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Subject: Senator Gregory's January / February 2012 Legislative Update

January / February 2012 Legislative Update

After one month in session we are finally beginning to get some traction. Traditionally, the SC Senate is like a baseball team expected to contend for the pennant, but starts off 0-10 just to make it sporting. Sometimes we finish in a wild flurry of success. Sometimes we end up in a heap like last year's Braves and Red Sox.

I'm hopeful for a pennant winning season, as we have been spending quite a bit of time trying to perfect and pass legislation establishing a **Department of Administration**. This would rid us of the anachronistic Budget and Control Board and transfer most of its functions to the executive branch. In the other 49 states the legislature passes laws and the executive branch executes them, but in SC many of these functions are administered by this unaccountable five member board. A vote on Wednesday effectively eliminated the B&C Board, but Important matters yet to be decided in this legislation are where to place the governance of the South Carolina Retirement Systems and state procurement.

While the DOA bill has consumed most all debate time on the Senate floor, other bills have been working their way through committees. These include:

DOT Reform / "Fix It First" – SC DOT is governed not by the executive branch as it is in 48 other states, but by - you guessed it - an unaccountable board. As a result, it is not governed well. Instead of a comprehensive road plan for the state, we have competing fiefdoms pursuing parochial interests. (Apparently additional roads are still needed because all existing roads, interchanges, rest stops, overpasses and pig paths in SC are already named for politicians.) This disjointed decision-making must end, and the only way to do it is to eliminate the board. Legislation introduced by Sen. Larry Grooms, which I support, would do so.

In conjunction with eliminating the DOT Board we need to direct that 75% of all funds devoted to roads be used for maintenance. Our roads are in disrepair and the first step towards correcting that is to not build new ones, but to resurface existing ones. York County roads are in better shape than those of most any other county because of Pennies for Progress. Lancaster roads, though, are like those of the rest of rural SC: in poor shape and getting worse. Legislation introduced by Sen. Vince Sheheen, and co-sponsored by me, would make fixing our existing roads and bridges SC DOT's top priority.

Bath Salts / Synthetic Marijuana – These products are doing a lot of damage to those who partake. Legislation to ban them is moving quickly through the Senate.

Casinos – The Catawbas want a casino in York County and the Cherokees want one in Jasper County. The odds may be better for the Catawbas, but I wouldn't take bets on either succeeding.

Spending Limits – SC could have stayed off the budget roller coaster if we had more spending discipline in the fat years. Because we did not, it made the recent lean years more acutely painful. The budget picture is bright this year for the first time in many. There is no lesson in the second kick of the mule, though. Spending caps need to be put in place to level out the highs and lows. Legislation to accomplish this is being debated in the Senate.

For me, among priorities in the budget this year is a raise for state employees. They have not had

one in several years and are certainly due. I will also work to attempt to bring more equity in funding to USCL and Winthrop. Both have been hamstrung by the convoluted way that SC has funded higher education. Funding for universities that have benefitted from the current practices should be held constant while it is increased for those that have been unfairly penalized.

USC vs. Clemson Forever: A Lexington House member has introduced a bill that, if passed, would require that this football game take place each season. Longtime rivalries like Texas vs. Texas A&M are, unfortunately, ending due to conference realignment (also known as greed). I doubt any time will be spent on this bill as there is little chance this rivalry will ever be ended by anything short of Armageddon.

That's all I have room for now. If I didn't cover something of interest to you please send me an e mail at [greggregory @scsenate.gov](mailto:greggregory@scsenate.gov) or call me at 803-804-1830.

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