

Title: **State should collect bucks before planning spending**
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■ OUR VIEW

State should collect bucks before planning spending

Maybe Gov. Nikki Haley and the state's Budget & Control Board should have a conference call with Toby Chappell, Greenwood County manager.

In case you missed the front-page story on Thursday, it turns out the budget that lawmakers and the governor wrangled with and eventually settled on is going to come up short. In fact, it came up \$10.3 million short, and that means some of the spending plans will get nixed.

Comptroller Richard Eckstrom must take the paring knife in hand and begin cutting from the bottom of the list. Not to worry; the \$50 million earmarked for road work remains intact. That could change, of course, if another revenue shortfall takes place.

Meanwhile, publicly owned airports are not getting the dollars that were headed their way for maintenance and upgrades. While that might not bother many South Carolinians who spend more time behind the wheel than in the air, it can mean the airports will not be well positioned to vie for federal grants. And while you might not be a flier, bear in mind that air transportation and good airports go hand in hand with economic development.

What happened, you ask? Simple, really. As it does every year, the state bases its budget on *anticipated* revenue. That includes budgeting based on *anticipated* surplus dollars pouring into the state's coffers. Oops. Anticipation makes a better song title than method of budgeting. Of course the state — really, any government and any business — must have projections for revenue. That's understandable. But what sometimes that number is out of kilter, as it was this year and again back in 2012. When the predictions are spot on, that's great because the list of funding recipients remains whole. When they're off, however, then the cuts begin and someone loses.

As to the conference call, we're just thinking that Greenwood County is operating a bit more responsibly. Right now, the county is debt-free. That is thanks to the last penny sales tax approved by county voters. That tax raised the dollars needed to build the new county library and cover the costs initially outlined by the feds for ensuring the Buzzard Roost Dam could withstand an earthquake the likes of which are experienced along the Pacific and that send tsunami waves washing over miles of shoreline. You know the feds; they like to do things in a big way. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission put a big project on the county, which came with an equally large price tag. The county balked, however, and asked FERC to reassess and consider a fix that was not on quite so grand a scale. FERC did, and agreed with the county, which freed up dollars that could be and were then applied to the county's debt service (by law, the savings could not be spent on another capital sales tax project but could be used to pay down debt).

As county residents are well aware, they will have an opportunity this November to decide whether they support another penny sales tax for a number of capital sales projects that have been outlined in great detail. And while the county has a figure it *anticipates* collecting via the penny sales tax — roughly \$72 million collected during a maximum eight-year span — it will not borrow money in an effort to launch any of the projects beforehand. Only until sufficient money is collected through the sale tax will the county begin projects — again, provided county voters approve the plan.

Maybe the state should approach its spending the same way. Anticipate, yes, but collect first and *then* decide what gets funded. Just a thought.

Title: **Williston 29 public input talk promising**

Author:

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EDITORIAL

Williston 29 public input talk promising

It was encouraging to see some members of the Williston 29 Board of Education signal an interest in revising policies governing public participation, policies that will lead to greater transparency and trust.

At its monthly board meeting Tuesday night, the Williston 29 board considered reducing the required days of advance notice residents wishing to address the board in public participation must give from three business days to one.

The board discussion came after the *Aiken Standard* previously protested the school district's policy of requiring three days of notice.

This policy is routinely paradoxical, as meeting agendas often aren't provided or published until 24 hours in advance. By then it's too late for a member of the public to address the board about an item appearing on the agenda.

Williston 29 deserves credit for giving better notice for the August meeting. The *Aiken Standard*, and presumably the public, was notified six days in advance of Tuesday's meeting, giving members of the public three days to sign up.

We also commend the board for taking up

the issue during Tuesday's meeting, which began with a benchmarking study performed by Dr. Missoura Ashe, superintendent of Schools for Williston 29.

According to Ashe's report, there is no uniform policy for public input in South Carolina. Some districts require up to seven days notice. Others allow the public to sign up 30 minutes before the board meeting begins.

A majority of Williston board members seemed to lean in favor of reducing the district's current three-day policy, with one member correctly noting that residents needed time to "meditate" on matters coming before the board.

Unfortunately, the issue never came up for a vote following questions mainly centering on whether or not public participation should be limited to agenda items. We hope the board doesn't enact such a restriction.

Restricting public input to agenda items limits feedback from the public, feedback that could be useful in shaping school district policy. Public participation should be expanded to include all relevant school district-related business.

Also at Tuesday's meeting, the *Aiken Stan-*

dard addressed the board during public participation. The newspaper asked Williston 29 to follow the law and release the disciplinary records of Joel Mitchell, former principal of Williston-Elko High School.

The *Aiken Standard* requested those records on June 2, but they had not been released as of press time.

Mitchell resigned in May and has since been charged with first degree assault. An arrest warrant said Mitchell exposed himself to a student. The disciplinary records are clearly in the public's interest and should be released.

As the *Aiken Standard* noted in its presentation, the S.C. Court of Appeals in *Burton v. York County Sheriff* (2004) noted how public officials perform their duties is of "a large and vital public interest that outweighs their desire to remain out of the public eye."

Gov. Nikki Haley, in vetoing a bill that would have restricted the release of teacher evaluations, said in a May 27 letter to the General Assembly that such records should be public, we noted.

Williston 29 is showing great wisdom in reviewing public participation rules. Likewise, it should apply that same wisdom to our request for the principal evaluations.

Title: **Film highlights dangers of man-made ocean noise**
 Author: By Clayton Stairs cstairs@southstrandnews.com
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Film highlights dangers of man-made ocean noise

Free screenings at Grand Strand events this month

By CLAYTON STAIRS

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Over the last few decades, man-made noise in the world's oceans has increased substantially, causing harm to sea creatures, including whales and dolphins, that depend on sound for feeding, mating, socializing and security.

That was the message of a new documentary film called "Sonic Seas," presented by Stop Oil Drilling in the Atlantic, a volunteer grassroots group of citizens known as SODA, and Oceana, a group dedicated to ocean conservation.

The groups presented the movie on Aug. 10 at the Waccamaw Library in Pawleys Island while also offering attendees literature and giving them a chance to sign a petition against seismic testing in the Atlantic Ocean, which will go to President Barack Obama. There will be other free screenings in the area through the end of the month.

The film focuses on the impact of man-made noise in the ocean, including noise from large cargo ships, military vessels and seismic air gun testing. It shares stories and reflections about marine life from scientists, environmental activists and even celebrities like musician Sting.

Despite a five-year reprieve for allowing offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean, seismic air gun testing could be per-

mitted later this year, according to SODA members. The blasts, which occur every 15 seconds, carry the force of dynamite and are so loud they can be heard across ocean waters for 2,500 miles.

"It's a back door to reopening the debate on drilling," said the retired Rev. Jim Watkins of the SODA Leadership Team. "Applications for seismic testing are pending approval in Washington, D.C. The oil and gas industry is pushing this strategy to help them restart a push toward offshore drilling. We urge people to come see this film and learn more."

Peg Howell, a Pawleys Island resident with a petroleum engineering degree who is also a SODA team leader, agreed. "These blasts cause risks to marine life," Howell said. "They carry serious risks for disrupting the fishing industry — part of our economic base — and they don't really prove the existence of oil and gas reserves."

She said recent research has shown negative impacts from seismic blasting on ocean ecosystems.

"Endangered whales and sea turtles can be harmed," she said. "The big question is 'Why do it?' Coastal residents and elected officials in over 200 Atlantic coastal

communities say drilling and seismic blasting will hurt our economic future."

Some of the points Howell made during a short presentation after the movie include:

- Seismic testing, or airgun blasting, is the first step before exploratory drilling for oil and natural gas;

- 130,000 marine mammals would be harmed by seismic testing;

- Politicians, including South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and U.S. Rep. Tom Rice (R-SC), say they support seismic testing because they want to know what is out there, but seismic testing will not "tell you what's out there;"

- Drilling would have negative impacts for economics, infrastructure, the environment (since oil spills and accidents happen routinely); and

- The U.S. is already energy-independent and now exporting crude oil;

Donna Grimes, a Murrells Inlet resident who attended the Aug. 10 event, said it was enlightening.

She said she was most disturbed to learn that the seismic testing companies don't share the information they gather from airgun blasts.

"We, the public, should know what is going on," she said.

Lew Aufdemort, also of Murrells Inlet, said he was in the U.S. Navy and served on

submarines. He said he has heard, firsthand, the noise generated by ship traffic and military operations, including active sonar to pick up long-distance targets.

"I understand that is the technology they have right now," he said. "But, they need to come up with alternative methods."

Jessie White, an attorney with the South Carolina Environmental Law Project, said the message of "Sonic Sea" is powerful.

"I am empathetic to marine life," she said. "I try to think of things from their perspective and what humans are doing has significant impacts on them."

Dates and locations for other free screenings of the movie are:

- Thursday, Aug. 18, at 10 a.m. at Surfside Beach Library, 410 Surfside Drive, Surfside Beach

- Wednesday, Aug. 24, at 4:45 p.m. at North Myrtle Beach Library, 910 First Avenue South, North Myrtle Beach

- Wednesday, Aug. 31, at 7 p.m. at Base Recreation Center, 800 Gabreski Lane, Myrtle Beach

The movie trailer may be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/156602381>. Learn more about SODA activities at: <https://www.facebook.com/StopOffshoreDrillingintheAtlantic/>.

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PHOTOS BY CLAYTON STAIRS/SOUTH STRAND NEWS

Attendees of the event had a chance to gather information and sign a petition against seismic testing in the Atlantic Ocean. From left are Amelia Thompson, Zack Furr and Jessie White, all with the South Carolina Environmental Law Project.

Title: **State experiences Coming up short: revenue shortfall**
 Author: By SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press
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Coming up short: State experiences revenue shortfall

By SEANNA ADCOX

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — A revenue shortfall has cut \$10 million worth of spending from the state's \$7.5 billion budget, South Carolina's chief accountant said Wednesday, as he cautioned legislators to save more and spend less on "nice-to-have" items.

The surplus for the fiscal year that

ended June 30 came in \$10.3 million less than the Legislature expected. By law, state Comptroller Richard Eckstrom must chop from the bottom of the budget's priority list for one-time spending.

"There are items on there that probably did not rise to the level of being high-priority spending items,"

Eckstrom said of the entire \$400-million-plus supplemental spending list.

The cuts hit the state's Aeronautics Commission the hardest; \$7 million was intended for maintenance and upgrades at the state's 51 publicly owned airports, which include six

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REVENUE

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with commercial flights.

Agency director James Stephens said airports may miss out on federal grants that provide 90 percent of a project's costs — benefiting competing airports in other states — or local governments will have to come up with the full 10 percent match.

"If we don't take advantage, our neighboring competitor states will come up with a way to secure the funding," he said Wednesday. "More people are on the roads, but it's a huge economic benefit to all of our communities to have the airports open."

Other cuts to Aeronautics include \$100,000 to upgrade its security system and \$150,000 to help recruit a nonstop international flight to South Carolina. That effort requires market research, Rep. Jim Merrill, R-Charleston, said in June in successfully urging his colleagues to override Gov. Nikki Haley's veto of the item.

While Merrill didn't want to get specific, he said, "If we can get direct, nonstop flights to

Europe from South Carolina, it's a game-changer to the state for business and tourism."

The \$1.1 million cut from the adjutant general's office includes \$380,000 to South Carolina's National Guard museum.

The last item on the list was \$100,000 to the treasurer's office for a new savings account program benefiting people with disabilities, created by law earlier this year.

This is the first time since 2012 that Eckstrom has had to cut anything. In the last three years, his year-end closings have revealed larger-than-expected surpluses.

Eckstrom said he's concerned about an economic downturn.

"I think we're going to see some real stress this upcoming year," he said, adding the state's existing reserves may not cover a plunge in revenue, depending on the severity.

He applauded the \$50 million at the top of the supplemental list for repairing roads.

Title: **Airports, military museum among the losers of state's \$10M budget cut**
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"I think we're going to see some real stress this upcoming year," he said, adding the state's existing reserves may not cover a plunge in revenue, depending on the severity.

The state's general reserve fund has \$328 million, but Eckstrom notes revenues dropped by more than \$1 billion amid the Great Recession.

He applauded the \$50 million

at the top of the supplemental list for repairing roads. Other items at the top included \$37 million to reimburse the Department of Transportation for emergency repairs following last October's historic flooding.

Legislators need to focus more on such priorities, rather than funding "nice-to-have things," he said.

The list's varied spending includes money for school buses, college maintenance, parks, museums, a city bus, and restoring historical buildings.

Eckstrom pointed to the \$30 million allocated for replenishing sand along South Carolina's coast as an example of questionable spending.

While some said it's essential for tourism, "some say it's folly to fight Mother Nature," Eckstrom said. "I think it's probably more important to take care of the roads."

Legislators will resume their debate next year over how to fund tens of billions of dollars' worth of existing highway needs.