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This one is LOADED!
Common Core, Texting Ban, Gambling OK, Solar Power, Hemp and Much More

Dear Friends:

I wrote Friday summarizing the Ethics Reform Act that unanimously passed the House last week. That single-issue newsletter provided the opportunity to detail that important legislation.

This morning we are back in session at the Statehouse. With six days left in the 120th session, we have much on the legislative calendar. Last week we moved forward on a number of bills. Here's your top-line briefing on those accomplishments.

School Tax Referendum : Legislation allowing the Aiken County School District to ask county voters to approve a one-cent sales tax increase for school construction won House approval. The amended legislation was sent back to the Senate for approval. This would allow voters in Aiken County to vote on the proposed tax.

Common Core Sidelined : The House gave final approval to a bill requiring SC to reconsider the national Common Core State Standards for student assessments. The bill was sent to Gov. Haley to be signed into law. The bill calls for new academic standards to be put in place by the 2015-16 school year. South Carolina is not the first state to withdraw from Common Core. Indiana repealed the standards in March and other states are in the process of dropping Common Core.

Texting/Driving Ban : The legislative tug-of-war over creating a worthwhile ban on texting while driving (TWD) continued. The House voted to toss out language in a Senate bill that would have banned only new teenage drivers from using a cell phone while driving. The Amended version calls for a statewide ban on ALL drivers from texting while behind the wheel. It is my hope a compromise can be struck which institutes the House's statewide ban coupled with the increased fines found in the Senate version.

A Result of Texting and Driving

Solar Legislation Wins Approval : The legislature has taken an historic step to change the state's longtime resistance to solar power. The House voted unanimously in favor of a solar energy bill that is forecast to make sun-generated electricity more abundant in the Palmetto State. The compromise bill has support from South Carolina's influential utilities and conservation groups.

Beach Erosion : The House approved a new experimental technology that could fight beach erosion

along the coast. The legislation will allow reusable plastic walls known as "wave dissipation systems" to be tested in the Lowcountry.

Deal!: The House approved legislation making certain social card and dice games are legal. This bill would allow members of a club or other social organization to gather for play games of cards, dice or tiles, where the games are played among members in a private residence, home, or community clubhouse. The legislation prohibits betting, wagering, or gambling of any kind.

Brew Battle: The House passed a bill loosening restrictions on small breweries and brew pubs in SC. Current state law does not allow a restaurant that brews its own beer to distribute that beer to retail stores. A conference committee is trying to work out differences in the two versions of the bill.

Legalizing Hemp: A bill that would let SC farmers grow and sell industrial hemp passed the House 72-28 and was sent to the Governor for her signature. Until recently, hemp was banned at the federal level. The plant is from the same species as marijuana. Hemp is useful in making clothing material, paper, rope and other consumer products.

Epilepsy Research: The House concurred in Senate amendments to "Julian's Law" authorizing SC's academic medical centers to conduct clinical trials to investigate the value of cannabidiol as a treatment for patients suffering from severe forms of epilepsy that are not adequately treated by traditional medical therapies.

Constitutional Amendment : It's going to be up to voters to decide whether to stop electing the state's adjutant general. The Senate gave unanimous approval to a bill that would allow voters to change the state constitution to allow the governor to appoint the adjutant general with approval by the Senate. The House passed the bill earlier. SC is the only state to elect the leader of its state National Guard.

Protecting Military Honor: Gov. Haley signed into law legislation making it a crime for someone to falsely claim military service for purposes of personal profit. The law makes it a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a fine.

Ridding Eyesores : The House approved legislation establishing an expedited mortgage foreclosure process for abandoned property. It heads to the Governor's desk for approval.

State Budget Being Finalized: A chief task of the General Assembly is to create the annual state budget. The House to creates the budget and the Senate revises it. Differences in the versions are worked out in conference committee. This year there are very little differences in the two versions. The general fund budget totals \$7 billion. Last week, the Board of Economic Advisors officially added almost \$86 million in revenue for the state budget that takes effect July 1, a move that could mean local governments will get additional money from the state.

Around House District 86

Honoring Veterans: It was an honor to participate in the Memorial Day activities in Aiken to honor those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of their country. Saturday's downtown parade was basked in sunshine and patriotism. Monday's Memorial Day ceremony was exceptionally poignant with speakers focusing on the current VA Hospital scandal. In my remarks, I called the VA issue "shameful". Keynote speaker Col. Gus Fitch delivered a blistering indictment against the Obama administration and the entire federal government for failing veterans.

Broadband, Phone, TV Options Expand in Wagener, Salley, Perry: It is very good news that Atlantic Broadband will expand its services into Wagener and surrounding communities including Salley, Perry and Springfield this summer. This means residents and businesses will have the option of connecting to Atlantic Broadband's cable TV, phone and Internet services.

The Wagener-Perry-Salley area has long been under served by cable and broadband services. In today's fast moving economy expanded broadband services are essential to residents and businesses for the opportunity to prosper. I am delighted to see a company with local roots deliver Wagener and surrounding communities with fast Internet, phone and TV services.

Thank you for the privilege of serving you in House District 86. If I can be of assistance to you, or if you have ideas on issues you want me to share with the rest of the General Assembly, please don't hesitate to contact me.

In your Service,

Bill Taylor

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Photo of the Week

State House to School House Continues

Last week I took my 'State House to the School House' tour to East Aiken Elementary where I answered questions from the third graders. It was a lively and fun Q&A session! This is my fourth year of sharing with third graders throughout the district.

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