide safe and reasonable accommodations for pain management or any other item that it would treat, I certainly would be interested in that.

Would you support a

movement to consolidate school districts in Florence County?

Jones: If the school boards got together and decided they wanted to consolidate districts and brought that to the state level, that would be something for the legislature and delegation to consider after doing some due diligence.

Hill: As a businessman, my mind tends to say this is the right decision to have. I've even talked to the governor about it, when I have the opportunity. I think it's a controversial issue for sure, but my business com-

mon sense approach says that we don't need four or five superintendents telling us what to do in our school districts. ... As we look at fixing our school funding formulas, this could be something we talk about.

Jordan: I think it's absolutely something we should give strong consideration to. There are counties larger than ours that operate with one school district or maybe two. Those are dollars we're spending on multiple administrators, multiple staff, multiple facilities. All that costs millions of dollars, and we could put those funds in

the classroom.

Who should hold responsibility for oversight and penalty enforcement of ethics violations in the General Assembly?

Jordan: Ethics is something that ... I've been very disappointed in. We need dramatic response to the problem we have. The one-size-fits-all is not the right approach, and that's how government has approached ethics. We need to break it down into three categories.

Hill: The only way we can have true ethics reform is to have independent oversight. We have to start with basic transparency. We have to show when one of us becomes your representative, where does our money come from? What is our influence in the government? How does that affect our salaries and our income?

Jones: I absolutely believe the House and Senate should be under an independent body, not the composition of House and Senate Ethics Committees, as it is now. The level of distrust of government is so high, and that's directly related to the ethics trouble we've had in this state.



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PHOTOS BY GAVIN JACKSON/ MORNING NEWS

S.C. House District 63 candidates Jay Jordan, Florence City Councilman Robby Hill and Elijah Jones participate in the Florence County GOP candidate forum Feb. 9, 2015. The event, held at the Floyd Conference Center on the campus of Carolinas Hospital System, brought out 100 people to listen to the three candidates discuss their platforms and respond to 12 questions about issues across the state.

NEXT FORUM

The Morning News will hold an S.C. House District 63 candidate forum at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology Center on the Florence-Darlington Technical College campus. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m.



Florence County GOP Chairman Richard Skipper moderated the candidate forum that around 100 people attended Monday evening. S.C. House District 63 candidates Jay Jordan, Florence City Councilman Robby Hill and Elijah Jones discussed their platforms and responded to 12 questions during the forum.