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Coal ash meeting planned Thursday

By Greg Oliver
Courtesy The Journal
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LIBERTY — Residents upset over the possibility of coal ash being dumped in Pickens County will have an opportunity to let their voices be heard Thursday evening.

A forum titled "No Coal Ash" will take place from 6-8 p.m. in the Liberty Civic Auditorium, located at the site of the

old Liberty High School at 310 W. Main St.

Local businesswoman Pree Hamilton said nearly 3,000 signatures in opposition have already been turned in to Pickens County Council, and another petition will also be on hand that evening to sign.

"We're trying to bring more awareness to the issue," Hamilton told The Journal this week.

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Ash

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"I want the public to show up so we can show how united we are."

Elected officials invited to attend and address the audience include South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, U.S. Rep. Lindsey Graham, State Sen. Larry Martin and State Rep. Davey Hiott, as well as state Department of Health and Environmental Control director Catherine Heigel.

Hamilton said she is trying to get in touch with municipalities throughout Pickens County to see if they can set signs out in their communities opposing coal ash.

Late last year, the Pickens County Legislative Delegation sent a letter to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control expressing opposition to the application of a variance made in connection with an existing permit for a construction and debris landfill near Liberty. If approved, the variance would allow the permit holder to dispose of coal ash in the landfill.

The letter requested that DHEC deny the request, stating that Pickens County Council entered into an agreement with an out-of-state company to create a construction and debris landfill at the site in 2007.

But the letter also said county council "never contemplated that this company would attempt to convert the landfill for the disposal of coal ash as this toxic waste material is not produced in the county and is not a typical C and D material."

The delegation added that the site is "much too close" to the city of Liberty and the Pickens County Industrial Park.

"We oppose Pickens County becoming a dumping ground for this out-of-state company," it read.

Martin and Hiott have each introduced bills in their respective chambers in response to the issue. Senate Bill 1061, introduced last Thursday, would require any utility that disposes of coal ash in a South Carolina landfill to use a Class 3 landfill.

"It's my understanding that South Carolina utilities are using Class 3 landfills, and there's no reason why this out-of-state company can't use a Class 3 landfill as well," Martin said. "The legislation has one purpose — to keep the disposal of

coal ash out of Pickens County, but also to keep it out of other communities."

In his legislation, Martin included a five-year "sunset" provision that would require the Senate to go back and revisit when that time arrives.

"There's a lot of technology when it comes to coal ash and recycling," Martin said. "It might be easier to get through by having a sunset provision where it could be revisited."

Martin said the bill would go to the Senate Judiciary Committee, which he chairs, this week, and he hopes it will reach the Senate floor in about three weeks. While he feels the bill, if ultimately passed, will definitely keep coal ash out of Pickens and other counties throughout the state, the Senator said Pickens County Council also has some legal options it can explore.

Hiott characterized his bill as an effort to slow down the process, though he isn't sure it will completely stop it.

"It's the county's problem, but it's obviously our problem, too, as members of the delegation," Hiott said. "We're trying to make sure we do it the right way and do what's best for the citizens of Pickens County and continue making the county the

beautiful place it is."

One thing is for sure — Martin said that as diverse as Pickens County is politically, the coal ash issue has united the county unlike anything he has ever seen before.

"No one wants coal ash in Pickens County, and we all need to do our respective part to keep it out," Martin said. "But this is a good object lesson for other counties across the state in that while it may be economically advantageous to farm it (construction and debris disposal) out, you lose control over it. Once you make a contractual arrangement with someone like that, you start to lose control."

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Local Festival reaches 5th year with new direction

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Special Report

The 5th Annual South Carolina Heritage and Humanities Festival, set for Saturday, February 20 at 11 a.m. at the Eutawville Community Center is predicted to reach a new high attendance this year and only the first 200 attendees will have seats inside the facility.

"This year, additional seats will be placed outside for the overflow to enjoy the festival," said Byron Brown, founder and coordinator. "The Festival has grown in scope and capacity. I would hate to move the festival outside of Eutawville. It seems imminent, however, for future years."

The theme for this year's Festival is "Stand Up and Be Counted: A Call to Serve Humanity!" The keynote speaker will be Virginia Delegate Michael T. Futrell.

The Master of Ceremonies will be Miss South Carolina Pageant Judge and Actor, Mr. B. J. Sumpter.

Festival Event Activities: **The Charleston Church** **Massacre Candlelight** **Memorial**

In memory of the nine church members who were shot to death on June 17, 2015 at the hands of a coward whose intention was to increase the racial divides in South Carolina but failed at it when the Honorable Nikki Haley ordered that the Confederate Flag be lowered from the State House. Rev. Larry Simmons, Pastor of Laurel Hills Missionary Baptist Church of Fayetteville, North Carolina will conduct the candlelight service.

A Little History about a Little **Town: Eutawville**

Mr. Herbert Sellers will share historical facts and his memories of Eutawville when he was a little boy growing up in the rural area. Mrs. Mary Ellis Jenkins will give a brief talk about the history of South Carolina.

Smiling Faces, **Beautiful Places**

Mr. Arthur McClendon, a history teacher from Colleton

County School District will narrate describing South Carolina's 46 Counties from a variety of perspectives.

Cultural Musical **Performances**

Dr. Morris Ravenell, Superintendent of Dorchester County Public Schools District Four, will conduct a musical performance playing his guitar with spirit and tenacity to electrify a crowd. JJ Dae, a rising music star from Greenville, S.C. will be explosive in his musical message to the audience. When different becomes hard to come by in the music industry every artist must define what sets themselves apart from the norm. Whether lyrical genius or a vocal Sinatra, JJ Dae embodies the evolution of music from Southern soul to new age alternative with hints of urban grit.

Gospel Singing and Spirituals

Great singing will be sung by Eutawville's gifted Mrs. Alice Blanchard, St. George's Mrs. Viola Felder, St. Matthew's Mr. John Govan, Cross's Mr. Allen D. Taste, Jr., and Holly Hill's Glenn Reben and Family. The Town of Eutawville's Mayor, Mr. Jefferson Johnson will offer a gospel spiritual as he sings to the citizens.

Youth Oratorical Contest
Elementary, middle and high school students from across the state of South Carolina will be competing for the top prize in the Byron S. Brown Oratorical Contest. For the first time ever, the festival will be offering monetary rewards for the winners. First place winner will receive \$75, second place winner will receive \$50 and third place winner will receive \$25. Judges will be combination of a business professional from Columbia, a superintendent, a principal and two educators from Dorchester 4, Orangeburg 3, Orangeburg 5 and Lexington 2 County Public Schools. Students will tackle the question: "What Does it Mean to Serve Humanity?"

Poetry, Dancing and **Dramatic Monologues**

Mrs. Vernell Jenkins and

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Ms. Anita Gethers will excite the crowd by reading inspiring poems. Seven year old Daniel Brown and six year old sister, Hannah Brown will perform a dance. Dr. Becky Kennedy of Bowman, and Ms. Reva Footman of Cross, S.C. will each do a dramatic monologue.

Serving Humanity Educational Seminars:

Serving Humanity in Hospice Care—Rev. Ken Hay, Orangeburg, SC

Serving Humanity with Financial Services—Mr. Leroy Reginald Brown, Clinton, Maryland

Serving Humanity in the United States Navy—Petty Officer Brake, Orangeburg, SC

Serving Humanity in the Peace Corp—Mr. Marvin Goodly, Columbia, SC

Serving Humanity in Life

Insurance—Mrs. Rita Spann, Charleston, SC

Serving Humanity in Law Enforcement Restoring Trust and Respect—Sheriff Leroy Ravenell, Santee, SC

Fun, Vendors, Navy Recruitment and Refreshment

The audience will have lots of fun receiving door prizes and gifts. Vendors will be on site. Members of The United States Navy Recruitment Office will be present to speak to students, parents and interested individuals about enrolling eligible citizens in the U.S. Navy. Refreshment will be available.

The Festival will begin with prayer by Evangelist Janie Graham of Eutawville, scriptures by Pastor Jimmy

Bradley of Holly Hill and will close out with prayer and benediction by Pastor Samuel Middleton of Goose Creek, S.C.

“The 5th Annual South Carolina Heritage and Humanities Festival promises to be a great delight and a better and more informed one than the previous four successful Festivals,” says Brown. “Due to the fire marshal’s regulations, I’m nervous about the crowd and am praying for favorable weather so that the overflow of people will have comfortable listening and viewing of the event from outside.”

“In serving humanity, it is my hope that when the day is over, everyone in attendance will walk away ignited and inspired to live a better life,” expressed Brown.

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DHEC director concerned about lack of TB funding

BY JIM HILLEY

jim@theitem.com

While many South Carolinians worry about the Zika virus, it may be an outbreak of tuberculosis that is of more concern to epidemiologists in the Palmetto State.

When South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Director Catherine Heigel testified about her agency budget before a House subcommittee on Jan. 27, she told the subcommittee that shortchanging some DHEC requests could end up being much more expensive than the original budget request.

She said that although she supports Gov. Nikki Haley's executive budget request, funding for TB control would likely be among the items the department would have to cut under Haley's proposal.

Any repeat of the 2013 outbreak in Greenwood County, when more than 100 people, including 53 students and 21 faculty members at the Ninety Six Primary School tested positive for TB, may be difficult to contain without proper funding, she warned.

Heigel said in 2013, health officials were able to tap into unused funds from inoculation programs.

"Greenwood beefed up monitoring in line with what the Centers for Disease Control recommends," she said.

While DHEC sought no additional funding in 2013, tapping the inoculation programs is not an option today.

"The costs of vaccines have gone up," she said. "That is not a sustainable model."

She told the subcommittee that in 2015 there were 593 TB patients in the state, 489 latent infections and more than 1,200 people who had potential contact with the disease.

"If you fund immunizations and not TB, that is a clear directive not to put money in the TB (control) program," she said.

Heigel said being able to closely monitor how TB patients follow their treatment protocol is crucial but difficult with many of them being transient and hard to track.

The antibiotic treatment for TB costs about \$17,000 per patient, she said, but if the patient does not take the antibiotic correctly and the infection develops immunity to the vaccine, the alternative treatment costs an additional \$130,000 per patient.

"We could really be in a mess if there is another TB outbreak," she said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, tuberculosis is a disease caused by germs that are spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the

lungs, but it can also affect other organs such as the brain, the kidneys or the spine. The disease can be fatal if not treated.

Symptoms include feeling sick or weak, weight loss, fever

and night sweats. Coughing, chest pain and the coughing up of blood are signs of the infection in the lungs. Symptoms of TB disease in other parts of the body depend on the area affected, the CDC said.





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JIM HILLEY / THE SUMTER ITEM

Department of Health and Environmental Control Director Catherine Heigel testifies to a House Ways and Means subcommittee Jan. 27.

Kasich works to assure S.C. of conservative record

NORTH MYRTLE BEACH (AP) — An energized John Kasich heads into South Carolina's Republican presidential primary hoping to build on a strong showing in New Hampshire, but he's refusing to tailor or shift his message to fit the state's more conservative electorate.

"People told me: 'They're really conservative down there,'" Kasich joked to a crowd Wednesday in Mount Pleasant, his first campaign stop in the state since a debate in mid-January. "And I'm like, 'wait a minute, people are people — we all have the same concerns.'"

Kasich is making a three-day swing through the state with stops along the coast and in several population centers, making sure to hit the state's more moderate corners along the way.

In town hall meetings packed to the brim with supporters or curious voters, Kasich is making the case for a brand of conservatism that leaves no one behind. And he's defending himself as attacks against his conservative credentials start flying, chiefly on his decision to expand

Medicaid in Ohio despite resistance from his GOP-led Legislature.

Gov. Kasich is a good guy, and he's been a good governor, Jeb Bush said at a campaign stop Thursday in Co-

lumbia. "But my record as a conservative reformer far exceeds his, and that's not attacking, that's not negative, that's what you call comparing and contrasting."

Bush said Florida taxpayers "are appreciative" of the decision not to undertake expansion efforts, while Kasich "led the charge in Ohio to expand Medicaid. ... He can defend

that all he wants, but that's the difference."

It's an accusation Kasich may hear again as the Republican campaign shifts to the South for the next month. From the Carolinas west to Oklahoma and Texas, none of the GOP-run states has embraced Medicaid expansion, and several of Kasich's Southern counterpart governors have been openly hostile to President Obama's health care law, calling it a federal overreach — and worse.

But Kasich isn't backing down, arguing his decision has helped people suffering from mental illnesses or drug addiction and is a good deal for the state in the long run. As of December, roughly 650,000 Ohioans had enrolled under the expansion, and according to the

state, Ohio's total Medicaid spending was nearly \$2 billion below estimates for the fiscal year that ended in June — despite more newly eligible enrollees than projected.

His defense of Medicaid ex-

pansion dovetails with a key theme of his campaign: the idea that helping society's most vulnerable is a central piece of what it means to be conservative.

"It makes total sense to have a package that can make sure everybody has a chance to rise, and I think the public loves it," Kasich told reporters Wednesday. "Somebody wants to hit me on it or hammer me on it, God bless them — I'm not going to back off this."

Still, that may be tough to sell in South Carolina and beyond. The governor here, Nikki

Haley, won easy re-election in 2014 on her staunch rejection of Medicaid expansion and refusal to run a state-based exchange to sell private insurance policies, the other pillar of Obama's health care law.

"It's safe to say a majority of South Carolina Republicans are opposed to Medicaid expansion," explained state Rep. Murrell Smith, R-Sumter, whose legislative committee handles health care policy. "It can be viewed as expanding government, which to put it mildly is just not very popular in South Carolina."

There's also the matter of the "Obamacare" law's name-sake. Haley, who often called the law "wrongheaded" and "unconstitutional," mentioned the president often in her blistering critiques.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Republican presidential candidate Ohio Gov. John Kasich speaks during a campaign stop Thursday in Pawleys Island.

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Coastal Carolina

Terri DeCenzo of Pawleys Island, executive director of Women in Philanthropy and Leadership for Coastal Carolina University, was awarded the Order of the Silver Crescent by Gov. Nikki Haley last week. The award honors leadership, volunteerism and lifelong influence within a region or community. It was presented during the annual Women's Leadership Conference.

Under DeCenzo's leadership, WIPL has awarded more than \$172,500 in scholarships to 122 deserving Coastal students.

DeCenzo, the wife of the university president David A. DeCenzo, serves on the board of South Carolina Catholic Charities and has served on the boards of the Red Cross and the Georgetown Hospital System foundation. She was an adviser to the Safe Families Initiative that established the Family Justice Center in Georgetown County.



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**Trump, Rubio
plan Pawleys
campaign stops**

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Donald Trump and Marco Rubio will campaign in Pawleys Island this week on the eve of the GOP presidential primary. It's a sign that the state's primary has gained significance in an election year that has upended expectations, the local Republican Party chairman says.

"The gap between first and second is important to whoever comes in second," said Randy Hollister, the party chairman. "The margin makes a big difference to Trump" who is leading in the polls.

Both candidates will make stops on Friday. Rubio will be in the gym at Lowcountry Prep at 11:30 a.m. Trump will be at Pawleys Plantation at 3 p.m.

Hollister said last week that the Trump campaign hoped to make a stop in the area, but was concerned that the candidate's 757 was too large for the Georgetown County airport.

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Registration for both visits can be made online at georgetown.gop.

"It's a crazy experience," said Hollister, who has not backed a candidate in order to help draw as many of the hopefuls as possible to Georgetown County.

The county has a long tradition of attracting Republican presidential candidates, said Alan Walters, a former county chairman who is leading the local Rubio campaign. "I got Bush and McCain in 2000 when I was chairman," he said.

Walters said he lobbied hard to get Rubio to make a stop. "They're trying to hit the big population centers," he said. "We kept pushing and prodding."

It's possible Rubio will be accompanied by Gov. Nikki Haley, who endorsed the senator from Florida on Wednesday. That's a significant boost for the campaign, Walters said.

"We've had five of the six finalists. That's pretty darn good for Georgetown County," Hollister said.

The only candidate he hasn't heard from is Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas. He's more focused on the evangelical voters in the Upstate, Hollister said.

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Club tracks state polls in picking Trump

Although interest is high, party members weary of bickering in debates

BY JASON LESLEY
COASTAL OBSERVER

Waccamaw Neck Republicans agree with polls that show Donald Trump as the favorite to win South Carolina's Republican presidential primary Saturday.

Those attending the Waccamaw Neck Republican Club Monday gave Trump 33 percent of their votes in a straw poll and first place over Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida (28 percent) and Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas (19 percent).

Trump's margin among local voters is actually lower than polls are showing in the state. A CBS News poll shows South Carolina voters favoring Trump by

22 points over Cruz, and a poll of South Carolina House Republicans shows him with a 19-point lead over Cruz and Rubio and a 20-point lead over Jeb Bush.

The good news for candidates chasing Trump is the number of Republicans still undecided. State Rep. Stephen Goldfinch told the Waccamaw Neck group that he hasn't settled on a candidate, but the most important factor for him is picking someone who can win in November. A number of other local Repub-

licans stressed the importance of coming together after the primary. Televised debates have become little more than name-calling contests and failed to deliver much in the way of substantive differences in the candidates, they said. "This doesn't work," Georgetown County Republican Party chairman Randy Hollister said. "Hopefully, our party will learn something, and next time around not do these. It's been nasty."

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Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Party members cast paper ballots in a straw poll at the Waccamaw Neck GOP Club this week.





GOP | Club's straw poll tracks state polls in picking Trump

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Hollister said candidates have detailed policy positions on their websites and get into them in more detail when they have campaign events that provide time to go beyond the sound bite. Alan Ray, 7th District chairman for the Cruz campaign, said the press is intentionally keeping that information from the public.

Dennis Space of Pawleys Plantation agreed the issues are being ignored. "Until candidates stop trashing one another, we're really not going to find out who's a leader and who has a cogent plan about how to move forward," he said. "It's a much more difficult problem than just waving a magic wand."

Nonetheless, the debates and personality clashes are generating record interest in Saturday's primary. Waccamaw Neck Republican Club president Jerry Rovner said voter turnout in Iowa and New Hampshire has been exceptional and he expects the trend to continue in South Carolina. The state GOP predicts over 700,000

votes to be cast, exceeding the total of 604,000 in the last presidential primary.

State Rep. Mike Ryhal of District 56 in Horry County told Waccamaw Neck Republicans he is backing Trump because the country needs "somebody who's not a politician." Ryhal said he felt like an outsider and unwelcome in the state House because he had been a businessman. "Trump is a business guy who's not very welcome," he said. "He brings skills to the table."

Ryhal said he dealt with the Environmental Protection Agency and labor unions in private busi-

ness. "To say people not inside politics don't know anything about politics, I disagree with that vehemently," he said. "We learn outside. We bring it inside."

He said his biggest fear is losing the right to be Christians and to serve God. "That's how we became a great country, and I want to see that maintained," he said.

Former County Council Member Bob Anderson said he was voting for Trump because he says he

can bring jobs back from Mexico, China and Japan. "Over my lifetime," Anderson said, "I've watched the demise of our economic power." He said if Trump can bring jobs back to America there will be a middle class again. "If we can bring that back," Anderson said, "and put all these people back to work, we're not going to need Medicaid, we're not going to need 60 percent of our dollars going to some entitlement programs."

Rubio supporter Paula Hero of Heritage Plantation said she finds Trump "offensive and irascible and, to be perfectly frank, narcissistic." She said Rubio is believable and has citizens' best interests at heart.

Alan Walters, chairman of Rubio's campaign in Georgetown County, said his decision was driven by what's best for his sons. "Sen. Rubio has the strongest plans for the future," he said. "That's what resonates with me. He believes in American exceptionalism and can build consensus to get things done."

Bill Reynolds, a volunteer with the Rubio campaign and retired U.S. Army veteran, said his No. 1 issue was national defense. He said he agrees with Rubio's vision for a

21st-century military and the role South Carolina would play in it. Reynolds also praised Rubio for his efforts to reform the Veterans Administration — he has a son who served two tours of duty in Afghanistan — and his stances on abortion and gun ownership.

Rubio's campaign got a boost on Wednesday when Gov. Nikki Haley announced her support at a Chapin rally. Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who has shared advice on education issues with the governor and helped her raise money for her re-election bid in 2014, also was considered a top contender to win Haley's endorsement. But he has lagged in recent S.C. polls, falling to fifth in the six-candidate GOP field. Rubio sits third. Haley's decision was a bit of a reversal in the past day. The governor told reporters Tuesday that she had not made up her mind on

who to back in the 2016 race.

Linda Caswell said she supports Cruz. "People say he's not electable," she said. "I don't think that's true because if enough people want someone really conservative who didn't go wishy-washy in the Senate, who will stand up for my religions rights, my gun rights he will win. It annoys me when people say he's not electable."

Teresa Bennani, a candidate for probate judge who attended the meeting along with her GOP primary opponent Leigh Powers Boan, said she favored former Ohio Gov. John Kasich. "I'm tired of my children's future being leveraged by people who can't live within their means," she said.

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Sophie Chmil, left, makes her case for Trump. Alan Walters, center right, tries to persuade Dick Faulk to back Rubio.



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The Herald (Rock Hill) on an equal-pay law

While Gov. Nikki Haley is predictably conservative on most issues, she sometimes is willing to go against the grain, such as when she recently helped lead the effort to bring down the Confederate battle flag that had flown on the grounds of the Statehouse. We suggest that she now consider leading the charge to pass equal-pay protections for women in South Carolina. Haley, who as a female politician has experienced gender discrimination in her public life, should be sympathetic to the plight of underpaid women in the state's workforce. And as the state's governor, she is uniquely positioned to make the case for South Carolina women.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which made it easier for women to challenge discriminatory pay in court, was the first bill President Barack Obama signed into law. As reported Friday, the seventh anniversary of the law, South Carolina ranks as one of only four states in the nation without an equal-pay law.

The others are Alabama, Mississippi and Utah, although Utah introduced equal-pay legislation this month.

Comparing the pay of men and women can be difficult, even when they have similar jobs. Nonetheless, the disparity is so wide in many cases that the only logical culprit is gender discrimination.

Women in South Carolina make 80 cents for every dollar that similarly employed men make, according to the National Partnership for Women and Families. That comes to a difference of \$8,272 per year.

For women of color, the gap is wider. African-American women make 57 cents for every dollar a white man makes in South Carolina, while Hispanic women make 48 cents.

Opponents of an equal-pay law in the state fear that it could have a negative impact on small businesses, although we can't understand how allowing small businesses to discriminate against female employees is a worthwhile benefit. Some opponents no doubt have an aversion to the equal-pay law simply because it is championed by the federal government — and specifically by Obama.

Another possible reason the law has not gained traction in the state is because the Legislature is so heavily dominated by men. South Carolina has only 22 women in the state House and only one in the Senate, or about 13.5 percent of all legislators, which is among the lowest in the nation.

In Colorado, by contrast, women occupy 42 percent of the seats in the state Legislature, the highest percentage in the nation.

Some South Carolina lawmakers have tried to push equal-pay legislation. Charleston Rep. Leon Stavrinakis, a Democrat, introduced a bill that would make it illegal for a state agency to "discriminate against an employee on the basis of gender" by paying a woman less than a man for the same work as long as they are equally qualified. But the bill has been stalled for more than a year.

Someone such as Haley might be able to break the logjam. She is a Republican and, with her final term as governor ending this year, has nothing to lose politically.

Ironically, despite the widespread opposition to equal-pay legislation in the Legislature, it is extremely popular with voters. A 2014 Winthrop University poll found that 3 out of 4 South Carolinians are in favor of such a law.

There is no feasible reason that the women of South Carolina shouldn't have the same legal protections regarding pay as those in 46 other states and the District of Columbia. If women are being paid less simply because of their gender, they need a legal recourse, and state lawmakers need to give them one.



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148 Senators given options for road funds

BY JEFFREY COLLINS
The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — As South Carolina senators prepare to debate how much extra money to give to the state's highways and bridges,

the leader of the roads agencies has been careful to give lawmakers plenty of options while not pushing them too hard in any direction.

Department of Transportation Secretary Christy Hall has given

senators a host of options, from spending just \$65 million extra per year to get the pavement on the interstates up to good condi-

tion while doing no bridge work or expansion to \$800 million in new money that would attack

congestion, widen more than 150 miles of major highways and get rid of old bridges.

One PowerPoint slide she likes to show lawmakers has nearly a dozen options on how she could spend whatever extra money

lawmakers can find.

The Senate started debate on a roads bill Thursday before adjourning for the weekend. Senate President Pro Tem Hugh

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Roads

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Leatherman told his colleagues they could spend most of the next week on it, too.

The proposal getting the most attention on the Senate floor would raise the gas tax by 12 cents per gallon over three years and increase or add a number of other fees. In five years, an estimated \$723 million extra would be put into roads, nearly reaching Hall's most expensive option.

But the idea only cuts income and other taxes by \$400 million over that period, and Gov. Nikki Haley and other conservative lawmakers want an even swap. Supporters of the amendment say they factored in that one-third of the gas tax is paid by out-of-state drivers who need no tax break, but some lawmakers don't think the basis behind that estimate has been proved.

Reforming the DOT's board and the State Infrastructure Bank, which helps borrow money for expensive projects, also will be discussed, with conservatives again fearing the proposal doesn't go far enough to give the governor more control of the agency.

If lawmakers give the DOT more money without reform, "we're going to see hundreds of millions of dollars going to rural areas where it is not needed," said Sen. Tom Davis, R-Beaufort.

For her part, Hall prom-

ises to use whatever money she gets wisely. But she also is carefully pointing out that the state's roads are reaching a crisis.

"The fear I have is that we have waited too long," Hall told lawmakers last week during hours of testimony.

She used what was supposed to be a repaving project on Interstate 85 to make her point. Tests showed the foundation of the road had crumbled from years of neglect, adding about \$10 million to what was supposed to be a \$48 million project. Hall said she fears a similar problem on an upcoming resurfacing of Interstate 26 between Newberry and Columbia.

Sen. Ray Cleary, a Republican and Murrells Inlet dentist who has been pushing for more money for roads for years, likened it to a patient who can floss or brush, wait and have a cavity filled, or wait even longer and need a crown or more extensive dental work.

"I can fix it for \$100, \$300 or \$3,000, depending on when you see me," Cleary said.

The one thing all lawmakers agree on is something must be done. With all the attention on interstates, Hall worried the primary roads that carry nearly half the state's traffic are falling apart quickly and about to reach a crisis. Only 20 percent of pavement on them is in good condition.

"It's been neglected and it's at a point where it's going to take complete reconstruction," Hall said.

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The Herald (Rock Hill) on an equal-pay law

While Gov. Nikki Haley is predictably conservative on most issues, she sometimes is willing to go against the grain, such as when she recently helped lead the effort to bring down the Confederate battle flag that had flown on the grounds of the Statehouse. We suggest that she now consider leading the charge to pass equal-pay protections for women in South Carolina. Haley, who as a female politician has experienced gender discrimination in her public life, should be sympathetic to the plight of underpaid women in the state's workforce. And as the state's governor, she is uniquely positioned to make the case for South Carolina women.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which made it easier for women to challenge discriminatory pay in court, was the first bill President Barack Obama signed into law. As reported Friday, the seventh anniversary of the law, South Carolina ranks as one of only four states in the nation without an equal-pay law.

The others are Alabama, Mississippi and Utah, although Utah introduced equal-pay legislation this month.

Comparing the pay of men and women can be difficult, even when they have similar jobs. Nonetheless, the disparity is so wide in many cases that the only logical culprit is gender discrimination.

Women in South Carolina make 80 cents for every dollar that similarly employed men make, according to the National Partnership for Women and Families. That comes to a difference of \$8,272 per year.

For women of color, the gap is wider. African-American women make 57 cents for every dollar a white man makes in South Carolina, while Hispanic women make 48 cents.

Opponents of an equal-pay law in the state fear that it could have a negative impact on small businesses, although we can't understand how allowing small businesses to discriminate against female employees is a worthwhile benefit. Some opponents no doubt have an aversion to the equal-pay law simply because it is championed by the federal government — and specifically by Obama.

Another possible reason the law has not gained traction in the state is because the Legislature is so heavily dominated by men. South Carolina has only 22 women in the state House and only one in the Senate, or about 13.5 percent of all legislators, which is among the lowest in the nation.

In Colorado, by contrast, women occupy 42 percent of the seats in the state Legislature, the highest percentage in the nation.

Some South Carolina lawmakers have tried to push equal-pay legislation. Charleston Rep. Leon Stavrinakis, a Democrat, introduced a bill that would make it illegal for a state agency to "discriminate against an employee on the basis of gender" by paying a woman less than a man for the same work as long as they are equally qualified. But the bill has been stalled for more than a year.

Someone such as Haley might be able to break the logjam. She is a Republican and, with her final term as governor ending this year, has nothing to lose politically.

Ironically, despite the widespread opposition to equal-pay legislation in the Legislature, it is extremely popular with voters. A 2014 Winthrop University poll found that 3 out of 4 South Carolinians are in favor of such a law.

There is no feasible reason that the women of South Carolina shouldn't have the same legal protections regarding pay as those in 46 other states and the District of Columbia. If women are being paid less simply because of their gender, they need a legal recourse, and state lawmakers need to give them one.