



Title: **Local officials endorse candidates**
 Author: By COLIN RIDDLE criddle@indexjournal.com
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Local officials endorse candidates

Republican lawmakers weigh options ahead of Saturday primary

By COLIN RIDDLE

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As the first-in-the-South Republican primary approaches, a number of state leaders have announced endorsements of candidates in the past week, while local leaders are still weighing their options.

"You want to be thoughtful, and you want to pick the right guy," said state Rep. Craig Gagnon, R-Abbeville, who jokingly shared he was endorsing "Mr. Undecided."

Many representing the Lakelands on the state level are in the same boat. State Rep. Mike Pitts, R-Laurens, said he narrowed his decision down to U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz from Texas and U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio from Florida, who join reality TV star and businessman Donald Trump as the top three candidates in national

polls. Cruz recently received the endorsement of U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan, who represents South Carolina's 3rd Congressional District.

Rubio was endorsed by South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley on Wednesday and has held onto another from South Carolina's junior U.S. Sen. Tim Scott.

The state's senior U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham has endorsed Jeb Bush, who has been near the bottom of polls with retired neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster endorsed Trump last month, a notion Pitts said he will not offer.

Pitts said he has met with Trump numerous times and does not think his business tactics will make him an effective leader in

government.

"They get so impatient with the system of government that they make some serious mistakes," Pitts said. "I really question his sincerity of being in the race, because Trump does a lot of talking, but he doesn't say much."

He added Trump has a tendency to make rash decisions, which could hurt international relations if he got to the White House.

"Trump can do the job, but he's not going to walk in the door with a good understanding of government," Pitts said.

Pitts said Trump is resonating with voters because the majority of people are afraid of and angry at the federal government.

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2016 Elections

■ Read about the candidate news of the day on **5A**

ENDORSE

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"Trump is saying what people are feeling, but when you look below that level, he has no plan," Pitts said.

Pitts said he likes that Cruz is a purist when it comes to the Constitution and the rule of law.

Pitts said the country needs someone who understands international issues and has a firm belief and

foundation in the Constitution, which is Cruz and Rubio, in his opinion.

Pitts said people are taking shots at Rubio for his involvement as one of the Gang of Eight senators who drafted a bipartisan immigration reform bill, which included a pathway to amnesty for illegal immigrants.

The bill passed the Senate

but is getting no consideration in the House thus far. Graham was also a Republican member of the Gang of Eight.

"They were trying to do what nobody had done, and that was address immigration," Pitts said.

Pitts said amnesty makes common sense because the government does not have enough law enforcement to

remove 12 million illegal immigrants. He mentioned the bill's pathway to amnesty required illegal immigrants to do certain things over a certain amount of time to earn amnesty, such as serving in the military.

"I think the immigration issue is being misplayed on Rubio," Pitts said.

Gagnon said one glaring weakness in a candidate makes it that much more dif-

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difficult in choosing and he has seen at least one in each of the candidates going back to a number of elections.

He said he looks at three things when considering a candidate, including if they have a track record of being a conservative and principled person, if they are genuine and if they are electable.

"It's been a really difficult decision," Gagnon said. "There's bits and pieces of every one of these guys that I like. All of them would be better than a Democrat though."

Oftentimes, candidates will move more toward the polar ends of a party's political beliefs prior to primaries and caucuses in order to secure party nominations, then move toward the center politically to win the general

election, Gagnon confirmed.

"That's why I tend to go toward record and what he's done in the past," Gagnon said. "It is a fascinating dynamic. I see it time and time again."

Pitts admitted he liked Carson and his ideas, but said his numbers aren't getting him out of the shoot.

"My end goal is to win in November," Pitts said. "I think Rubio gives the Republicans the best chance to win in the running."

Pitts added Trump and Cruz also have the ability to win in November.

State Rep. Mike Gambrell, R-Anderson, said he will not be endorsing anyone prior to Saturday's primary. He said he is considering voting for

Kasich or Rubio.

"The biggest thing is I want to pick who can help us in November," Gambrell said. "I like the way both of them conduct themselves.

It's president of the United States, not the president of the eighth-grade class."

Gambrell, who is known for a calm, even-keeled demeanor, said Kasich and Rubio don't get off the charts like most of the other candidates.

After a contentious debate Saturday in Greenville, name calling, negative campaign ads and irreverent remarks have fueled this week's race, particularly between Trump, Cruz and Rubio, while Bush has been thrown in the rum-

ble at times.

State Sen. Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, said he will be hitting the polls Saturday but does not yet know who he will vote for.

"I've decided I've got enough problems on my own, so I better stay out of other people's sandboxes," he said Thursday.

State Rep. Shannon Riley, R-Greenwood, could not be reached for comment.

Polls open 7 a.m. Saturday for the Republican primary and close 7 p.m. Results will be live on scvotes.org.

Contact Colin Riddle at 864-943-5650 or follow on Twitter @IJCINRIDDLE.



**CRAIG
GAGNON**



**MIKE
GAMBRELL**



**MIKE
PITTS**



**SHANE
MASSEY**

Title: **Rounding the bend, heading to primaries**
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■ OUR VIEW

Rounding the bend, heading to primaries

Are you planning to vote on Saturday? Are you voting in an effort to support the Republican candidate you most want to be president, or are you casting a vote for the person you think will be least likely to secure the White House in a bid against the Democratic Party's nominee? The same line of questions can be asked of those who are waiting to vote next Saturday, the 27th, when the Democratic primary election will take place in South Carolina.

The Palmetto State has been swarming with Republican hopefuls and their spouses leading up to Saturday's vote. In case you did not notice, only one candidate graced the Lakelands with his presence when Ben Carson swept in Wednesday for a visit to the Greenwood Genetic Center in between a Newberry public visit and the evening's town hall meeting in Greenville. Heidi Cruz did come to Greenwood, but the spouse of the candidate is not the same as having the candidate himself. Other GOP hopefuls who had planned visits to Greenwood or elsewhere in the Lakelands either wound up dropping out or canceled their visits because their campaigns were about to go belly up. Perhaps the Cruz camp caught wind of that and that is why they chose to send his wife while Carson's camp perhaps figured there was no harm at this point, no need to be superstitious.

Next week, it's the Hillary and Bernie show and the Lakelands has yet to hear whether either candidate will make a swing through here. We're not putting any money on this one, but Greenwood is so heavily conservative one would expect the two will spend their time wooing the voters of predominantly Democratic areas.

But we'll see, won't we?

This will prove to be an interesting two weeks, as we head into the June primaries. South Carolina, as most know by now, has been a solid forecaster when it comes to its primaries. Rounding the corner and heading to Saturday — as of this writing — Trump still commands a hefty lead, followed by Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio. Wednesday's endorsement of Rubio by Gov. Nikki Haley might well serve to boost his votes on Saturday. And at this point, much as was the case in New Hampshire, Clinton and Sanders are running fairly evenly in the polling.

As we said, we're not putting any money on any races. But if you're the betting sort, now is the time to pony up. Or maybe you're still just too uncertain. You might be thinking this is the year when South Carolina flops as an election bellwether state. Heck, maybe you're fearful of a particular face-off.

One scenario we'd be inclined to put money on — again, if we were so inclined as to place money on political races — relates only to the GOP ticket. A Rubio-Haley ticket, readers, would be a palpable one and, for many who lean right of center, a palatable one. Think about it. A president and vice president who, not unlike the sitting president, would make history. Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants who came to America to make a better life for their family, and Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants who ... well, you get the picture, and it's a picture that could bring much focus to the race should Rubio chip away at Cruz and certainly should Trump's tower fall.

Title: **Haley backs Rubio**
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■ REPUBLICANS IN SC

Haley backs Rubio

By SEANNA ADCOX

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley has endorsed Marco Rubio, three days ahead of Saturday's first-in-the-South Republican presidential primary.

Haley introduced the Florida senator at an event Wednesday night in Lexington County, saying he's a compassionate fighter who will "show my parents the best decision they ever made for their children was coming to America."

Haley is the South Carolina-born daughter of Indian immigrants and, at 44, the nation's youngest governor.

"She embodies everything I want the Republican Party to be about," Rubio said. He noted he and Haley share the backgrounds of many other Americans, as his parents immi-

grated from Cuba.

"First and foremost, as a mom who wants her children to be safe in this country, who wants her children to have the education and opportunity," Haley said in explaining her choice to several hundred people gathered for the event outside a warehouse in Chapin.

"I want a president who's going to have the back of our military veterans and those in active duty. I want a presi-

dent who knows when we fight wars, we win wars," said Haley, whose husband Michael Haley is an officer in the Army

National Guard who served in Afghanistan in 2013. "I want a president who understands we have to stop the federal mandates pushed on states like Obamacare and the EPA."

She was also critical of Republicans in Washington, saying the next president must "bring a conscience back" to the GOP on balanced budgets, cutting debt and building reserves.

Haley's endorsement was considered the most coveted among South Carolina politicians. She joins U.S. Sen. Tim Scott and Rep. Trey Gowdy in endorsing Rubio. U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham endorsed Jeb Bush after leaving the crowded Republican presidential field himself.

Speculation that Haley, the state's first female and first minority governor, could be a potential GOP running mate increased after she gave the Republican response to President Barack Obama's State of the Union address last month.

Related

■ Want to see the candidates before voting? Find out where on **3A**.

■ GOP fight gets nasty among top 3 candidates, **5A**.

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**NIKKI
HALEY**



**MARCO
RUBIO**

Title: **Carolina Health Center program joins state initiative**
 Author: By MARY KATE MCGOWAN mmcgowan@indexjournal.com
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Carolina Health Center program joins state initiative

By MARY KATE MCGOWAN

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In the wake of Gov. Nikki Haley announcing the launch of the South Carolina Nurse-Family Partnership Pay for Success project — the first in the nation — Tuesday, Carolina Health Centers Inc. is joining the initiative.

Carolina Health Centers, which owns the Children's Center, has been running Nurse-Family Partnership since 2011 and is the NFP provider for Greenwood, Abbeville, McCormick, Saluda and

Edgefield counties.

The Pay for Success program will connect about 2,300 first-time mothers and their babies to NFP programs, which will include home visits from early pregnancy to the child's second birthday that aims to improve health outcomes for mothers and children living in poverty.

According to the Nurse-Family Partnership, more than 280,000 children in

South Carolina live in poverty, which is about 27 percent, and the partnership wants to help break the cycle of poverty.

Sally Baggett, Carolina Health Centers' manager of the local NFP services and Director of Family Support and Child Development Services, said the project could advance new sustainability options for evidence-based services as well as improve South Carolina's children and

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STATE

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families' lives.

Baggett said the area CHC serves is rural with no transportation, and families living in poverty are overburdened and sometimes transient.

"The idea of asking them to come to us for any kind of additional services around parenting, healthy growth of their young children is really not reasonable, so we go to them," she said.

From muscle to brain development, she said some families do not know how the first three years determine a lot of a child's life.

By visiting the homes of their patients, Baggett said the trained home visitors are able to see the children's home environment, which greatly affects their healthy growth. She said there have been houses with no safe places

for children to crawl, which affects their gross motor development.

CHC services are voluntary and there is no fee to the family. Baggett said the families served by the program aren't just low income.

"We want our kids to be on a level playing field when they get to school," she said.

While building a level of trust with families through several years, CHC home visitors explain various aspects of their child's development including

oral health to the parents in-depth. Baggett said they ask the parents to change their behavior to change their child's prospects in the evidence-based practice programming.

Baggett said CHC has been visiting patients at home since 2000, which is longer than other communities. CHC is

part of a federal project and receiving significant federal money, and CHC is measured by an outside evaluator on 34 outcomes for both mother and children's health.

CHC is also the area's Prevent Child Abuse Affiliate, and the staff are mandated reporters. Baggett said they implement protective factors into the house to offset risk factors for child maltreatment and neglect.

"If they understand why a child is behaving the way they do, it just helps calm that situation," she said.

Other home visitation programs target families with significant risks including mental illness, drug usage and parents who were abused as children. Baggett said the program empower families from a strength-based approach while avoiding seeming as if

they are "fixing" the parents.

Baggett said more than 400 families receive home visitation services, and most participating home visitation families join when the child is born and come into pediatric care at the Children's Center.

"Most families need help," she said. "They just need it in different ways that fit their needs."

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Tara Cothran, of
Carolina Health
Centers, hits
plastic toys
against a metal
bowl while
demonstrating
a method to
engage young
children.

MARY KATE MCGOWAN
| INDEX-JOURNAL

Title: **So it begins**
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AT THE STATEHOUSE

So it begins

Which SC senator should be watched during roads debate?

By JEFFREY COLLINS

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina's Senate promises an extensive debate, starting today, on how to get more money to the state's roads and highways.

On Tuesday, Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman told members of the chamber to get to the Statehouse two hours early today for a session that could go well into the evening.

The proposal getting the most attention in the Senate would raise the gas tax by 12 cents a gallon over three years and increase or add some other fees. In five years, an estimated \$723 million extra would be put into roads yearly to repave pothole filled interstates and roads, repair aging bridges and expand some highways. But plenty of amendments changing those figures are likely from Republicans who don't want to raise a lot of taxes and Democrats leery about widespread tax cuts.

Another big issue: Who gets to run the South Carolina Department of Transportation? Some conservatives oppose a plan to have the directors of 10 regional government councils each pick three candidates for the DOT board to send to the governor to make the final choice. Gov. Nikki Haley wants more power over who is appointed to the board at the roads agency. Legislators currently pick seven members, with the governor choosing the eighth.

Here are people to watch as the roads debate begins in earnest:

Ray Cleary and Joel Lourie

Cleary, a Republican from Murrells Inlet, and Lourie, a Democrat from Columbia, are

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ROADS

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the lawmakers trying to pull together a compromise.

They volunteered in part because they aren't running for re-election this year and feel they can herd the Senate to make what could be some unpopular decisions on raising and cutting taxes.

"There's nobody in here who is going to get everything they want," Lourie told senators.

Tom Davis

Davis filibustered the roads bill last year and is the most vocal critic of how the DOT spends its money. The Republican from Beaufort hasn't ruled out voting for a gas tax increase, but is demanding reform at both the DOT and the State Infrastructure Bank, which pays for larger projects without the same kind of ranking process lawmakers require of the DOT.

Davis suggested last week that lawmakers use extra revenue to spend \$65 million immediately and get almost all the pavement on existing interstates up to good condition, so they can take more time to get a roads funding bill right.

"When you swallow an elephant, you do it a little at a

time," Davis said.

Nikki Seltzer

As Senate Minority leader, Seltzer answers to Democratic members who want good roads, but aren't sure South Carolina needs to be cutting taxes when it's under a court order to come up with a plan to improve poorer school districts, and with a state employee workforce that's only received small raises in the past eight years.

The West Columbia Democrat also thinks improving South Carolina's interstates is the key to keeping the state growing. He wants to widen nearly all of the more than 900 miles of interstate highways in the state to at least three lanes in each direction. That costs at least \$10 million a mile, or a total price tag close to \$9 billion. There are no current plans to do that.

Harvey Peeler

Peeler has spent much of his 35 years in the Senate trying to get 20 or so miles of Interstate 85 widened in Cherokee County, where his home in Gaffney is located. It's one of only three two-lane segments of I-85 in the 265 miles of highway between Durham, North Carolina, and Anderson

Peeler has long felt road

funding is too politicized, as powerful lawmakers along the coast get money for projects that aren't as important.

Peeler, the Senate Majority Leader, must get a wide variety of Republicans on board — from conservatives reticent to raise taxes to more moderate members worried infrastructure problems will never get solved without a steady revenue stream.

Gary Simrill and Nikki Haley

The Senate is not the end of the road for highway funding. Whatever comes out must go back to the House, where Rep. Simrill helped guide a bill through last year that would have raised about an additional \$500 million a year for roads.

The Rock Hill Republican says he's watching the Senate carefully, encouraged by its discussion. He doesn't agree with all the Senate ideas, but knows the bill will likely end up as a compromise between the Senate and the House.

"I think in conference we can work out details," Simrill said.

Haley has said she will only sign a bill that reforms DOT and offsets any increase in the gas tax with a comparable tax cut. She hasn't said whether she likes the Senate's plan. And she wields the veto pen.



Title: **G.W. Bush offers tough Trump takedown**
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G.W. Bush offers tough Trump takedown

Associated Press

CHARLESTON — George W. Bush never mentioned Donald Trump. But with his folksy touch, the former president unleashed a tough takedown Monday of the billionaire businessman who has upended a Republican Party his family has long led.

"I understand Americans are angry and frustrated," Bush said during his first campaign rally for his brother, Jeb Bush. "But we do not need somebody in the Oval Office who mirrors and inflames our anger and frustration."

Trump's rise has confounded the Bush family and its allies. But despite months of predicting the brash billionaire would fade, it's Jeb Bush whose White House hopes are in peril, particularly if he's unable to pull out a strong showing in Saturday's South Carolina primary.

The former president emerged from his self-imposed political hibernation to try to give Bush a boost. He layered each validation of his younger brother with an

implicit critique of Trump.

He urged voters to back a candidate who will be "measured and thoughtful" on the world stage. A candidate whose "humility" helps him understand what he doesn't know. A candidate who can win in November's general election.

"All the sloganeering and all the talk doesn't matter if we don't win," Bush said. "We need somebody who can take a positive message across the country."

With his brother as a strong warm-up act, Jeb Bush delivered an impassioned version of his campaign speech, touting his experience as Florida governor and vowing he could put Republicans back in the White House for the first time in eight years.

"I can beat Hillary Clinton," he said of the Democratic front-runner. "I can promise you that."

The former president's return to presidential politics has been met with blis-

tering attacks from Trump about the unpopular Iraq war and the economic recession that began at the end of his administration. Trump has also repeatedly reminded voters that the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks happened on Bush's watch.

"If the ex-president is campaigning for his brother, I think he's probably open to great scrutiny, maybe things that haven't been thought of in the past," Trump told reporters Monday.

Rather than gloss over 9/11, Bush leaned in. As the crowd fell into a hushed silence, he recounted in detail his whereabouts on the morning of the attacks and praised the troops that served in the two wars he started in response.

"Your most solemn job as voters is to elect a president who understands the reality of the threats we face," he said.

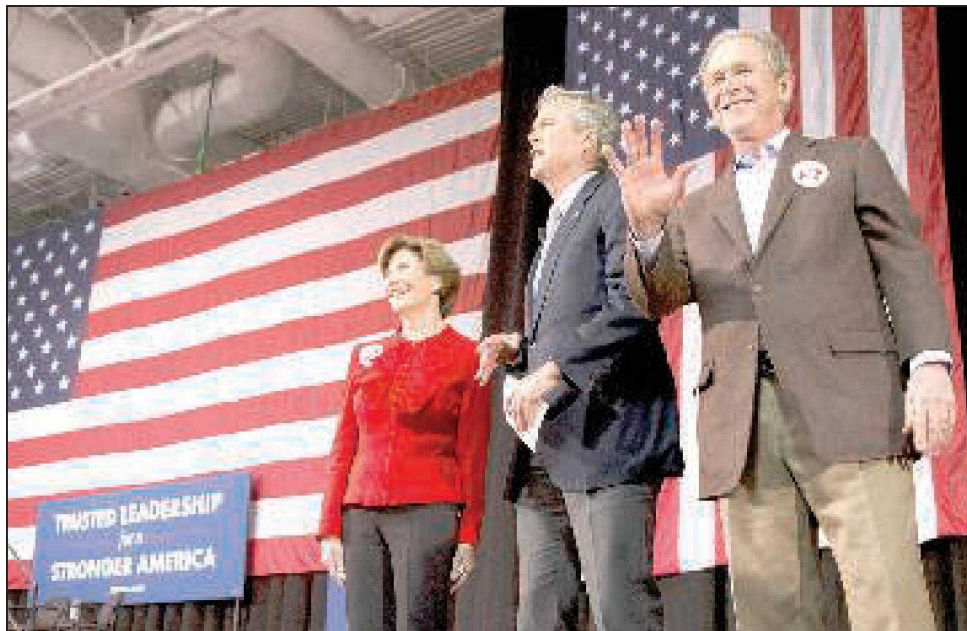
As he praised South Carolina's Republican Gov. Nikki Haley, the daughter of Indi-

an-born parents, Bush pointedly said, "Thank goodness our country welcomed her parents when they immigrated here in 1969."

It was a reminder of how much the Republican Party has changed since he was president. While Bush championed failed legislation that would have provided a pathway to citizenship for millions of people in the U.S. illegally, many current GOP presidential candidates have fought to outdo each other with tough enforcement policies, even mass deportations.

Jeb Bush spent months trying to figure out what role, if any, his brother might play in his campaign. The 43rd president left office deeply unpopular with a nation fatigued by the Iraq War and angry over his botched response to Hurricane Katrina. He's also a reminder to voters eager to break with the political establishment that Jeb Bush would be the third man from his family to serve as president.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Republican presidential candidate and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, center, accompanied by his brother former President George W. Bush and George's wife Laura Bush, takes the stage during a campaign stop Monday in North Charleston.



Title: **New bills have little chance of passing**
 Author: By SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press
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New bills have little chance of passing

Legislation would raise minimum wage, repeal right to work law

By SEANNA ADCOX

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Proposals to raise the minimum wage in South Carolina and repeal an anti-union law have virtually no chance of passing in the Republican-dominated Legislature, but Democrats hope to spark a debate as the nation's attention turns to the first-in-the-South primary state.

Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter, who sponsored both bills, said it's time to discuss living wages in a state that ranks 46th in child poverty, 48th in per capita income and last in union membership.

"We keep hearing all these glowing numbers about how great things are," she said of jobs touted by GOP Gov. Nikki Haley. "Yet we get reports that show we're ranking in the bottom. ... I don't see why we can't at least start talking about the reality of what it means to work in

South Carolina on one hand and still be eligible for assistance on the other."

Cobb-Hunter, D-Orangeburg, held a news conference on the bills last week after a House panel officially adjourned debate on both. A second hearing is not expected.

One bill would set the state's minimum wage at \$10.10 an hour. South Carolina is among 21 states where employers can pay as low as \$7.25 an hour, the federal minimum since 2009.

Proponents call \$10.10 a start. That's the minimal pay for federal contractors, as per President Barack Obama's 2014 executive order.

"We'll continue to fight for \$15" an hour, said Rachel Nelson of Charleston, who makes \$9 an hour at Hardee's after 10 years as a fast food worker.

The mother of three children, ages 8 to 12, told the House panel she'd like to get off of public assistance, but her paychecks make it impossible.

"With my last check, I was only able to pay my light bill," Nelson said.

"Trying to keep a roof over our heads is a constant stresser in my life."

More than 2,600 state employees make less than \$10.10 an hour, or about 4 percent of the state-paid workforce. Just over half of those employees are considered temporary, according to the Department of Administration. It noted the numbers could be higher since public colleges aren't required to send the agency data on temporary workers.

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BILLS

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Rep. Todd Atwater, who sits on the subcommittee, contends raising the minimum wage is bad for the economy because it increases products' cost and eliminates entry-level jobs often filled by high school and college students.

"It hurts the workers they're trying to help," said Atwater, R-Lexington.

The answer, he said, is better training, so students graduate from school with skills that enable them to get a higher-paying job.

Cobb-Hunter's other bill would repeal the state's right-

to-work law.

About half of states have such laws, which means unions can't force employees across an entire worksite to pay membership dues as a condition of employment.

Haley, who frequently lambasts unions, considers the state's low union membership

an economic development tool.

About 41,000 people — or just 2.1 percent of South Carolina's workers — belong to unions, leapfrogging North Carolina in 2015 to rank last nationwide, according to a January report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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**NIKKI
HALEY**



AT THE STATEHOUSE
Associated Press

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Senators get several choices on road money

JEFFREY COLLINS

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 a year to get the pavement on the interstates up to good condition 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 Pres-

ident Pro Tem Hugh Leath-erman told his colleagues they could spend most of next week on it too.

The proposal getting the most attention on the Senate floor would raise the gas tax by 12 cents a 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 a 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 proven.

Reforming the DOT's board and the State Infrastructure Bank, which helps borrow money for expensive projects will also 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 promises 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.

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