

Applicants for agency agree DOT lacks funds

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

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COLUMBIA --Almost all of the five candidates for the 1st Congressional District seat on the Department of Transportation Commission agree that having enough money to meet road needs is the biggest problem facing the agency.

None had specific solutions to offer on Thursday other than raising the gas tax.

Danny Isaac of Myrtle Beach is one of the applicants for the seat. The unpaid job is hotly contested because the commission decides priorities for road projects and determines how the agency's funds will be used.

The other four are from the Charleston area.

The candidates were interviewed Thursday by the Joint Transportation Screening Committee. The committee will nominate qualified candidates, who will be elected by the members of the legislative delegation from the congressional district.

Isaac came under special questioning because he put on his application that Interstate 73 is important. The road would connect the Myrtle Beach area with an interstate highway for the first time.

"How important is I-73 compared to other needs of the state?" asked Rep. Annette Young, R-Summerville.

I-73 is "a direct corridor into South Carolina" from Ohio and Michigan, which bring many tourists and retirees, Isaac replied. It will help the whole state, not just Horry County, he said.

Financing for the highway and other state road needs are the problem, he said in answer to the panel's question about the top issue facing the agency.

The other candidates are David Bunch of Awendaw, a trucking company owner; Thomas Byrd of Moncks Corner, trucking owner; Tara Walsh of Summerville, a homemaker; and Ken Willingham of Mount Pleasant, another trucking owner.

The trucking company owners said they would bring the perspective of highway users to the commission. Walsh said she would use her experience as a bookkeeper to help solve the problems of the everyday commuter in the Charleston area.

Isaac, partner in A&I Fire and Water Restoration, said his experience is in construction and in running companies.

The panel has not said when it intends to release the names of qualified candidates. After it does, it is up to the congressional delegations to schedule public meetings to elect a candidate.

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