

Title: **SC needs to flush bathroom bill away**
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SC needs to flush bathroom bill away

A powerful backlash to the ill-advised and hastily approved public restroom law in North Carolina unfortunately did not prevent an attempt at similar legislation in South Carolina, embodied in Senate bill 1203. Before a Senate committee heard testimony, opponents mobilized.

State Sen. Lee Bright of Spartanburg, chief sponsor of S 1203, claims to have concern about the safety of women in restrooms. Following that reasoning, women using public toilets are vulnerable to potential attacks from men posing as women — or pretending to be transgenders. That illustrates distressing unenlightenment, but Bright adds, “If a (small percentage) of the population wants to be something that a majority of the population thinks is strange and abnormal, that’s their business. You can’t force people to accept something like that.” Accept what? That human rights apply to everyone?

Intellectually, Bright appears to have been on another planet — Mars, perhaps? — or paying no attention to the equality and civil rights issues at stake. Sen. Marlon Kimpson of Charleston alluded to the intrusive aspect of enforcement. “We’re going to have the Lee Bright genitalia patrol for bathrooms in South Carolina.”

Like the now-maligned N.C. law, S 1203 would invalidate municipal ordinances, including those in Myrtle Beach, Columbia and Charleston, that protect lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders from discrimination. Members of the LGBT community need protection from discrimination, not protection from a nontransgender lady from Little River. It’s the transgender high school or college student who needs protection from his or her peers, not the other way around, as suggested in the email blast sent last week by the Palmetto Family Council: “Protect Our Chil-

dren in Restrooms and Showers.” The Palmetto Family Council, based in Columbia, organized testimony in support of S 1203.

“Bright’s bathroom bill would, if passed, make transgender students feel unsafe at school, said Greg Green, a 32-year-old transgender man who runs a support group for transgender people at his Columbia church,” Jamie Self and Andrew Shain of The State newspaper reported in The Sun News. “What it causes really is a lot of anxiety. My concern is the outing,” Green said.

Reaction to HB2 continued in North Carolina. Gov. Pat McCrory signed an executive order he said expanded protection for gay or transgender state employees. Attorney general Roy Cooper, who is McCrory’s re-election opponent, said the “executive order is a day late and a veto short.” (Mark Berman in The Washington Post.) Deutsche Bank announced the law caused the firm to put off plans to add 250 jobs in an expansion at its software application center in Cary.

PayPal earlier backed off from an announced expansion. Other major companies such as Apple, Google and American Airlines, have criticized the law. The Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau reported more event cancellations. Bruce Springsteen cancelled a Greensboro concert. The NBA All-Star game may not be in Charlotte, as scheduled. The N.C. law clearly is bad for business, creating many economic hardships.

Many in South Carolina, including Gov. Nikki Haley, are aware of the problems from the N.C. law and know S 1203 will create the same here. There is reason for optimism that Bright’s bill will not advance in the General Assembly, and we hope that will be the outcome for this discriminatory proposal.

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61,000 stand to lose SNAP benefits under newly reinstated federal rules

As of April 1, 61,000 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients in South Carolina must meet specific requirements or lose their benefits.

The change comes because South Carolina elected not to re-apply for a waiver that allows qualifying states to extend benefits for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents past the federal time limit of three months in a three-year time period, Gov. Nikki Haley said during a Thursday news conference. The requirements South Carolina is now subject to require that people between the ages of 18 and 49 with no dependents or disability work at least 20 hours per week; participate in a job training program 20 hours per week; or do some combination of work and job training for a total of 80 hours a month.

"Right now, we have able-bodied adults without dependents that are on food stamps," Haley said. "This is not denying anyone food stamps. What this is saying is, we need to get these people to work." Susan Alford, director of the S.C. Department of Social Services, and Cheryl Stanton, executive director of the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce, flanked Haley at the news conference and pledged a more active partnership between their agencies to achieve that goal.

"Historically, DSS has not systemically been in and out of our (work) centers, and what we're working on now is making sure that we have a DSS/SNAP employment and training coordinator moving around the state to all of our centers on a regular basis," Stanton said.

No specific new outreach programs are planned. Stanton emphasized the success of recently launched initiatives, including a job-readiness program with the Transitions homeless recovery center in Columbia that she said put 16 out of 19 participants in its first class to work.

"We've stopped sitting behind our desks and waiting for people to come into our S.C. work centers and gotten out into the communities," Stanton said.

The time limit for the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents was a part of 1996 federal welfare law. The economic

downturn caused many qualified states to waive that limit, but as the economy improved and unemployment rates dropped, some states no longer qualified for the waiver. South Carolina has an unemployment rate of 5.5%, according to the most recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — above the national average of 5% — and would have qualified for the waiver again, Haley said.

"We would qualify. We're choosing not to do that. This is a choice by this administration not to do that," Haley said. "What we are saying is, we are in a position where we don't want that waiver anymore." A call to DSS, which would have sought the waiver, to confirm South Carolina's qualification status was not immediately returned Thursday.

As of March, approximately 61,000 of the 772,093 SNAP recipients in South Carolina were designated as able-bodied without dependents. Nationwide, that number stands between 500,000 and 1 million, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The time limit will take effect in 40 states in 2016 — 22 of those for the first time since before the 2008 recession. Nineteen must re-impose the limit in at least part of the state, while three are electing to re-impose it despite qualifying for a waiver because of continued high unemployment, according to the center, which did not specify which states.

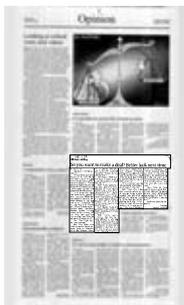
The food assistance in question averages \$150 to \$170 per month person, the center said. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicate that those likely to be cut off from these benefits have an average monthly income of approximately 17% of the poverty line and typically qualify for no other support.

"The mission of the Department of Social Services is to get families stable, and to help them as they struggle to get back on their feet," Alford said. "Since 2012, in working with our SNAP recipients, over 14,000 of them have gotten jobs and have started that pathway to independence.

"We believe we'll see even more success with our folks in terms of getting families stable by partnering with (DEW) in a more formal way."



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Offshore drilling

So you want to make a deal? Better luck next time

To the editor:

Applause from the audience.

"Welcome to the loser's round of 'So You Think You Have a Deal,' brought to you by the American Petroleum Institute - whose goal is to supply the United States with the best politicians money can buy. I'm your host Bob Blowhard.

"You remember that last week we brought back Sen. Tim Scott whose valiant effort to have the 50-mile offshore oil drilling restriction removed so oil rigs would be visible as close as 3 miles was rebuffed when President Obama pulled drilling leases in the Atlantic off the table. That qualified him as a big loser. Who do we have this week, Don?"

Don: "Gov. Nikki Haley, *come on down!*"

Bob: "Gov. Haley, this time you get to choose between Door No. 1 labeled 'Pick the Winner,' Door No. 2 labeled 'The People' or Door No. 3 labeled 'Surprise.' Which do you

choose first?"

Gov. Haley: "Well, Bob, I'm usually pretty good at picking winners so I'll take Door No. 1."

Bob: "Sorry, Governor, but you (and Tim Scott) decided to back Marco Rubio in this year's presidential race. His lackluster performance in the debates and his loss in even his home state's primary knocked him out of the contest early. Care to try another door?"

Gov. Haley: "I *am* the governor of the people of South Carolina so I'll take Door No. 2."

Bob: "Sorry, again, Governor, but you pursued offshore oil drilling in the Atlantic in spite of the fact that every coastal community in your state opposed it and that over one million people wrote to the federal government opposing it. When President Obama withdrew leasing of oil rights in the Atlantic the best you could come up with was 'Golly, he sure pulled the rug out

from under me!'

"It is clear that you do not represent 'The People' so you lose on this one."

Bob: "Since this is the loser's round and we can't let you go home empty-handed, you get what is behind the surprise Door No. 3. You have won an all-expense paid trip to California by way of Florida, courtesy of oil and gas tycoons the Koch brothers so you can take part in an intense training seminar on 'How to Succeed in Politics by Representing Only the Fat Cats' with the hope that they will get more for their money next time. Don, who is our next loser?"

Don: "Now we have Gulf of Mexico sport fisherman, African big game hunter, and all-around macho man S.C. Rep. Stephen Goldfinch. *Come on down!*"

Applause from the audience.

Ed Yaw
North Litchfield