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Subject: Weekly Legislative Update from Rep. Tom Young – Feb. 21, 2012 to Feb. 27, 2012

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## **Weekly Legislative Update from Rep. Tom Young – Feb. 21, 2012 to Feb. 27, 2012**

The House of Representatives is back in session for 2012. I hope that you find this update helpful and informative.

### **Last Week's Legislative Session**

**State General Funds Budget:** Last week, the House Ways & Means Committee approved a \$5.9 Billion budget for the General Funds budget. The House budget writers' proposal will be presented to the full House for debate and consideration beginning March 12. Education (both K-12 and higher education) and Medicaid/Social Services/DHEC/Mental Health together make up about 75% of the General Funds budget. The budget proposal includes the following:

- Increases the 'Base Student Cost' sent to K-12 public schools by \$152 Million to \$2,012 per child;
- Restores \$18 Million in funding to the Department of Mental Health;
- Appropriates \$24 Million to help train workers through the readySC program at the technical colleges;
- Provides \$47 Million worth of tax relief to businesses across the State by contributing funds to repay the federal government loan for unemployment benefits. Doing so will lower the average unemployment tax per employee from \$363.75 to \$325.21.
- Increases funding for Department of Commerce Closing Fund by \$10 Million.
- Provides \$21 Million in new funds to the State's two primary law enforcement departments (SLED and Department of Public Safety).
- Provides a 2% state employee pay raise and an additional 3% raise for class one officers including Highway Patrolmen and DNR officers.

**Charleston Port Funding:** As part of the budget proposal, the Ways and Means Committee approved \$180 million to pay for the state's 60 percent portion of the

\$300 million Charleston Harbor dredging project. The money would go into the South Carolina State Ports Authority Harbor Deepening Reserve Fund which the Ways and Means Committee also established last week. This is very important to the state's efforts to make the port of Charleston the number one port on the east coast. Thousands of jobs in our state depend upon the Charleston port.

**Video Gambling:** The House Constitutional Laws Subcommittee passed a bill aimed at closing a loophole which some have argued allows a new form of video poker to be legal in South Carolina. The "sweepstakes" video games will be illegal under the proposal. I voted in favor of the ban.

**School Choice Bill:** After several months of work, a compromise proposal has been reached on school choice in the House. The bill, which a House Ways and Means subcommittee will take up next week, provides a limited number of privately funded scholarships to children living in poverty and children with special needs, as well as offering small tax deductions (not tax credits) for parents paying across district public school, independent, or home school expenses out of pocket. To see a summary of the legislation, go [here](#).

### **This Week's Legislative Session**

**Action Item – High School Dropout Bill:** The Senate Education Committee will consider this bill (H.3164) this Wednesday, February 29 at 10 am. The bill prohibits possession of a driver's license until age 18 unless the young person is enrolled in, or has completed, high school. The bill contains a hardship provision for some limited exceptions including (1) where the young person has to go to work to support himself or his immediate family or (2) where he or she joins the military at age 17. Numerous reports show that high school dropouts in general increase the costs to taxpayers in areas such as crime, teenage pregnancy, infant mortality, health problems, juvenile delinquency, and single parent families living in poverty. Georgia and North Carolina have similar laws. Please email Senate Education Committee Chairman [John Courson](#) or call (803) 212-6250 to express your support. All 3 Senators who represent parts of Aiken County are on this Committee. Please contact them too as follows: Sen. [Greg Ryberg](#); Sen. [Shane Massey](#); and Sen. [Nikki Setzler](#).

**DOT Reform Bill on House Floor:** The full House should debate a bill this week which overhauls the governing authority of the State Department of Transportation (DOT) and require that the DOT prioritize road projects in each of the state's 7 engineering districts as part of the Department's annual budget request.

**Drug Test Results and Unemployment Benefits on House Floor:** The full House is also expected to consider a bill this week which states that if a person receiving unemployment benefits applies for a job and (1) takes a drug test required by the prospective employer and fails it OR (2) refuses to take a drug test as required by the prospective employer, then the person can no longer receive unemployment benefits from the Department of Employment & Workforce. State law already disqualifies workers fired for illegal drug use from collecting unemployment benefits.

**Freedom of Information Act Bill on House Floor:** Rep. Bill Taylor's bill to improve the SC Freedom of Information Act related to requests for information from government entities received approval of the House Judiciary Committee last week. The bill will be on the full House calendar this week.

### Other Topics of Interest

**Reading Report:** Being able to read at grade level is critical to academic achievement in school. Last week, the state's Education Oversight Committee released its latest report documenting the reading performance of the state and school districts. To see the report, go [here](#).

**My Aiken High Week starts today:** The Aiken High School PTO is sponsoring a week long fundraiser this week with a series of events including Aiken High night at the Wing Place tonight and A Taste of Italy catered by the award-winning Aiken High culinary arts program on Wednesday night of this week. To learn more about A Taste of Italy, go [here](#).

**Aiken Prep Students Visit:** The 3rd and 8th grade students from Aiken Prep School visited the State House on Wednesday.

**SCDOT Weekly Update:** The Department of Transportation started a weekly update in August to inform the public about what is going on at the agency as to its financial situation and other matters. To see the latest, go [here](#).

### Constituent Information

**Speaking with Groups Around the District:** Several local groups have invited me to attend one of their meetings to provide a legislative update. If you have a group that would like for me to come to a meeting, please let me know.

**Help for Displaced SRS Workers:** If you or someone you know lost a job at SRS, there is a One-Stop Transition Center open in downtown Aiken at Park Avenue and Laurens Street to assist workers displaced at SRS with finding new work. The Center is open from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday. For more information, [visit](#).

**Report Waste, Fraud and Abuse in State Government:** To report waste, fraud and abuse in state government, you can call: 1-855-SC-FRAUD.

**Facebook:** I have a Facebook page for [Representative Tom Young](#). Please [like](#) the page to receive updates during the week from me on Facebook.

**Tom Young's Website:** My website can be reached at [www.reptomyoung.com](http://www.reptomyoung.com). There are links to a variety of constituent services; the status of sponsored bills; and roll call votes. Please add my web site as a bookmark on your computer.

**State House Tours:** Tours are available for the S.C. State House by calling (803) 734-2430. If you set a tour between January and June and it is on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, please let me know so I can do my best to see you.

**Email Updates:** If you know of people in or around District 81 who do not receive my updates but they would like to get them, please email their names and email addresses to me.

**Road Issues:** If you see a road problem, call the SCDOT at 641-7665 or Aiken County at 642-1532 to report the problem. If you do not get a prompt response, please let me know at [TomYoung@schouse.gov](mailto:TomYoung@schouse.gov) or call me. Generally, most paved roads in the County are maintained by SCDOT and are identified on the road sign poles by a small black and white sign listing the road number, such as S-2-1669. Most unpaved roads in the County are maintained by the County.

Thank you for the opportunity and the honor to represent you. Please let me know if I can help you in any way or if you have questions about these or other issues. Your feedback is meaningful and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Tom Young  
649-0000 (o)  
215-3631 (cell)

P.S. Please visit [www.reptomyoung.com](http://www.reptomyoung.com) for more posts, news, video updates, and, if you have Twitter, please [click here](#) to start following me!

This message was sent to katherineveldran@gov.sc.gov from:

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