

Title: **Senate roads plan falls short**

Author:

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THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

Senate roads plan falls short

South Carolinians should be used to this by now, but the “good” news from the state Senate this past week is predictably not as good as it could be.

Yes, Republican senators finally gave up a self-serving filibuster of a bill that would increase funding for the state’s highways. But they did so at the likely expense of additional funding that would be supplied by a stable revenue source that could have made significant improvements in the state’s infrastructure.

If the bill senators agreed to discuss this past week finally is approved by both houses and signed by the governor, it will be another half-step by a Legislature that routinely fails to do all it can when faced with an important issue.

First the good: If the Senate approves this measure and the House and Gov. Nikki Haley concur, the plan would use recurring surplus revenue to add \$400 million a year to the state’s infrastructure budget. That’s enough to bring 95 percent of the state’s interstate miles to good condition, up from 66 percent in 2014, according to a report by *Greenville News* Columbia reporter Tim Smith.

Now the bad news: The \$400 million falls well short of what’s needed, and primary routes that carry almost half the state’s traffic would see less change. Only 35 percent of the state’s primary road miles would improve to “good.” Further, little

would be done to relieve congestion on the busiest roads.

The state Chamber of Commerce has suggested the total needed to bring the state’s roads and highways up to good condition is roughly \$600 million annually. Other groups say the state needs \$700 million a year. A Senate proposal from last year would have provided about \$800 million a year. State Transportation Secretary Christy Hall said in a GreenvilleOnline report on Thursday that it would take \$1.2 billion per year to bring the entire state transportation system to “good” condition. One estimate that includes “wish list” items puts the funding deficit at \$1.5 billion a year.

The Senate’s decision to finally discuss the proposal came after a tempestuous discussion at the end of a lengthy filibuster led by Sens. Tom Davis and Kevin Bryant. Both are adamant that infrastructure funding come from surplus revenue only with no gasoline tax increase. They also demand any increase in funding be accompanied by a change in the structure of DOT to provide more accountability.

We have repeatedly said and still agree that a portion of the state’s surplus revenue should be used for infrastructure funding. But it should augment a more stable, recurring revenue source such as a gasoline tax increase. We also agree in principle with reforming DOT to provide greater equity and accountability.

But it’s worth stressing: A gas

tax increase is essential.

Although the new surplus revenue appears sufficient now to fund the \$400 million, South Carolina has enough experience to know that when – not if – the economy turns south, some of the surplus, or “new,” revenue will dry up and difficult decisions will have to be made, including perhaps cutting infrastructure spending.

The time is right for a gasoline tax hike: Business leaders support an increase to the state’s gasoline tax that hasn’t been raised since 1987, in part evidenced by the Chamber’s agenda. The public generally supports an increase as well, with 61 percent of state Republicans saying in December they support a gas tax increase as part of a road-funding plan.

Lawmakers should not let election-year fears of a backlash get in the way of this opportunity to finally provide adequate funding for infrastructure.

Sure, there is no question that an additional \$400 million a year would help but not, obviously, as much as \$700 million. If this is all that our dysfunctional Legislature can squeeze out of this session, it is a step forward. But it cannot be the end of the road, pardon the pun. Employers already have stated that not updating our infrastructure will cost South Carolina jobs. That is an inadvisable path to take just as this state’s economy has gotten its legs back and is beginning to sprint.

Title: **Author Pat Conroy dies at 70**
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Author Pat Conroy dies at 70

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"I write best in South Carolina," Pat Conroy once said. "It is burned in my brain."

Time and time again, Conroy returned to the vistas and people of the Palmetto State, which served as sources of inspiration for his novels, especially "The Lords of Discipline" and "The Prince of Tides."

Conroy, 70, died Friday at his home in Beaufort, where he was surrounded by friends and family, according to his publisher.

It had been less than a month since author told fans on Facebook that he was battling pancreatic cancer.

"I intend to fight it hard," Conroy said. "I owe you a novel, and I intend to deliver it."

Born in Atlanta, Conroy was 15 when he moved to Beaufort with his military family. It was there, Conroy would later say,

that his life began. But while the Lowcountry featured prominently in much of his work, Conroy did get to tell one story set in Greenville.

That story, in which Citadel cadets make a late-night foray to Furman's campus to steal the school mascot's horse, cropped up in Conroy's 1995 novel "Beach Music."

In an August interview that year with *The Greenville News*, Conroy said Greenville had been a great venue for him.

"Greenville and Spartanburg and cities like that supported me in the early days," he said.

Ashley Warlick, author and editor of "edible Upcountry," said Conroy was hugely supportive in the campaign to open downtown Greenville's M. Judson bookstore.

At a fundraising dinner for

the bookstore, Conroy "signed book after book for friends and family and for our shelves," Warlick recalled.

Conroy, who served as editor-at-large for Story River Books, a fiction series published by the University of South Carolina Press, also supported many new writers with encouragement and advice and bear hugs, which he gave freely.

"I believe it gave him joy to see other writers succeed, which is such a rare kind of generosity," Warlick said.

Conroy's writing career spanned nearly five decades and included several screenplays, a cookbook and a collection of essays chronicling his love for literature.

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Conroy

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At one point, Conroy was approached by the estate of Margaret Mitchell to write a sequel to "Gone With the Wind," though the negotiations never panned out.

"There are rare people whose very existence make life bearable for the rest of us for reasons of grace, wisdom and understanding. Pat was such a man," Con-

roy's Facebook page said late Friday. "To say he will be missed is the grandest of understatement."

On Twitter, Gov. Nikki Haley said South Carolina has lost a beloved son.

"Pat Conroy will be missed. We can find comfort knowing his words and love for SC will live on."

In a statement from publisher Doubleday, Conroy's wife, the novelist Cassandra King, said: "The water is wide and he

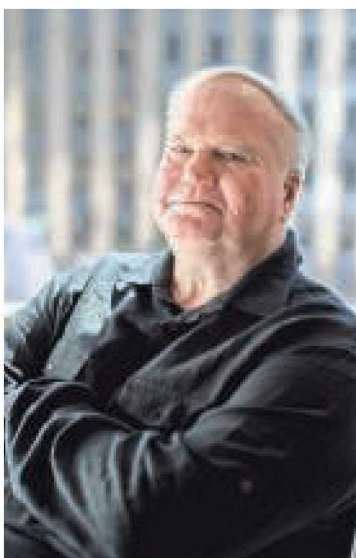
has now passed over."

And on Instagram, Barbra Streisand, who starred in the 1991 film version of "The Prince of Tides," posted an old picture of herself with Conroy.

"Pat's natural language was poetry. He wrote sentences that are like an incantation," Streisand wrote. "I lost a dear friend, and the world has lost a great writer."

The Associated Press contributed.

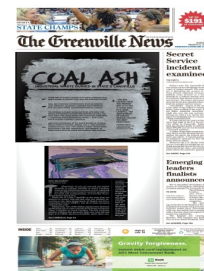
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TODD PLITT/USA TODAY

**Author Pat Conroy, shown in 2013
promoting his memoir "The Death
of Santini" in New York.**

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COAL ASH

INDUSTRIAL WASTE BURIED IN STATE'S LANDFILLS

THERE ARE 12 CLASS 2 LANDFILLS IN SOUTH CAROLINA THAT ARE ALLOWED TO ACCEPT COAL ASH AND NINE ARE UNLINED.

COAL ASH CONTAINS CONTAMINANTS SUCH AS ARSENIC, LEAD, MERCURY, SELENIUM, CADMIUM AND CHROMIUM, AND HAS BEEN LINKED TO INCREASED RISK OF CANCER.

THE FEDERAL NUCLEAR SAVANNAH RIVER SITE (SRS) WAS AMONG THE BIGGEST UNLINED REPOSITORIES OF COAL ASH LAST YEAR. TWO LARGE PAPER AND PACKAGING COMPANIES — KAPSTONE AND INTERNATIONAL PAPER — BURY COAL ASH IN UNLINED COMPANY LANDFILLS.

LESS THAN 10 PERCENT OF ALL WASTE BURIED AT INTERNATIONAL PAPER'S UNLINED LANDFILL AND A LINED COMPANY LANDFILL IS COAL ASH. THE LANDFILLS WERE "ESTABLISHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR MILL OPERATIONS" AND OPERATE "IN COMPLIANCE WITH ALL STATE AND FEDERAL REGULATIONS."

"THE EPA
 CLEARLY SAID
 THE PROPER
 WAY IS TO PUT
 IT (COAL ASH)
 IN A LINED
 LANDFILL. THE
 DEPARTMENT
 OF ENERGY
 SHOULD FOLLOW
 THE BEST
 PRACTICES."

BARBARA SMOAK,
 A SPOKESWOMAN FOR
 SAVANNAH RIVER
 NUCLEAR SOLUTIONS

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RICK BRUNDRETT
 THE GREENVILLE NEWS

Thousands of tons of coal ash are buried annually in unlined landfills in South Carolina, even as the federal government is now requiring new landfills to have liners to protect groundwater from ash contamination, a *Greenville News*' investigation has found.

There are 12 Class 2 landfills in the state that are allowed to accept coal ash and nine are unlined, according to the state Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). Not all of them accepted coal ash last year.

Wednesday, Gov. Nikki Haley signed a law aimed at prohibiting out-of-state coal ash from being dumped in Class 2 landfills in South Carolina. The law excludes electric utilities that generate their own coal ash and bury it in DHEC-approved landfills under their con-

See LANDFILLS, Page 6A

SAVANNAH
 RIVER NUCLEAR
 SOLUTIONS

Aerial view of Savannah River Site landfill in Aiken County that will accept coal ash excavated from on-site, pond-like basins as part of a large clean-up project announced last year.

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Landfills

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trol.

Frank Holleman of Greenville, a senior attorney with the Virginia-based, nonprofit Southern Environmental Law Center, told *The News* that coal ash should be buried only in Class 3 landfills.

"A Class 3 landfill by definition is an industrial solid-waste landfill," he said. "Coal ash is industrial waste. It contains heavy metals, which, over time, often contaminate groundwater."

"We still have a few of those outliers that need to clean up their acts and need to ensure that their ash is being properly stored," he added.

The federal nuclear Savannah River Site (SRS) in Aiken County was among the biggest unlined repositories of coal ash last year, records show.

Besides SRS, at least two large paper and packaging companies are burying coal ash in unlined landfills, and two of the state's main utilities with coal-fired plants were operating that type of landfill as of last year, though those sites are no longer operating, according to company spokespersons and state records.

All of those landfills are classified by DHEC, which regulates landfills statewide, as Class 2 non-commercial landfills, which, under state regulations, allow only waste generated by the landfill owner or entity that controls the landfill.

Environmental groups say because coal ash, which is generated by burning coal, often contains heavy metals, it should be buried in Class 3 landfills or better, which must have liners and are regulated more than Class 2 landfills.

Coal ash contains contaminants such as arsenic, lead, mercury, selenium, cadmium and chromium, and has been linked to increased risk of cancer, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Under a new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rule that went into effect last October, new landfills or existing landfills that have "lateral" expansions must have approved "composite" liners, made up of a "geomembrane" and a 2-foot layer of compacted soil, if the sites accept coal ash. The rule also requires those sites to install systems to collect and remove any leachate that accumulates on top of the liners.

The rule applies to coal ash generated by "electric utilities and independent power producers that fall within the North American Industry Classification System."

DHEC did not respond to questions on landfill rules or if any non-commercial Class 2 landfills have been cited for environmental violations in the last fiscal year.

Coal ash at nuke site

Last year, SRS, spread over 198,000 acres in Aiken, Barnwell and Allendale counties, accepted a total of nearly 30,000 tons of coal ash at two unlined Class 2 non-commercial landfills in Aiken County that have been operating since the early 1950s, according to Barbara Smoak, a spokeswoman for Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, which manages the nuclear complex.

The ash was generated over many years from coal-fired power plants no longer operated by SRS, Smoak said. SRS last year announced it had begun excavating about 1.3 million cubic yards of coal ash from four "pond-like basins" at the site, which would be "safely and efficiently consolidated into two large mounds," according to a press release. The project began last April and is scheduled to be completed in 2019 at a total cost of about \$75 million.

The two disposal mounds cited in the press release are in one of the on-site landfills; last year, 28,687 tons of coal ash was "consolidated" at that landfill,

Smoak said.

Smoak said there are no liners at either landfill because they were not required when the landfills were built and given permits.

She added, though, that as a "robust protective measure, a multi-layered geosynthetic cover system" will be placed over one of the landfills by the end of this year as "protection for human health and the environment." She said groundwater will "continue to be monitored and evaluated to make sure that this remedy is working as intended."

"More than 9,000 environmental and groundwater samples are collected each year to make sure the quality remains safe," Smoak said.

Although the federal government owns the landfills, DHEC regulates them, she said, adding that when "it comes time to close the landfills, both SCDHEC and EPA get involved."

Smoak said the new federal rule doesn't apply to the landfills because SRS isn't an electric utility or independent power producer. But Holleman questioned why the federal nuclear complex isn't required to comply with the rule.

"The EPA clearly said the proper way is to put it (coal ash) in a lined landfill," she said. "The Department of Energy should follow the best practices."

'Consistent with' regulations

Besides SRS, two large paper and packaging companies — KapStone and International Paper — bury coal ash in unlined company landfills in Berkeley and Georgetown counties, respectively. Company spokesmen told *The News* that most of the waste dumped in these landfills is not coal ash.

Less than 10 percent of all waste buried at International Paper's unlined Georgetown landfill and at another lined company landfill near Eastover in Rich-

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land County is coal ash, said company spokesman Tom Ryan.

He said the landfills were “established exclusively for mill operations” and operate “in compliance with all state and federal regulations.”

Last fiscal year, about 165,000 tons of waste was collectively disposed of at the two sites, according to a landfill list provided to *The News* by DHEC, though the list didn’t specify the types of waste. Based on that figure and the percentage provided by Ryan, less than 16,500 tons of coal ash was buried at the two sites.

KapStone spokesman Larry Cobb told *The News* that out of 123,799 tons of biomass and coal ash waste buried last fiscal year at its unlined Berkeley County landfill, an estimated 30 percent, or 37,139 tons, was coal ash.

Cobb said the landfill they operate doesn’t have a liner because it was “built and operated under the direction of DHEC consistent with the permitting process and regulations.”

The DHEC landfill list indicates that 12 Class 2 non-commercial landfills in the state accept coal ash, nine of which are unlined, though spokespersons for three companies on that list — DAK Americas, Domtar Paper and Resolute Forest Products — told *The News* their landfills in Calhoun, Marlboro and York counties, respectively, don’t handle coal ash.

Brian Risinger, spokesman for Hartsville-based Sonoco said the packaging company’s Class 2 non-commercial landfill in Darlington County — part of which is unlined — accepted coal ash last year, though he noted coal ash went only to the lined portion. About 11,000 tons of waste was disposed of at the landfill in fiscal 2015, the DHEC list shows.

“This landfill is almost full and will be closed this year,” Risinger told *The News*, adding coal

ash generated by the company’s multi-fuel boiler will be buried in a recently constructed, on-site Class 3 landfill, which has a liner.

Santee Cooper, SCE&G landfills

At Santee Cooper’s unlined Class 2 non-commercial landfill near Pineville in Berkeley County, most of the nearly 358,000 tons of waste buried there last fiscal year was coal ash, said utility spokeswoman Mollie Gore. The waste comes from four coal-fired generating units at the site, she said.

Gore told *The News* the landfill ceased operations at the end of last year because it was “getting full.” Coal ash generated there will be buried in a lined, on-site Class 3 landfill, she said. Although the Class 2 landfill doesn’t have a liner, it was built to “what the regulations required at the time,” she said.

Under a 2013 settlement with conservation groups represented by Holleman, Santee Cooper agreed to excavate all coal ash and underlying soil from ash ponds at the company’s former coal-fired plant near Conway in Horry County. The removed materials are to be “sold, recycled, or placed in a Class 3 or better landfill,” according to the agreement.

Gore said the decision to open a lined Class 3 landfill at the company’s Berkeley County site was not related to the settlement. She said the landfill complies with the new federal landfill rules, though she added construction of it began before the regulations took effect.

Like Santee Cooper, SCE&G agreed in a 2012 settlement with a conservation group to remove coal ash from ash ponds at the utility’s coal-fired plant near Eastover in Richland County and either sell or recycle it, or “place it in a Class 3 (or better) landfill.”

Company spokeswoman Gin-

ny Jones told *The News* that to date, more than 876,000 tons of coal ash have been removed from the two ponds. It’s the company’s “intent to recycle 100 percent of the ash being generated from power generation or removed from our ponds as market demand allows,” she said, adding, any “excess will go into an on-site Class 3 landfill, in full compliance with state and federal regulations.”

SCE&G last year operated an unlined, Class 2 non-commercial landfill at its coal-fired plant near Cope in Orangeburg County, the DHEC landfill list shows, though Jones said the landfill closed in October, and “all ash is being stored” in a lined, on-site Class 3 landfill. Last fiscal year, a total of 11,076 tons of waste was disposed of at the Class 2 landfill, according to the landfill list.

SCE&G also operated an unlined, Class 2 non-commercial landfill near Irmo in Lexington County that accepted coal ash, the list shows. Jones said that plant “recycles for beneficial use about 90 percent of all coal ash produced.” She said SCE&G no longer stores material at the plant site and is using off-site commercial Class 3 storage for any remaining ash “as the plant coverts to 100 percent natural gas.”

Overall, SCE&G’s coal-fired plants in Berkeley, Lexington, Orangeburg and Richland counties use about 4.6 million tons of coal annually, generating about 500,000 tons of ash, Jones said.

Jones said “our Class 2 landfills were permitted, constructed, operated and closed out within DHEC standards and regulations.” She referred further questions to DHEC.

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