

Title: **South Carolina senators get many choices on funding for new roads**
 Author: BY JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press
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South Carolina senators get many choices on funding for new roads

BY JEFFREY COLLINS
Associated Press

COLUMBIA — As South Carolina senators prepare to debate how much extra money to give to the state's highways and bridges, the leader of the roads agencies has been careful to give lawmakers plenty of options while not pushing them too hard in any direction.

Department of Transportation Secretary Christy Hall has given senators a host of options, from spending just \$65 million extra a year to get the pavement on the interstates up to good condition while doing no bridge work or expansion to \$800 million in new money that would attack congestion, widen more than 150 miles of major highways and get rid of old bridges.

One PowerPoint slide she likes to show lawmakers has nearly a dozen options on how she could spend whatever extra money lawmakers can find.

The Senate started debate on a roads bill Thursday before adjourning for the weekend. Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman told his colleagues they could spend most of next week on it, too.

The proposal getting the most attention on the Senate floor would raise the gas tax by 12 cents a gallon over three years

and increase or add a number of other fees. In five years, an estimated \$723 million extra would be put into roads, nearly reaching Hall's most expensive option.

But the idea only cuts income and other taxes by \$400 million over that period, and Gov. Nikki Haley and other conservative lawmakers want an even swap. Supporters of the amendment say they factored in that a third of the gas tax is paid by out of state drivers who need no tax break, but some lawmakers don't think the basis behind that estimate has been proven.

Reforming the DOT's board and the State Infrastructure Bank, which helps borrow money for expensive projects will also be discussed, with conservatives again fearing the proposal doesn't go far enough to give the governor more control of the agency.

If lawmakers give the DOT more money without reform "we're going to see hundreds of millions of dollars going to rural areas where it is not needed," said Sen. Tom Davis, R-Beaufort.

For her part, Hall promises to use whatever money she gets wisely. But she also is carefully pointing out that the state's roads are reaching a crisis. "The fear I have is that we have waited too long,"

Hall told lawmakers last week during hours of testimony.

She used what was supposed to be a repaving project on Interstate 85 to make her point. Tests showed the foundation of the road had crumbled from years of neglect, adding about \$10 million to what was supposed to be a \$48 million project. Hall said she fears a similar problem on an upcoming resurfacing of Interstate 26 between Newberry and Columbia.

Sen. Ray Cleary, a Republican and Murrells Inlet dentist who has been pushing for more money for roads for years, likened it to a patient who can floss or brush, wait and have a cavity filled, or wait even longer and need a crown or more extensive dental work.

"I can fix it for \$100, \$300 or \$3,000, depending on when you see me," Cleary said.

The one thing all lawmakers agree on is something must be done. With all the attention on interstates, Hall worried the primary roads that carry nearly half the state's traffic are falling apart quickly and about to reach a crisis. Only 20 percent of pavement on them is in good condition.

"It's been neglected and it's at a point where it's going to take complete reconstruction," Hall said.

Title: **Agency wants new voting machines**
 Author: BY CASSIE COPE ccope@thestate.com
 Size: 40.3 square inch
 Columbia, SC Circulation: 128564



THE BUZZ

Agency wants new voting machines

BY CASSIE COPE
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Before hundreds of thousands of S.C. Republican voters head to the polls Saturday for their party's presidential primary, poll workers will be setting out roughly 13,000 voting machines that were purchased more than a decade ago — in 2004.

Those machines have a life expectancy of about 15 years, meaning they should be OK Saturday. However, the S.C. Election Commission is asking

lawmakers for \$41.5 million for new voting machines.

"We're still confident in our current voting system," said Election Commission spokesman **Chris Whitmire**.

But, Whitmire added, the voting machines are kind of like a family car — it's not a good idea to wait until it breaks down to start the search for a replacement.

Roughly \$1 million has been set

aside for the new voting machines in past state budgets.

This year, Gov. **Nikki Haley** put \$20 million for new machines in her executive budget proposal, unveiled last month. Haley suggests spending another \$20 million next year.

State Sen. **Ronnie Cromer**, the Newberry Republican who chairs the

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FROM PAGE 3A

THE BUZZ

Senate budget subcommittee that will consider the voting-machine proposals, says the Election Commission's request for \$41.5 million likely will not be fully funded this year. "We've got enough other leaking holes in the dike that we need to plug up."

That request comes in a year when lawmakers have an added \$1.2 billion to spend. But other state agencies are vying for more money, too, for roads, bridges, schools and flood costs.

The state is not close to a situation similar to the 2012 voting meltdown in Richland County, which saw voters stand in line for hours to cast a ballot in the presidential race, Whitmire said. That debacle happened because not enough machines were

put out, not because of the quality of the machines.

Still, the state's current voting technology is becoming outdated. The voting system was bought in 2004, but its technology is older, Whitmire said.

"How many laptops do you see people using from 2003?"

AMERICAN PARTY OF S.C. TO HOST COUNTY CONVENTIONS

The S.C. American Party, a third party co-founded by former Democratic state schools superintendent **Jim Rex** and former Republican candidate for governor **Oscar Lovelace**, will host county conventions this month.

The conventions will be held to elect party officers at the county level, select

delegates for a state convention and discuss possible American Party candidates for local offices, Rex said.

"This November's election will be an important opportunity to join the growing momentum in America against the two-party establishment and politics as usual," the party said in a news release. "The presidential primaries have shown clearly that the majority of us are fed up with the status quo of our broken political system."

The party's **Lexington County** convention will be held Saturday at 3 p.m. at 110 Birch Terrace Court. Its **Richland County** convention will be held Feb. 23 at noon at the Columbia Marriott's lobby lounge, 1200 Hampton St.

A full list of county conventions can be found at www.americanparty.sc.com/convention-meetings.html.

RICE DRAWS DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGER

Coker College sociology professor **Mal Hyman** is running for the Democratic nomination for the 7th District congressional seat held by Republican **Tom Rice** of Myrtle Beach. Hyman announced his candidacy Thursday.

Rice first was elected to the newly created seat in 2012.



Title: **Fix roads now, deal with tax cuts later**

Author:

Size: 9.3 square inch

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Fix roads now, deal with tax cuts later

Hats off to Gov. Nikki Haley and her economic-development team for a job well done. Bil-

lions of dollars of investment have been brought into our state and thousands of jobs created.

But we are faced with the challenge of stepping up to the plate on fixing our transportation infrastructure. Every day we are reminded of the terrible condition of our roads. Tires are cut, wheels are bent, suspensions are thrown out of line, yet our elected leaders continue to posture and play politics over how to fund the repairs.

Enough is enough. The time has come to set aside politics, review the facts regarding what needs to be repaired and then decide on how best to pay for it. There does not need to be any tax reform attached to this issue. That is a separate issue.

It is true that there are many things that need to be done to update how our state raises revenue, but let's begin to fix our infrastructure first.

*- F.C. Dent Jr.
Lexington*

Title: **TALKBACK**
 Author:
 Size: 23.09 square inch
 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



TALKBACK

803-644-2384

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State money

What happens to all the money that comes into the state? At least some of our roads should be repaired with that money.

Ads

I have never seen so many ads in one paper, and even one on the front page.

Computers

This is for the person who wrote in questioning why we have computers in restaurants. It's very simple. A computer is a lot cheaper than a \$12-an-hour worker or the \$15 an hour that some people in the Democratic Party are advocating. High-priced labor causes employers to look for alternatives, and the alternative for fast-food restaurants, particularly, is computer ordering. Check out the McDonald's up near the interstate exit, and you'll see what it's all about.

Aiken Mall

Everyone keeps complaining that the mall is closing. If you would have supported the mall and shopped there, it would not be closing. That's how easy it is.

Services

Why would the City of Aiken even consider providing water

and sewer service to an unincorporated development, Talatha Gardens? If they want to have city services, they should pay city taxes. And the City Council should stop this ridiculousness of extending city benefits to unincorporated areas and then later on have them incorporated into the city and us having to absorb the expense of repairing roads and other substandard work done by developers. Who does the Aiken City Council represent?

MOX

The ploy by Gov. Haley to get MOX fine money is simply to barter an agreement to get DOE to continue funding that money pit. Just watch.

Extended TalkBack | 4A

Call our TalkBack hotline at 803-644-2384 and leave your message, or email it to us at editorial@aikenstandard.com. Readers' names are not necessary to make a comment and will not be published in the newspaper. Comments should be brief and to the point, and the Aiken Standard reserves the right to edit for space and content.



Title: **SRS should not be used to store nuclear waste**

Author:

Size: 28.05 square inch

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SRS should not be used to store nuclear waste

Department of Energy plans for bringing nuclear waste to SRS always includes its "disposition," indicating removal to a federal repository. No such repository exists, is under construction, or in planning. Claiming otherwise misleads the public.

There have been failed plans to dump it into the ocean, shoot it into space, bury it under the now-melting ice caps, or dump it in the Gulf of New Mexico equal distance from U.S. and Mexican shores. It has been dumped 27 miles off the shores of San Francisco and in Boston Harbor.

Plans to build a national deep geologic repository beneath Yucca Mountain for commercial waste and a minor share of defense waste did not work. The "energetic event" at WIPP closed that site. There is now talk of turning to unproven deep borehole drilling. Disturbingly, no containers are designed to last the lifetime of radioactive waste inside the non-existent repository.

Aiken County Council filed a 2010 lawsuit against the federal government for canceling the Yucca Mountain construction. Gov. Haley has threatened additional lawsuits for failing to

take possession and remove SRS defense waste. Citizen organizations complained and petitioned SRS management and the federal government to halt using SRS as a long-term storage site. Still, DOE continues to skirt the consent-based requirements in the 2012 Blue Ribbon Commission report and the 2013 DOE Strategy For The

Management and Disposal Of Used Nuclear Fuel and High-Level Radioactive Waste.

Tank closure has slipped schedule, those subsurface decades old containers of "legacy" Cold War defense waste which have leaked into the environment. Additionally, the site continues to receive both domestic and foreign waste for which there is increasingly less storage space and a multitude of discarded resolutions, including dry cask systems and additional storage buildings. The double stacking practice is an obviously limited solution. Funding short falls threaten continued processing in interdependent facilities.

The MOX program requires testing the new fuel form, constructing facilities to convert the weapons-grade plutonium into fresh commercial reactor

fuel and customers. After years of delay, TVA has not applied to NRC for the required test license. Project construction has been temporarily halted, modified and canceled by funding shortfalls. No utilities have contracted for MOX fuel. Regardless, weapons-grade plutonium has been received at SRS and will join the other "temporarily stored" radioactive waste, some of which has been on-site waiting to be "disposed" for over 50 years.

South Carolina politicians advocate using SRS as the nation's nuclear waste dump, but don't pursue efforts to enforce federal commitments for its removal. "Dispositioning" variously changes the location and/or form of SRS nuclear waste but does not remove it. That is likely criminal since SRS has never been studied, tested or li-

censed as a national repository for permanently storing defense, commercial or research nuclear waste.

Finally, SRS is officially a DOE clean up site. Properly funded, there would be many good paying jobs for local residents.

Dr. Rose O. Hayes
Aiken

Title: **DHEC needs funding to protect public healthy safety**
 Author: The (Columbia) State
 Size: 55.33 square inch
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GUEST EDITORIAL

DHEC needs funding to protect public health, safety

The (Columbia) State

Rivers that aren't being monitored often enough for us to know whether the fish are safe to eat. Air-monitoring equipment that's so broken-down that officials don't know whether it's safe to issue permits for new industry. Underground storage tanks and abandoned gold mines that aren't being cleaned up to stop gasoline and acid and metals from leaching into the groundwater. And the giant hazardous waste dump on the shore of Lake Marion that we can't even monitor properly, much less shore up to prevent water contamination of unimaginable proportions.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that the state Department of Health and Environmental Control — the agency charged with making sure we have clean water to drink and clean air to breathe and that the people who cook our meals and provide our medical care don't infect us — says it doesn't have the money to do its job. We slashed its budget from \$169 million in 1998 to \$107 million today. That's a 37 percent reduction. A 37 percent reduction that doesn't even factor in the inflation and growing population that make it cost more to do the job the agency was doing eight years ago. Yet we didn't reduce what we expected the agency to do.

We saw rather dramatically the result of such cuts in October, when the floods washed out dams that hadn't been inspected as they should have been or repaired as they ought to have been, because DHEC didn't have the inspection staff or the enforcement staff to make sure our public-safety laws were obeyed.

If DHEC is spending money wastefully — and any bureaucracy is going to, whether it's in the public sector or the private sector — then it absolutely is appropriate to try to get that under control. And to the extent that this is what former DHEC Director Catherine Templeton did as she oversaw the defunding of the agency (the budget dropped as low as \$83

million at one point), we applaud her work.

But as The State's Sammy Fretwell reports, Ms. Templeton's successor, Catherine Heigel, has told the Legislature she needs an additional \$35 million just to cover the basics. That still would be \$27 million less than the agency received in 1998, when there were fewer people and businesses in South Carolina and everything (except maybe gasoline) cost less.

We've seen no reason to believe that Ms. Heigel, a former Duke Energy executive who was hand-picked by Gov. Nikki Haley to run the agency, is a spend-thrift, or a shill for the bureaucracy. It's more reasonable to think she's a professional who put her reputation on the line and then discovered that the agency she inherited simply does not have the resources to do the job state law requires it to do. As she told lawmakers last month, it is her job to at least make them aware of the problems — which a lot of people believe Ms. Templeton declined to do for political reasons.

Even Gov. Haley has requested an \$18 million budget increase, which suggests there's some serious underfunding, given her preference for cutting taxes to paying for government services.

We can debate whether the state should be in the business of inspecting the strength of dams and the purity of river water and the safety of restaurants and whether it should limit how much pollution manufacturers can spew into the air and take on the task of cleaning up hazardous sites that have been abandoned by bankrupt owners. But there should be no debate on this: Once the state decides to do those things, it is obliged to do them. Well.

DHEC isn't the only agency that sustained massive cuts to its funding without corresponding cuts to its responsibilities, and it's not the only one that is still struggling. The Department of Social Services leaps to mind, and there are others, and our Legislature



Title: **DHEC needs funding to protect public healthy safety**
Author: The (Columbia) State
Size: 55.33 square inch
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needs to handle them the same way it needs to handle DHEC:

If the state is not going to guarantee that the water is safe to drink, it needs to let people know that they drink it at their own risk. If the state is not going to hold companies to the pollution standards set in state law and regulations, it needs to just stop spending our money on a program that promises to do that but doesn't.

We believe the state ought to be working to protect the public health, by regulating how much our environment can be despoiled and making sure people who are paid to handle our food and our medicines are doing so safely, and we expect that most South Carolinians feel the same way. That means we have to pay for the equipment and the people who do that important work.

Title: **SplitssurfaceasSenate starts weighing road-repair proposal**
 Author: BY TIM FLACH tflach@thestate.com
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Splits surface as Senate starts weighing road-repair proposal

BY TIM FLACH

tflach@thestate.com

Deep political divisions surfaced quickly Thursday as the state Senate started consideration of a new road-repair plan.

No decisions were made. But battle lines emerged over the proposal, a package combining a gas-tax increase and other fee hikes for road improvements, changes in the state agencies that oversee those projects, and cuts in income and property taxes

for individuals and businesses.

The plan mixes proposals advocated by Republicans, Democrats and GOP Gov. Nikki Haley.

It includes:

- Roughly \$665 million a year in higher taxes for road repairs, to be phased in over three years

- Nearly \$400 million a year in tax cuts, to be phased in over four years.

- Revamping the boards that oversee the state Department of Transportation and State Infrastructure Bank.

State Sen. Thomas McElveen, D-Sumter, branded the package “a three-headed monster,” saying it faces an uncertain future.

The proposal was developed through a series of trade-offs that produced a framework “everybody likes but nobody loves,” said Sen. Joel Lourie, D-Richland, who helped shape the plan.

For example, Lourie said he has “a lot of heartburn” over the proposal’s tax cuts at the same time that schools and other services need more state money.

But the cuts are necessary for any road-repair plan that includes higher gas taxes to win acceptance from the GOP-controlled General Assembly and Haley, the Democrat said.

Some Republicans warned a gas-tax hike will founder unless accompanied by tax cuts. “I find it baffling we don’t want to give money back to taxpayers,” said state Sen. Sean Bennett, R-Dorches-

ter.

State Sen. Tom Davis, R-Beaufort, renewed his resistance to a gas-tax hike, arguing growth in state revenues is sufficient to budget more money for roads.

That’s a fallback, “piece-meal” step, Lourie said.

State Sen. Nikki Setzler of Lexington, leader of the Senate Democrats, warned against settling for “a quick fix” that doesn’t include correcting problems in the way that the state’s two roads agencies are run. Some senators predict slow going in reaching a roads deal.

Sen. John Scott, D-Richland, said the road-repair package contains all the “pieces of the puzzle,” but many of its features do not appear to be arranged to achieve consensus.

However, Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, pledged to push for agreement soon on a proposal, stalled for nearly a year in the Senate.

Title: Haley should tackle overdose epidemic**Author:****Size: 10.85 square inch****Columbia, SC Circulation: 128564**



Haley should tackle overdose epidemic

While other governors and presidential candidates speak out, Gov. Nikki Haley's silence on the heroin and opioid overdose epidemic risks the lives of thousands of South Carolinians.

Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control, says that deaths from drug overdoses have increased 137 percent since 2000, devastating families and communities.

Gov. Haley is well aware of the problem: She commissioned the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Council and signed the S.C. Overdose Prevention Act, which allows first responders to administer the opioid antidote naloxone in an overdose emergency.

But as emergency rooms wrestle with an increase in overdoses, reports sit on shelves, naloxone distribution goes unchecked, and families are left grieving.

The governor's voice is needed to highlight that South Carolina is not immune to death from overdose and to urge legislators this session to address our public-health emergency. Bringing overdose to the forefront and reassuring families that they have support will begin to save lives.

*- Elaine H. Pawlowski
Daniel Island*

Title: **S.C. women deserve an equal-pay law**
 Author: The (RockHill)Herald
 Size: 38.90 square inch
 Hilton Head Island, SC Circulation: 20015



EDITORIALS

S.C. women deserve an equal-pay law

The (Rock Hill) Herald

While Gov. Nikki Haley is predictably conservative on most issues, she sometimes is willing to go against the grain, such as when she recently helped lead the effort to bring down the Confederate flag that had flown on the grounds of the Statehouse. We suggest that she now consider leading the charge to pass equal pay protections for women in South Carolina.

Haley, who, as a woman politician, has experienced gender discrimination in her public life, should be sympathetic to the plight of underpaid women in the state's workforce. And as the state's governor, she is uniquely positioned to make the case for South Carolina women.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which made it easier for women to challenge discriminatory pay in court, was the first bill President Barack Obama signed into law. As reported on Friday, the seventh anniversary of the law, South Carolina ranks as one of only four states in the nation without an equal-pay law.

The others are Alabama, Mississippi and Utah, although Utah introduced equal-pay legislation this month.

Comparing the pay of men and women can be difficult, even when they have similar jobs. Nonetheless, the disparity is so wide in many cases that the only logical culprit is gender discrimination.

Women in South Carolina make 80 cents for every dollar that similarly employed men make, according to the National Partnership for Women and Families. That comes to a difference of \$8,272 a year.

For women of color, the gap is wider. African-American women make 57 cents for every dollar a white man makes in South Carolina, while Hispanic women make 48 cents.

Opponents of an equal-pay law in the state fear that it could have a negative impact on small businesses, although we can't understand how allowing small busi-

nesses to discriminate against women employees is a worthwhile benefit. Some opponents no doubt have an aversion to the equal pay law simply because it is championed by the federal government — and specifically by Obama.

Another possible reason the law has not gained traction in the state is because the Legislature is so heavily dominated by men. South Carolina has only 22 women in the state House and only one in the Senate, or about 13.5 percent of all legislators, which is among the lowest in the nation.

In Colorado, by contrast, women occupy 42 percent of the seats in the state Legislature, the highest percentage in the nation.

Some South Carolina lawmakers have tried to push equal-pay legislation. Charleston Rep. Leon Stavrinakis, a Democrat, introduced a bill that would make it illegal for a state agency to "discriminate against an employee on the basis of gender" by paying a woman less than a man for the same work as long as they are equally qualified. But the bill has been stalled for more than a year.

Someone such as Haley might be able to break the logjam. She is a Republican and, with her final term as governor ending this year, she has nothing to lose politically.

Ironically, despite the widespread opposition to equal-pay legislation in the Legislature, it is extremely popular with voters. A 2014 Winthrop University poll found that three out of four South Carolinians are in favor of such a law.

There is no feasible reason that the women of South Carolina shouldn't have the same legal protections regarding pay as those in 46 other states and the District of Columbia. If women are being paid less simply because of their gender, they need a legal recourse, and state lawmakers need to give them one.

Title: **S.C. women deserve an equal-pay law**
 Author: The (RockHill)Herald
 Size: 38.90 square inch
 Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



EDITORIALS

S.C. women deserve an equal-pay law

The (Rock Hill) Herald

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