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148 Senate Panel Passes Fuel Tax Increase Plan

South Carolina senators passed their own version of a plan Tuesday to raise money to repair the state's crumbling roads, setting up a crash with their counterparts in the S.C. House.

The collision came as the Senate Finance Committee voted 14-8 to replace a House road-repair plan with a Senate proposal. The Senate plan would raise more money for roads — roughly \$800 million a year versus \$427 million — but also increase the gas tax more — by 12 cents a gallon versus 10 cents.

Despite a veto threat from Republican Gov. Nikki Haley, the Senate panel approved:

☒ Increasing the state gas tax by 12 cents a gallon over three years

* Increasing fees for 10-year driver's licenses to \$50 from \$25

* Levying a \$60 fee on hybrid vehicles every two years and a \$120 fee on electric vehicles

* Increasing the cap on the state's sales tax on vehicles to \$600 from \$300

House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Darlington, said he was "extremely disappointed" the Senate committee did not debate

the various parts of the House bill, instead substituting its own proposal.

Lucas called the House's 87-20 passage of its own roads plan two weeks ago a "courageous vote," adding senators focused only on "dollar signs," not the other reforms in the House plan.

State Rep. Gary Simrill, the York Republican who sponsored the House bill, said the resounding House vote — enough to withstand a promised Haley veto — was because that proposal also included reforming the State Infrastructure Bank and S.C. Department of Transportation.

"The Senate bill ... has nothing for reform. It has nothing for right-sizing DOT," Simrill said. "It is just a funding (proposal)." Pressure has been building this session for lawmakers to pass a proposal to fix the state's roads — a task estimated to cost up to an added \$1.5 billion a year. Lawmakers go home in early June, so time is running out to reach an agreement. Next week, the Senate will debate its version of the state budget, which takes effect July 1, leaving even less time for roads.



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S.C. Senate refuses to prioritize roads bill; end of session looms

BY SEANNA ADCOX

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — The South Carolina Senate refused Thursday to give priority status to a bill funding road and bridge construction.

The 26-19 vote failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority to give special debate status to an issue that both lawmakers and business leaders have

called their top priority this year. The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce and Manufacturers Alliance are among those calling on legislators to address South Carolina's roads now.

Senate Majority Leader Harvey Peeler urged senators to give him more time to work toward a compromise with Republican senators who won't support the proposal as written.

The bill raises an additional \$800 million annually for roads through increasing gas taxes and sales taxes on vehicles, as well as fees on drivers' licenses and alternative-fuel vehicles.

"We've got to take time on this and do it right," said Peeler, R-Gaffney.

Sen. Kevin Johnson, D-Manning, said he was disappointed the vote to give the roads bill priority status was voted down.



JOHNSON

"We tried to put it on special order to make it a priority because it is a priority," he said. "I don't understand how the residents can tell us all year that this is a priority but apparently the majority party doesn't think so."

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Senators of both parties pointed out they're running out of time, and the Senate must get to the debate to make any changes. The session ends June 4, and the Senate is expected to spend at least all of next week debating its state budget plan. An anti-abortion bill already threatens to bog that chamber down for the remaining weeks.

"All we're asking now is to put it in position so when you come up with your supernatural compromise that will make everyone happy, we'll at least be in a position to move," said Sen. Darrell Jackson, D-Columbia.

Senate President Pro Tem Hugh Leatherman said such a plan will never materialize.

"If this group can come up with something all senators will agree with, the end of times is here," said Leatherman, R-Florence. "That's magic I've never seen before. ... Let's move forward with this most crucial thing."

Democrats accused Republicans of killing the bill since all "no" votes were Republicans. Leatherman was among eight Republicans voting "yes" to priority status.

"I'm ashamed of what we did today," said Sen. Joel Lourie, D-Columbia. "We're sending a message to the people of South Carolina we're not serious about fixing the roads problem. This is an indictment on the entire process."

Johnson said he is concerned there will be no road bill to pass at all.

"I hope I am wrong, but they chose to make the abortion bill on special order priority, and I think it will be filibustered," he said.

Even if the Senate passes a plan, much work remains. The House passed its road-funding plan 87-20 two weeks ago — enough for a veto-proof majority — but it's vastly different than the Senate's current proposal, raising an additional \$400 million yearly.

But Peeler insists the Legislature can still pass an infrastructure package before going home for the year — just not as is.

Whatever the Senate comes up with must somehow address Haley's reform and income-tax stipulations, Peeler said. He doesn't want to debate the bill until there's a plan that can either garner Haley's support or enough Senate support to override her veto.

Those votes don't yet exist, but "we've moved some hard 'Nos' into soft 'Maybes,'" he said, declining to name anyone. "It's just a tender situation."

Haley has insisted she will veto any road-funding bill that doesn't also give her office full control of the Department of Transportation and substantially cut personal income taxes. Currently, the DOT is in her Cabinet, but its director also reports to a legislatively appointed commission.

Legislators of both parties have balked at her plan to cut income taxes by \$1.8 billion yearly when fully implemented.

Sumter Item reporter Jim Hill-ey contributed to this article.



Title: **SC doesn't need a gas-tax hike to fix its roads and bridges**
 Author:
 Size: 56.26 square inch
 Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



SC doesn't need a gas-tax hike to fix its roads and bridges

There are three weeks left in the legislative session, and the drumbeat in Columbia for a massive gas-tax increase is now deafening; all the major lobbying groups are crying in a single chorus: "Higher taxes to fix our roads!"

The House has obliged, passing a bill to raise taxes by \$360 million annually. And the Senate Finance Committee almost doubles down, jacking up that tax increase to \$708 million annually.

As the House bill as amended is about to be debated by the full Senate, here is where I stand, and why.

As a threshold matter, I reject the premise — wrongly considered gospel by many — that insufficient funds are being appropriated.

Total annual spending for our transportation infrastructure in 2009 (my first year in the state Senate) was \$1.051 billion. In the budget passed by the Senate a couple of weeks ago, it is \$1.627 billion, an increase of 54.8 percent.

Yes, our roads and bridges are in bad condition, but that's because spending decisions are made by a politically motivated and legislatively controlled state agency.

(More on that below.)

Even if one concedes more money is needed, however, that does not mean higher taxes are necessary.

Existing revenues are sufficient if we have the political will to spend them wisely.

For example, the Senate recently passed a budget appropriating an additional \$69 million for roads and bridges. In addition, that budget includes a supplemental section (which appropriates tax revenue anticipated but not yet certified) providing an additional estimated \$100 million.

In other words, instead of simply spending the additional revenue on

special projects (as we usually do), we prioritized this year and spent taxpayers' money on actual needs.

And we will have opportunity to do the same in future budgets since the state Board of Economic Advisors projects that the average amount of recurring annual growth in General Fund revenues over the next 10 years will be \$355 million. If just 30 percent of this annual growth is dedicated to roads and bridges, then after four years we will have increased transportation spending to the level targeted by Gov. Nikki Haley — without raising taxes.

In the remaining weeks of this year's session, instead of debating massive gas-tax hikes, the legislature should focus on structural reforms to the S.C. Department of Transportation, the state agency that makes the expenditure decisions.

Capital outlays by the SCDOT for new transportation projects in recent years have been more than triple the amount spent on repairs and maintenance, and that's a direct consequence of the SCDOT commissioners being elected by lawmakers.

There's a reason South Carolina has the fourth-largest state highway system in the nation; no politician ever held a ribbon-cutting for a pot-hole-filling initiative.

The necessary structural fix here is to have the governor appoint all of the SCDOT commissioners in order to establish a clear line of accountability for expenditure decisions.

Better still, abolish the commission and have expenditure decisions made by a Cabinet-level Secretary of Transportation, appointed by and directly accountable to the governor. That way, the

voters can hold an official elected statewide directly accountable for the wise or unwise spending of their money.

Also, any serious plan to address our state's transportation situation must include devolving control over some roads to local governments. According to research published by the S.C. Policy Council, there are about 65,800 miles of roads in South Carolina, and 63 percent of them are controlled by the state. By way of comparison, the average state DOT controls only 19 percent of roads in other states.

The fix here is for the state to transfer a significant portion of those road miles to local governments, along with an appropriate share of existing gas-tax revenue.

The Policy Council correctly summarizes the benefits of this: "Local governments would have better knowledge than a centralized entity of local road conditions. Further, local governments' proximity and accountability to the citizens who use the roads in their borders would provide them an incentive not to neglect rural or residential roads that currently receive little attention from DOT.

Currently, they can simply blame the state — with some justification. Road devolution would take away that excuse."

This is where I stand on the transportation plans the legislature will be debating over the final weeks of session (which ends at 5 p.m. June 4). Things will be moving very fast at the Statehouse, and my decisions along the way will be guided by the principles and concepts discussed above.

Tom Davis represents Beaufort County in the state Senate. His email address is tom@senatortomdavis.com.

Title: **SC doesn't need a gas-tax hike to fix its roads and bridges**

Author:

Size: 56.26 square inch

Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



SEN. TOM DAVIS

Special to The Island Packet
and The Beaufort Gazette

Title: Task force: Domestic violence problems in SC may be worse
Author: By JEFFREY COLLINS The Associated Press
Size: 22.78 square inch
Beaufort, SC Circulation: 11269



Task force: Domestic violence problems in SC may be worse

By JEFFREY COLLINS
The Associated Press

COLUMBIA—South Carolina is consistently ranked as one of the worst states in the country for domestic violence, and research by the governor’s domestic violence task force has determined the problem might be bigger than originally thought.

The task force found no uniform reporting system for domestic violence. It also found no consistent policies on how police agencies handle domestic violence calls, that no one can defi-

nitely say how many domestic violence cases are successfully prosecuted in the state because of limitations to court records, about half of schools don’t have any domestic violence education and while there are services available for domestic violence victims, the providers sometimes don’t coordinate.

The information stunned Gov. Nikki Haley, who brought together the 136 people across a broad range of law enforcement

and social services. She said it emphasized why stopping domestic violence is one of her top priorities in her second term and it will take a change in culture as much as changes in laws.

“It’s a silent crime that continues to go on because people aren’t comfortable talking about it,” Haley said.

The problems in data collection start with the officer responding to a domestic violence call. The incident reports they fill out can introduce faulty data when crimes aren’t reported as

domestic violence or sections of the report about the relationship between the suspect and victim are not filled out, said Corrections Department researcher Charles Bradberry, who reviewed the system.

The task force found that only half of the agencies required officers to speak to children who are at domestic violence calls and only about one in eight had officers check to see if victims might have been strangled, which advocates said is often a gateway to extreme violence.

INCONSISTENT REPORTING

The task force found that less than half of police departments use checklists for officers on domestic violence calls, which can mean they forget to take important steps such as ask for cellphones or take pictures of injuries.

Title: **Five Cabinet directors' salaries increasing**
 Author:
 Size: 4.96 square inch
 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



Five Cabinet directors' salaries increasing

COLUMBIA (AP) — Five of Gov. Nikki Haley's Cabinet directors will collectively see their salaries increase by about \$62,000.

The Agency Head Salary Commission on Tuesday set salaries for six of

Haley's appointees who were confirmed this year. Only the salary for the Department of Revenue's director remains unchanged.

The other approved increases range from less than \$4,300 to nearly \$27,000. Each followed Haley's recommendation.

Their new salaries take effect immediately.

Title: **Domestic violence task force: Problem may be even worse**
Author: BY JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press
Size: 13.33 square inch
Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



Domestic violence task force: Problem may be even worse

BY JEFFREY COLLINS
Associated Press

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Graham Makes Inroads with Home-State Crowd

By Chris Trainor

United States Sen. Lindsey Graham has an unusual relationship with South Carolina Republicans, particularly the more conservative side of the party.

While he has been in the U.S. Senate for 12 years and has comfortably won re-election each time he has been on the ballot, some have questioned his conservative bona fides, viewing him more as a centrist dealmaker, rather than a lawmaker firmly ensconced on the right.

The perceived schism between Graham and his own party was on display during the 2014 primaries, when he had to turn back a wave of tea party challengers. (He did so easily; there wasn't even a runoff.)

However, with Graham openly flirting with a presidential bid, it appears the hawkish senator could be gaining some momentum in his home state, at least if the reaction he received at the May 1 South Carolina Republican Party Silver Elephant Dinner is any indication.

That night — playing to perhaps the most dyed-in-the-wool of Palmetto State GOP audiences — Graham walked on stage to a polite, but reserved, hand from the crowd. He left the stage to a full-on standing ovation.

Graham was one of several presidential hopefuls who addressed the audience at the dinner. Other speakers included U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry and former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum. Gov. Nikki Haley and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott also spoke briefly.

Speaking to a room full of Republicans, Graham acknowledged those who have supported him — and extended an olive branch to those who supported tea party candidates





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in the 2014 primary.

“To those who stood by me and helped me in the primary and the general election the last time around, it meant the world to me,” Graham said. “To those who were on the other side, I want to work with you where I can. I’m not your enemy. Eighty percent of the time, as Ronald Reagan said, makes us friends. Everybody in this room is my friend. A lot of problems were identified, and a lot of promises were made. I’m going to make one: As long as I’m around, I’m going to keep being Lindsey. I owe that to you and I owe that to myself.”

While he stopped short of saying “I’m in” in regard to the 2016 presidential race, Graham heavily alluded to a possible run for the White House, cheekily saying “Hello” to the people of early primary states Iowa and New Hampshire. State GOP boss Matt Moore also referenced Graham’s recent visits to those states.

Graham also spoke ominously of the near future.

“As to where we go and what I do and what happens in the coming weeks and months, get ready,” Graham said. “Get ready for a debate that’s long overdue within the party. Get ready for a voice that understands you can’t save America without somebody willing to sacrifice and die for America. To our enemies, get ready, because there’s a new way of doing business coming. Get ready for the America that you used to know.”

Of the other presidential hopefuls who addressed the Silver Elephant attendees, Cruz, who was the first GOP candidate to announce a 2016 bid, received the strongest reaction. The Texas senator played heavily to the right in his remarks.

“There is a movement that is sweeping the people,” Cruz said. “Millions of courageous conservatives are standing up and saying ‘There is a better way.’ We can reignite the promise of America. We can bring back jobs and growth and opportunity. We can pass tax reform, a simple flat tax, and we can abolish the IRS. We can repeal every word of Obamacare. We can have a federal government that doesn’t assault our constitutional rights, but stands and defends the Bill of Rights.”

Polling data compiled by Real Clear Politics shows Cruz polling just outside the top tier of GOP candidates, at about 9 percent. The top three candidates, according to Real Clear Politics, currently are Jeb Bush (15 percent), Scott Walker (12 percent) and Marco Rubio (11.8 percent). The Real Clear compilation shows Graham tracking at 1.5 percent.



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an officer. — *Chris Trainor*

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State Budget Moving Along

The South Carolina Senate on Monday passed a first version of the state's \$7 billion budget, doing so with a reasonably short three hours of discussion. However, the Senate will have to vote on it again before it is sent back to the House, with debates set to continue throughout the week. The Senate's budget calls for a \$100-per-pupil increase in education funding, bringing the student base cost up to \$2,200. The Senate also is expected to have a contentious debate on a nearly \$240 million borrowing plan, one that has been rejected by the House and that Gov. Nikki Haley has vowed to veto. — *Chris Trainor*



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¹⁴⁸ Haley calls on party delegates to vote out GOP lawmakers

BY ANDREW SHAIN
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COLUMBIA — Five 2016 presidential prospects were supposed to highlight the S.C. Republican Convention on Saturday, but Gov. Nikki Haley grabbed the spotlight to showcase her heated fight against lawmakers in her own party.

Haley asked state party delegates to vote out S.C. legislators if they back a bond bill and a roads-funding plan that does not include an income-tax cut.

“That red is not as bright as it used to be,” the Lexington Republican said, referring to the party’s color theme.

Haley has held little back in her criticisms of GOP state lawmakers who failed to back her stances. The former state representative was criticized for telling a Realtors group in March that they needed to take a “good shower” after visiting the Statehouse.

On Saturday, she took the messages that she posts on her Facebook ac-

count to an audience of Republican activists gathered in Columbia.

The governor has opposed proposals to issue bonds of up to \$500 million and roads-funding plans that raise the state gas tax and other vehicle fees without a large, corresponding income-tax cut. She also protested a plan last year by lawmakers to boost their pay.

Haley listed 17 of 105 Republicans in the Legislature who she said have agreed with her on these three issues.

“At a time where presidential candidates will be coming though South Carolina, how can we hold our head up when all year I have been fighting my own Republicans?” Haley asked. “These are the people that are supposed to be with me. ... Where’s my army?”

House President Pro Tempore Tommy Pope, a York Republican who was not among the GOP lawmakers on Haley’s list of those backing all of her agenda, said Haley chose the best venue to air her grievances against legislators with a convention filled with Republican activists.

“I wish we could find ways to come together to work for the good of the people,” Pope said.

With five White House hopefuls speaking at the S.C. Republican convention on Saturday, Haley’s speech

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Haley

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highlighting her willingness to fight within her party could be perceived as an audition for a job in a Republican administration.

She also will get national attention when CBS' morning show plans to air an interview with the governor later this week.

Haley has said repeatedly that she has no plans to leave Columbia before her term ends in January 2019. She has not endorsed a 2016 presidential candidate, though she has close ties to two early front-runners, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

Bush addressed the S.C. GOP convention with four other other presidential hopefuls — Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum.

Also Saturday, state Republicans re-elected Matt Moore as party chairman for a two-year term. Moore was appointed chairman in 2013 when Chad Connelly resigned to take a post with the Republican National Committee.

What the presidential hopefuls said

Sampling of speeches by the five 2016 Republican presidential hopefuls who appeared at the S.C. GOP convention Saturday in Columbia:

Former Florida Gov. Jeb

Bush: "Restoring security means we need to be engaging the world in an appropriate way. By the way, to do that, you shouldn't have any experience in the Obama administration. You shouldn't be riding shotgun with the guy who pulled us back. So I guess that (Democratic front-runner) Hillary Clinton is not going to be the proper person to bring us back to a stable world. ... She has her fingerprint on all these foreign policy disasters."

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz: "We need a president who doesn't serve as an apologist for radical Islamic terrorists. We need a president who says ISIS is the face of evil. ... The single greatest threat to our national security is the threat of the nation of Iran with nuclear weapons. ... Let me give you the very simplest principle of history: If somebody tells you that they want to kill you, believe them."

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham: "I see a country that's going to come back stronger; a country with a military that can take on anybody anywhere and crush them; a country that understands that Israel is not the problem, Israel is the solution; a country where a poor kid in Balti-

more has a school worth going to, finally." (Graham also announced that he will retire from the Air Force next month after 33 years of active and reserve service.)

Former Texas Gov. Rick Perry: "We cannot accept one in 10 Americans either being out of work or unemployed or just giving up hope in finding a job. It's not acceptable for 1 in 5 children in the country to live in a family on food stamps. It's time to revive the American economy and to cut corporate tax rates to bring those jobs we throw away overseas ... back home, (and) bring prosperity to Main Street, not just Wall Street."

Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum: "We understand we need a vision that's inclusive of those Americans without college degrees, that they have the opportunity to rise. ... You've got great jobs here in South Carolina manufacturing. ... Those jobs that are family jobs. Those are jobs of small-town America so we can create the vibrant society we need. ... But what about putting vocational education back in our high schools to get our kids the training they need? That's common sense."





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At GOP confab, Haley blasts Republicans in legislature

COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley has launched a new offensive against Republican legislators she says are not conservative enough on taxes, debt and other matters.

Speaking at the South Carolina state Republican convention, Haley told delegates that the over-

whelmingly majority of Republicans in the GOP-controlled House and Senate have violated GOP principles in recent years by pushing a legislative pay raise, new bond debt and higher taxes to pay for road construction.

The Republican governor urged party faithful to pressure their fellow GOP lawmakers to toe the line.

From wire reports