

Title: **Most in S.C. support raising gas tax, pollsays**
 Author: By JAMIESELF jself@thestate.com
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WINTHROP POLL

Most in S.C. support raising gas tax, poll says

Residents favor
10-cent-a-gallon
hike if all funds
go for road repairs

By JAMIE SELF
jself@thestate.com

More than half of South Carolinians say the state should raise its gas tax by 10 cents a gallon to pay for road repairs, according to a Winthrop Poll released Wednesday.

That is, if the money is used exclusively to pay for roads and bridges, and the state's gas prices remain lower than its neighbors'.

Fifty-five percent of 1,109

South Carolinians polled between Feb. 21 and March 1 said they would support raising the gas tax on those conditions. Forty-two percent said they opposed the hike.

The gas tax increase is part of a proposal that Gov. Nikki Haley supports and one that lawmakers are considering.

Haley said in January that she would support the gas-tax

increase if lawmakers also would agree to lower income tax rates by 2 percentage points over 10 years. Her plan would swap about \$3.5 billion in new money for roads for tax cuts totaling \$8.5 billion.

The poll results mark a shift from an October Winthrop poll, when 52 percent of South Carolinians said they opposed a gas-tax increase to pay for

roads. But in a later question in that same poll, public opinion shifted to approve an increase after those surveyed were told the state's gas prices would remain below neighboring states even with the tax increase.

In the poll released Wednesday, those surveyed were told the gas tax "would increase the

SEE TAX PAGE A7

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TAX

FROM PAGE A3

cost of gas in the state, but a gallon of gas in South Carolina would still be cheaper than a gallon of gas in North Carolina or Georgia. The money raised would be restricted to use for infrastructure, such as repairing roads and bridges."

Public opinion varies widely on the issue depending on the context of the question, said Winthrop Poll director Scott Huffman.

That is because the public knows very few details

about the state's gas tax and road-funding issues, he said.

Bill Ross, executive director of the S.C. Alliance to Fix Our Roads, said the poll results show public opinion on a gas-tax hike is "moving in the right direction."

"Most people don't support a tax increase" outright, said Ross, whose group says a gas-tax hike is needed to help pay to repair the state's roads. But told how South Carolina's gas tax would compare to other states, the public can support it, Ross added.

"People just don't under-

stand that other states have moved forward with their highway funding," Ross said. "It helps them relate to the issue."

But Dave Schwartz of Americans for Prosperity, a limited-government group that opposes raising the gas tax, said the poll question was based on "a big if" — whether lawmakers would keep their promise to spend the money on road repairs.

"There is no guarantee that, if you pass the gas tax hike, that the money will go to roads and bridges," Schwartz said. "How

would you feel about your gas-tax dollars going to pay (for) bicycle trails and not roads?"

Schwartz said that before lawmakers consider raising the gas tax, they first must reform the way the state decides on transportation projects and how to pay for them.

A more than \$40 billion list of state transportation needs includes light-rail projects and bike paths, Schwartz said, adding that cost exceeds what drivers should be forced to support.

Reach Self
at (803) 771-8658.

WINTHROP POLL

The Winthrop Poll, conducted Feb. 21 through March 1, interviewed 1,109 adults living in South Carolina. The margin of error is 3 percentage points. Some highlights:

S.C. POLITICIANS

Should U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham run for president? Registered voters — Yes: 26%; **No: 65.3%**; Republicans — Yes: 34%; No: 56.5%

Rating Gov. Nikki Haley's job performance — **Approve: 53.2%**; Disapprove: 37.1%

S.C. ISSUES

Should same-sex marriages be legal? Yes: 42.8%; **No: 52.7%**

Should S.C. pass a law enforcing federal gun restrictions for criminal domestic violence offenders? **Yes: 74%**; No: 19.5%

Should the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control be allowed to offer the HPV vaccine to girls entering the 7th grade? **Yes: 67.7%**; No: 23.7%

Most important issue facing South Carolina? **Education: 17.9%**; Jobs or unemployment: 12.9%; Economy: 9.4%

S.C. ECONOMY

Direction of S.C. — **Right track: 52%**; Wrong direction: 39.8%

Condition of the S.C. economy? Very good: 6.7%; **Fairly good: 59.7%**; Fairly bad: 25.3%; Very bad: 6.2%

Is S.C. economy getting better or worse? **Better: 63.3%**; Worse: 28.4%

U.S. ISSUES AND ECONOMY

Most important problem facing the U.S.? **Terrorism, ISIS: 10.3%**; Politicians, government: 9.2%; Economy: 9%

Direction of the U.S.? Right track: 26.1%; **Wrong direction: 67.4%**

Condition of U.S. economy? Very good: 4.1%; **Fairly good: 51.9%**; Fairly bad: 29.3%; Very bad: 13.4%

Is U.S. economy getting better or worse? **Better: 51.2%**; Worse: 40.5%

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THESTATE.COM

Read the complete latest
Winthrop Poll online.



Title: **Judge blocks board from firing Elzey**
 Author: By ANDREW SHAIN ashain@thestate.com
 Size: 79.51 square inch
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S.C. STATE'S PRESIDENT

Judge blocks board from firing Elzey

State Senate passes bill to oust trustees;
 hearing on lawsuit set for next week

By ANDREW SHAIN
 ashain@thestate.com

South Carolina State University President Thomas Elzey won a reprieve Wednesday when a judge halted efforts by school trustees to fire him after less than two years on the job.

The university's board met behind closed doors for more than two hours Wednesday, deciding to negotiate a separation settlement with Elzey, who sued Tuesday for breach

of contract, school officials said.

Before the emergency court order, trustees of the embattled Orangeburg school had been expected to fire Elzey, placed on paid suspension a little more than a week ago.

As state lawmakers debate

replacing S.C. State's board, Circuit Court Judge Edward Dickson said Wednesday he wanted to give any new trustees, named by lawmakers, a chance to decide Elzey's fate.

Dickson set a hearing on Elzey's lawsuit for March 12.

It's unlikely legislative proposals to replace S.C. State's trustees will be passed by next week. Senate and House pro-

posals to replace those trustees differ on who should take over the school's board temporarily.

SEE **ELZEY** PAGE **A7**

ELZEY

FROM PAGE **A3**

The Senate voted 41-1 Wednesday to approve a bill to replace those trustees with a five-member board, appointed by lawmakers and Gov. Nikki Haley.

A House panel is expected to send its bill, which hands authority of the university to the S.C. State Budget and Control Board, to the House floor Thursday.

Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said

Wednesday that S.C. State could run out of money by May or June without more cash from the state.

The state's only historically black public college owes vendors and the state more than \$17 million.

Elzey sued S.C. State Tuesday, alleging it had breached his four-year contract, which runs through June 2017. He would be owed more than \$400,000 in state pay and unpaid vacation if he is fired without cause.

Elzey's lawsuit seeks additional damages for humiliation and emotional

distress.

"He's asking for a ton of money," said Ken Childs, an attorney for the S.C. State board. "And the school is broke."

The suit was filed in Orangeburg County after negotiations between Elzey and trustees broke down, said Nancy Bloodgood, the president's attorney.

S.C. State's trustees have not said why they suspended Elzey and replaced him with interim Provost Franklin Evans.

Elzey arrived in Orangeburg from The Citadel in June 2013, charged with

fixing the school's finances. Seven months later, he said S.C. State had a \$14 million deficit, the result of seven years of excessive spending.

Black state lawmakers and U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, a Columbia Democrat and S.C. State graduate, say Elzey failed to make enough cuts at the school to offset its falling enrollment.

South Carolina State's enrollment has slid by 40 percent since 2007 to less than 3,000 students.

Elzey has said trustees would not allow him to

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make deeper cuts, including ending the men's basketball program.



Elzey



FILE PHOTOGRAPH/THE STATE

Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, says S.C. State could run out of money by May or June without more cash from the state.

Title: **Lawmakers:VolvodrivingtowardS.C.**

Author: By ANDREW SHAIN and CASSIE COPE ashain@thestate.com ccope@thestate.com

Size: 54.09 square inch

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Lawmakers: Volvo driving toward S.C.

State is finalist for new automotive plant, likely in Charleston area

By ANDREW SHAIN
and CASSIE COPE
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Volvo soon could drive into South Carolina with a manufacturing plant, likely in the Charleston area, four state legislators told The State on Wednesday.

South Carolina is a finalist for a Volvo plant, which would join BMW as a major automaker in the Palmetto State, the lawmakers said. North Carolina and Kentucky also are pur-

suings the Swedish carmaker's plant, according to media reports.

Gov. Nikki Haley returned Wednesday from a four-day economic-development trip to an undisclosed location with state Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt.

Her office declined comment Wednesday. The state Commerce

Department does not comment on economic-development projects.

State Rep. Chip Limehouse, a Charleston Republican who heads the S.C. House's transportation budget panel, said Wednesday that he has received requests for money for road projects and workforce training tied to a potential Volvo plant in Berkeley County.

SEE **VOLVO** PAGE **A5**

VOLVO

FROM PAGE **A1**

House budget writers included \$35 million for a Charleston-area workforce training center in a \$500 million bond proposal that they recently passed.

"We didn't just do that for our health," Limehouse said. "We're setting the table."

In a House budget briefing Wednesday, state Rep. Jim Merrill, R-Berkeley, said Volvo could be among several large companies taking advantage of the Charleston-area workforce training center.

After that briefing, Merrill said he did not have official details. But, he added, "We're very hopeful that we (will) have an an-

nouncement soon."

State Sen. Paul Campbell, a Berkeley Republican who helped broker the deal that brought the Boeing jet plant to North Charleston, said, "Volvo is giving South Carolina serious consideration."

A fourth state lawmaker familiar with the talks, who did not want to be identified because of the sensitivity of the negotiations, confirmed South Carolina is a finalist for a Volvo plant in the Charleston area.

Volvo, now owned by Chinese-based Geely Holdings, had no comment when asked about the plant this week.

The Financial Times, citing two people familiar

with the project, reported in January that Volvo has sought incentive packages – usually made up of millions of dollars in tax breaks, land giveaways, roads and water lines – from South Carolina, North Carolina and Kentucky.

Volvo is not the only foreign carmaker reportedly checking out South Carolina.

Jaguar Land Rover is also considering the state for a plant, according to several trade industry news reports. A company spokesman said the British automaker, which received a visit from Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal in January, is looking worldwide for plant sites.

Foreign carmakers have

found homes for new plants in the South over the past two decades.

BMW opened in Greer in 1994 and now employs about 8,000. Mercedes-Benz opened a plant in Vance, Ala., in 1997, and employs about 3,500.

Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Volkswagen, Hyundai and Kia have plants in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi and Texas.

The Charleston area is set to land more automotive-related work later this week.

Mercedes' parent company, Daimler, will announce plans to expand a van assembly facility with more than 1,000 added jobs in Ladson, Limehouse said.

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Title: **House hopes to revive ethics reform with 'omnibus' bill**
 Author: BY JEREMY BORDEN jborden@postandcourier.com
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House hopes to revive ethics reform with 'omnibus' bill

BY JEREMY BORDEN
jborden@postandcourier.com

COLUMBIA — The S.C. House passed a so-called “omnibus” ethics bill Wednesday that proponents of reform hope will reignite the debate over who polices lawmakers’ conduct and whether they should disclose their sources of personal income.

The bill combined several measures that have passed the House already, including an independent panel to investigate lawmakers and new disclosure requirements. House Speaker Jay Lucas has said the guilty plea and resignation of Bobby Harrell last year means the state should push for reform of its ethics laws.

That debate, however, has come to a halt in the Senate

after an independent panel to investigate lawmakers’ conduct was rejected.

Currently, lawmakers police themselves, with ethics complaints against lawmakers investigated by House and Senate ethics committees.

Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, has said he will push for the Senate to take up the debate again.

The new House bill, however, removed language that would have required lawmakers to disclose local or state government contracts, as well as those given to immediate family and related businesses.

Gov. Nikki Haley’s spokeswoman, Chaney Adams, said the governor was pleased that the debate continues.

Title: **Billboardtallies whatS.C.'smissing**
 Author: By JOEY HOLLEMAN jholleman@thestate.com
 Size: 31.62 square inch
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UNTAPPED MEDICAID MONEY

Billboard tallies what S.C.'s missing

By JOEY HOLLEMAN
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A coalition pushing for South Carolina leaders to expand Medicaid has paid for space on an electronic billboard that updates the federal money left on the table by the minute.

The total is more than \$2 billion, and it goes up about \$3,500 every time the message rolls back around on the billboard.

Close the Gap SC is made up of many of the groups that urged legislators to accept the federal expansion of Medicaid through the Affordable Care Act in 2014.

Because Gov. Nikki Haley and Republican leaders refused to accept the expansion, about 194,000 people in the state fell into a coverage gap.

The U.S. Supreme Court on Wednesday heard arguments in a case that could wipe out federal health insurance subsidies for people in South Carolina making about \$12,000 through \$46,000. About 115,000 people in the state could lose those subsidies de-

pending on the ruling.

The Close the Gap group is focusing on people who weren't eligible for the subsidies or for Medicaid because they made between about \$6,000 and \$12,000 per year.

The groups behind Close the Gap changed their strategy slightly this year, asking lawmakers to follow the lead of several other Republican-dominated states to use the federal money to pay for a private option health insurance program for low-income residents.

"Other red states are moving in this direction," said Frank Knapp, CEO of the S.C. Small Business Chamber of Commerce. "We should, too."

Knapp and Teresa Arnold, state director of AARP, said the Close the Gap coalition is working with lawmakers to draft legislation on the private option solution. "There is a chance we can at least make a run at it," Knapp said.



JOEY HOLLEMAN/JHOLLEMAN@THESTATE.COM

A billboard ad in the Vista, by the Close the Gap SC coalition, shows the amount of federal money left on the table because South Carolina leaders turned down Medicaid expansion.

Title: **Lawmaker's plan could pump \$1.3B into roads, schools**
 Author: BY JEREMY BORDEN jborden@postandcourier.com
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Lawmaker's plan could pump \$1.3B into roads, schools



BY JEREMY BORDEN
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back the Legislature next year. **Horne**

COLUMBIA — Simplifying how it funds schools and eliminating some sales tax exemptions could pump more than \$1 billion into South Carolina's schools and roads, a Summerville lawmaker said Wednesday.

Unveiling her plan at a news conference, Rep. Jenny Horne, R-Summerville, said the state's formula for funding schools is overly complex and often shortchanges poor, rural school districts. Horne hopes her plan can gain support in the wake of the state Supreme Court's recent Abbeville decision.

"The goal of the bill is to simplify funding and put the control in the hands of the school boards and school districts," Horne said. "It's the first filed bill that I know of addressing the Abbeville decision."

The Supreme Court's November Abbeville decision stems from a 1993 lawsuit when roughly half of the state's school districts, including Berkeley County, sued the state, saying the Legislature had failed to adequately fund the state's poor, rural school districts. The Supreme Court sided with the schools and put the onus on the Legislature to find solutions.

Gov. Nikki Haley has proposed raising the average amount spent on students, among other education proposals. House Speaker Jay Lucas has also convened a task force to study the issue and report

Horne's proposal, called the South Carolina Jobs, Education and Tax Act of 2015, would provide what amounts to a statewide property tax cut in most places on businesses and automobile sales by making property tax rates uniform across the state.

To make up for the loss of about \$600 million in tax revenues, Horne is proposing eliminating a number of sales tax exemptions that could amount to \$2 billion in additional revenue for the state.

Those dollars would be split between roads and infrastructure and school districts. All told, the plan would provide an additional \$1 billion for roads and \$350 million per year for schools statewide, she said. The plan also provides a new mechanism to redistribute education dollars more evenly across the state and bring up the average spent per pupil for most districts.

Horne's plan, also sponsored by Rep. Mia McLeod, D-Columbia, has gained little traction in the past — eliminating sales tax exemptions is a politically perilous road because they are prized by the industries they protect.

The measure would eliminate a number of sales tax exemptions, such as those on fuel and health care, among others, although Horne said that list would likely change.

Title: **Poll: Graham should skip presidential bid**
 Author: BY SCHUYLER KROPF skropf@postandcourier.com
 Size: 76.57 square inch
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Poll: Graham should skip presidential bid

55% of S.C. voters back gas tax hike for roads; 75% favor gun ban for domestic abusers

BY SCHUYLER KROPF
 skropf@postandcourier.com

If U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham heeds what South Carolina voters are saying in a new poll, he'll be sitting out the 2016 presidential race.

But polls don't have the final word on who runs, or even who wins.

"At the end of the day, if I didn't think I could win my home state, I wouldn't be doing this," Graham has said whenever questions pop up about whether he would win

even the state primary.

Poll results released Wednesday by Winthrop University in Rock Hill once again show most South Carolinians — six out of 10 — say Graham should give up on exploring a White House bid.

The findings mirror earlier surveys by NBC News/Marist College and by Public Policy Polling, which also say most state voters don't think Graham should be

spending time campaigning for the Republican nomination.

Winthrop political scientist Scott Huffmon, who directed the poll, said the results should not be interpreted as the kiss of death for Graham. That's because politicians running for president rarely poll well in their home states.

"It will certainly be fodder for any opponent," Huffmon said of

Graham's lackluster support from South Carolina voters so far. "But

no state really wants their guy to run."

Overall, Graham remains well-liked in the state, with a 60 percent approval rating as a senator from Republican-aligned voters.

The question, "Do you think

Please see **POLL**, Page A8

Online

Read more about the university's poll at winthrop.edu.

Poll: Graham should skip presidential bid

POLL, from A1

Lindsey Graham should or should not run for president in 2016?" was part of Winthrop's regular schedule of statewide polling on the views of South Carolinians on issues of the day. This month's installment covered gun ownership and domestic violence, opinion on raising the gas tax and the job performances of various high-level state and federal political figures, among other areas.

The responses were drawn from interviews with more than 1,100 South Carolina residents by both landlines and cellphones between Feb. 21 and March 1. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percent — a 95 percent confidence level.

Graham has said he will decide by May whether to formally announce a bid. Despite some who say he should not run, he is leading or competitive in hypothetical Republican primary

College of Charleston political scientist Gibbs Knotts also said it is too early to write Graham off, saying potential candidates are more focused at this point on such fundamentals as raising money, picking up endorsements and opening offices in other states.

"Doing all these things will be really important for him," Knotts said.

Graham will be in Iowa and New Hampshire this weekend as part of his White House exploratory effort.

His camp said Wednesday Graham isn't fazed by early polls.

"Sen. Graham is leading or at the top of all the public polling in South Carolina," said spokesman Scott Farmer. "There are supporters of other candidates in the Palmetto State, so they naturally do not want Lindsey Graham to run because they know he will be difficult to beat. If Sen. Graham decides to run, he will run to win."

In other results:

Gun ban

South Carolina has one of the highest rates in the nation of women killed by men. The Statehouse is currently debating bills to toughen domestic violence laws by creating a tiered system of offenses that increase penalties and seek to bar batterers from possessing guns.

The survey found that about 75 percent of residents think the Legislature should pass a law to ensure full enforcement of a federal law in the state that forbids people who have been convicted of criminal domestic violence from owning guns. About 19 percent were opposed.

The state ranks second in the nation in domestic violence deaths of women killed by men, a pattern reported on by The Post and Courier in its recent series "Till Death Do Us Part."

Gas tax hike

Respondents were asked if they would be willing to pay 10 cents more per gallon in

gas taxes so the money raised could be used for infrastructure needs, including repairing roads and bridges. The results showed a wide divide.

About 55 percent said they would support the idea, while about 42 percent were opposed.

Gov. Nikki Haley recently advocated bumping the gas tax up by 10 cents per gallon over the next three years as part of a three-part package that included the income tax cut and a restructuring of the state Department of Transportation. Debate over dueling plans proposed by lawmakers continues in Columbia.

The country's bearings

The poll found there's still concern over the direction of the nation, but less about South Carolina's. More than two-thirds of respondents said the U.S. is headed in the "wrong" direction but were more positive about the state's direction. About 63 percent said they see South Caro-

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lina's economy getting better.

About 58 percent "rate their household's experience as either good or excellent, and a majority said it is getting better," the poll found.

ISIS, or terrorism in general, was the most important problem respondents said facing the country, followed by politicians/government and the economy/financial crisis.

Gay marriage

Gay marriage may have been legalized by the courts in the state, but that isn't sitting well with

most of the survey respondents.

More than half of those who took part, nearly 53 percent, said they think marriages between same-sex couples should not be recognized by the law as valid.

Respondents who said they felt same-sex marriages should be valid remained consistent with previous Winthrop polls, at about 43 percent.

Approval ratings

President Barack Obama's approval rating in South Carolina continues to be low and below that of the rest of the country.

Among South Carolina respondents, it's about 40 percent; nationally, it's around 50 percent.

Gov. Nikki Haley's approval rating was about 53 percent among state residents who were sampled, but shot up to 78 percent among voters who identified themselves as Republican.

U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., has a 54 percent positive job performance among South Carolina residents surveyed, but 71 percent among GOP voters and those who align with Republicans.

Tea party membership is

claimed by only about 7 percent of those surveyed and 11 percent of GOP supporters. But the tea party question also shows that many Republicans have unfavorable views of the movement. Only 22 percent of respondents and 39 percent of GOP backers said they approve of the tea party.



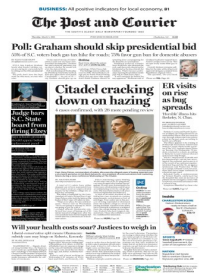
Poll

Should Lindsey Graham drop out of the presidential race? Go to postandcourier.com/polls to vote.



Graham

Title: **Judge bars S.C. State board from firing Elzey**
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX and JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press
 Size: 53.47 square inch
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Judge bars S.C. State board from firing Elzey

Says school's president
should appear before
replacement panel

BY SEANNA ADCOX
and JEFFREY COLLINS
Associated Press

ORANGEBURG — A judge barred the trustees of financially troubled South Carolina State University from firing suspended President Thomas Elzey, noting legislators will likely fire the entire board soon.

Circuit Judge Edgar Dickson on Wednesday agreed with Elzey's lawyer that he was placed on administrative leave last week without the opportunity to be heard. The judge ordered the apparently lame-duck board to main-

tain Elzey's paid-leave status until he appears before its replacement.

"As it appears likely there will be a differently constituted board of trustees in the near future, it is in the public's best interest" to side with Elzey in blocking his firing, Dickson wrote.

The ruling came hours before the trustees were scheduled to meet amid ongoing turmoil involving South Carolina's only public historically black

university, which is wrestling with escalating debt.

Please see **ELZEY**, Page A7



Poll

Do you agree with the judge's order that prevents the S.C. State Board of Trustees from firing Thomas Elzey? Go to postandcourier.com/polls to vote.

Judge bars S.C. State's trustees from firing Elzey

ELZEY, from A1

Trustees promised last week to have more information Wednesday on Elzey's fate. They still met Wednesday by telephone, speaking privately for about two hours before voting 8-1 to ask their lawyers to keep negotiating with Elzey and appeal the ruling if both sides can't agree.

Elzey's attorney, Nancy Bloodgood, filed a lawsuit in Orangeburg County court Tuesday, accusing the trustees of breaking his four-year con-

tract, which extends to mid-2017.

Meanwhile, state senators voted 41-1 to approve that chamber's plan to fire all trustees.

That plan, introduced two weeks ago by Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman, would create a new, five-member board to oversee S.C. State until 2018 as it works to bring the 119-year-old school to fiscal solvency. Its members would be appointed by five GOP lawmakers, including Leatherman. The new board would decide whether to fire

or replace Elzey.

Sen. Gerald Malloy, D-Hartsville, opposed the bill as ceding the Legislature's appointment authority to five individuals.

"This is not a solution. This is just a new board," he said.

Sen. Shane Massey said Elzey, hired in 2013, deserves credit for disclosing S.C. State's fiscal "shenanigans."

"He hasn't had a lot of cooperation from the board. He's had no support from the very beginning," said Massey, R-Edgefield. Massey said that while he also recognizes the school's fis-

cal problems couldn't be solved "overnight," he's frustrated that "in a two-year period, I've not seen a realistic plan to right the ship."

A separate proposal advancing through the House committee process would put the state's financial oversight board temporarily in charge. It requires the board, chaired by

Gov. Nikki Haley, to fire Elzey.

Under Elzey's contract, he can be fired only for cause. The lawsuit notes the suspension occurred less than two weeks after the board publicly backed

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him, despite legislators' calls for his removal, and that trustees gave him a satisfactory review last summer.

Breaking his contract without cause would cost \$428,000, according to an estimate from state economic advisers, dated Tuesday.

Elzey's lawsuit seeks more than that. While giving no specific amount, it asks for lost

wages and benefits, as well as compensation for the ordeal's emotional distress and embarrassment.

Elzey is supposed to be paid \$305,400 this year, with \$173,400 funded by taxpayers and \$132,000 by the school's foundation. He also receives a \$25,000 annual housing allowance and is entitled to six weeks of paid vacation, according to

the Budget and Control Board.

S.C. State owes more than \$11 million in unpaid bills, despite receiving \$7.5 million from separate state bailouts in the past year.

It has been on accreditation probation since last summer.

"He hasn't had a lot of cooperation

from the board. He's had no support from the very beginning."

**Sen. Shane Massey,
R-Edgefield**



FILE/STAFF

Breaking S.C. State President Thomas Elzey's contract without cause would cost \$428,000.

Title: **Domestic violence bill appears likely to pass**

Author:

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Rock Hill, SC Circulation: 34688

**Our view**

Domestic violence bill appears likely to pass

South Carolina consistently ranks among the nation's worst in its rate of domestic violence. Thankfully, this appears to be the year that the Legislature finally takes meaningful steps to address that problem.

Last week, the S.C. Senate cleared the way for passing a substantive domestic violence bill with a 38-3 vote to include a measure to take guns away from many people convicted of criminal domestic violence. The gun ban had been the most contentious issue about the bill, requiring two weeks of debate, and its approval virtually ensures passage of a bill to strengthen penalties across the board.

The bill also must pass in the House, which is considering a domestic violence bill with a less stringent gun ban. But lawmakers in both chambers appear ready to do something to curb the shameful incidence of domestic violence in the state.

While many have called for reforms in past years, this year the forces for reform successfully united to move the effort forward. Gov. Nikki Haley lobbied hard for reforms and created a special task force to study domestic violence and its causes.

The panel includes members from law enforcement, courts, religious groups, health care and social services.

S.C. Attorney General Alan Wilson also has taken a lead role in lobbying for changes in the law. He has

been joined by local prosecutors from across the state who have called for new penalties.

"Our laws reflect our values," Wilson told reporters in January. "We cannot live in a society where you can beat your dog and get five years and beat your wife and get 30 days.

Victim advocate groups also were effective in pointing to discrepancies in the law, noting that penalties are greater for hunting out of season than for domestic abuse. Penalties for hunting out of season can include confiscation of guns, vehicles and hunting licenses.

That no doubt hit home even in a state that reveres gun rights as much as South Carolina does. As a compromise, the bill's sponsors added an amendment that would tone down gun penalties for the least serious offenses, but the bill still would automatically ban offenders from owning guns for 10 years if convicted of the two most serious charges.

Under the amendment, a third-degree domestic violence conviction would lead to a five-year gun ban, but only if a judge approved.

The meat of the bill, however, gives prosecutors and judges more options in dealing with domestic abusers. Under current law, prosecutors have only two options for charges: a misdemeanor carrying a possible 30-day sentence or a felony punishable by up to 10 years.

The new bill would create a

four-tiered system of possible crimes with which suspects could be charged. Options would range from a misdemeanor with a possible 90-day sentence to a felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

Those are important changes. The state needs a law that would fit penalties to the severity of the crime rather than simply basing the sentence on how many times a defendant has been convicted of domestic violence.

The Senate is expected to pass the bill on a procedural vote. Then the House must follow suit.

We are optimistic that a coalition of concerned citizens, victims and their advocates, state leaders and others have succeeded in raising awareness about this problem, and that lawmakers are poised to confront it. More will be required, including a change in the culture that spawns violence against women, but changes in the law are a big step in the right direction.

In summary

S.C. Senate has included a gun ban as part of a wide-ranging bill to address the problem of domestic violence.

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Fort Mill getting 200 jobs

A North Carolina-based home furnishings retailer is consolidating its corporate headquarters and distribution center from Charlotte to Fort Mill.

Broad River Furniture, the largest licensee of Ashley Furniture HomeStore in the Carolinas and Georgia, in about November will move into a 174,000-square-foot building at Lakemont Business Park, Gov. Nikki Haley's office announced Tuesday.

The retailer's \$12.6 million investment is expected to bring with it 200 jobs to the I-77 corridor in York County, the announcement said.

Broad River Furniture employs 500 full-time workers in the three states where it operates, the governor's office said.