

Title: **Gas tax coining to pump near you?**  
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# Gas tax coming to pump near you?

**BY ROB COTTINGHAM**

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State lawmakers passed a 10-year, \$4 billion roads bill last year.

Will that be enough?

During a Jan. 5 S.C. Press Association legislative workshop last week, legislators discussed how they might go about finding money for the state's crumbling roads.

"If you're gonna tax the middle class through a gas tax and then give tax cuts to the rich, then I can't morally support that," said Sen. Vincent Sheheen, D-Kershaw.

Sheheen has doubt about curbing state income taxes to help offset a gas tax increase.

He said he believes this would benefit the wealthy more than the middle class.

Sen. John Matthews, D-Orangeburg, said, "There needs to be a sufficient revenue with the predictability to accommodate long-term planning."

"I've got to make sure that plan includes the 33% of the population using our roads who don't live (in Orangeburg County). That's got to be in the equation."

Matthews also said he and perhaps other legislators would take issue with a tax that hurts the working class and relieves the rich.

The governor will play a role in such legislation, he said.

Gov. Nikki Haley's opposition to a gas tax increase without an income tax cut had stifled roads bills. With her departure, a new veto-eager governor could prove a problem.

Sen. Tom Davis, R-Beaufort, was highly critical of the S.C. Department of Transportation reform included in last session's bill. He was outspoken in his support of a bill Sen. Shane Massey, the Senate Majority Leader who represents Lexington county, proposed.

"I don't know that I am as down on what we accomplished last year as Sen. Davis is, but I don't want anyone to think that it's a fix to the problem, because it's not," Massey said.

"I think there were a few small improvements over where we were, but it is not where I think we need to be. I think we need to work on the structure of the department."

Critics have questioned how state roads officials make deci-

sions and spend tax dollars.

Sen. Gary Simrill, considered by many legislators as an expert in roads legislation, further emphasized the need for a gas tax hike, even with the popularity of hybrid cars.

"We still rely heavily on the road use tax, knowing, as Sen. Matthews pointed out earlier, that a third of that comes from people who don't have a 29 ZIP code," Simrill said in reference to tourists. "But as more people have electric cars, gas hybrids, plug-in hybrids that are using less and less fuel, we will have to adapt to that in another form of getting funding into the roads."

"Fuel tax is currently the most appropriate way to get that money."



**Massey**

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## SC Editorial Roundup

### The Post and Courier of Charleston on teaching computer science to children

**I**t's virtually impossible to know what the future job market might look like for a child in kindergarten. But one thing is sure — he or she will have to know how to use a computer.

And that's really just a bare minimum. App development, coding ability, web design and similar skills might well be job requirements rather than simply resume-boosting perks. For a lot of positions, they already are.

So the South Carolina Department of Education has the right idea in pushing much stronger new computer science standards for all K-8th grade students in the state.

Lots of schools in the state only offer keyboarding classes right now, but students need to know more than just how to type quickly if they're going to be competitive job seekers. And rural schools are even less likely to offer serious computer science course work — or have sufficient access to up-to-date technology.

That's putting too many students at a serious disadvantage.

According to the draft standards, kindergarten students would be expected to learn to identify different computing devices, communicate over the internet and protect personal information, for example. Middle schoolers would analyze network structures and security, practice basic data collection and develop algorithms to solve basic problems.

Those are incredibly useful skills for students regardless of what career path they might eventually choose.

Learning about algorithms and code and data analysis can boost math and language ability, develop creative thinking and help young people better interpret the world around them. And familiarity with network security, internet use and data protection have immediate and critical real-world applications.

Rural students in particular could benefit from better computer science training. Some might not have access to much technology at home, meaning that school could be the only chance they get to use a tablet or work with certain software.

And the skills they learn can open valuable career paths even in parts of the state otherwise left behind economically. Web developers, app designers and other tech professionals can work from pretty much anywhere in the world, and those jobs generally pay very well.

Of course all of this requires that South Carolina get serious about providing sufficient funding to all schools to equip students with the technology they need. It's a worthwhile investment in the state's future.

And teachers will need to get up to speed on some relatively complex new topics to cover in the classroom. That's going to require expanded access to training and continuing education, a similarly worthy investment.

The public can review the proposed standards and offer feedback through Sunday on the state Department of Education website.

In an increasingly digital world, it's hardly a stretch to lump computer literacy in with reading, writing and arithmetic as a fundamental skill.

South Carolina students will increasingly require a serious, in-

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depth computer science education to prepare them for a competitive job market. The state would be wise to provide them with that opportunity.

### **The Sun News of Myrtle Beach on the upcoming legislative session**

Three area state senators are optimistic that 2017 could be a year of legislative progress, with a positive impact for Horry County and the Grand Strand.

When the General Assembly convenes this month in Columbia, "it will be a new session, a new year and a new atmosphere," Sen. Luke Rankin of Myrtle Beach told The Sun News Editorial Board.

Rankin has served in the S.C. Senate since 1993. Greg Hembree of Little River was re-elected in November to a second four-year term and Stephen L. Goldfinch Jr. was elected a senator after serving in the House.

The new atmosphere to which Rankin alludes is the leadership of Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster, who will become governor if Gov. Nikki Haley is confirmed by the U.S. Senate as ambassador to the United Nations. Haley has bipartisan support and her nomination by President-elect Donald Trump is expected to be confirmed. All three senators expressed optimism for a better working relationship between the legislative and executive branches, Rankin and Goldfinch being more outspoken on that topic.

"Surely it can't be any worse," Rankin said of Haley's attitude and approach. Goldfinch added that the Horry County "delegation begged Haley to help us with a number of issues, including beach renourishment," to no avail. Haley has "disdain for anything east of the (Intracoastal) Waterway, including beach renourishment."

McMaster was the S.C. attorney general before being elected lieutenant governor with Haley in 2014. He became an ally of Haley after running against her in the 2010 Republican primary. She won the governorship and was re-elected two years ago. While Haley served in the House, she has had an off-again, on-again, at times abrasive, approach with legislative leaders.

As lieutenant governor, McMaster has presided over the Senate, so he understands the legislative process, including the give-and-take that can mean progress on such issues as infrastructure and public education, two of the state's most pressing problems. Comprehensive funding for highways and bridges includes an increase in the gasoline (motor fuel) tax, thwarted by Haley's threats to veto such legislation.

Haley did veto legislation that would have placed mopeds and their drivers under the motor vehicle code. Hembree and Rep. Crosby of North Charleston have pre-filed bills for another try. After the Haley veto in 2016, the House overrode but the Senate ran out of time, although there were enough votes to override.

Additional legislative concerns include placement of a constitutional amendment on the ballot to appoint, not elect, the state education superintendent. Reform of how homeowners associations operate is likely to come up again, as well as changes in the criminal code to try and deal with the heroin epidemic. Other area concerns include the state training of law enforcement officers and tightening the dram shop laws to require liability insurance.

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## General Assembly

# Gas-tax questions facing lawmakers

BY JOSHUA LLOYD  
 Morning News  
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COLUMBIA — To raise the state's gas tax or not? For South Carolina that's a billion-dollar question.

In a legislative workshop on Thursday, state lawmakers spoke to media about plans for the 2017 General Assembly and a prime topic, as usual, was potential fixes for state roads.

There are two thoughts on the issue: Raise the gasoline tax to boost funding for the department of transportation or leave the gas tax alone and completely restructure the department.

There are multiple bills pre-filed in the House and Senate to raise the gas tax. One House bill would raise the tax by two cents per year up to a 10-cent total, while a Senate bill would increase the gas tax by 4 cents a year for three years, for a total of a 12-cent increase by 2020.

Some lawmakers think the deciding factor this year will be Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster, who's positioned to take Gov. Nikki Haley's spot once she steps down to join the Trump administration.

"If he [McMaster] says he'll pass something with a gas tax I think there will be enough votes to pass it," said Sen. Vincent Sheheen, a Democrat from Camden. "If he says he will veto it I don't think it will move forward."

Last year Haley said she would veto any bill that raised the gas tax without giving the executive branch the ability to appoint Department of Transportation leaders.

Sen. Tom Davis, a Beaufort-area Republican, has been a vocal opponent

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## Tax

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of a gas tax increase and sides with Haley in that regard. He said no more money should go to the Department of Transportation until there's system reform.

"What we always do in the General Assembly is settle and settle and accept half-loads. We settled again last year and had fake reform," he said. "We don't have a restructured DOT. It's still controlled by the legisla-

ture. We not only appropriate the money, we also want a say in how's it's spent, and that's why we're behind in so many areas as a state."

Sen. Sean Bennett, a Democrat from the Dorchester area, said there's no reason both issues can't be tackled together.

"We have to deal with both issues," he said. "Most people agree that we need more resources to our DOT and we have to start talking now about how we can do

that in the right way."

Lawmakers estimate that at least one-third of the people who pump gas in South Carolina come from out of state. Some are suggesting alternative funding options, like tolls along interstates.

Sen. Shane Massey of Edgefield, the Senate Republican majority leader, said lawmakers are in a better position now than ever to pass a comprehen-

sive bill.

"Outside the Statehouse, it appears that very little progress has been made,

but the points of disagreement have been narrowed and now I think we're fairly focused," Massey said.

"We've learned a lot about some of the structural deficiencies. I think there will be a renewed conversation between the House and Senate this year and I think here's a better chance for success now."



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# Lawmakers target road funding again

Gregory A. Summers

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COLUMBIA – Just as it did last year, the General Assembly begins its 2017 session this week determined to fix the state's crumbling roads and bridges, but flailing about over how to pay for the job.

At a roundtable discussion Thursday sponsored by the S.C. Press Association,

state House and Senate members discussed competing proposals for financing road repairs. Most involved some kind of increase in the state's gasoline tax to provide a sustained, long-term funding source.

"To truly fix three decades of neglect,

we must have a sustainable funding source for our roads," said Democratic Rep. Mandy Powers Norrell of Lancaster.

Norrell backs a House proposal that would raise the gas tax by 2 cents a gallon

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## Roads

>>FROM 1A

each year for five years and raise the sales-tax cap on vehicles from \$300 to \$500.

Republican Rep. Gary Simrill of York County is leading the road-funding effort in the House, just as he did last year. He called the House plan a "phased approach."

"We got part of the way down the field" last year, said Simrill, the House majority leader. "But no touchdown."

The state's gas tax – about 16 cents per gallon – is one of the lowest in the nation and has not been raised since 1987.

Last year, legislation to increase the tax bogged down, and lawmakers settled instead for a \$4 billion bond package to pay for state road improvements over the next 10 years.

Simrill said the inability to pass any sort of recurring funding plan in 2016 caused another problem in that neighboring Georgia and North Carolina are now ahead of South Carolina on road

improvements and paving companies in the region will be busy there.

"A lot of the paving contractors we need are in other states," he said. "Just putting extra money right now at DOT is not necessarily the answer. What the answer is, is to have a sustained plan where we will have the funding source needed."

Simrill said road repairs are also a safety issue, noting a 20 percent increase in traffic fatalities in the state since 2013.

The S.C. Department of Transportation is seeking an additional \$40 million to address safety concerns in the next two years.

### Senate plan differs

A separate bill in the Senate would increase the gas tax by 4 cents per gallon each year for three years while enacting broad-based tax cuts, credits and reforms.

Sen. Sean Bennett (R-Dorchester) called the bill a front-loaded approach that's "a little smarter with DOT mon-

ey" to reduce debt, since the state isn't in the best situation to raise its debt capacity through bonds.

But the Senate plan does more than raise the gas tax. It also would reduce the state's commercial and business tax rates, to allow businesses to expand.

"I've always been of the opinion that South Carolina's overall tax laws are broken, and any opportunity we can take to improve that... it's a good

thing," Bennett said.

Sen. Shane Massey (R-Edgefield) said the General Assembly's past gridlock on road funding has been frustrating. Massey is majority leader in the Senate.

"Inside the State House, the points of disagreement have been narrowed," he said, adding that governance, oversight and organizational issues at SCDOT also need addressing.

"A few years ago, we were all over the board on stuff," he said. "I think we've learned a lot...it's culminating to the point that I'm optimistic of be-

ing able to get there this year."

### Real reform ahead?

However, if Republican Sen. Tom Davis of Beaufort has any say in the matter, raising the gas tax to fix roads will be a pockmarked road to navigate.

Davis has almost singlehandedly derailed past attempts by the legislature to raise the gas tax unless substantial reforms are made at SCDOT.

In 2016, the General Assembly gave the governor authority to appoint or remove state highway commissioners, but only at the recommendation of the state legislators.

The fiery Davis said he considers those changes nothing more than "fake reform" when true accountability by SCDOT is what is needed.

Davis remains adamant in his stance that the governor's office should control the state agency instead of the state legislature. He refuses to support any gas tax increase without

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meaningful DOT reform.

Davis said while road funding in the state has increased by 130 percent (\$1 billion to \$2.3 billion) since 2009, accountability has not.

"We always settle. If we're going to do right by the people of South Carolina, then let's do the hard thing," Davis said. "We have to give our executive the executive functions."

Sen. Vincent Sheheen (D-Kershaw) said the biggest hurdle in passing a roads bill last year was a clear message from Gov.

Nikki Haley that she would veto any measure that did not include DOT reform.

Without a super-majority to override Haley's threatened veto, he said the Senate had little incentive to pass anything.

Sheheen said any type of gas-tax increase will depend on the state's

117th governor.

Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster will become governor if Haley is confirmed as President-elect Donald Trump's United Nations ambassador.

"If he (McMaster) says he will veto it, then I anticipate that you won't see anything," he said.

Sheheen also believes that tolls along I-95 to improve and widen it must be considered, too. When it comes to tying road funds to tax cuts, he said Democrats in the Senate will not support any plan that contains tax relief only for the most affluent South Carolinians.

"In other words, if you're going to increase the gas tax on moderate-

income South Carolinians to benefit rich people, then I personally have a problem with that," he said. "If it focuses on real problems... maybe there is room for consensus to emerge."

Norrell said she is optimistic that McMaster won't take Haley's hard-line stance on road funding, so a bipartisan funding plan on state road and bridge repairs can be passed.

"I'm hopeful that Gov. McMaster will work with the legislature to get that accomplished," she said.



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Rep Mandy Powers Norrell and House Majority Leader Gary Simrill discuss road funding at Thursday's legislative roundtable.

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# State of emergency declared

## Awaiting storm, county residents stock up on ice melt

**Mandy Catoe**

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Under cold, grey skies with with very little ice," said Darren Player, the county's emergency management director.

He said the county's emergency responders will remain in "bad weather mode" for the weekend. Looking ahead to the

Under cold, grey skies with significant snowfall, Gov. Nikki Haley declared a state of emergency late Friday to cope with the approaching winter storm, and Lancaster County residents jammed stores buying up ice melt and last-minute groceries.

As the day progressed, snow predictions increased slightly, and a fine, cold mist was falling.

"The most recent forecast is calling for 3 to 6 inches of snow,

## Snow

>>FROM 1A

SCDOT nor Lancaster County has any obligation to pretreat it or scrape it.

As officials prepared for the worst, excited shoppers were hitting the hardware stores and grocery stores.

The most common item bought at area hardware, home supply and auto stores was ice melt.

Tractor Supply enjoyed a busy couple of days leading into the weekend.

"We've sold a lot of snow shovels, a lot of ice melt and a lot of heaters," said Ashley Schlegel, sales associate.

The store sold out of

ice melt by noon Friday.

In the Home Depot parking lot, Hunter Thompson, owner of Chick-fil-A, was loading his car with several bags of ice melt.

"We are making sure trucks can get in and out for deliveries late tonight and early in the morning," he said.

Inside Home Depot, people were lingering near the portable heaters.

"We've sold a lot of ice melt and outdoor faucet protectors," said Eric Tweddle, Home Depot manager. "We have also sold generators and kerosene heaters as people prepare for a possible loss of power."

expected frigid temperatures after the storm, Player warned motorists to take precautions.

"Monday is going to be a really dangerously cold morning," he said. "If people really need to leave home, they need to carry extra warm clothing in case they become stranded."

Player said his units will be on the road looking for those in need of help, but isolated areas will take longer to reach.

"The wind chill will be close to zero and the extra clothing

could save their lives," Player said.

The S.C. Department of Transportation continued pretreating roads with brine Friday and had scrapers on standby for expected plowing operations on Saturday.

One spot in Lancaster County is particularly problematic, officials said. The privately-maintained, high-volume Regent Parkway at the north end of the Panhandle will pose great risk to motorists. Neither

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Larry and Delcenia Kelly were bundled up and shopping at Home Depot Friday afternoon. The Kellys have shared 46 winters together and are ready for what this one brings.

"The phone is saying it will snow. The TV is saying it will snow," said Del-

cenia. "I say just look at the clouds and whatever happens, happens."

Faulkner's Animal Hospital spokesperson Heather Plyler offered cold-weather tips for pets. Outdoor pets need extra care with the single-digit lows expected Sunday night.

"If it's too cold for us, it's too cold for them,"

Plyler said.

Keep outdoor dogs dry and off the wet, cold ground by using cedar or pine shavings. Prevent drafts into their house with a door over the

opening. Heated bowls and beds are ideal.

Place sweaters on short-hair dogs when they go outside. Older dogs and puppies should be brought inside.

Plyler cautions against bathing pets during the cold weather and if they get wet from snow or rain, then they should be brought indoors and dried off.

"Make sure to check under car hoods for cats before cranking up," Plyler said. "They will be



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seeking warm places.”

Food Lion remained busy Friday and had been for two days as shoppers continued stocking up on staples, according to manager Adam Threatt.

Threatt said the store has been so busy they're "selling a day ahead on stock."

"We've already sold out what we ordered for today and are getting what we ordered for tomorrow a day early," he said.

"We've been two days full-capacity on employees," Threatt said, pointing to cashiers scanning groceries at five chock-full checkout lanes as a crew in the background stocked shelves.

Among the customers preparing for the first winter storm of the year were Spencer and Shirley Raffaldt of Lancaster, who said they were buying everything they need to weather a long week-

end inside: dairy items, canned goods, bread, stew meat, steaks and a few cases of Natural Light.

"I'd hate to get snowed in without beer, and if the power goes out, we can always cook on the grill," Spencer Raffaldt said, laughing.

Follow Reporter Mandy Catoe on Twitter @MandyCatoeTLN or contact her at (803) 283-1152.

**We want your  
snow photos!**

Send them to [news@thelancasternews.com](mailto:news@thelancasternews.com)

## By the numbers

The state Department of Transportation began preparations for this weekend's winter storm on Thursday. Trucks were dispatched with salt brine, salt and sand to protect roadways and drivers alike. Here are the numbers from the effort:

<b>234</b>	Maintenance employees actively involved with road operations
<b>283</b>	Tons of salt (cumulative total)
<b>13</b>	Tons of sand (cumulative total)
<b>207,625</b>	Gallons of salt brine
<b>114</b>	Pieces of equipment used for preparation



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# Some snowflakes, but no accumulation

**BY KONSTANTIN VENGEROVSKY**

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Sumter, Clarendon and Lee counties experienced a winter wonderland for about two hours on Saturday. The snow flurries melted before they could hit the ground, however.

Unlike the upstate, which received more than 5 inches of snow in some areas, the tri-county region remained unscathed, said Dan Miller, meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Columbia.

Temperatures throughout the area stayed steady at about 32 degrees Fahrenheit on Saturday, Miller said.

The only other concern was the below freezing temperatures that were supposed to take place Saturday night, he said. Temperatures were expected to drop down to as low as 10 degrees.

"With rains the night before, the freezing temperatures could create the potential of black ice from any residual moisture on bridges and overpasses," he said.

Black ice, sometimes referred to as clear ice, is a thin coating of ice often found on roadways during below freezing temperatures. The ice itself is not black, but visually

transparent, allowing the often black road below to be seen through it.

Miller said drivers should use extra caution when traveling during below freezing temperatures.

Today is supposed to be filled with sunny skies, with temperatures in the 30s, he said. Monday temperatures are supposed to increase to above 40 degrees, before going down again to the 20s Monday night.

Sumter County Emergency Management Director Erik Hayes said

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## WEATHER FROM PAGE A1

his office had been monitoring the potential snowstorm all week.

"Luckily, this particular time, the weather swung in our favor," he said.

Hayes said no power outages were reported in Sumter County.

Hayes also encouraged motorists to stay off the roadways during below freezing temperatures.

On Friday, Gov. Nikki Haley declared a state of emergency for South Carolina in anticipation of the potential winter storm. Governors of Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina had also previously declared states of emergencies.

The state of emergency will remain in effect through midnight Sunday.

The order places the state's emergency operations plan in effect, Hayes explained.

"It allows state agencies access to equipment from the National Guard that could be used to treat and clear blocked roads," he said. "It also places National Guard members on duty to assist, should the need arise."

The declaration also allows for certain state monies specified towards emergency services to be used if necessary.

"Without the order, the state's emergency operations plan could not be activated," he said.

Hayes also said that following a disaster, a state would not be considered for FEMA assistance if a state of emergency was not first declared.

No major incidents related to the weather were reported in Sumter, Clarendon or Lee counties.

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# to choose consultant

## Trustees hope to make selection before Monday's meeting

BY BRUCE MILLS

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The Sumter School District Board of Trustees interviewed two outside school finance consultants Thursday night at its special called meeting in response to a debt crisis and said it planned to make a selection before Monday's regularly scheduled board meeting. Both candidates were interviewed during a 3½-hour executive session at the district office, 1345 Wilson Hall Road.

The board revealed Wednesday its direction to secure an outside consultant for the remainder of this fiscal year to help the district's finance department analyze cash flow and monitor spending.

## BOARD

FROM PAGE A1

update on the board and superintendent's progress. He outlined that Baker had completed the emergency financial plan, which was reviewed by Poston and presented Thursday. He said the board was weighing Thursday night in executive session whether to work on that plan proposal or to have the selected financial consultant come in to review that work before it's published.

"There is a lot of analysis of cash flow going on," Halligan said. "But all those at this point are not as definitive as the board wants them to be. Things have been proposed and discussed, but the decisions are not ready to be made yet."

He said Baker has also im-

The two candidates for the position are Scott Allen of School Support Inc., and Robert "Bob" Davis of Robert E. Davis LLC Consulting Services.

The action comes after the release last month of the 2015-16 audit report, which showed the district had gone over budget by \$6.2 million in the fiscal year ending June 30. The audit report also revealed the district had \$106,449 in its general fund at the end of the fiscal year — a critically low level, according to auditor Robin Poston.

Additionally, in its executive session Thursday night,

plemented a cash spending freeze, unless items are absolutely necessary. All overtime has also been eliminated for employees. But no decisions on cutting staff members have been made.

"There have been no actual changes in the board-approved budget yet," Halligan said. "That will be coming, but I don't know if any changes will be made on Monday or not."

One noteworthy recommendation that came from the district's finance committee earlier in the week was a revised staffing plan to address the fact the district was about 60 full-time equivalent positions over budget last year. Baker said Friday he will provide that plan Monday night at the board meeting and that staff-

the board heard from Poston on her midyear budget review and cash flow analysis and from Superintendent Frank Baker on his emergency financial plan for the

district for the remainder of the fiscal year. Sumter School Board attorney William "Bick" Halligan was present for all of Thursday's proceedings, providing legal advice to the board.

After the closed meeting, the board did not reveal Baker's plan or current cash flow details.

Halligan did provide an

SEE BOARD, PAGE A10

ing changes could be made by the end of the month.

In last week's finance committee meeting, board member Johnny Hilton attributed the 60 positions over-budget to "miscommunication between the district's finance department and personnel department."

The audit report showed the district was roughly \$1.1 million in the hole for budgeted classroom instructional expenditures and \$4.7 million in the red for budgeted support services for the fiscal year. Support services include operations and maintenance, student transportation and general administration, among others.

## CONSOLIDATION?

After Baker mentioned

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Wednesday during the district finance committee meeting that three district schools had fewer than 200 students each, committee member and local business owner Greg Thompson recommended the board take a serious look at consolidating schools to operate more efficiently. The three schools identified by Baker as low-enrollment schools were Mayewood

Middle School (155 students), DeLaine Elementary (169 students), and Rafting Creek Elementary (163 students).

After Thursday's meeting, Halligan said it was too early in the emergency financial plan process for the board to discuss consolidation.

"That is certainly a topic that will be addressed later," Halligan said. "That's going to be studied and its effects on effi-

ciency and the budget will be analyzed. But it's totally premature now to talk about that as any part of this first round of cuts or elimination of costs."

Monday's board meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. at Hillcrest Middle School, 4355 Peach Orchard Road in Daltzell. Public participation is listed as an item on the agenda.



KEITH GEDAMKE / THE SUMTER ITEM

**Mayewood Middle School, with 155 students, is one of three schools in the district identified as possible candidates for consolidation to help save money in the school district.**



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# WINTER BLAST

## Governor declares state of emergency

### STAFF REPORTS

WILMINGTON, N.C.

A winter weather advisory has been posted for all Pee Dee counties except for Williamsburg County, a move reflective of a northward track of the storm predicted to hit overnight Friday into this morning.

Gov. Nikki Haley declared a state of emergency Friday afternoon to mobilize additional state resources and the National Guard should they be needed. The governor's executive order activates the Emergency Operations Plan, directing all state agencies to coordinate emergency resources should local public safety efforts request assistance.

## Storm

From Page 1A

ending as snow showers and/or light freezing rain Saturday afternoon."

The updated forecast for snow calls for Hartsville, Bennettsville and Dillon to receive less than an inch instead of more than two inches forecast earlier in the week.

Hartsville, Bennettsville and Dillon are still forecast to receive a few hundredths of an inch of freezing rain, though Pee Dee areas south and east are now forecast to receive only a light glaze, if that.

County: Florence

While the Upstate and Midlands are forecast to receive snow, the state as a whole is forecast to suffer through dangerously cold weather as an arctic air mass blows into the area following the storm.

"Snow/sleet accumulations have been shifted farther northwest. Minor accumulations from freezing rain/drizzle are possible with a few hundredths of an inch across northwest and northern areas

with a slight glaze possible slightly farther south and east," Steven Pfaff, warning coordination meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Wilmington, N.C., said in an update on the storm.

While the Pee Dee may not get the freezing precipitation grief originally forecast, it could still end up with downed trees and black ice.

"We still have the potential for downed trees due to wind gusts and dangerous driving conditions due to black ice," Kristy Doriety Burch, senior coordinator for Florence

County Emergency Management Division, said in a Friday evening media advisory.

Gusty north winds, forecast to be in the 30-35 mile an hour range today, will not only blow in an arctic cold air mass but could also finish off trees that were partly uprooted or weakened by Hurricane Matthew. The timing of the event for most of the Pee Dee will be rain overnight followed by "a slow change to a brief wintry mix Saturday morning, then

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### INSIDE

- » A winter storm checklist
- » Local closings
- » This morning's windchills

Page 3A

Dangerously cold weather remains the forecast for Sunday and Monday mornings with overnight lows in Florence forecast to be 18 Sunday morning, 16 Monday morning with wind chills throughout the Pee Dee in the mid-single-digits both mornings.

Florence Salvation Army Maj. Christopher Thornhill said the organization's shelter will be available as a warming shelter but the number of people sheltered will be limited to the number of available beds.

Florence City Councilman Glynn Willis, in a Facebook post,

said that Help Florence Flourish and House of Hope would provide overflow accommodations on Jan. 6-8 to clients who are numerically more than the new Courtney Graham Community Shelter can handle.

"The plan calls for checking in those in need of shelter at the Graham Community Shelter and then transporting any over flow to other sites for overnight housing accommodations," Willis said in his post.

Florence County Emergency Management Director Dusty Owens said that as long as electrical service was uninterrupted



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the county had no plans to open warming shelters but would coordinate with the Red Cross if there was a power issue and shelters needed to be opened.

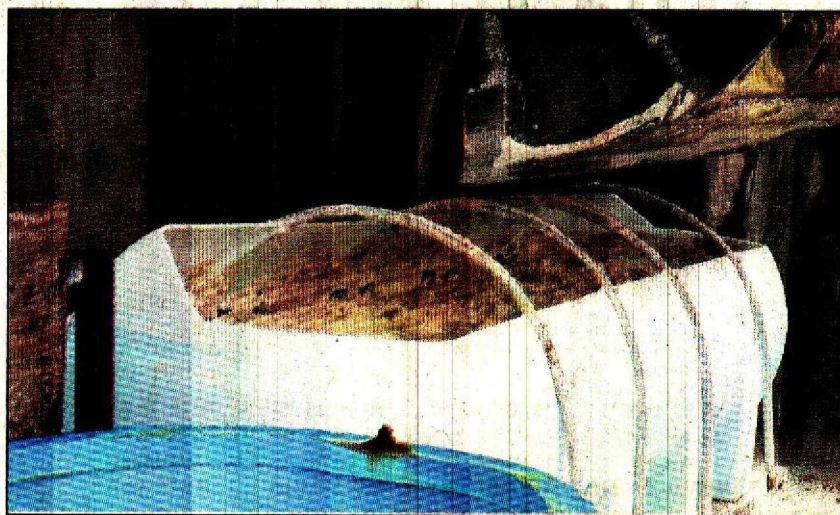
The long-range weather forecast for the Pee Dee calls for overnight temperatures Monday to dip into the upper teens before climbing to 50 degrees Tuesday with an overnight low of 36 forecast for Tuesday night. Temperatures Wednesday are forecast to be in the mid-60s.



**Plow trucks sit ready Friday afternoon at the S.C. Department of Transportation facility in Florence.**

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW ROBERTSON/MORNING NEWS

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**A fresh load of brine soaks Friday afternoon at the S.C. Department of Transportation facility in Florence. Crews started spreading salt, brine and sand on state roads in preparation for this weekend's winter storm.**

Title: **Unfinished business awaits General Assembly**  
 Author: BY JIM HILLEY jim@theitem.com  
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# Unfinished business awaits General Assembly

BY JIM HILLEY

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Most of the issues discussed during the South Carolina General Assembly's annual workshop with members of the state's media were little different from those discussed before last year's session.

The General Assembly will once again have sustainable funding for roads and exploring ways to improve

public education in poor, rural school districts at the

top of its list of objectives. Leaders also promised a new focus on dealing with inadequately funded pensions and continued efforts to pass income tax reform.

Before the legislators outlined their priorities, however, State Budget Director Les Boles reported financial projections for fiscal year 2017-18.

"No budget surplus this

time," he said, making it clear the \$1.5 billion surplus from fiscal year 2016-17 will not be repeated.

He also said there is no budget shortfall, either.

Growth during the year will lead to more than \$300 million in new money available, he said, but he outlined \$318 million in obligations the state must meet as well.

In addition to those obligations, Boles pointed out it

would take the state an additional \$103.9 million to fully fund the Local Government Fund and \$518 million to fully fund the base student cost as established by the Educational Finance Act of 1977.

"I am just putting those numbers out there because that's my job," Boles said.

Rep. Gary Simrill, R-York, said the roads bill that

SEE **WORKSHOP**, PAGE A5

## WORKSHOP

FROM PAGE A1

passed the House last year closely mirrored what an audit said was needed. He called for a 2-cent increase in the gas tax each year for five years.

He said any roads bill must include a safety component as called for by Transportation Secretary Christy Hall.

"Fatality figures are totally unacceptable," he said.

Hall is requesting \$40 million for road safety in the next few years, Simrill said.

Sen. Sean Bennett, R-Dorchester, said the Senate is asking for a 4-cent increase in the gasoline tax for the next three years, for a 12-cent increase.

Senate Majority Leader

Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, said the roads discussion has been frustrating, but he said he thinks progress had been made in the Statehouse.

"I am optimistic," he said. "Maybe because the session hasn't begun."

Sen. Vince Sheheen, D-Kershaw, said one of the major obstacles to a gas tax last session was Gov. Nikki Haley's vow to veto any tax increase not accompanied by an income tax cut.

With Haley expected to become the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, he said what the General Assembly can pass depends on what the new governor — expected to be current Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster — will accept.

Sen. John Matthews, D-

Orangeburg, said last year's road funding bill was only a "band-aid."

He said any roads bill must include sufficient revenue and predictability to allow long-term planning, a way to fund some of the roads with money from out-of-state drivers, and it must be acceptable to the new governor.

Rep. Tom Davis, R-Beaufort, said last year's reorganization of the Department of Transportation Committee was not adequate in that it doesn't allow the governor to appoint the members.

"Not a single penny to the DOT until we get real reform," he vowed.

Bennett disagreed with Davis.

"Your idea of requiring reform first, I am not OK

with that," he said. "We did that last year, and now you say it isn't good enough. We have to deal with both of those issues."

Concerning pension reform, Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter, D-Orangeburg, said the General Assembly dealt with the issue four years ago.

"We thought we had it fixed," she said.

She said the pension fund needed sustainable revenues to keep it solvent.

"Don't do what we usually do and kick the can down the road," Cobb-Hunter



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told her fellow legislators.

Cobb-Hunter said the state has a math problem.

"The bottom line is, when are some of us going to pass math?" she asked. "We keep flunking math when it comes to funding our government."

She said leadership needed to make some hard choices.

"You can't make all these

cosmetic changes and not fund them," she said.

Rep. Rita Allison, R-Spartanburg, who chaired the Education Reform Task Force convened by House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Darlington, last year, said she would continue to push forward on the task force's recommendations in response to the S.C. Supreme Court's mandate to improve the state's education system in

poor, rural counties in response to the Abbeville v. South Carolina lawsuit.

"It's not all about money," she said. "It's about leadership development and teacher development."

She said money needed to be put where it is really needed.

Cobb-Hunter said she keeps hoping for the day education reform passes.

"Here we are still talking

about it," she said. "The lawsuit is 24 years old. We have had two generations of kids, and we are still talking about this."

Cobb-Hunter said the state's budget reflected its priorities.

"At some point the Legislature, the governor and the judicial branch decided disparity is OK," she said.



**COBB-  
HUNTER**



Title: **Rep. Joe Wilson unveils 2017 legislature priorities**

Author: JONATHAN VICKERY Managing Editor jonathan.vickery@morris.com

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# Rep. Joe Wilson unveils 2017 legislative priorities

**JONATHAN VICKERY**

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Congressman Joe Wilson announced his 2017 Legislative Agenda at a Dec. 27 media presentation in front of the Barnwell County Courthouse, part of a tour of the Second Congressional District of South Carolina.

After November's general election led to the largest Republican majority since 1926, Wilson said he is "confident" Congress will "work on a very positive agenda for the American people" when they convene Jan. 3.

"With President-elect Donald Trump and strong majorities in the House and Senate, we have been given a new opportunity to promote positive conservative change," Wilson said. "I am optimistic for our children and grandchildren—fighting to promote limited government and expanded freedom for American families."

Barnwell County is a special place to Wilson, he said, because growing up his grandfather brought him to Fuller Pond to go hunting. As the county's representative in the U.S. House, Wilson said he wants to be accessible and involved. He said he enjoyed a performance of "1776" at Circle Theatre last year.

When asked how he will help Barnwell County, Wilson said, "The best way to help Barnwell County is to help the economic growth of the community." He said he enjoys working with Mayor Ed Lemon and local economic development officials, including Southern-Carolina Alliance.

Focusing on creating jobs

and economic growth, Wilson detailed plans to reduce taxes and harmful regulations that destroy jobs. "Government regulation and overbearing executive action stifled small businesses and job-creators. I will continue to support initiatives in Congress to lower taxes and reduce costly regulations," he said.

Locally, he wants to help

the Savannah River Site by advocating for new missions and the completion of the MOX facility. Wilson said he is looking forward to working with Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who is the incoming energy secretary.

Wilson is also excited about other incoming members of Trump's cabinet, including S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley who is the nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

As Chairman of the House

Armed Services Subcommittee for Emerging Threats and Capabilities, Wilson is also committed to strengthening the nation's cyber capabilities and promoting the military and veterans. "In the past year, terrorist attacks at home and across the globe have constantly reminded that we are in the Global War on Terrorism. We need to promote peace through strength to protect American families," said Wilson, whose four sons have all served overseas in the military.

He is proud of the recent bi-partisan effort to approve the National Defense Authorization Act, which gives a 2.1 percent pay raise to members of the military and keeps the Guantanamo Bay prison open.

A video of Wilson's entire speech is available on *The People-Sentinel's* Facebook page.

## Joe Wilson's 2017 Agenda

Creating Jobs, Reducing Spending, Enhancing Cyber, and Strengthening Military

Create Jobs and Economic Growth	Reduce Regulations that harm jobs	Strengthen our nation's cyber capabilities	Promote Our Military and Veterans
Work with local chambers and agencies to bring jobs to South Carolina	Support a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution	Work with President Trump to coordinate an inter-agency response to cyberattacks	Back President Trump's pledge to promote peace through strength
Protect South Carolina's "Right to Work" laws	Support Conservative budgets	Strengthen our nation's offensive and defensive cyber capabilities	Protect TRICARE benefits and sustain the quality of life for military families
Continue to advocate for current and future missions at the Savannah River Site (SRS) and Savannah River National Lab	Promote tax cuts proposed by President Trump	Study our nation's response to emerging cyber threats, such as vehicle safety	Reverse defense sequestration
Repeal and Replace Obamacare, which destroys jobs	Eliminate burdensome government regulations that stifle small businesses and job creation	Promote public private partnerships to encourage cyber innovation	Support Guard and active Reserve units
			Ensure our Veterans receive quality healthcare
			Support reforms to the VA system

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Jonathan Vickery/Managing Editor

U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, pictured above with members of his staff, unveiled his legislative priorities (graph below) for 2017 on Dec. 27 in front of the Barnwell County Courthouse.