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**Subject:** A Rockin' Week in the House

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## A Rockin' Week in the House

Dear Friends:

For the first month of a new two-year session most work is done in committees preparing legislation to move to the House floor. Topping the list this week was a House Judiciary subcommittee opening debate on two bills that will block the implementation of 'ObamaCare' in our state.

**Nullify 'ObamaCare':** Hundreds of South Carolinians were on hand for a Committee hearing exploring ways to NULLIFY 'ObamaCare' and resist its implementation in SC. Two bills were being reviewed. Republican Rep. Tommy Pope of York County laid out the GOP position concisely when he said: "The House Republican Caucus will oppose 'ObamaCare' in any way we can. We're trying to figure out the Constitutional way to do so." The three hours of testimony presented excellent, thought-provoking discussion of Constitutional rights. Time ran out and no decisions were made; there will be another hearing with more testimony.

**FOIA Bill Advances:** After three hearings, a House Judiciary sub-committee approved my bill aimed at strengthening the state's open records laws. This was a significant hurdle. ([Aiken Standard Story](#)) [H. 3163](#) seeks to bring greater transparency to all levels of government in SC. It curbs excessive fees charged those seeking records and ensure those requests are filled in a timely manner. We fine-tuned and improved the legislation after listening to citizens and officials at the previous hearings. ([Editorial from Charleston's Post & Courier](#))

**Do Our Work in Less Time! You could be the Judge.** The House of Representatives gave strong, bi-partisan approval to shortening the legislative session by nearly two months. The 91-9 vote on the

constitutional amendment sends the bill to the Senate. If approved by a two-thirds vote in the Senate, it would go to voters for approval, November 2014. For 20 years efforts have been made to shorten the legislative session.

**Ethics Reform Taking Shape:** The House GOP Caucus Ethics Reform Study Committee reported its findings after months of meetings. Here are the highlights:

- Amend the State Constitution to create an independent commission from both the legislative and executive branches of government to investigate all complaints against public officials.
- Establish a Public Integrity Unit comprised of Attorney General, Chief of SLED, Director of the Department of Revenue, the Executive Director of the Ethics Commission, and the State Inspector General. This unit will report facts for the commission to adjudicate in the same way SLED will investigate for the state solicitors.
- With approval of Constitutional amendments, the House and Senate ethics committees would be abolished ending the practice of legislative "self-policing."

The committee further recommended these improvements to the Ethics Reform Act:

- Require the disclosure of private income sources by all public officials.
- Abolish "Leadership PACs".
- Enhance both the level and number of penalties for violations of the Ethics Act.
- Expand the definition of "lobbyist" to include parties who appear before counties and municipalities.
- Require lobbyists to disclose all income received from lobbyist principals.
- Define "economic interest" to include not only economic benefit but also the avoidance of loss.
- Add numerous new requirements and restrictions focusing on public officials' financial relationships with state and local governments as well as companies with lobbying interests.

Additionally, I was most gratified the Ethics Committee endorsed the changes to the Freedom of Information Act, and they specifically endorsed the legislation I'm pressing forward on ([H. 3163](#)). The General Assembly will be debating ethics reform over the next few months. This is an important issue since our ethics laws have not been substantively changed since the creation of the Internet.

**HOT Topic-Homeschooling:** A bill was introduced this week that has enraged homeschool parents across the state. [H.3478](#) would reclassify homeschool students setting new requirements. I've heard from hundreds of parents in the past few days who say there is no justification for these changes. I support homeschoolers and *oppose* this legislation.

**Distracted Driving Bill Hits the Ditch:** Just as the House was prepared to debate a bill that would make texting while driving illegal, it was snagged from us and sent back to a committee instead of getting a vote by the full House. The bill had worked its way through the Education & Public Works Committee, but legislative-lawyers moved to send the bill to the Judiciary Committee where the penalties could be evaluated. It's still a work in progress.

**Moped Law Adjusted:** Mopeds in SC are often referred to as 'liquor-cycles' because a long-ago law didn't classify them as motor vehicles. That made moped riders not subject to DUI laws. On a vote of 98-3, the House passed [H.3191](#) reclassifying mopeds as motor vehicles. The bill goes to the Senate.

**High School League Under Pressure to Reform:** For 100 years, the SC High School League has been overseeing public school athletic competition. Many criticize the League for being dictatorial, resistant to change and failing to look at the totality of individual situations in making rulings on athletic eligibility. In my view, that behavior was on display by League representatives in a House committee hearing where we considered a bill to move the League's responsibilities to the State Department of Education. The bill ([H.3229](#)) was approved and sent to full committee. The Senate is considering similar legislation.

**Outlawing Bear-Baying:** Legislation was introduced to outlaw bear-baying, a training practice for

hunting dogs who learn to charge a de-clawed, de-fanged bear while howling (or baying). The goal is to get the agitated bear to stand up on its hind legs, keeping it "at bay" and making it easier for hunters to shoot it. SC is the only state that allows the practice. [H.3490](#) would outlaw bear-baying.

**Funding MOX:** The Aiken Legislative Delegation sent a letter to President Obama urging him to financially back the MOX project at the Savannah River Site. A similar letter was sent by the S.C. Congressional delegation.

**Home Rule for Elections:** The Aiken County House Members sponsored a bill to turn over the County Election Office to county government. It won unanimous approval in the House. We believe it's another step in favor of 'Home Rule' and better management of our elections. The Senate must still approve the bill. Following long lines and other difficulties during the November voting, we asked the State Election Commission to come to Aiken and review our election operations. Aiken County Election Commissioners appeared before the Delegation meeting this week and offered a series of remedies. ([Aiken Standard Story](#))

**USC Day:** Wednesday was the annual USC Day at the State House and Rep. Don Wells and I received a visit from USCA students, Chancellor Jordan and administrators. We treated them to a civics lesson and they 'lobbied' us for parody funding for USCA so it receives the same level of state funding as other campuses. Welcome USCA!

USCA at the State House

**New Conservative Think Tank:** Former Sen. Jim DeMint announced that he is launching a conservative think tank in SC. [The Palmetto Policy Forum](#) will conduct research and present Conservative ideas to state government. The goal is to provide new ideas and solid thinking, working closely with Legislators, in developing plans to make SC the best it can be.

**GOOD NEWS** - State Representatives are on furlough the week of February 11 - saving taxpayers \$50,000! I'll be in Aiken working among constituents for the week and back in session February 19.

As always, it is my pleasure to be of service to YOU. Thank you for allowing me to do so

In your Service,

***Bill Taylor***

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**Photo of the Week**

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We welcomed the 'Women On The Move' group of the Cedar Creek Ladies Club to the State House. Sen. Tom Young and I gave them and their husbands an inside view of the House floor just before session started.

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