

148 Soul of legislature may be up for grabs in June

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Just over half of the 170 seats in the South Carolina General Assembly have only one candidate — all incumbents, except for one seat where a newcomer has no challenger at all.

At first blush, it might seem like business as usual for our legislative elections thanks to past gerrymandering of districts that protected parties, favored incumbents and tamped down opposition to help the status quo. But a closer analysis shows something else is going on -- a battle for the soul of the legislature in the state Senate.

Of the 46 seats in the Senate, 17 senators are running unopposed — 10 Republicans and seven Democrats, including some who you might think opposing parties would scramble to find challengers. Examples include Democratic Sens. Vincent Sheheen and Brad Hutto who are continuing thorns in the sides of the GOP and its governor, Nikki Haley. On the Republican side, high-profile senators like Danny Verdin, Chip Campsen and Tom Davis got byes. You would think somebody might run against them, but with safe seats, those who could must figure, "Why?"

Meanwhile, a baker's dozen of Republican senators face primary opposition, sometimes from more than one candidate. At the top of the list is President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman of Florence, who has three challengers, including a county party chair. Also with challengers are moderates who sometimes conflict with the hard right William Wallace caucus in the Senate — Judiciary Chair Larry Martin of Pickens, Banking and Insurance Chair Wes Hayes of Rock Hill, Ethics



Andy Brack
Statehouse Report

Chair Luke Rankin of Conway and veteran Paul Campbell of Goose Creek.

But wait, it's not only the moderates, who believe they've been targeted by right-wingers and who are facing challenges. So do some of the more conservative members of the Senate, including Kevin Bryant of Anderson, Mike Fair of Greenville and Lee Bright of Roebuck, who has drawn three primary opponents including former state Rep. Scott Talley.

There also are some Democratic Senate squabbles, such as the Charleston rematch between former Sen. Robert Ford who was unseated after ethics problems by incumbent Sen. Marlon Kimpson, seen as a rising star. In Greenville, Sen. Karl Allen will again face Greenville City Council member Lillian Brock Flemming in the Democratic primary; the winner will face a Republican challenger.

More traditional challenges of Senate incumbents also exist. In November, voters will be able to decide whether a long-time Democratic Minority Leader Nikki Setzler of Lexington or senior Republican like John Courson of Columbia will

Yes, something serious is going on -- a battle for the heart of the state Senate. The June 14 primary should clarify which side will prevail — unless the incumbency advantage (money, media exposure, more) trumps the philosophi-

cal battle fueled by dark money and angst. In the Year of Voter Anger, it's tough to predict.

In the House, don't look for as much change, especially as 26 Democratic incumbents and 43 GOP current office-holders face no opposition. Fourteen incumbents — about split evenly between the two parties — face only primary opposition. Nineteen incumbents of 124 members have general election opposition only.

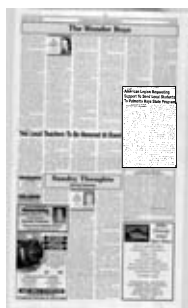
Perhaps the most interesting House races will be for the 13 open seats. Six Democrats are vying for longtime Rep. Grady Brown's Bishopville seat. The primary winner has no GOP challenger. Three Democrats, one Republican and one Libertarian want the Columbia House seat held by Mia McLeod, who is running for Sen. Joel Lourie's open seat. Republicans are likely to pick up the Charleston seat held by Democratic Rep. Mary Tinkler, who is running for a county office. (That seat was held by disgraced House Speaker Bobby Harrell.)

Three open Republican House seats to watch include those held by veterans Kenny Bingham of Lexington, Jenny Horne of Summerville (who is running for Congress) and Chip Limehouse of Charleston. Each will feature primary and general contests.

More than usual, this year's field of legislative candidates offers more choices in districts throughout the state. Despite the advantages of incumbency, it's healthy for voters in a democracy to have more than the same old candidates. The unhealthy exception? The open Georgetown House seat where a brand new candidate has no opposition at all. That's just plain sad.



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Series without Joe DiMaggio 632-0698.

American Legion Requesting Support To Send Local Students To Palmetto Boys State Program

**Submitted by Lloyd
Brown Post Commander**

The American Legion is requesting financial support to help selected Delegates from our local High Schools, Dillon Christian School, Dillon High School and Latta High School. This money will be used to send the Delegates to the Palmetto Boys State encampment at Anderson University from June 5th through June 11th, 2016.

In 2015 with the help from our Sponsors we were able to send Connor Hamilton from Dillon Christian School, Austin Moody and Daniel Hamilton from Dillon High School; Jonathan Anderson and Aaren Hyatt from Latta High School.

The cost to send a Delegate to Boys State is \$300.00. This program provides a unique way for young men to learn about the American system of Government and Politics by participating in a mock government system.

We call it a "Laboratory of Government" because during

the week each young man will have the opportunity to run for and be elected to mock offices ranging from the City level, Mayor, City Council to state constitutional offices such as Lt. Governor and Governor. They may also participate in a Law School which conducts mock trials.

These Boys State Delegates also have the opportunity to hear from some of South Carolina's top leaders. Speakers in the past years include Nikki Haley, David Beasley, Dick Riley, Lindsey Graham, Jim Clyburn, and Tom Rice.

If you can and will help support this worthwhile program, we would appreciate it; if you are not able to contribute the full amount for a Delegate, any contribution would help this worthy cause.

Please make checks payable to The American Legion, Post 0032 attn: Boys State.

The mailing address is PO Box 11, Dillon, SC 29536. (adv.)

148 Jettisoning pervasive negativity

A few news items, two from South Carolina and two national:

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

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: S.C. state Sen. Lee Bright introduced legislation to regulate which bathroom transgender folks can use. The bill was filed accompanied by emotionally charged, dog whistle rhetoric – guaranteed to make a certain 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. Celebrities like Bruce Springsteen, the pro basketball and football leagues and hundreds of national and international companies and executives have all actively opposed these states' actions.

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).

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 or 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: 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 is politics these days. What makes it so extraordinary is that

Guest column



Phil Noble
is president of the
S.C. New Democrats.

these things are becoming ordinary. This has become the new normal in politics – what one analyst called "the politics of personal destruction."

It is possible to do things differently.

In the divisive, 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 is a match for the avalanche of neg-



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activity in 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. 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 across the South, in big cities and small towns.

People simply acted of their own accord because they came to know, deep down in their hearts, that something different was not only better but possible.

We did it once. We can do it again. }

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148 Fire training qualifies under new SNAP rules

Gregory A. Summers
gsummers
@thelancasternews.com

The Lancaster County Fire Rescue's "Is There Fire in You?" campaign got an unexpected boost this month from the governor's office.

On April 1, Gov. Nikki Haley announced revised guidelines for those who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits,

what were once known as food stamps.

Under the new standards, any able-bodied adult without dependents will be limited to

three months of SNAP benefits unless they meet a work requirement or exemption, that being at least 20 hours of work during the week or at least 20 hours of a job training per week.

As of March, an estimated 61,000 of the

772,093 SNAP recipients in the state were classified as able-bodied without dependents.

Nathan Wall, volunteer recruitment and retention coordinator for Lancaster County Fire Rescue, said firefighter training qualifies to help meet the educational component for SNAP benefits if

applicants meet the necessary qualifications.

Wall said the basic course includes 105

hours of training.

"If you are with us, we can give you an education and skills through the training you get," he said. "It's an option for someone who is dedicated and needs a hand up to get back up on their feet."

To learn more, contact Wall at (803) 283-888 or Nwall@lancasteresc.net.

Contact Greg Summers at
(803) 283-1156

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The Joslyn Clark Controls building was recently purchased by Polish manufacturer MAKROchem LLC.

FILE PHOTO

MAKROchem to start hiring in May

Gregory A. Summers

gsummers@thelancasternews.com

MAKROchem, an international company with ties to the rubber and tire industries, will start hiring in May for its Lancaster facility.

The company recently purchased the old Clark Controls building at 2013 W. Meeting St. and expects to have its first U.S. location fully operational within the year. The company is planning to invest \$7.5 million here and create 20 new jobs at the 183,000-square-foot facility.

Those interested in applying should contact careers@makrochem.com.

"We are very pleased to welcome MAKROchem to Lancaster County," said Lancaster County Council Chairman Bob Bundy. "This is a perfect example of how all counties in the area benefit from the successes within the region."

Based in Lublin, Poland, MAKROchem makes and supplies carbon black, a compound used in the tire-making process. The company also provides comprehensive logistics services, including transfer,

warehousing and delivery.

Carbon black is added to rubber as a filler and strengthening agent. The rubber is then used to make tires.

MAKROchem is expected to be one of several suppliers for Giti Tire, which is building a 1.8 million-square-foot plant located near Richburg to make passenger and light truck tires. Lancaster County Administrator Steve Willis said the Lancaster location, which has rail access, will be used for warehousing and distribution.

"MAKROchem's decision to invest \$7.5 million and create 20 new jobs in Lancaster County is a real reason to celebrate across our state and is a huge win for South Carolina's automotive industry," said Gov. Nikki Haley.

"We're excited to welcome this fantastic company to the South Carolina family, and we look forward to watching them succeed and grow here for many years to come."

Contact Greg Summers at (803) 283-1156

148 Fashion-backward in North Carolina

EASTON, Md.

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 show-down will be this weekend, when not nearly as many buy-

ers 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 industry 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 them 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?" he asked. "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. The state's 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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Kathleen Parker
Washington Post Writers Group

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Transgender advocates fear bill's fallout even if it dies

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Transgender people said Thursday they fear a South Carolina bill that would require them to use the public bathroom for their biological sex will stoke misguided fears and endorse restroom vigilantism, even if the bill ultimately dies as expected.

Opponents told a Senate panel the unenforceable measure perpetuates myths against an already-ostracized community, while supporters contend it's about protecting the privacy and safety of women and children.

The measure mimics part of a North Carolina law passed last month that's caused economic fallout and debate nationwide.

A growing number of musicians have canceled concerts in North Carolina in protest, including Cyndi Lauper, Bruce Springsteen and Ringo Starr. In Massachusetts on Thursday, an LGBT group booed the Republican governor off stage when he declined to commit to legislation expanding protections for transgender people.

The South Carolina bill, introduced last week, may

go nowhere.

The proposal requires multi-stall bathrooms on public property to be designated and used according to the gender on people's birth certificates. It would also bar local governments from requiring businesses to let transgender people use the bathroom of their choice.

No vote was taken during the panel's second and final hearing. It's not yet clear whether the full committee will consider the measure. But even if it manages

to advance to the Senate floor, Sen. Joel Lourie, D-Columbia, promises to use Senate rules to block debate. House GOP leaders say their chamber won't deal with the issue before session ends in June anyway. And opponents include Republican Gov. Nikki Haley, who has repeatedly called it unnecessary.

The sponsor, GOP Sen. Lee Bright, contends his bill is a "matter of common sense," and

its opponents are "forgoing the safety and privacy of the largest

part of the population in order to defend" a tiny minority.

In a letter read at the hearing Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott said the bill addresses a nonissue. In his 41 years in law enforcement, he said, he's never heard of a transgender person attacking or otherwise bothering someone in a restroom.

He said he can't enforce a bill that burdens law enforcement with bathroom checks and exposes his agency to lawsuits.

"Obviously, DNA testing is cost prohibitive," he wrote. And asking deputies to check genitalia "invades subjects' dignity and privacy."

Transgender people say the

bill's requirement would put them in danger of harassment and violence, as they would clearly look out of place.

"To make discrimination legal is an atrocity," said transgender male Greg Green, a Citadel graduate and former police officer and firefighter. "Going to the bathroom is natural. Worrying about whether the person in the stall beside you is sitting or standing is not commonsense."

Sharon Mansell, a Beaufort mother of 10, said she sympa-

thizes with transgender people's objections, but it's a mother's duty to protect her children. She said she fears that without the law, "someone with a perverted mind" can pretend to be transgender to abuse the opposite sex.

"I stand firm that we need to vote 'yes' for this bill for the protection of everyone," she said. "This is not a war against transgender people."

Oran Smith of the Palmetto Family Council said his members' top concern is "young girls who may have men in their shower rooms" at public schools.

Opponents argued laws already address assault and shower curtains can provide privacy.

O.K. Keyes, a transgender Columbia resident who works with LGBT youth, said the bill invites



people to hate a community they know little about.

"The legislation claims to protect, but it actually targets youth," said Keyes, 25. "Senators get to propose legislation to stir un

their base and it ultimately dies, but in the process, it garners all this attention and talking points. And no one is thinking about what happens afterward."

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The Trans Student Alliance at the University of South Carolina holds a rally Wednesday at the state Capitol in Columbia to protest a bill that would ban transgender people from choosing the bathroom they use.

go nowhere.

to advance to the Senate floor





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148 Conservative lawmakers drive backlash against LGBT rights

The Associated Press
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA — Year after year, South Carolina Sen. Lee Bright has watched as gays won more rights through legislation and the courts. And as he sees proposals elsewhere in the U.S. aimed at allowing transgender people to use the bathroom that conforms to their identity, he says plenty of people feel just like he does.

"I've about had just about enough of this. Years ago, we kept talking about tolerance, tolerance and tolerance. And now they want men who claim to be women to go in the bathroom with children," said Bright, who has proposed a bill to keep transgender people in restrooms conforming to their sex at birth.

Bright's proposal is part of a backlash by lawmakers across the historically conservative South who have passed laws that LGBT groups say roll back their rights.

Mississippi's governor signed a law that allows businesses to refuse services to gays; Georgia's governor vetoed a similar bill passed by lawmakers. North Carolina's governor signed a law that says transgender people can't use the restroom that

user people can't use the restroom that conforms to their identity — which inspired Bright's bill — and also says local governments can't enact their own anti-

discrimination ordinances. Tennessee has passed a bill that allows counselors to refuse to treat LGBT people, and lawmakers there also are considering a bill aimed at restricting which public bathrooms transgender people can use.

However, they've found opponents where they might have once found allies. South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley said Bright's proposal was unnecessary. Corporate leaders by the dozen, most with global reach, have been pressuring the same conservatives who lured their companies.

And even the South has seen a cultural shift since 86 percent of Mississippi voters approved a ban on gay marriage 12 years ago. The region overall is more cosmopolitan and less rural. And LGBT people are going public in increasing numbers, putting a personal face on an issue that could once be held at arm's length.

Alliance for Full Acceptance Executive Director Warren Redman-Gress keeps all that in mind as he keeps fighting these laws even while acknowledging the gay rights advancements this century.

"Plenty of folks across the South are hurting — they feel their religious beliefs



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or heritage is being attacked. And they are looking to push back," said Redman-Gress, whose group is based in Charleston, South Carolina. "But the support we are getting is quite encouraging."

That support is finding one of the softest spots for conservatives are in their wallets. The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce vowed to spend money to defeat Bright in this year's election.

"Senator Bright is trying to create a political crisis that doesn't exist to save his political career. Meanwhile our state has real issues we need to address including crumbling roads," chamber president Ted Pitts said in a statement.

People on Bright's side of the issue have had more success in Mississippi and North Carolina, with supporters using a few different arguments. They said the Mississippi bill protects the freedom to run a business or a group without being told what to do by the government. In North Carolina, the law's backers said they are trying to protect people from being in a bathroom with someone they are uncomfortable with or could be a danger.

But big business isn't agreeing. PayPal canceled a major expansion in North Carolina. Opponents of the Mississippi bill are still organizing.

Conservative lawmakers have loved these kind of laws because they appeal to voters without costing much. But that might be changing, said Charles Bullock, a political science professor at the University of Georgia.

"A lot of them gave these companies incentives to come to their states. It's not a very good return on your investment if you run them out," Bullock said.

Supporters of the bills also have said they are trying to protect traditional values and people who believe for religious reasons that homosexuality is a sin. After signing his state's bill, Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant said opponents of the measure need to "also understand that people of faith have rights."

But the South isn't nearly as homogeneous as it used to be. Since the Civil Rights era, cities like Atlanta and Charlotte, North Carolina, have become major urban centers. Smaller cities in the South have also grown rapidly as people come from elsewhere. The number of South Carolina residents who were born in the state fell from nearly 77 percent in 1970 to 59 percent in 2010. States across the South have seen similar trends.

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Bathroom access for transgender people debated across South

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Louisiana's governor issued an executive order Wednesday banning discrimination in state government based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and transgender people in South Carolina told state senators that a bill requiring them to use a public bathroom corresponding to their "biological sex" puts them in danger of harassment.

The overwhelming majority of people at the Senate hearing opposed the measure, which mimics part of a North Carolina law signed last month that has brought a national backlash. No vote was taken.

In Tennessee, 60 business leaders — including the CEOs of Williams-Sonoma, Airbnb, Alcoa, T-Mobile and Dow Chemical — signed a letter asking lawmakers to kill similar legislation. The events seemed to unfold across the South almost simultaneously as the fight over LGBT rights raged on.

The South Carolina bill introduced by Sen. Lee Bright would require multistall bathrooms on public property to be designated and used "based on biological sex." It specifically includes student bathrooms, locker rooms and showers in public schools. It would also bar local governments from requiring businesses to let transgender people use the bathroom of their choice.

Bright said he's had enough of tolerance if that means "men who claim to be women" going into a bathroom with children.

"I don't believe transgender people are pedophiles," the Republican said. "I think grown adult men would use this as protection to violate women in the restroom."

U.S. Attorney Bill Nettles, who was invited to the hearing to discuss instances in South Carolina of transgender people verbally or physically assaulting someone, had a simple answer: "I can find none."

He declined to give any position on the bill, but when asked whether current laws protect people from being victimized, he said, "the state of South Carolina has laws to address assault and battery."

Dex Sexton, 17, of Blythewood, said people don't undress openly in women's restrooms, as stalls provide privacy. If the issue is fear of assault, he asked, then why are men who have abused little boys not forced to use a different bathroom?

"It's protections against sexual assault that stop them, not because they can't use the men's bathroom," he said.

In Louisiana, the LGBT protection order signed by Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards prohibits state agencies, boards and contractors from harassment or discrimination based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, political affiliation, disability or age. State contracts will be required to include a similar anti-discrimination provision.

Edwards, in office since January, also terminated a religious objections executive order issued by former Republican Gov. Bobby

Jindal last year. That "Marriage and Conscience" order from Jindal prohibited state agencies under the governor's control from denying licenses, benefits, contracts or tax deductions to businesses and people that take actions because of a "religious belief that marriage is or should be recognized as the union of one man and one woman."

At the South Carolina hearing, opponents said the proposal would do the opposite of its purported intention.

"Look at me and tell me I belong in the men's restroom," said Capri Culpepper, who was wearing a blue, low-cut dress and fingernails with red polish. Last year, she settled a lawsuit against the state

Department of Motor Vehicles after being told to remove her makeup for a driver's license photo. "Our community is already at risk for sexual assault and violence."

Culpepper was among nine transgender people who stood in a show of support. Opponents also questioned how the bill would be enforced.

"In everyday life, how do we determine whether someone we're with is male or female? We look at them. We don't inspect their genitalia," said University of South Carolina law professor Gregory Adams. "Are we going to start looking at their birth certificate?"

The bill has little chance this year. House GOP leaders have said they won't deal with the issue and Republican Gov. Nikki Haley has called it unnecessary.



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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Trans Student Alliance at the University of South Carolina holds a rally and news conference at the state Capitol to protest a controversial bill that would ban transgender people from choosing the bathroom they use on Wednesday in Columbia.



Transgender citizens stand Wednesday during a Senate hearing of a bill limiting their bathroom choices in Columbia.



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148 House alters roads plan

Senators say bill is likely dead

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — The South Carolina House made changes Wednesday to the roads bill that has been debated for more than a year, leading senators and the governor to say the proposal is likely dead for the year.

South Carolina roads will still likely get more money. The House has placed an extra \$400 million in its

budget it sent to the Senate.

But Wednesday's amendment greatly reduces the chances of reforming how commissioners are chosen to the board that helps run the Department of Transportation. Many lawmakers have said that is a critical first step toward getting closer to the extra \$1 billion a year the road agency has said it needs to get state highways back to good condition.

The House could have agreed to the Senate road bill, which allows Gov. Nikki Haley to appoint all members of the DOT board with Senate approval. But instead, the House changed the bill to have approval by the House and Senate.

"Government closest to the people is usually best. And there is no need to take 124 people out of the process," Rep. Gary Simrill, R-Rock Hill, said of House members.

State Sen. Larry Grooms said in South Carolina's 240 years as a state the Ethics Commission is the only body where both chambers approve members. The Republican from Charleston said senators can't just remove that kind of precedence.

"They knew before they voted that putting in a joint confirmation was going to kill it," said Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey, R-Edgefield. "Several of us told them that beforehand. They knew it and they did it anyway. I think they've killed the bill."

Simrill, who has led the effort to pass a roads bill in the House since

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the fall of 2014 said that shouldn't be true. He said the House and Senate should agree to a conference committee to hash out their differences.

Massey said that committee likely wouldn't reform DOT enough.

The House waited until after the Legislative Audit Council released its report on DOT. It found that 54 percent of the state's primary roads are now in poor condition, compared to 31 percent eight years ago.

The audit also found DOT revenues aren't even keeping up with inflation.

Gov. Nikki Haley has taken to Facebook to scold and threaten House members this week. After their 113-6 vote to amend the bill Wednesday, she posted the roll call. In an earlier message, she suggested the House was creating problems for future work to get more money for roads.

"The Republican House of Representatives, plans to kill two years of work and that as a result, there will be no change in their road conditions anytime soon," Haley wrote.

Simrill said that kind of

rhetoric doesn't respect the legislative process. He points out the House passed a more comprehensive road bill that included a gas tax increase nearly one year ago and the proposal sat in the Senate for 11 months.

The House also removed a Senate proposal to move \$400 million each year from the general budget fund and put to roads.

"At worst it is unconstitutional, and at best it is bad public policy," said Simrill, pointing out the state has failed to fund similar promises to education and local governments.