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Subject: Opinion

This is the final version, unless you find something.

State budget projections tell us that government will take in nearly half a billion dollars more of your money in the coming fiscal year over last year, and I know you're not shocked to discover that establishment politicians already are lined up to spend every dime.

My position, however, is the same this year as every year. All so-called new revenue should be returned to the taxpayers or used to pay off debt--a return to the taxpayers of future generations. The establishment should fund your government with the money you've already surrendered, because you've given plenty.

I also propose three significant budget initiatives for the coming year. Their price tags are small, but their impacts will be tremendous, especially for children.

I pledged in 2017 to ratify no more budgets that funded facilities in South Carolina that perform abortions other than to save the mother. I will keep that pledge, and there is a quick and easy solution to the problem.

Federal funding for abortions flows from Washington into South Carolina through federal Medicaid law to a line item in the state budget called "Family Planning". This year it totals just over \$15m. Family planning also covers services that have nothing to do with abortion, and we all agree that those in need of services, such as pre-natal care, should receive them. But, federal regulations allow clinics that offer these services also to kill unborn children. SC abortion mills killed over 5700 children in 2016, alone, and they have put to death almost THIRTY THOUSAND innocent lives since 2012. That must end.

The solution lies in simply rejecting the federal money and the regulations that go with it. South Carolina should replace federal dollars with state dollars and make its own rules. My rule is that no facility in South Carolina may receive state Family Planning dollars unless DHEC certifies each month that no abortions were performed for any reason other than an immediate danger to the life of the mother.

It's time we spend \$15m it to end elective abortion in South Carolina, and the lives of the tens of thousands we will save are worth every penny.

We also must expand school choice for families in South Carolina. We already enjoy incredible success with the very limited scholarship program for children with exceptional learning needs. That program is capped at \$13 million, and that is claimed within the first half of each school year. We can do more for exceptional needs children, and other children in special circumstances, for very little money. We must double the exceptional needs scholarship program cap and include children in foster care and children in South Carolina military families.

Foster children have endured circumstances that affect them in many ways, including the classroom. They, and their parents, need access to the learning environment best suits their circumstances. Military children often experience both physical relocation and a parent absent to deployment. Their families deserve access to the learning environment that meets their unique needs. State estimates project that these families could benefit from school choice for as little as \$13m. That would be money well spent for these children and their families.

My third budget proposal helps our men and women in law enforcement, and our taxpayers. The Assembly passed legislation in 2017 to raise contribution rates both on state employees and their employers--you the taxpayer. The impact on the Police Officers Retirement System totaled almost \$30m between higher contributions from officers and higher contributions from local governments, such as your sheriff's department.

We should return those contribution rates to their previous levels both to put more money back into your local law enforcement agencies and to reduce the burden on our officers, although their contribution rates still will be higher than other state employees. The money is there. We simply need the commitment to our law enforcement and our taxpayers.

My voting record in the Senate reflects my belief that Columbia does not have a revenue problem; it has a spending problem. State funds available will exceed \$8 billion in the coming year. We should return all new money to your pockets and spend your money already in Columbia to serve children and families and those who protect us. Please join me, and tell your legislators to get the priorities right.