

Title: **Haley, lawmakers working toward compromise**
 Author: By CASSIE COPE The (Columbia) State
 Size: 56.42 square inch
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FIXING S.C. ROADS

Haley, lawmakers working toward compromise

By CASSIE COPE

The (Columbia) State

COLUMBIA — Republican Gov. Nikki Haley has been meeting with some GOP House members — as recently as Tuesday at the Governor’s Mansion — in an effort to merge two competing road repair proposals.

Haley’s plan to fix S.C. roads and a proposal by state representatives had appeared to be on course to fail. But the two bills soon may become one, aimed at repairing and maintaining the state’s roads.

In meetings with House GOP caucus members, Haley has indicated a willingness to compromise on gas tax hikes, the size of a cut in the state’s income tax and how to restructure the state Transportation Department.

“She gets a lot of grief from time to time that it’s her way or the highway ... but she has shown me a great willingness to work with the Legislature, which is something I haven’t seen in my 10 years in office (from a governor),” said state Rep. Nathan Ballentine, R-Richland, a Haley ally.

For instance, Ballentine said Haley told GOP legislators that she would accept a slightly smaller income tax cut — to 5.5 percent — than the 2 percentage point cut to 5 percent that she originally proposed.

House Majority Leader

Bruce Bannister, R-Greenville, said Haley has been discussing what a roads plan should look like with many House members before a proposal is sent to the state Senate.

“She is advocating for the strongest bill that she can get out of the House,” he said.

‘ARE WE GOING TO BE SMART?’

While Haley is willing to work with House members on details, the governor told The (Columbia) State newspaper on Friday that the key points behind her tax-swap proposal must remain.

“What we’ve made very clear, from the very beginning, is: If we’re going to do this, there has to be three components,” Haley said.

Those components are:

- Cutting the state’s income tax rate
- Ensuring the cost to maintain S.C. roads, including fuel taxes, remains competitive for businesses
- Restructuring the Transportation Department, giving the governor more control over the agency

If taxpayers must pay higher gas taxes to repair the state’s roads, Haley says, there must be an offsetting tax cut, and she wants to see a

“massive” decrease.

Haley originally called for swapping a 10-cent-a-gallon increase in the state’s gas tax, to be phased in over three years, for a 2 percentage point decrease to the state’s 7 percent income tax rate, to be phased in over 10 years. That proposal was introduced two weeks ago in the House by state Rep. Tommy Stringer, R-Greenville.

Critics say that plan would raid the state’s general fund — which pays for other state operations, including schools, health care and public safety — by \$1.8 billion a year, starting in 2025.

Meanwhile, they note, Haley’s proposals don’t come close to addressing the added amount needed to repair the state’s roads. The proposals would raise an added \$400 million a year, far short of the added \$1.5 billion a year needed, according to state roads officials.

Many have questioned whether an added \$1.5 billion a year really is needed, since that figure includes the cost of building new roads. And Haley has said the general fund cuts would be offset by growth in the state’s revenues.

The real question, Haley said Friday: “Is South Carolina going to get bloated and grow into all of those revenues? Or

are we going to be smart about it ... and give it back to the taxpayers so that they can invest it, and spend it the way they want?”

‘SEE IF THESE TWO CAN GET MARRIED’

Some House Republicans say they are willing to compromise with the governor.

“Certainly, we’ll work to see if these two can be married,” state Rep. Gary Simrill, R-York, who worked for months to develop the House’s road repair plan.

Simrill said he has met with Haley or her staff at least five times “all in an effort that we would coagulate around a plan and coordinate.”

“That has been my goal,” Simrill said. “That goal has not diminished.”

Haley has said she could get behind the road funding component in Simrill’s plan.

Simrill has proposed increasing the state’s gas tax revenues by dropping the current 16.75-cent-a-gallon gas tax to 10.75 cents, then applying a 6 percent excise tax at the wholesale level, a cost that would be passed on to taxpayers.

The new gas tax would be capped at the equivalent of 26.75 cents a gallon, the amount that Haley proposed.

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In the past, Haley too has suggested counties take over more state roads. But now is not the time for that debate, she said, adding that the issue should be in a separate bill.

Simrill, R-York, says local roads have to be addressed now.

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A tale of two highways

While the state works to address problems on I-26, I-95 gets less attention.

By SARAH BOWMAN and DAN BURLEY

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South Carolina's two longest and busiest highways — Interstates 95 and 26 — have much in common.

Both have roughly 200 miles of roadway in the state.

Both are traveled by an average of more than 35,000 people daily.

HIGHWAYS

Continued from 1A

main east-west thoroughfare — namely by removing trees and erecting barriers.

I-95, on the other hand, has mostly been left untouched.

Why?

It might have to do with the lack of public outcry over I-95 deaths as well as the lack of political clout Jasper County has.

“While statistics play a role (in making safety improvements), not all of it is based off of hard numbers,” said Colleton County engineer Jared Fralix, who has worked with the state’s Department of Transportation concerning problems with trees. “When we called (DOT about two years ago) and asked why they weren’t doing anything and hadn’t heard about all these wrecks (on I-95), they said there hadn’t been a large public response.”

Public outcry influences which projects are prioritized, he said.

Those traveling I-26 — and those dying on it — are neighbors, coworkers and friends of the residents living in the counties it cuts through. More people travel that road to commute to work in Charleston, Columbia or Greenville. Residents are conscious of who is dying on these roads.

That appears to be lacking in the counties through which I-95 winds.

Beaufort County alone has more than

Both have logged nearly 70 deaths during the last five years.

And both have thousands of tall, swaying pines along their roadsides that contribute to their fatality rates.

But one big distinction exists between I-26 and I-95. State officials

are working to reduce the number of deaths along I-26, South Carolina’s

Please see **HIGHWAYS** on 4A

CONTACT INFORMATION

Want to contact your legislator about I-95? Lawmakers’ contact information can be found on 4A.

two million visitors each year, almost all of them spending some time on the deadly interstate, whether driving from another state or from the airport.

And in Jasper County, of the 22 people who died in wrecks with trees along I-95 during the last five years, at least 15 were from other areas of South Carolina or other states, including Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Delaware and New Hampshire. That means nearly three in every four of the fatalities was someone who was not local.

“All the wrecks along I-95 are not made that alarming of an issue a lot of times because it’s not local folks in these wrecks,” Fralix said. “It is people from out of town passing by, so it doesn’t hit home the same way it would if it was their neighbor.”

Compounding the problem is the strange, political way South Carolina determines which road projects get funded.

According to critics of the current funding process, a small group of legislative leaders — none of them from Jasper County — have an oversized say in how DOT dollars pegged for road projects are spent as well as how the S.C. Transportation Infrastructure Bank selects the road projects it finances.

The result: Projects in Charleston County and other politically powerful areas get the lion’s share of the money

while road projects in other parts of the state are pushed down the list.

Gov. Nikki Haley and other critics have called for an overhaul of how road projects are prioritized, saying the current process is overly political and that projects that would benefit the state overall are sometimes getting pushed aside in favor of pet projects.

Hardeeville Police Chief Sam Woodward hopes more public outcry and changes in Columbia could ultimately lead to some Jasper County trees being removed.

“Local legislators, they’re the ones we need to call to get this done, to get more money behind these projects and make them a priority,” Woodward said. “I’ll go up to Columbia if I need to because ... this is a real problem. It’s something that needs to be looked at closely and taken care of, and soon.”

Local lawmakers say they’re taking note of the problem and making plans.

“Yes, resources can be and often are a problem,” said Rep. Bill Herbkersman, R-Bluffton. “But if the trees are that big of a problem, then we need to figure something out and figure out a way.”

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FATALITIES PER COUNTY

County	Total fatalities	Fatalities with trees	Number of miles
Jasper.....	22	16	35
Clarendon	15	11	33
Colleton.....	13	10	28
Sumter	6	5	14
Florence.....	5	1	24
Dillon.....	4	1	24
Dorchester.....	2	2	18
Hampton	1	0	6
Orangeburg.....	1	1	14
Darlington.....	0	0	5

Source: S.C. Department of Public Safety data for past five years

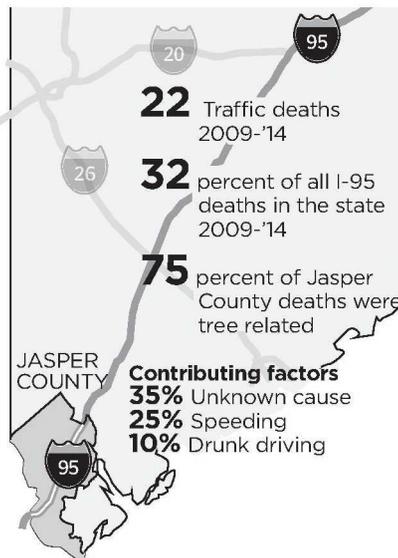
MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

Go to <http://bit.ly/deadlytrees> to find:

- A chart of top reasons I-95 motorists are dying, including trees
- A map to see the deadliest stretches of I-95



I-95 FATALITIES IN JASPER COUNTY



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Photo courtesy of Colleton County Fire Rescue

On Oct. 21, 2013, this car traveling at a high rate of speed struck a culvert, became airborne and struck several pine trees about six to eight feet off the ground, breaking the trees in half. The driver died at the scene.



THEOPHIL SYSLO • Staff photo

A high-tension cable is shown in the median of I-26 between mile markers 170 and 198. But one big distinction exists between I-26 and I-95. State officials are working to reduce the number of deaths along I-26, South Carolina’s main east-west thoroughfare — namely by removing trees and erecting barriers. I-95, on the other hand, has mostly been left untouched.

Title: **State bond package addresses vital needs**

Author:

Size: 30.84 square inch

Rock Hill, SC Circulation: 34688



Our view

State bond package addresses vital needs

Despite Gov. Nikki Haley's objections, we hope the state Legislature will proceed with a plan to borrow nearly \$500 million for a variety of much needed projects across the state. Now, with interest rates extremely low, is an ideal time to borrow the money.

Since 2008, when the Great Recession hit, South Carolina has done little but cut spending. The proposed \$497.2 bond package, which was unanimously approved by the House Ways and Means Committee Feb. 19, would be the first major state bond issue for buildings and infrastructure in 15 years.

Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, also has indicated that he would look favorably at the bond package.

Among the proposed projects, the borrowed money would provide 12 colleges and universities across the state – including Winthrop University but not S.C. State – \$146 million for long-delayed building repairs and maintenance. That would be the largest expenditure in the bond package.

The package also would provide \$94 million for technical schools for work force training; \$60 million for water and sewer projects for economic development; \$50

million for deferred maintenance at state-owned buildings and renovation of state welcome centers; and \$50 million for K-12 education. The education money would not be spent on any particular projects but, instead, would be set aside as a reserve to meet the mandate from the state Supreme Court to improve student access to education in poor, rural school districts.

Haley, predictably, opposed borrowing the money even though the bond package would address several of her priorities, such as infrastructure improvements to help attract development and increased work force training. Haley accused Rep. Brian White, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and the House's chief budget writer, of wanting to "run up the credit-card debt just because he can."

But proponents of the plan argue that the bond package would not increase what the state is paying on the debt because another bond package is about to be retired. Supporters also argue that spending the money could help spur rural job growth, especially in terms of job training and infrastructure improvements.

It also is important to note that deferring maintenance

and failing to make timely investments in job training can end up costing more over the long haul. And it makes sense to borrow the money to do that when interest rates are near historic lows.

Even if the state approves the money for these worthy projects, it still would fall well short of what is needed to address a variety of other pressing needs. For example, his bond package includes nothing for road and bridge repairs.

But the bond issue would help. The state needs to address overdue maintenance as well as job creation and work-force education.

And as any homeowner can attest, it makes sense to borrow money to fix the roof when leaks could destroy the whole house.

In summary

Proposed \$500 million bond package would help pay for deferred maintenance, train workers and make infrastructure improvements.

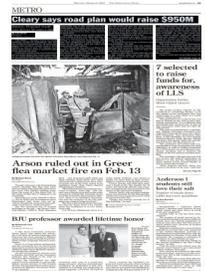
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Your view

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Title: **Cleary says road plan would raise \$950M**
 Author: By Tim Smith Staff Writer tcsmith@greenvillenews.com
 Size: 56.26 square inch
 Greenville, SC Circulation: 113473



Cleary says road plan would raise \$950M

Senator: Proposal would cost drivers 18 cents a day

By **Tim Smith**

Staff Writer

tcsmith@greenvillenews.com

COLUMBIA — Income taxes on small business would be eliminated, the gas tax would be increased by 10 cents per gallon and counties would receive \$120 million a year to pay for taking over some state roads under a senator's plan to be introduced soon.

Until now, much of the focus has been on two other plans that would raise money for roads, both filed in the House. One is sponsored by Rep. Tommy Stringer of Greenville but is the creation of Gov. Nikki Haley. The other was produced by an ad hoc House infrastructure committee and sponsored by Rep. Gary Simrill of Rock Hill.

Both the House plans would raise between \$400 million and \$600 million a year for infrastructure. But Sen. Ray Cleary, a Georgetown Republican who last year championed road funding efforts in the Senate, said his plan will raise about \$950 million.

ROADS

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tax on small businesses at a cost of about \$150 million, which he said is more affordable for the state than Haley's proposed income tax cut that would eventually cost \$1.7 billion.

He also wants to remove most sales tax exemptions, keeping those for food, electricity, health care items and newsprint, which he said would generate \$300 million.

"Is DOT getting all the money they need (under the plan)? No, but with the

"I'm throwing this idea out there because I think it makes sense," Cleary told *The Greenville News*. "If I'm lucky the House will think it makes sense and just incorporate some of it."

Cleary's plan, which he said he thought of more than a year ago, would

not only raise the gas tax, which he refers to as a user fee, but also increase driver's license fees, paid every 10 years for most, from \$25 to \$50; increase car decal fees from \$12 to \$20; and index the fuel tax for inflation with a cap.

Those increases, he said, would cost the average driver about \$65 a year, or 18 cents per day.

"If you don't drive a car, it doesn't cost you anything," he said.

He would mandate tags for trailers, making theft recovery somewhat easier, he said, and would be open to tags for golf carts and mopeds.

Cleary's plan also would raise the cap

on the vehicle sales tax from \$300 to \$1,400, a move he said would bring in \$120 million.

All of that money, he said, would go to counties to take care of the roads his plan would send to them, about half the state's mileage. Every county would be sent \$750,000, he said, and those that have passed penny sales tax options would get another \$750,000. The rest would be divided up under the current formula used to send money to county transportation committees.

The state Department of Transportation already is getting half the vehicle sales tax money, he said, which would be increased once the cap is lifted. The other half under Cleary's plan would go to the counties.

Cleary's plan also would eliminate the

See **ROADS**, Page 4A

bonding ability, with more efficiencies because they would be focused on the interstates and highways, I think they'll be able to do what they need to do to get good roads in 20 years," he said.

The state's gas tax, one of the lowest in the nation, was last raised in 1987. Nearly half the state's primary and secondary roads are rated in poor condition by the state Department of Transportation, which maintains the fourth-largest state road system in the nation.

DOT last year projected a funding shortfall for

all transportation needs until 2040 of \$1.4 billion a year.

Haley and State Transportation Secretary Janet Oakley said the \$394 million a year that they say would be raised by the governor's plan is not a panacea for the state's infrastructure issues but an attempt to repair what's broken.

The governor's plan would raise the gas tax by 10 cents, but only if lawmakers also agree to scrap the highway commission, which is now selected by lawmakers, and

agree to reduce the income tax rate from 7 percent to 5 percent.

The House infrastructure committee plan would cut the 16.75-cents-per-gallon gas tax by 6 cents and a new 6 percent excise tax be created on gas at the wholesale level, a combination that would mean 4 cents per gallon more if gas were selling for \$2 per gallon, Simrill has said. A ceiling would be set so that the total tax could never exceed 26.75 cents per gallon.

The proposal also would increase the sales tax cap on vehicles from \$300 to \$500 and offer

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counties increased funding if they want to take over any of the local roads now in the state's inventory. It would also change the way highway commissioners are selected, giving the governor that power, and expand the board for the state Transportation Infrastructure Bank.

Cleary said he believes getting rid of the highway commission is a "non-starter" for the Legislature, though he would be open to proposals to change the way commissioners are chosen.

He also said Haley already has the power to reform DOT through the transportation secretary, whom she appointed.

Because next year is an election year, he said, he believes the Legislature must act this year on any transportation plan.

Simrill said the House infrastructure committee's bill may be heard before a House budget subcommittee as early as next week.

"The good news, whether it's the Ad Hoc Committee bill, or the governor's bill or a Senate bill, is that more and more people are gearing toward infrastructure reform or funding," he said.

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Please see HIGHWAYS on 4A

HIGHWAYS

Continued from 1A

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The result: Projects in Charleston

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A high-tension cable is shown in the median of I-26 between mile markers 170 and 198. But one big distinction exists between I-26 and I-95. State officials are working to reduce the number of deaths along I-26, South Carolina's main east-west thoroughfare — namely by removing trees and erecting barriers. I-95, on the other hand, has mostly been left untouched.

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Photo courtesy of Colleton County Fire Rescue

On Oct. 21, 2013, this car traveling at a high rate of speed struck a culvert, became airborne and struck several pine trees about six to eight feet off the ground, breaking the trees in half. The driver died at the scene.

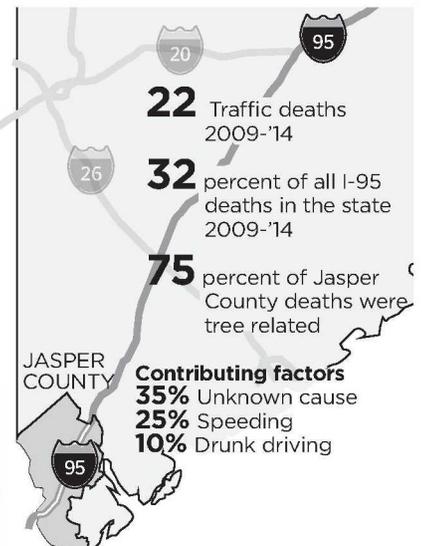
MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

Go to <http://bit.ly/deadlytrees> to find:

- A chart of top reasons I-95 motorists are dying, including trees
- A map to see the deadliest stretches of I-95



I-95 FATALITIES IN JASPER COUNTY



22 Traffic deaths 2009-'14

32 percent of all I-95 deaths in the state 2009-'14

75 percent of Jasper County deaths were tree related

Contributing factors

35% Unknown cause

25% Speeding

10% Drunk driving



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FATALITIES PER COUNTY

County	Total fatalities	Fatalities with trees	Number of miles
Jasper.....	22.....	16.....	35
Clarendon.....	15.....	11.....	33
Colleton.....	13.....	10.....	28
Sumter.....	6.....	5.....	14
Florence.....	5.....	1.....	24
Dillon.....	4.....	1.....	24
Dorchester.....	2.....	2.....	18
Hampton.....	1.....	0.....	6
Orangeburg.....	1.....	1.....	14
Darlington.....	0.....	0.....	5

Source: S.C. Department of Public Safety data for past five years

Title: **Roads compromise begins to take shape**
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Roads compromise begins to take shape

By CASSIE COPE
 ccope@thestate.com

COLUMBIA | Republican Gov. Nikki Haley has been meeting with some GOP House members – as recently as Tuesday at the Governor’s Mansion – in an effort to merge two competing road repair proposals.

Haley’s plan to fix S.C. roads and a proposal by state representatives had appeared to be on course for a head-on crash. But the two bills soon may become one vehicle, aimed at re-

pairing and maintaining the state’s roads.

In meetings with House GOP caucus members, Haley has indicated a willingness to compromise on gas tax hikes, the size of a cut in the state’s income tax and how to restructure the state Transportation Department.

“She gets a lot of grief from time to time that it’s her way or

the highway ... but she has shown me a great willingness to work with the Legislature, which is something I haven’t seen in my 10 years in office (from a governor),” said state Rep. Nathan Ballentine, R-Richland, a Haley ally.

For instance, Ballentine said Haley told GOP legislators that she would accept a slightly

smaller income tax cut – to 5.5

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ROADS

From Page 1C

percent – than the 2 percentage point cut to 5 percent that she originally proposed.

House Majority Leader Bruce Bannister, R-Greenville, said Haley has been discussing what a roads plan should look like with many House members before a proposal is sent to the state Senate.

“She is advocating for the strongest bill that she can get out of the House,” he said.

‘Are we going to be smart?’

While Haley is willing to work with House members on details, the governor told The State newspaper on Friday that the key points behind her tax-swap proposal must remain.

“What we’ve made very clear, from the very beginning, is: If we’re going to do this, there has to be three components,” Haley said.

Those components are:

- Cutting the state’s income tax rate
- Ensuring the cost to maintain S.C. roads, including fuel taxes, remains competitive for businesses
- Restructuring the Transportation Department, giving the governor more control over the agency

If taxpayers must pay higher gas taxes to repair the state’s roads, Haley says, there must be an offsetting tax cut, and she wants to see a “massive” de-

crease.

Haley originally called for swapping a 10-cent-a-gallon increase in the state’s gas tax, to be phased in over three years, for a 2 percentage point decrease to the state’s 7 percent income tax rate, to be phased in over 10 years. That proposal was introduced two weeks ago in the House by state Rep. Tommy Stringer, R-Greenville.

Critics say that plan would raid the state’s general fund – which pays for other state oper-

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ations, including schools, health care and public safety – by \$1.8 billion a year, starting in 2025. Meanwhile, they note, Haley's proposals don't come close to addressing the added amount needed to repair the state's roads. The proposals would raise an added \$400 million a year, far short of the added \$1.5 billion a year needed, according to state roads officials.

Many have questioned whether an added \$1.5 billion a year really is needed, since that figure includes the cost of building new roads. And Haley has said the general fund cuts would be offset by growth in the state's revenues.

The real question, Haley said Friday: "Is South Carolina going to get bloated and grow into all of those revenues? Or are we going to be smart about it ... and give it back to the taxpayers so that they can invest it, and spend it the way they want?"

'See if these two can get married'

Some House Republicans say they are willing to compromise with the governor.

"Certainly, we'll work to see if these two can be married," state Rep. Gary Simrill, R-York, who worked for months to develop the House's road repair plan.

Simrill said he has met with Haley or her staff at least five times "all in an effort that we would coagulate around a plan and coordinate."

"That has been my goal," Simrill said. "That goal has not diminished."

Haley does not want to include one part of Simrill's plan

– giving counties the option to take over roughly half of the state's 41,000 miles in roads in return for more money from the state. "The more components you have (in a proposal), the more complex it gets, and the more likely it can get derailed," she said.

In the past, Haley too has suggested counties take over more state roads. But now is not the time for that debate, she said, adding that the issue should be in a separate bill.

Simrill says local roads have to be addressed now.

The Transportation Department has indicated it will be focusing on repairing highly traveled roads in the future, he said. That means if counties don't look after local roads, no one will. "That becomes problematic for folks that live on those state roads" that are less traveled, Simrill said.

Meanwhile, Haley has said she could get behind the road funding component in Simrill's plan.

Simrill has proposed increasing the state's gas tax revenues by dropping the current 16.75-cent-a-gallon gas tax to 10.75 cents, then applying a 6 percent excise tax at the wholesale level, a cost that would be passed on to taxpayers.

The new gas tax would be capped at the equivalent of 26.75 cents a gallon, the amount that Haley proposed.

That will put South Carolina's gas tax in line with Georgia's 26.5 cents per gallon and below North Carolina's 37.75 cents per gallon, according to the American Petroleum Institute.

Bannister said Haley told GOP lawmakers she would veto

the road funding proposal if the 26.75-cent-a-gallon cap were removed.

Haley also told lawmakers she would be willing to compromise on restructuring the state Transportation Department.

That agency currently has seven commissioners elected by legislators and one commissioner appointed by the governor. The governor also appoints the secretary of transportation with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Haley wants the Transportation Department to report directly to the governor.

"We have always wanted a cabinet style of government," Haley said. "If you look at my agencies ... I'm working with one director; I'm not working with multiple people."

Simrill's House plan would create a board structure where the governor would appoint commissioners to a board, who would select a secretary – similar to the Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Haley said as long as she gets some restructuring and the system "won't be just a free-for-all of commissioners having their pet (road) projects taken care of, then it's something we'll talk about."

'Hope for one bill'

In her discussions with GOP lawmakers, who control the House and hold a majority of the seats in the Senate, Haley made it clear they must pass a roads plan, said state Rep. Ralph Norman, R-York.

"It's loud and clear that other industries she's courting have laid out what has to be done with roads in order for them to

come here, so there is a sense of urgency," Norman said.

Haley and GOP House members want to reach agreement on a compromise because any proposal "will be Senate-ized," Simrill said. "We definitely don't know what it's going to look like coming out of the Senate."

Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, is among those who expressed concern about Haley's proposed income tax cut, saying it would force huge cuts in state programs.

Other senators have concerns about changing the Transportation Department's structure.

For example, state Sen. Larry Grooms, R-Berkeley, grilled Transportation Secretary Janet Oakley on the need to reform the Transportation Department at a recent Senate transportation meeting.

Haley also faces a divided House.

While GOP state Reps. Balentine, Bannister and Norman all have signed on to Haley's tax-swap plan, other Republican House leaders – including House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Darlington, and state Rep. Brian White, R-Anderson, the House's chief budget writer – are backing Simrill's plan.

About 20 House members have signed on to both plans, including Freshman Caucus chairman Rep. Neal Collins, R-Pickens.

But, Collins said, with the House GOP Caucus actively working with the governor to try to reach a compromise, "There is hope for one bill."

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FILE PHOTO

Gov. Nikki Haley has been meeting with some GOP House members in an effort to merge two competing road repair proposals.

Title: 'Clubbiness'
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'Clubbiness'

LEXINGTON COUNTY sheriff candidate Ed Felix denounces what he calls the "clubbiness" that characterizes the culture of the department he wants to lead.

He said if he's elected he won't tolerate cronyism and will hire based on credentials and ability rather than who you know. "The boat's going to rock when I walk in," Mr. Felix said.

Candidate Justin Britt said the sheriff's department is no place for political patronage, favoritism and hiring friends. The "days of deals and back scratching" at the sheriff's department would come to an end under his leadership, he said.

While candidate Jay Koon, assistant police chief in the town of Lexington, doesn't think the culture at the department is that bad, he said that "in the previous administration we got way too political" and declared he would cling to his values as a law officer and stress honesty and integrity.

West Columbia police chief Dennis Tyndall said politics have no place in police work and that he'll closely examine the culture of the department and demand professionalism.

Each of the four candidates has declared he will make it a priority to rebuild the sheriff's department's image, which was tainted by the demise of then-Sheriff James Metts, who

pleaded guilty to a federal felony charge. For sure, residents will be looking to the next sheriff to restore their confidence in the department.

But it's not easy to change the culture of an organization that was cultivated over four decades under the leadership of a man who, by the time he left office, was the most powerful public official in Lexington County. In addition to running the sheriff's department and jail — where he hired and fired at will — Mr. Metts also oversaw all public safety agencies for homeland security purposes. He also had wide latitude when it came to how he managed his budget. His power was virtually unchecked.

That's a hard act to follow, and obviously, bringing change could prove to be difficult. Rooting out that "clubbiness" Mr. Felix refers to could be particularly hard.

Part of the reason is that the hire-your-buddy system that candidates suggest has settled in the sheriff's department isn't unique to that agency. You can find it throughout local government in the county. To put it plainly: Lexington County is a bit incestuous when it comes to government. It's the culture.

Need examples?

When County Council made former Sheriff Metts head of homeland security in 2003, he hired Tim James as his public safety chief to oversee those duties. But in 2005, Mr. James surprised council members — who

were by that time grooming him to become administrator — when he left to be head of security at Lexington Medical Center, the county hospital.

That's the same Lexington Medical Center whose foundation hired Lexington County resident and then-sate Rep. Nikki Haley, now our governor, as a \$110,000-a-year fundraiser. But, rest assured, Mrs. Haley didn't use her position as a state representative to lobby for Lexington Medical Center in that high-paid position. It's true. The House Ethics Committee told us so.

When Mr. James left the public safety position in 2005, what did Mr. Metts do? He hired then-County Council chairman Bruce Rucker, then the longest-serving council member, of course.

In 2009, the town of Lexington hired County Councilman Johnny Jeffcoat as its economic director, a position that had been abolished four years earlier because town leaders said it duplicated the efforts of county officials and local business groups.

Mr. Jeffcoat's job entailed trying to bring new restaurants, retailers and corporate offices to town. It was an arrangement fraught with possible conflict. Who would the councilman represent when the town's interest conflicted with that of the county? Beyond that, Mr. Jeffcoat's hiring appeared to be an attempt by the town to

gain favor with a member of County Council.

Town officials seemed oblivious to the obvious pitfalls of such an arrangement. Perhaps that was because the town's elected leader had a questionable arrangement of his own: Then-Lexington Mayor Randy Halfacre served as executive director of the Greater Lexington Chamber of Commerce while continuing to hold public office.

Dare I mention former Lexington Town Councilman Danny Frazier, who is accused in an indictment of bribing Mr. Metts? In addition to being on council, he held jobs as an adviser to West Columbia on annexation and to Sheriff Metts on community concerns. He lost those jobs amid controversy over his involvement in advising Internet sweepstakes parlors seeking to expand the online gambling that some state officials deemed illegal.

No doubt, a sheriff determined to run his department on the up-and-up can change that culture, though deeply engrained.

But the job is made tougher because he'll run into it time and again as he traverses Lexington County, where "clubbiness" is business as usual.

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Warren
Bolton

*Associate
Editor*

Title: **Koon would serve well as Lexington sheriff**
 Author:
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Koon would serve well as Lexington sheriff

THE NEXT LEXINGTON County sheriff will need not only to protect life, limb and property, but to restore and protect the department's tarnished image.

While the four candidates in Tuesday's Republican primary in the special election for sheriff readily embrace those challenges, only two are prepared to get the job done — Lexington assistant police chief Jay Koon and West Columbia police chief Dennis Tyndall.

Both men have the experience and managerial skills needed to oversee the sheriff's department. Although neither has run a department — let alone a jail — of this size, both would be quick studies.

But Mr. Koon possesses the polish, professionalism and smarts needed not only to restore public confidence but to propel the agency forward into a new era. That's sorely needed at the department former Sheriff James Metts shaped in his image during a 42-year tenure, only to leave it in disgrace when he re-

signed and pleaded guilty to a federal felony charge.

The department would benefit from Mr. Koon's calm, steady demeanor and commitment to treating employees and residents with equity and respect. He said he sees employees as assets that are to be used effectively and efficiently to serve the residents of Lexington County.

And don't expect him to play favorites. He pledges to treat everybody equally under the law, regardless of who they are, and to run a shop that sticks to the basics. "In the previous administration we got way too political," Mr. Koon told us.

Mr. Koon has served at the Lexington Police Department for 20 years, nine of them as assistant chief. He has helped manage a \$5 million budget and been responsible for initiating the hiring and promotion of officers.

Having worked in close proximity to and in conjunction with the sheriff's department over the years, he is familiar with the agency and its people. After Mr. Metts' departure, Mr. Koon spent five

months as a member of the transitional leadership team for acting Sheriff Lewis McCarty, which allowed him an up-close look at how the department operates as well as its challenges. That experience, while not extensive, should serve him well.

While the sheriff's department has a sizable budget, it is essential to spend wisely and not assume more money is the answer to every problem, Mr. Koon said. He said he intends to scale back or farm out duties — such as security at the courthouse entrance — to gain efficiencies and free up deputies.

Although Mr. McCarty wisely removed four top aides after Gov. Nikki Haley appointed him to replace Mr. Metts, it would be naive to think that alone is enough to change the culture established over four decades. The next sheriff must be willing to confront any residual problems and, if need be, do even more house cleaning.

On Tuesday, voters should charge Mr. Koon with that task.

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ONLINE EXTRA

Watch video from our meeting with Mr. Koon and other candidates and read their answers to our candidate questionnaire at **thestate.com/1107**.



Koon

 Title: **Republicans yet to show they're smart**

Author:

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Republicans yet to show they're smart

Gov. Nikki Haley has begun her second term and still has not come up with any bright ideas about improving South Carolina that have actually helped. I've heard about all of the businesses that are locating here, but some are also leaving for the simple fact that she does not like unions.

It just seems to me that she is against anything that has the potential to improve the livelihood of a South Carolinian. No wage increase (except for her staff), no unions (so a company can do whatever it wants to employees), no expansion of Medicaid (that would allow more health care for many who lack it). I like South Carolina and would like to see better cooperation within state government, rather than worrying about Washington, which does not run anything here.

I am a Democrat, and if Republicans think they're smarter than anyone else, then show me. I'm tired of reading stories of domestic violence and dodging potholes. Raising the gas tax is still a tax increase, and lowering other taxes results in reduced revenue.

JEFFREY DYER
Columbia