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148 Bill would give money to school districts

BY JIM HILLEY
jim@theitem.com

Renovations to several elementary schools would be the most likely targets for repair and renovation in the Sumter School District if a bill passed by the South Carolina House



GALLOWAY

of Representatives Ways and Means Committee becomes law, said Sumter School District Public Information Coordinator Shelly Galloway.

She said Alice Drive Middle School, and Millwood, Willow Drive and Kingsbury elementary schools are included in the district's plans for repair and renovation if the funding becomes available.

"The plan would also include renovation to the Fine Arts Auditorium at Sumter High School," Galloway said.

Under the bill, schools in South Carolina could receive grants or borrow money from the state to build and repair

the state to build and repair buildings or to wire schools for technology.

The proposal would have the state determine how much debt capacity is available and issue as much as \$200 million in bonds each year.

S.C. Department of Education would make an assessment of the school district's needs, and the districts would submit plans for how they would spend the money to the department, which would create a priority list and send that to the General Assembly for a vote.

The bill allows the agency flexibility to give grants to poorer districts or offer loans to districts with better tax bases, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Brian White, R-Anderson said.

The bill passed unanimously

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BONDS

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in committee and now advances to the full House.

Gov. Nikki Haley suggested a similar plan in her State of the State address in January.

The funds would be targeted at instructional facilities, and sports stadiums and administration buildings would be excluded from receiving the money.

To make sure the money is spent properly, districts must keep maintenance records on buildings, which may be difficult for some poor districts.

"Some districts have facilities offices and departments and some do not," pointed out Rep.

William Clyburn, D-Aiken.

The funding includes incentives to encourage consolidation. A district could have to build one technology center to be shared by several schools, White said.

"There would be some consolidations of facilities as needed for that district," White said. "I think this is a great tool not only to build facilities, but to get financial houses in order as well."

That would not apply to the Sumter School District, Gallo-way said, as it is already consolidated into one district.

The Associated Press contributed to this article.

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FASHION | Lisette-L

Canadian designer's pants have bipartisan support

BY **CARRIE HUMPHREYS**
FOR THE OBSERVER

Lisette Limoges designs women's pants. The ultimate pant, according to her, that flatter women of every body type and size. For women of all ages and lifestyles.

Celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Martha Stewart, Kathi Lee Gifford, Governor Nikki Haley, Ivanka Trump, and Hillary Clinton all proclaim to be fans of the Lisette-L line.

Limoges says her pants make you feel better about yourself. "Once you try them on, you feel good in them. You buy them. That's it."

Shoppers can try them on at Pawleys Island Wear in the Hammock Shops. Limoges and family – husband Neil Small, daughter Kathrynne, and puppy Jupiter – visited the boutique on Monday to showcase the Lisette-L brand. The business is a family affair. Lisette's daughter is associate creative director. Lisette's husband and son David oversee sales. They charmed customers, according to store owner Beth Hart.

Hart has carried Lisette-L pants for nearly 10 years. Locally the line is exclusive to Pawleys Island Wear. "My clientele come back season after season to try on the newest looks. There is such a variety of styles that work well for all body types. But the best part is the fit," Hart said.

Monday's appearance was Limoges' first visit to the Hammock Shops. Prior

to her visiting our area, she and family spent 10 days in Charleston as one of the sponsors of the Family Circle Volvo Cup Classic tennis tournament.

"We hosted the players party and I had such good time. People are so warm here," she said in a lilting French-Canadian accent. "I met Nikki [Haley] and had cocktails with Martha [Stewart]. They both love my pants."

Priced between \$129 to \$179, and ranging in size from 0 to 16, the wash-and-wear, pull-on pants are constructed with a hidden tummy panel that smooths and enhances a woman's natural curves. They come in all lengths and in a multitude of colors, even prints. No buttons. No zippers. No pockets.

It is Oprah who put Limoges' brand on the map several years ago. Oprah wore the pants for three separate covers for O Magazine and "fell in love with them," Limoges said. Oprah then included her in The Life You Want tour, which attracted up to 22,000 people at a time in cities like Atlanta, Newark and Miami, where 250 pairs of Lisette-L pants were given away to participants. When Oprah took the stage she would tell the crowd she was wearing Lisette-L pants, calling them the most comfortable pair of pants she has ever worn.

Since Oprah's endorsement, Limoges' business, located in her home town of Montreal, has boomed. She is stunned that the sales for the made-in-

Canada brand have grown 900 percent. Staffing has increased from 5 to 65 employees, not including the outside contractors.

"We grew fast," Limoges said.

And although sales soared with Oprah's approval, her pants got their kick-start four years ago when Kathie Lee Gifford held up a pair of Lisette-L pants on her morning television show, declaring to viewers that they "fit like a dream." Gifford had purchased the pants in a Key Largo, Fla., boutique.

"We had no idea she was going to do that," Limoges said. "Our website was flooded with so many people trying to place orders that it crashed."

Limoges and her husband spent 30 years representing other manufacturers prior to forming their own company in 2003. Their retail clients kept asking them for a perfect fitting pair of pants. When they couldn't find it, they

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Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Limoges, right, and her daughter meet a fan, Judy Schwarzmann at Pawleys Island Wear.

decided to create it themselves. Today their unique line also includes mix-and-match knit tops and blazers to complement the solid or print pant. The multitude of pieces are versatile and incredibly chic. No surprise that celebrities fancy them.

Since her unexpected success, Lisette now spends most of her time traveling to boutiques

across Canada, The United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand listening to the needs of her customers. She then returns home to produce the next season's designs, selecting the fabrics and a diversity of styles, from boot cut to capris, which she embellishes with a signature Lisette metal tab attached to the front of the pants, just

below the waistband.

A grandmother, Limoges, 66, grew up in her family's grocery store. "I was always in the public, around people," she said. "I like to talk, but I never thought I would have this – that I would become what I am. It cannot get any better. My dream is now. My mother is so proud."

148 Let's all take a deep breath

By **PHIL NOBLE**

Guest column

A few items from this week's newspapers, two from South Carolina and two national:

Item one

Attorney General Alan Wilson called David Pascoe (the special prosecutor that Wilson appointed) a "liar" over his handling of a public corruption case.



NOBLE

It began with a barrage of harsh words from Wilson delivered with great heat and passion and ended with a flurry of papers filed in court.

Gov. Nikki Haley called the whole thing "an embarrassing mess." There's no reason to think it won't continue for a while.

Item two

This week, S.C. Senator Lee Bright introduced legislation to regulate which bathroom transgender folks could use. The bill was filed accompanied by emotionally charged, dog whistle rhetoric – guaranteed to make a certain small portion of the electorate start politically salivating.

Bright's bill follows similar measures in Georgia and North Carolina and the response has been quick in coming.

Everyone from Bruce Springsteen to the National Basketball and Football Leagues, to literally hundreds of national and international companies and executives have all actively opposed these states' actions. As one Georgia lawmaker said, "This is 2016 and the people supporting this bill want to take us back to the 1800's."

Item three

On the national level, opinion polls now show

that a majority of Americans have a negative opinion of both Hillary Clinton (55 percent negative) and Donald Trump (69 percent negative).

Think about that for a moment. The actual cam-

paign with the two party nominees has not even begun and the two people most likely to be their party nominees have already turned off a majority of the country.

With seven more months of nastiness to go before the November election, it's quite possible that both candidates may have negative ratings that crack 70-80 percent.

How can anyone govern the country when overwhelming numbers of the American people don't like them or trust them – before they even take office and begin to try and govern?

Item four

This week, former President Bill Clinton was making a speech on behalf of his wife and was heckled by a handful of people from the Black Lives Matter movement.

Heckling of politicians by Black Lives Matter is nothing new and by now one would think that a politician as experienced as Bill Clinton could handle these disruptions easily.

Instead, in the words of one cable TV pundit, "He lost it." He got in a shouting match such that even he recognized he had crossed the line and the next day he said that he regretted the incident.

Such was this week in politics. What makes it so extraordinary is that it was not extraordinary, but ordinary. This has become the new normal in politics – what one analyst called "the politics of personal destruction."

OK, I know what comes next – "politics has always been nasty ... the campaigns just reflect our larger culture ... people get the politicians they deserve ... it was worse in the old days ..." and on and on it goes.

Yes, all of this is true. But, it is possible to do

things differently.

In the divisive and hostile era of Vietnam protest politics, there was at least some important policy at stake; today it is all personal attacks.

In that era, Vice President Hubert Humphrey was known as "the happy warrior" because he was. Bobby Kennedy could be a ruthless political street fighter, but he was also the candidate of "some men see things as they are and

ask why; I dream of things that never were and say why not."

Ronald Reagan was above all else, the candidate of sunny optimism and even after seven years of political vitriol, one can still see strains of Obama's hope and change coming through.

Is there anything that we, average citizens, can do about all this? To me, the answer is "no not much, but yes a little."

None of us are a match for the avalanche of negativity of cable TV politics. We don't have other choices; the candidates of the two parties are pretty much set and there are no other real alternatives.

Our one vote in a national or state election is not going to make much difference. All true – that's the "no not much" part.

But there is also the "yes a little" part. First, we can just not participate in the political trash talking that goes on all around us every day – at the break room at work, at the weekend get-together with friends and even at Wednesday night suppers at church.

Just don't join in. We can change things. Segregation-era racial divisions in the South began to change when people changed. When ordinary people changed their language, began to slowly open their minds and hearts and eventually extended their hands.

It happened without fanfare, it happened quietly on the personal level, it happened millions of times across the South, it hap-

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pened in big cities and small towns.

It happened simply because people acted of their own accord because they came to know, deep down in their hearts, that something different was not

only better but possible.

It happened slowly at first, but it happened. And today, no one wants to go back.

If "we the people" can change our attitudes about race – and thus change so-

ciety's attitudes – then we can also change attitudes about politics. We can change the politics of personal destruction.

We did it once, we can do it again.

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Fashion-backward in North Carolina

By Kathleen Parker

It's been a long while since South Carolina could look down upon its neighbor to the North.

Thanks to North Carolina's anti-LGBT legislation (HB2), also referred to as the "bathroom bill," the state effectively has begun redefining itself from its long-popular characterization as a "valley of humility between two mountains of conceit" (South Carolina and Virginia).

The new law, which ludicrously requires transgender people to use the restroom consistent with the sex on their birth certificates, has liberated South Carolina from its persistent place as the brunt of late-night jokes. Remarking on the law, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley said her state doesn't have "that problem." Brava.

The law in question was hurriedly passed last month and signed by North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory in response to what one state official called a restroom free-for-all,

referring to sudden hysteria over the possibility of transgender individuals using the "wrong" restroom. How would anyone know? Will officials now post monitors at public restrooms to check birth certificates and human bladder-evacuation portals?

This would be riotously funny if it weren't so patently discriminatory.

Many bad deeds go unpunished, but not this one. The economic fallout from the law already is being felt and the price of not doing business is about to go up. Bruce Springsteen recently canceled a concert in Greensboro and Deutsche Bank has frozen a planned 250-job expansion in the state. But the real showdown will be this weekend when not nearly as many buyers and designers as usual will attend the biannual High Point furniture market - the largest in the nation and the state's biggest economic event.

A recent study by Duke University placed the annual economic impact of the High Point market at \$5.38 billion. The furnishings in-

dustry also generates more than 600,000 visitor days to the state each year and accounts for 37,000 jobs.

If there were a Darwin Award for states, North Carolina would win hands-down. Already the High Point Market Authority reports that hundreds or thousands of the 75,000 retailers and designers

who annually attend the market won't be visiting this year because of HB2, which, come to think of it, sounds appropriately like a disease.

Many of those who plan to attend have expressed deep reservations amid likely plans to go to the relatively new Las Vegas furniture market next go-round. Among these is Don Wooters, interior designer and co-owner of Easton's Dwelling and Design, who told me he feels guilt about going to North Carolina.

"I feel like a traitor going to High Point, putting capitalism before human rights," he said. "I don't feel good about that and I know it's wrong."

Wooters isn't only baffled by the bigotry of the legislation but also

by whatever generates the fear behind it.

"Why do people feel they have to be afraid? It's a big sign of how uneducated America is."

Another local designer, Jamie Merida, owner of Bountiful, told me he decided to go if only to make his case to vendors that they have six months to straighten out this mess or he, too, will be off to Las Vegas next time.

Although North Carolina has been noted in recent years for its increasingly hard-right politics, it is still shocking that a state that boasts several of the nation's top colleges and universities and is home to the famed Research Triangle, could codify what is so plainly a discriminatory law. In comments Tuesday, McCrory, feeling the pressure, softened his defense of the law but stopped short of opposing the provision on bathroom use by transsexual people.

As in all other times when bigotry raises its hideous head, better angels will prevail. Either the

courts will overturn the law or the state will come to its senses, if only for economic reasons.

As to that valley of humility? In 1900, when Mary Oates Spratt Van Landingham, a cultural leader and author, first conjured the image in a speech, she was bemoaning her state's then-lesser "native literature."

"Could it be that being located between Virginia and South Carolina, our people for so long have been furnished such conspicuous illustrations of self-appreciation that they have, by contrast, learned modesty and silence?" she said. "Where there are mountains of conceit, there are apt to be valleys of humility."



Today, those mountains have good reason for self-appreciation by comparison. And North Carolina has proved itself a valley of ignorance, whose legislators and

governor could use a moment of silence to consider their ill-conceived conceit.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleenparker@washpost.com.

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S.C. public restroom 'protection' bill is really about blatant discrimination

Backlash to ill-advised N.C. law ignored by S 1203 sponsors

Transgender people more likely victims, hardly predators

'Bright bathroom bill' would deny human rights to some

By the Editorial Board

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 last week, 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 non-transgender 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 Children 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.

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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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N.C. legislator sees HB2 as the right thing

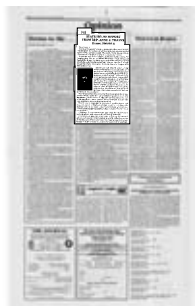
N.C. House Majority Leader Mike Hager defends the state's new HB2 law that has been widely criticized as discriminatory and an economic nightmare.

"There's not a price for doing the right thing. My first role in office is protecting citizens, not how much business we can get," Hager, R-Rutherfordton, told The State.

In addition to South Carolina, Tennessee and Mississippi are considering similar legislation and this shows "it's good policy," Hager said. All 50 states having ill-advised, discriminatory laws would not make make them good policy. Appropriate public policy depends on the intent and purpose of laws – not how many states have similar laws.



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STATE HOUSE REPORT FROM REP. ANNE J. THAYER House District 9

Dear Friends,

I've heard repeatedly from constituents they want SCDOT reformed before millions of additional dollars are sent to that agency to fix our state's roads. This week, the SC House of Representatives took decisive action to create real reform.

It was not easy as Gov. Haley insisted we rubber stamp the Senate's plan. Before our debate she took to social media and bashed the House for planning to amend the Senate proposal which she called "real, good reform". She went further to accuse House members of trying to kill reform. I have to disagree with her on this issue.



The House had delayed action on the Senate amendments for several weeks until we received the findings of the Legislative Audit Council report which exposed insufficiencies within SCDOT. That year-long investigation provided keen, independent insights into the operations of SCDOT that are invaluable in retooling that agency to meet the current road crisis and create an agency citizens can have confidence in for years to come. With those new revelations in front of us, the House could not in good faith pass the Senate amendment because it fell short of true reform.

With much debate this week, the House amended the Senate version of the roads bill by an overwhelming vote of 113-6. The legislative process exists so that the General Assembly can work together to move South Carolina forward, not provide opportunities for political grandstanding.

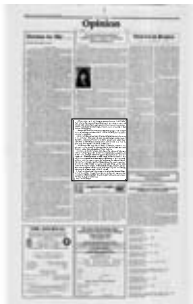
The House's amendment preserves qualifications and requirements for Highway Commissioners, solidifies the transparency of the State Infrastructure Bank, and removes irresponsible budgeting practices that threaten the stability of our economy.

- Highway Commissioners are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the General Assembly

- Commission appoints a Secretary of Transportation with advice and consent of the General Assembly, who then serves at the pleasure of the Commission to create a single line of authority from the Governor, to the Commission, to the Secretary.



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- Eliminates the Joint Transportation Review Committee, but retains the required qualifications for Commissioners to ensure appointees have appropriate education and experience. These qualifications and requirements were removed in the Senate amendment.

- Adopts the State Infrastructure Bank language in the Senate version and requires the entity to follow SCDOT prioritization criteria for projects.

- Removes the annual \$400M general fund mandate because it is unreliable. This year's House passed budget appropriated \$415M in additional funds to SCDOT, an amount larger than specified in the Senate amendment, and we will continue to give available funds to SCDOT in the future.

- Addresses the Legislative Audit Council's concerns expressed in the report by placing the SCDOT Chief Internal Auditor under the independent State Auditor.

It is now up to the Senate; they have the option of taking a vote or not taking a vote. A vote for concurrence would result in the bill's passage and sending it to the Governor's desk for signature. Nonoccurrence would result in the formation of a conference committee to hammer out differences. We obviously prefer a vote for concurrence, but welcome the idea of blending our two versions together. Regardless, the most important action is for the Senate to take a vote and bring us one step closer to fixing our roads. At the end of the day, South Carolinians want progress on this issue and repairing our crumbling infrastructure starts with SCDOT reform.

Filing has closed and I have opposition for the General Election in November. I hope I have proven to be a strong voice for you and an effective leader. It is my hope I will continue to have the opportunity to serve you.

Rep. Anne Thayer



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***FOIA policy
at SCDOT
reformed***

Secretary of Transportation Christy A. Hall has announced changes in the agency's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) policy in an effort to make the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) more open and accessible to the public.

The changes are as follows:

- SCDOT will not levy any charges for the research of information or retrieval and copying of documents that take less than two hours to complete.

- Any staff time required beyond two hours will be charged at a flat rate of \$20 per hour.

- Duplication of the first 25 pages from a requested document will not incur any charges.

Secretary Hall points to a review of FOIA requests filed with SCDOT over the past 12 months. Hall said more than 3/4 of those requests made in the past year would not have incurred any charges under the new policy.

Hall has been reviewing the agency's spectrum of policies since she was appointed Acting Secretary by Gov. Haley in 2015. Since the confirmation of her appointment a little over two months ago, Hall is moving forward with policy changes. "One of our goals is to significantly improve the public's access to SCDOT records and how taxpayers' money is being spent. The changes in SCDOT's FOIA policy are a step in that direction," said Hall.

Hall noted that she has begun other initiatives to improve the efficiency and performance of SCDOT, both internally and in the delivery of completed road and bridge projects for the public.

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The Sun News of Myrtle Beach on the state's 'bathroom bill'

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148 Losing control over a carefully crafted image?

BY JOHN MONK
The State
jmonk@thestate.com

COLUMBIA — For six years as attorney general, Alan Wilson could do little wrong when it came to his public image. He has been talked about by many as a strong contender in the 2018 governor's race.

That has changed.

In the past month, Wilson, a 42-year-old Republican, has been gobsmailed by publicity that is every politician's nightmare.

In a filing in the S.C. Supreme Court, Wilson has been accused of trying to halt a State Law Enforcement Division investigation into possible public corruption in the Legislature.

Days later, two of Wilson's political allies later were revealed by The State newspaper as potential subjects of the probe. And, during a March 30 press conference, Wilson hurled personal insults at the prosecutor who made the filing in the high court. At the press conference, Wilson also emotionally claimed that unnamed "cowards" and "haters" were out to get him.

Then, a top aide, Adam Piper, was discovered hatching a plot to publicly smear Wilson's legal opponent, special prosecutor David Pascoe. Wilson did not discipline Piper.

These events spell trouble for Wilson's future, some say.

"It just looks to the average fellow that the attorney general is trying to push something aside," said Neal

Thigpen, a state Republican party activist for more than 40 years and a former political science professor at Francis Marion University in Florence, which Wilson attended. Thigpen also is a friend of Wilson's father, Joe Wilson, a Republican congressman from South Caro-

lina since 2001.

"Logically, you would have to say, this could have an effect on whether Alan makes the race or not," Thigpen said. "This could be damaging — regardless of the outcome" of the court's deliberation.

Asked Friday about his political future and whether it had been affected by the Supreme Court controversy, Wilson's office released a short statement.

"The attorney general is focused on doing the best job possible as attorney general," said Wilson spokeswoman Hayley Thrift. "Our filings speak for themselves."

Worse than a sex scandal?

Wilson, like Gov. Nikki Haley, is from Lexington County. They were elected to statewide office the same year.

But even she said recently that the now-month-old Wilson-Pascoe dispute is "an embarrassing mess" and called on the Supreme Court to end it.

In his filings in the state Supreme Court, Pascoe has accused Wilson of trying to halt Pascoe's and SLED's ongoing State Grand Jury investigation of legislators' possible criminal violations.

Pascoe has asked the Supreme Court to decide whether Wilson has the authority to intervene in the investigation after the attorney general recused himself because of conflicts and appointed Pascoe as prosecutor instead. Pascoe also has asked the court to keep Wilson from firing him, as Wilson would like.

College of Charleston political science professor Gibbs Knotts said the stakes are high for Wilson in the current controversy.

Although all the facts aren't known in the Wilson-

Pascoe battle, and the S.C. Supreme Court has yet to rule, controversies involving finances or public corruption and alleged cover-ups — as the current dispute is rife with — are the worst kind of publicity for a politician, Knotts said.

"Even sex scandals aren't as bad," Knotts said. "If people view this as some type of corruption scandal, that could be damaging for Wilson's future prospects."

But Wilson has won his office in two statewide races and "at this point, until we have more information, he is a person who is known across the state and who would be a contender for future office," Knotts said.

Some remain strongly loyal to Wilson.

"All of our crime victims are very much in favor of Alan continuing his career," said Laura Hudson, head of the S.C. Crime Victims' Council. "I don't see any reason why not. He's done so much for victims of criminal domestic violence and forming a human-trafficking task force and using the bully pulpit of the attorney general's office to get things done."

Longtime Republican political operative Bob McAlister said of Wilson's fate: "It's too early to know. A lot is dependent on what the Supreme Court does. But this is important to know — Alan Wilson has done a lot of good things as attorney general."

Conservative base

In addition to building up his crime-fighting credentials, Wilson has used his position to take legal and political stands that are popular with the highly conservative and fundamentalist religious base that votes in Republican primaries, said Clemson University political scientist David Woodard.



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On the political front, before South Carolina's February GOP presidential primary, Wilson traveled the state, boosting his profile by hosting forums for most all of the Republican presidential front-runners, Woodard noted.

In South Carolina, that's something that, normally, a congressman would do, not someone like Wilson, who holds statewide elective office. The gatherings gave Wilson the chance to share his message of limited government, states rights, socially conservative values and strict constitutional interpretation before thousands of South Carolinians — helpful if he chooses to seek a higher of-

fice.

On the legal front, Wilson has used his office to take stands similar to those of conservative Republicans nationwide: filing legal actions to fight transgender equality bathroom access and to weaken the authority of the EPA to enact regulations. Environmentalists say are needed but big business interests say are burdensome.

Even Wilson's losing legal stands play well with many in the conservative electorate.

Last year, he fought a long and failing taxpayer-

financed federal court battle to stop the legalization of same-sex marriage. And his office continues to defend a death penalty appeal in a case in which a federal judge overturned the verdict and denounced a prosecutor for comparing a black defendant to "King Kong."

"I thought Wilson had been doing pretty well, and insulating himself from any criticism up until now, but this (current publicity) is a setback," Clemson's Woodard said.

"If Wilson has any chink in his armor, that will encourage people to come out and run against him," Woodard said.

Code of conduct

Many of the state's 10,000-plus lawyers are watching the Wilson controversy, said Greg Adams, who teaches legal ethics at the University of South Carolina law school.

"I've certainly heard a number of lawyers, not just

criminal lawyers, talking about his comments being out of bounds, uncivil, in violation of our oath of office — and being unethical," Adams said.

Under the lawyers' code of professional conduct, attorneys can argue a case passionately in court, but

they take an oath to be civil to each other outside court, Adams said.

Even if Wilson wins the case in the Supreme Court against Pascoe, "the lawyers with whom I've talked have reached the judgment that Wilson has not handled this in a professional way," Adams said.

Wilson's conduct contrasts with that of Pascoe, who has made no public comment about the Supreme Court litigation and is perceived as "simply trying to get an issue resolved," Adams said.

Wilson has said if the Supreme Court allows him to fire Pascoe, he wants the SLED and State Grand Jury investigation to go forward with a new special prosecutor.

But John Crangle, executive director of S.C. Common Cause and a longtime observer of ethics in state government, said that by seeking to fire Pascoe and making personal attacks on him while Pascoe is in the midst of an ongoing public corruption investigation, Wilson has handled himself poorly — no matter what he says.

Thigpen said, "Even if Alan wins in the Supreme Court over Pascoe, this whole thing has to be viewed as a minus for him."



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Crossover deadline clouds SC legislative dreams

BY JAMIE SELF
The State
jsself@thestate.com

COLUMBIA — Lawmakers in the House and Senate have one week left to pass bills from one chamber to the other before their policy hopes are — almost certainly — dashed for this legislative session.

Sunday is the crossover deadline. If a bill fails to pass in either the House or Senate and cross the lobby to the other chamber by that date, it will need a steep two-thirds vote just to stay alive.

A look at proposals that need a vote this week to beat the odds:

Improving rural schools

Operating in the shadow of a school equity lawsuit, state lawmakers introduced a handful of bills this year aimed at improving the state's ailing K-12 public schools, deemed unconstitutional by the S.C. Supreme Court two years ago.

Several proposals have cleared the House, including defining what a S.C. high-school graduate should know and giving the S.C. Department of Education authority to take over a school district in financially dire straits.

But the bill likely to have the most impact on the bank accounts of poor, rural school districts only just passed committee last Tuesday and hit the House floor.

First proposed by Gov. Nikki Haley, the bill would commit up to \$200 million a year in state spending to help school districts renovate and build school facilities.

Given its broad support, the bill probably will clear the House this week and sail smoothly into the Senate.

Fixing S.C. roads

Last week, the Senate Finance Committee approved a bill that would spend an added \$315 million on roads, including \$200 million a year to borrow more than 10 times that amount for roads.

The Senate and House have passed their own preferred road spending plans, but the chambers have failed to agree on a single path forward.

Senate Minority Leader Nikki Setzler, D-Lexington, said he'd like to see the Senate pass its roads plan and send it to the House this week. That's the surest way to make sure "there's no slip between the lip and the cup" on a roads fix before the legislative session ends.

Transgender bathroom bill has steep climb

State Sen. Lee Bright's bill to require transgender people to use the bathroom assigned to their biological birth sex has one week to get to the Senate floor and pass there to avoid the crossover deadline.

The Spartanburg Republican needs nine votes from Senate General Committee members to bring the bill directly to the Senate floor, skipping a committee vote. Bright said Friday he needs three more votes toward that nine.

Even if Bright succeeds, Democrats say they will block the bill on the Senate floor.

Disturbing schools

One of four bills that would change the state's disturbing schools law, which allows law enforcement to arrest students for misbehavior, managed to get a hearing last week.

But the bill's chances of being passed this year took a hit when a House panel decided to hold onto it for another week to make some changes. That ends the bill's chance of getting a House vote before Sunday's crossover deadline.

The panel's chairman, David Weeks, D-Sumter, said it's possible the bill could go directly to the floor.

But House Judiciary Chairman Greg Delleney, R-Chester, said that is unlikely because it would require the unanimous consent of the GOP-controlled House to bring the proposal to the floor for a vote.

Time is running out for all legislation introduced in this session, Delleney said. "Anything filed in the second year of a two-year session that has controversy in it doesn't make it."

Abortion at 20 weeks is not yet banned



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More than a month has passed since Delleney said he was certain the S.C. House would vote to send a bill banning abortion at 20 weeks and later to Haley's desk.

The bill passed the House 71-22 in February. The Senate then passed the bill, making some changes to provide for exceptions.

Now, Delleney needs 83 of the House's 124 members to OK a House-Senate compromise on the bill, already approved by the Senate.

So what's holding up the bill?

Attendance.

"We've had a lot of people out for sickness and business and other reasons," Delleney said.

Delleney has tried twice to get the compromise approved, failing by one vote the first time and

by three votes the second time in a chamber made up of 78 Republicans and 46 Democrats.

Delleney said he will try again in the next couple of weeks. Meanwhile, he has been counting votes, working to hold onto the support he has.

Efforts to persuade are going the other way, too.

Both sides are talking to everybody they can, said state Rep. James Smith, D-Richland, who opposes the abortion legislation. "If you look at the votes, many times there are Republicans who happen not to be there. It's not just a 'no' vote that is helpful. ... Simply not voting gets us there."

Cassie Cope of The State
contributed to this report.