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Officials lengthen legislative session  
Lawmakers must consider budget

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

COLUMBIA --Failure to reach agreement on the state budget last week means lawmakers will have to extend their session.

The six-member conference committee working to find agreement between the House and Senate on the \$7.3 billion budget did not meet because the House leadership demanded progress on other bills first.

One of those was Department of Transportation reform legislation, which was close to agreement at the end of the week.

Another was workers' compensation insurance, but little agreement was reached on that measure.

The Senate passed a resolution allowing legislators to leave by 5 p.m. Thursday, as planned, and to come back June 19 through 21 to vote on budget vetoes and anything else that can be finished by then.

The House is holding the resolution to see if it is needed. Both also have at the ready a resolution that allows the state to operate for the fiscal year beginning July 1 on the same budget it has this year, just in case budget agreement is not reached.

The conference committee working on the DOT reform bill is set to meet at 3 p.m. Monday, and the budget conference panel is to meet at 4 p.m.

State Rep. Tracy Edge, R-North Myrtle Beach, one of the three House members on the budget conference panel, said it looks hopeful for agreement on the spending plan this week.

The bill includes millions of dollars in allocations for beach renourishment, drainage projects, tourism promotion and Interstate 73/74. The Senate eliminated or cut to 10 percent most of those budget items.

On Tuesday, a conference committee will meet on a procurement bill where the House stashed a \$5 million allocation for I-73/74 after the Senate killed it in the budget.

Edge said the allocation is important because it allows for regular funding and for the state to issue \$50 million in bonds for immediate construction of part of the road, as soon as permits are in hand.

Sen. Hugh Leatherman, who sponsored the procurement bill, struck the I-73/74 money from it, setting up the conference committee process. Edge was named to the conference committee, and said that if the Senate does not leave the interstate money in the bill, Leatherman will not get his procurement bill.

#### Coastal insurance

The coastal insurance legislation could also be headed for a conference committee after the Senate made some changes in the House version.

One Midlands senator was happy to help get a bill passed after getting a taste of what had happened to many full-time residents. The previous week, he was notified that the insurance on his Garden City Beach condo was being canceled.

"We have never, ever been late with a premium, we have never, ever made a claim," said Sen. Jake Knotts, R-West Columbia.

He said his agent did not know why the policy was canceled and could not answer why the cancellation came after adjustments in the wind pool line that were made in March and again two weeks ago.

The legislation forbids cancellation of policies with less than 60 days notice and does not allow policies to be canceled during hurricane season.

The House could get the bill back from the Senate on Tuesday to consider whether it will accept the amendments.

#### River shacks

Last Sunday's report said Gov. Mark Sanford did not say why he allowed a ban on river shacks to become law without his signature. Sanford did file a letter about his action.

In it, he says he was deeply torn over the issue because he could see the river shacks fondly as pieces of a unique way of life in South Carolina.

He said some of his fondest memories were hunting, fishing and enjoying the outdoors with his family as a child and he hoped to pass that along to his four sons. The freedom to set up floating river shack symbolizes the kind of outdoor freedom he remembered and would like others to have, the governor said.

On the other hand, with the expected influx of a million new people into the state in the next decade, he could see the floating shacks becoming a problem so he let the bill become law.

This week

The House and Senate will work most of the three days to get as much legislation passed as they can before the 5 p.m. deadline.

The resolution to come back in two weeks allows conference committees to finish their work during that time if they are able to do so.

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