

Title: **Governors ask Obama not to nix Keystone**  
Author:  
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### **Governors ask Obama not to nix Keystone**

COLUMBIA (AP) — The governors of North and South Carolina are among top Republicans imploring the president not to veto a bill to build the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley and N.C. Gov. Pat McCrory on Thursday signed a letter asking President Barack Obama not follow through on his threat to veto the measure.

The letter was signed by 24 Republican governors who say the pipeline would create thousands of jobs and strengthen the United States' relationship with Canada.

On Wednesday, the Republican-controlled Congress approved a bill to construct the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Neither the House nor the Senate has enough votes to override a veto, the first of many skirmishes between the Democratic White House and Congress on energy and environmental policy.

Title: **S.C. Senate rejects ethics reform bill**  
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press  
 Size: 28.98 square inch  
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# S.C. Senate rejects ethics reform bill

BY SEANNA ADCOX  
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA — The Senate on Wednesday rejected a bill aimed at strengthening South Carolina's ethics laws, dealing a blow to legislation Gov. Nikki Haley said is her top priority.

The proposal failed on a vote of 19-24 after weeks of debate, including six hours Wednesday.

Senate Judiciary Chairman Larry Martin said the defeat could mean ethics reform is done.

"I'm embarrassed and taken aback," said Martin, R-Pickens.

He voted against his own bill after the Senate approved an amendment changing how investigations into legislators would be handled. Currently, legislative ethics committees oversee their own members' campaign filings, while the State Ethics Commission is responsible for all other filings from state and locally elected officials.

Haley, who devoted much of last month's inauguration speech to urging legislators to

pass ethics reform, has said any reform package must include independent investigations.

Haley's personal experience with the House Ethics Committee in 2012, when she was

cleared of allegations she lobbied for employers while a House member, prompted lawmakers of both parties to call ethics

reform a top priority. But legislators have been unable since to agree on what to do.

Martin's bill would have put a restructured State Ethics Commission in charge of investigations into legislators. But many senators have balked at that idea. They insist that problems with legislators overseeing their own have been in the House, not the Senate.

A compromise amendment by Senate Ethics Chairman Luke Rankin — approved 25-20

earlier Wednesday — instead created a nine-member investigative ethics committee for legislators, separate from the State Ethics Commission, that includes four legislators. The governor and attorney general would have appointed the rest.

"It was independent enough, and transparent," said Rankin, R-Conway. The only difference from Martin's proposal, he said, is that it didn't lump responsibility of legislators in with statewide, city and county officials to a state commission that can't handle their current workload.

But Martin said that's worse than changing nothing because it creates a mirage of reform.

"It placed ourselves in a special, privileged class we created for ourselves," he said. "I can't defend that, and I won't."

The bill was defeated after Haley posted on Facebook the names of senators who voted for Rankin's amendment, calling it a "slap in the face to every citizen," and pledged to veto any bill without "true independent investigations."



Haley

Title: **Water withdrawal act helps both business, conservation**

Author:

Size: 66.96 square inch

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# Water withdrawal act helps both business, conservation

Putting reasonable limits on water withdrawal from our state's rivers won't harm business interests, despite some not-so-subtle claims to the contrary.

In fact, to have a thriving agricultural business environment, South Carolina must do

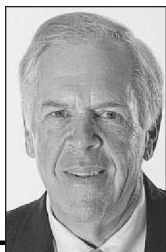
what it can to protect perhaps the state's most vital natural resources — our waterways.



Smith

A bill introduced by S.C. Rep. James Smith, D-Columbia, accomplishes that goal by instituting sensible water management practices throughout South Carolina.

This issue has regained traction as of late, particular as concerns over water withdrawal from the Edisto River continue to grow. Smith's bill effectively reforms the state's Surface Water Act by instituting a needed legislative fix.



Taylor

This isn't a measure that should put large agricultural businesses on the offensive.

Not coincidentally, though, S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley and Agriculture Commissioner Hugh Weathers held a news conference earlier this week, noting that agriculture businesses and forest corporations provide a \$41.7 billion impact on South Carolina's economy, based on a study prepared by Clemson University. This figure shouldn't be a figure that sways legislators into voting against Smith's measure. If anything, this should give greater strength to the need to properly regulate water withdrawal so that it's actually there for the future.

When the act regarding surface water withdrawal was originally created, it included an exemption intended to aid South Carolina farmers.

That exemption clearly needs tightening. There are increasing issues related to larger, industrial plants that withdraw significant amounts of water. Walther Farms, for instance, draws millions of gallons of water per month out of the Edisto River.

Smith noted that his measure "grandfathers in" current businesses with the statuses that are already in place. He added, however, that his bill looks to the future to make sure there a sensible permitting steps in the future.

If the state doesn't have a reasonable process that focuses on safe yields, our state's water resources will continue to dwindle. Unlimited and unregulated withdrawal clearly isn't sustainable.

S.C. Rep. Bill Taylor, R-Aiken, has thankfully signed on as a co-sponsor of Smith's bill, indicating via email that this shouldn't be a "political issue." These efforts, he said, were aimed at finding the "right path forward to insure we preserve our water resources, protect our small family farmers, while encouraging agricultural economic development."

A similar bill has also wisely been introduced in the S.C. Senate by S.C. Sen. Chip Campsen, R-Charleston, who explained during a press conference on Wednesday that the proposal merely called for "all classes of users, at least at some point or some level of use, would have to get a permit to use that public resource," Campsen said.

This is an issue that all residents of South Carolina should have a shared interest in for today and in the future. The state needs to take steps to ensure our waterways don't experience long-term harm, especially with the recruitment of large, industrial farms.

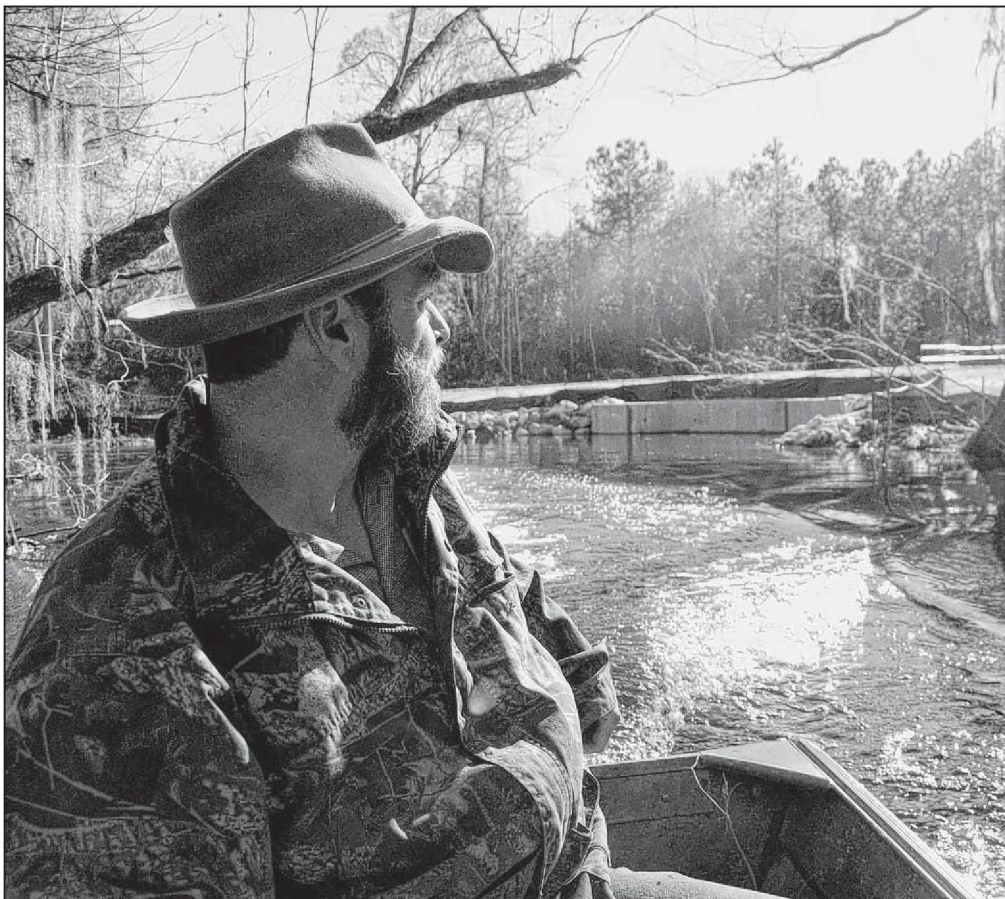
It's clear those types of farms bring a significant economic impact to South Carolina. The easiest way for our state to lose those industries and lose those jobs is by soaking up all the water through unregulated, unmitigated access.

Title: **Water withdrawal act helps both business, conservation**

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FILE PHOTO BY AMY BANTON

**Doug Busbee, a Wagener businessman, shown here on the Edisto River, is part of an effort calling for changes in South Carolina's surface-water laws.**



Title: **Boeing announces more work for propulsion plant**  
 Author: BY BRUCE SMITH Associated Press  
 Size: 18.6 square inch  
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# Boeing announces more work for propulsion plant

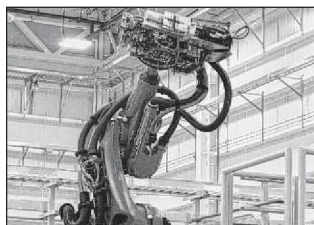
BY BRUCE SMITH

*Associated Press*

NORTH CHARLESTON — Even as Boeing opened a large new propulsion plant in South Carolina on Wednesday, the aeronautics giant announced the facility has already been assigned additional work.

When Boeing broke ground on the 225,000-square-foot plant 15 months ago, it said it would manufacture jet engine air inlets for the 737 MAX, a new generation of Boeing's workhorse 737.

But as Gov. Nikki Haley joined company and local elected officials to cut the rib-



AP PHOTO/BRUCE SMITH

**A prototype of a robot that will be used in Boeing's Propulsion South Carolina plant to manufacture jet engine intakes is displayed after the plant opened on Wednesday.**

bon for the plant on Wednesday, additional projects were announced.

Nicole Piasecki, vice presi-

dent and general manager of the Propulsion Systems Division of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, told a crowd of several hundred gathered in the cavernous building that Propulsion South Carolina would also design engine fan cowlings for the 737 MAX, as well as design air inlets for its new 777X.

"In this space in which we are in today we will house, in just the next several months, one of aerospace's most advanced automated manufacturing systems," she said.

In one corner of the building was a prototype of a robot that will be used to make the inlets.

Title: **Education department astute to examine pay**  
 Author:  
 Size: 32.70 square inch  
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# *Education department astute to examine pay*

Increasing teacher pay doesn't guarantee improvement in the classroom. However, South Carolina is seeing far too many young teachers leave because of lackluster salaries.

As a whole, South Carolina pays less than the average in both Georgia and North Carolina. That already puts our state at a disadvantage.

This is thankfully an issue that's wisely received bipartisan support. It's also deservedly back in the spotlight as the state's Department of Education looks for avenues to accomplish this long overdue goal of adjusting salaries. The department is looking at boosting pay on both ends of the spectrum – both for new teachers and those on nearing the end of their career.

Newly-elected State Education Superintendent Molly Spearman told a House budget-writing panel earlier this month that the department would "love to put additional pay across the lines," according to *The State* newspaper.

This isn't a new push, and Spearman recognized that such a full scale increase is likely unfeasible. However, it's positive to see the department rallying around the idea of increased teacher pay. Both Democrats and Republicans have advocated boosting pay, but such a move will need to be taken with fiscal responsibility.

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, a Republican, has vetoed pay raise initiatives in the past, including a \$10 million appropriation in 2012, previously expressing both a desire for raises to be recurring and also tied to performance. However, she did announce a budget plan with more than \$160 million in new spending on K-12 education, a proposal legislators adopted and added to the

2014-15 budget. She's also proposed creating a teacher recruitment program that would offer financial incentives for teachers to work in rural school districts. Still, with South Carolina lagging behind our neighboring states with average teacher pay, it makes it that much harder to recruit and retain teachers.

Having the state's Department of Education crunch these numbers related to pay raises is a needed step forward. Several lawmakers have pushed for years to bring South Carolina in line with other states. Haley's Democratic opponent in 2010 and 2014, S.C. Sen. Vincent Sheheen, D-Camden, previously introduced legislation that would have moved pay raises forward.

"I believe that we should try to get our public education tax dollars in the classroom. The simplest way to get your dollars in the classroom is to pay your teachers good salaries," Sheheen said. This should be an issue that's most concerning for recruiting the next crop of young teachers. A starting salary boost could certainly help persuade them into the profession, and ultimately to stay in it.

According to the state's Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement, of the nearly 5,300 teachers in South Carolina who left their jobs during or at the end of the 2014 school year, more than a third were within their first five years in the classroom. That's a troubling trend.

As the state's education department explores options, it's imperative they promote a fiscally responsible plan that boosts salaries for as many educators as possible.

Title: **Koon described as steady leader for future**  
 Author: ByTIMFLACH tflach@thestate.com  
 Size: 55.49 square inch  
 Columbia, SC Circulation: 128564



# THE RACE FOR LEXINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF

## Koon described as steady leader for future

By TIM FLACH  
 tflach@thestate.com

The plan that Jay Koon developed more than a decade ago remains the blueprint for traffic control during races in Lexington.

Its attention to detail shows Koon has "a lot on the ball," former town police Chief Mike Roth said.

Koon's habit of meticulous preparation is on display as he seeks to step up from assistant town police chief to Lexington County sheriff.

He's one of four Republicans vying to win the March 3 Republican primary that will determine the next sheriff through 2016 since no one else is running.

To his friends, Koon is steady instead of flashy.

While other candidates tell audiences about the criminals they've caught, Koon stresses the training he's received from the FBI and other experts will enhance "professionalism" among

### ABOUT THIS SERIES

This is part of a series looking at the issues and candidates in this spring's race for Lexington County sheriff.

deputies.

As with town police, he wants deputies to be more than crime fighters.

"We want our officers to be problem-solvers," he said.

"Sometimes you get situations that are not all about law enforcement, so you refer people to the help they need."

Koon exemplifies pragmatism, town leaders say.

As assistant chief since 2006, he has overseen daily policing, developed strategies to reduce crime, hired and trained officers, kept community leaders abreast of events and coped with financial pressures.

"He's got experience with all the problems that a sheriff deals with," town police Chief Terrence Green said.

Restoring public confidence

SEE **KOON** PAGE **A6**

## KOON

FROM PAGE **A1**

after the downfall of long-time Sheriff James Metts is another challenge awaiting the new sheriff, Koon said.

Metts stepped down in mid-December after 42 years in office – virtually Koon's entire life – shortly before pleading guilty to a federal misconduct charge.

"There's still that gray cloud some people like to paint," Koon said. "We need the healing to begin even though the Sheriff's Department is not broken."

Like other candidates, Koon wants more deputies on the road.

But tight finances will

prevent adding many more for a while, he said. So the answer is shifting assign-

ments so everyone will handle calls for assistance when levels are high, he said.

Flexibility also could come from hiring firms to handle some aspects of court security and tasks such as out-of-state extradition of prisoners and transport of inmates to medical care, he said.

More cooperation between deputies and police officers in 12 communities can pay off in better law enforcement countywide, Koon said.

"There is no magic wand," he said of finding ways to assure more officers are keeping an eye on neighborhoods and businesses. "There's no cookie-cutter solution."

Deputies still should assist community groups with projects but on a limit-

ed basis, he said. That role "got too political" under Metts, he said.

His outlook has found favor with county leaders.

Koon is backed by Gov. Nikki Haley and current Sheriff Lewis McCarty, the retired lawman she appointed to serve temporarily as sheriff.

At times, Koon echoes McCarty in promising to eschew politics in law enforcement.

It's a lesson learned while serving temporarily last fall as a top aide to McCarty, whom Koon calls "the gold standard" among local police.

Koon said he didn't join McCarty's staff with the goal of becoming sheriff, but decided to make a bid for the post "along the

way" while on that assignment.

The \$30,000 he's raised since becoming a candidate in mid-December nearly equals that of all other candidates combined, campaign reports show.

Those advantages have some political leaders talking of Koon winning the post outright at the primary ballot, getting enough support to avoid a runoff with the second-place finisher.

But his campaign is dealing with a claim from challenger Justin Britt that Koon was "connected" to former town Councilman Danny Frazier, who faces charges for allegedly bribing Metts and former South Congaree Police

Title: **Koondescribedassteadyleaderforfuture**  
 Author: ByTIMFLACH tflach@thestate.com  
 Size: 55.49 square inch  
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Chief Jason Amodio.

Koon adamantly denies any impropriety, calling the claims political hyperbole.

Lexington Mayor Steve MacDougall said that impression is off-base, calling Koon a "by the book" cop.

Federal and state investi-

gators never talked with any town police about Frazier, Green said.

Meanwhile, Koon insists he will blend the best of what deputies do with innovation.

"There's a great team already there," he said. "We're going to keep them

going down the track. But I'm not going to be status quo."

*Reach Flach  
at (803) 771-8483*

#### AT A GLANCE

**Personal:** 42 years

old, married with two children, lives near Lexington. A graduated from the University of South Carolina.

**Occupation:** Assistant police chief, town of Lexington,

having been an officer there for a 21-year career in law enforcement.



**Koon**



Title: **S.C. ethics reform met by roadblock in Senate**  
 Author: BY JEREMY BORDEN [jborden@postandcourier.com](mailto:jborden@postandcourier.com)  
 Size: 64.63 square inch  
 Charleston, SC Circulation: 110289



# S.C. ethics reform met by roadblock in Senate

BY JEREMY BORDEN  
[jborden@postandcourier.com](mailto:jborden@postandcourier.com)

COLUMBIA — When the hours started to tick by during last week's six-hour debate over ethics reform in the South Carolina Senate, lawmakers started to push each other on the issue in blunt terms.

Then, Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, rose to ask a question. The Senate pro-tempore doesn't always take part in lengthy exchanges, but when he does, everyone listens.

"Can you tell me what, if anything, is wrong with our current ethics law?" Leatherman asked his colleagues.

His question reflects the prevailing sentiment in the Senate, and those pushing ethics reform worry that attitude will stall any progress.

The key issue at stake is whether lawmakers will reform how they police themselves. Without progress on that front, they say, reforming the state's ethics laws in the wake of the guilty plea and resignation of former House Speaker Bobby Harrell will be considered a disappointment.

Ethics reform proponents, including Gov. Nikki Haley, House Speaker Jay Lucas and Judiciary Chairman Sen. Larry Martin, see a golden opportunity for change in the wake of Harrell's ethics woes — and they are seeking to change minds and reverse course after a bitter fight in the Senate has stalled progress. But they'll have to forge a compromise with senators who see deep flaws in Martin's original ethics legislation and some who don't

want to address the issue at all.

## Early start on ethics

Martin, R-Pickens, introduced a bill before the session began to reform the system of House and Senate members solely policing themselves. While his proposal has its detractors, reformists say that a committee half appointed by the Legislature and half by the governor to handle ethics investigations is a step in the right direction. Under the proposal, the House and Senate ethics committees would still punish members. The bill also required lawmakers to disclose their personal sources of income and outside advocacy groups that spend money in campaigns to disclose their donors, called independent expenditures.

Soon after Leatherman made his remarks during the Senate debate, Sen. Luke Rankin, R-Conway, successfully pushed

an amendment that set up an alternative investigative panel that involved placing four legislators in charge of policing members.

Martin and others balked at placing House and Senate members on a so-called "independent" investigative panel and mustered the votes to kill both Rankin's amendment and the bill as a whole.

It's the S.C. House across the hall, senators say, that has shown it can't police itself. In Harrell's case, the S.C. Policy Council, an advocacy group, had to push for an investigation for years, and the House Ethics

Committee never took action. Proponents of reform say it proved that legislators policing other legislators doesn't work.

A new independent panel to investigate lawmakers for campaign finance violations and other ethics problems is considered the linchpin to restoring trust in government.

## Haley speaks out

Gov. Haley said in an interview that she plans to use the bully pulpit to let voters know who stands for meaningful reform and who does not. Haley confirmed she held a closed-door meeting with some Republican senators last week who voted for Rankin's amendment and told them the same.

"It's arrogance at its worst," Haley said of senators who failed to endorse an independent investigation. "There's going to be an opportunity to reverse what happened. As that comes forward, I'd like to see them reverse course. They have the opportunity now to discuss what this vote was. If they fix it, they will get total praise. If they don't fix it, we're going to let everybody know they didn't fix it."

Sen. Lee Bright, R-Roebuck, one of the senators in the meeting, said he voted for Rankin's version because it included language that he believed could have led to voter registration by party. He also said he wouldn't

vote for Martin's bill because of the independent expenditures issue. Bright said those groups should not be required to disclose their donors because it

violates their free speech rights.

"We can't take away free speech in order to cut a deal to get enough votes," Bright said of the bill. Martin said he has no plans to take that provision out.

He also said Martin's original bill doesn't provide for independent oversight because there would be some General Assembly appointees on the investigative committee. Martin has said those appointees would be barred by law from speaking about investigations to members of the Legislature, preserving its independence.

Bright disagrees. "They think this is going to be totally independent oversight but it's not," Bright said. "There's a rush to have a press conference and declare victory, and I think that's bad government."

## Senate change of heart?

Many senators view the Senate Ethics Committee in a positive light and the guilty plea of former Sen. Robert Ford, D-Charleston, as an example of how the system worked. Ford pleaded guilty to raiding his campaign account for personal expenses last month.

But Lynn Teague, who has worked on ethics for the good government advocacy group League of Women Voters, said rumors persisted for years about Ford's activity before anyone took action.

Senators shouldn't pretend that political winds and who is in leadership doesn't affect who gets prosecuted, she said. "There were reports of prob-

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lems long pre-dating (senators) actually taking any action,” Teague said of the Ford case.

The House has sought to accomplish ethics reform in smaller bites, taking up 20-some ethics-related bills.

Speaker Lucas said he agrees that the House and Senate should work toward finding a compromise on a panel that can investigate lawmakers independently. “It’s such an inaccuracy that you can call this a House

problem,” he said. “I don’t think the opportunity to build the public trust belongs to any particular body. It brings back the confidence from the citizens of the state.”

He said he plans to push for

compromise. “We want to get ethics done,” he said.

Reach **Jeremy Borden** at 708-5837.



## Poll

Do you think the S.C. Senate views ethics reform as a top priority? Go to **[postandcourier.com/polls](http://postandcourier.com/polls)** to vote.

## Online

For more political coverage, information on the Palmetto Politics app or to sign up for our newsletter, go to **[palmettopolitics.com](http://palmettopolitics.com)**.

Title: **Certificate of Need law bad for S.C.**  
 Author: BY DAVE SCHWARTZ  
 Size: 40.61 square inch  
 Charleston, SC Circulation: 110289



# Certificate of Need law bad for S.C.

BY DAVE SCHWARTZ

All eyes are on Congress — at least as far as health care goes. South Carolinians are now waiting to learn what — if anything — Republicans will do to fix Obamacare's myriad problems, which have rippled across our state's and our country's health care systems. But Congress isn't the only legislative body that can start to fix our broken health care system. So can our legislature in Columbia.



Schwartz

They can start by repealing our state's "Certificates of Need" — a ridiculous law that deprives South Carolinians of the medical services we need.

Certificate of Need (CON) laws — which date back to the 1960s — limit the number of health care facilities that can open in local communities. "Facilities" includes everything from hospitals to nursing homes. They also require government approval for modifications and additions to existing facilities. Essentially, you can't open or expand a new health care-related business without proving to the government that the community actually needs it.

In fact, our state's Certificate of Need laws are so restrictive that existing health care facilities can't even lay out a new bed for patients without offering regulators definitive proof that the bed is needed. The laws also limit how much equipment

health care facilities can purchase for diagnosing and treating patients.

This bizarre system naturally harms South Carolina consumers. Do you think groceries would be cheaper if only one grocery store existed in your area? And what if the government had to sign off every time one store wanted to add a new aisle? In any other industry, we'd call this a monopoly.

Our state's Certificate of Need law makes that a reality in health care.

If new hospitals, clinics, or other health care providers want to offer high-quality health care services at a lower cost, they should be able to do so. They shouldn't have to beg regulators first.

Fifteen other states have realized this and shuttered Certificate of Need laws. The result? Affordable and innovative health care systems that better serve their customers and patients.

Just compare our state to those that have repealed their CON laws. The population of Kansas is only 60 percent that of South Carolina, yet the state contains nearly twice the number of hospitals that South Carolina does. Kansans repealed its CON laws in 1985. It's the same case in South Dakota, which has only 18 percent of South Carolina's population but more than 80 percent our number of hospitals.

States bogged down by Certificate of Need laws historically have experienced higher health care costs. For instance: Maryland first established its own Certificate of Need laws in 1968, and only three years later its

hospital costs per admission were more than 25 percent higher than the national average. And across the country, states without these burdensome regulations often have some of the lowest levels of spending on hospital services, over-the-counter drugs, and more.

South Carolina took a step in the right direction when Gov. Nikki Haley vetoed funding for the Certificate of Need program in 2013. State legislators sustained the veto, and a number of health care services opened as a result.

But then the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled that the state must continue to administer the program regardless. The health care facilities that opened between Gov. Haley's veto and the court ruling have no idea if they're allowed to continue operating.

Our state government should end this confusion by repealing Certificate of Need once and for all. In so doing, they would be looking out for South Carolinians' best interests. More choice, lower costs, more business investment and jobs — there's no reason this law should be kept on the books.

And who knows? By repealing our Certificate of Need law, South Carolina might even set an example for legislators in Congress as they begin to debate how to fix the higher prices and fewer choices forced on us by Obamacare.

**Dave Schwartz**, a resident of Mount Pleasant, is the South Carolina state director for Americans for Prosperity.

Title: **S.C. Houseroad plan starting on right track**  
 Author: BYCINDIROSS SCOPPE  
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## OTHER VOICES

# *S.C. House road plan starting on right track*

BY CINDI ROSS SCOPPE

The road plan that Speaker Jay Lucas' ad hoc committee rolled out last month puts the House back in what used to be familiar territory: a pragmatic voice positioned between a rigid anti-tax governor and an anti-reform Senate.

It's certainly not a perfect plan, and there's no guarantee that it can even pass the House; we can't even be sure it will be intact when it's filed as a bill, expected Wednesday.

The biggest problem is what it doesn't do: It doesn't overhaul our loophole-riddled, special-interest-driven tax code. We need to do that before we raise or lower any more taxes, but it's painfully clear that no one in the Legislature or the governor's office or much anywhere else believes that.

Once you take comprehensive tax reform off the table, what you're left with is a plan that is an excellent place to start a discussion. It's also a plan that could be improved significantly with a few simple (if not so simple to pass) tweaks.

Read the reports that the ad hoc committee used to formulate its plan

Let's start with the positives.

► It confines itself to our actual needs. That's why it raises \$400 million a year rather than the \$1.5 billion that we've all been repeating without asking what it covers; it turns out that the big number includes lots of new roads, among them the proposed Interstate 73 that we do not need.

► It has the potential to make our road decisions less parochial and instead focused on what's best for the state as a whole. First, it re-

quires the State Infrastructure Bank – the entity that borrows money to fund major projects – to use objective criteria to decide which projects to approve, as the Transportation Commission is sort of required to do. Second, it ends the practice of small groups of legislators appointing transportation commissioners to represent their regions, which has resulted in horse-trading at the expense of actual needs. Instead, the governor would appoint commissioners, with Senate approval.

Gubernatorial appointment also puts one person in charge of the Transportation Department, so voters have someone to hold accountable when things go wrong.

► It attempts to get the state out of the business of paving and repairing purely local roads that never should have been the state's responsibility, by offering more money to counties that take over the job. For those who object to even the optional version of this

plan, supporters note that practically speaking, the state isn't taking care of those local roads as it is.

► It closes some tax loopholes, which makes our tax system more coherent and our tax collections less volatile, and it has the effect of adding an inflation factor to the gas tax, so revenue increases as the cost of paying workers and buying raw materials increases. Specifically, it raises the maximum sales tax on cars, boats and planes from \$300 to \$500, and it effectively removes the sales-tax exemption on gasoline.

► It doesn't steal a lot of money from the general fund. I hate stating positives as negatives, but the fact is that Gov. Nikki Haley

kicked off this discussion with such a huge and unaffordable tax cut that just about anything short of that looks responsible by comparison. The House plan would reduce the money to pay for schools and courts and child-protective services and pretty much everything else the state does by just \$61 million per year.

There are two better ways to raise the extra \$60 million a year that this change would generate: Eliminate the cap entirely and lower the tax rate on automobiles, so that everyone pays a sales tax of about 3 percent of the total purchase value; that is, make it an actual sales tax rather than a fee for purchasing a vehicle. Alternatively, exempt the sales tax on the first \$1,000 of the purchase price, and tax the rest of it at the normal 5 percent – that is, create a tax floor instead of a tax cap.

Read the projections for car-tax alternatives, and other road-funding figures

The plan also could be improved by giving local governments the authority to raise the money themselves to maintain local roads, rather than giving them state money that they legitimately fear the Legislature would take back at the next economic burp.

This point needs elaboration. One of our big problems is that the Legislature has never gotten past its 19th century notion that it should control everything that happens in our state. It orders local governments to do things the state ought to be doing, while at the same time doing things that local governments ought to be doing; and it severely limits how and by how much the city and county councils can raise revenue.

It's true that having the option to raise the money locally would be of little use to rural counties that have practically no tax base. But it's also true that people in Richland County shouldn't have to pay to pave half-mile roads with two houses on them in Allendale County – or in Lexington County.

The plan could be improved by closing the loophole that allows the Transportation Commission to ignore the ranking of road projects that is based on objective criteria and instead undertake projects that haven't even been evaluated.

It could be improved by eliminating the Infrastructure Bank board rather than simply expanding its membership to dilute the outsized authority the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore have over it.

Finally, the House roads plan could be improved by adding a fix-it-first requirement, to make sure that we get our current roads and bridges up to safe-driving standards and add extra lanes before building whole new roads – such as the \$105 million interchange for the unfunded and quite possibly unbuildable leg of Interstate 73 that the Transportation Commission tried to authorize a few years back.

One of the reasons we're in this mess is that the Transportation Department has focused its limited resources on building new roads rather than taking care of the ones we have.

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Title: **DSS DIRECTOR MUST ACT QUICKLY TO FIX PROBLEMS**

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# DSS DIRECTOR MUST ACT QUICKLY TO FIX PROBLEMS

*The following editorial appeared Feb. 8 in The (Rock Hill) Herald:*

**W**e think Gov. Nikki Haley's pick to lead the state's Department of Social Services has the right idea in proposing a comprehensive review of operations at every DSS office in the state. But she should act right away to address some pressing problems that already are well documented.

In one of her confirmation hearings, Susan Alford said she wants to visit each county, assess its needs and hear why caseworkers leave the agency. She told the Senate General Committee that caseload problems are closely associated to turnover, and she plans to address both by using her experience to probe the department's "ground game" at the county level.

During the daylong county meetings, Alford, who was confirmed by the Senate on Thursday, said she would meet with local law enforcement, solicitors, guardians and caseworkers. She especially hopes to get a sense of how each of the state's 46 counties is handling its responsibilities to care for children.

Alford, 60, appears to have the experience to tackle the job. She has been director of The Girls Center at Clemson University since 2007, a re-

search hub for issues such as teen pregnancy and poor self-esteem. She also worked at the Department of Juvenile Justice for more than 12 years in various director roles and served as director of the state's probation and parole agency.

Alford would replace Lillian Koller, who resigned last year amid calls for her head from members of both parties. Haley was slow in realizing that Koller was in real trouble, attributing the criticism to election-year politics, but Koller resigned a day before the Senate was due to take up a no-confidence vote on her leadership.

Alford said making substantive changes at DSS could take years. She warned lawmakers not to start criticizing the agency if they don't see drastic improvements in the next year or two.

Certainly the agency's operation deserves an in-depth evaluation such as this. Alford no doubt is on the right track in trying to get at the root causes of high turnover rates. Once she's has identified why so many people leave the agency, she can begin to seek sensible remedies.

But Alford does not have to start from scratch on this effort. The Senate already has produced an improvement plan after a year's worth of bipartisan hearings investigating child

deaths, excessive caseloads and turnover.

Among other things, the plan calls for adding 221 child welfare positions this fiscal year.

Many of the agency's problems, especially regarding child welfare, have been common knowledge for years, in fact, decades. A federal class action lawsuit was filed Jan. 12 against Haley and DSS, saying a lack of health care and other basic services is endangering children in the system.

The complaint alleges Haley and DSS are responsible for drastic foster home shortages, too many caseloads for workers and a failure to provide children with basic health care. The lawsuit also alleges that child maltreatment while in foster care is not adequately investigated, and inaccurate data masks a much higher rate of abuse and neglect than the state reports to the federal government.

Whatever the outcome of the lawsuit, it raises red flags. And in light of the seriousness of the allegations, action should be taken right away.

We hope Alford will find a reasonable balance between thoroughly investigating the agency's operations while also acting quickly to ensure that children in the system now are being well cared for.