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WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

Senate bristles after chamber accusations

By Zane Wilson
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COLUMBIA - While the House debated the state's \$7.3 billion budget last week, the Senate spent more than an hour slamming one of its usual allies: the S.C. Chamber of Commerce.

The state chamber's newsletter criticized a delay in a workers' compensation reform bill, blaming some members who had nothing to do with it, including Sen. Luke Rankin, R-Myrtle Beach.

The previous week, a subcommittee handling the workers' compensation bill delayed action, saying the measure needed cleanup on wording and similar technical issues.

Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, the bill's sponsor and chairman of the subcommittee handling the bill, asked for the delay and was not among those singled out for blame.

Chamber President Hunter Howard later apologized to Sen. Glenn McConnell in person for alleging that McConnell, R-Charleston, was involved in the delay because he could profit from it, but did not apologize to the others.

"They've introduced amendments that are weakening the bill," Marcia Purday, spokeswoman for the chamber, said of Rankin and the others mentioned.

"This is about the silliest newsletter I've ever seen," said Sen. David Thomas, R-Greenville, chairman of the Banking and Insurance Committee. He was among those the chamber named as causing the delay, in addition to Rankin, McConnell and Sen. Gerald Malloy, D-Hartsville.

The newsletter said that McConnell was involved in the bill's delay because he is a lawyer who profits from the existing system.

McConnell, president pro tem of the Senate and chairman of the Judiciary Committee, is a lawyer but has not practiced law in years, and senators from the other party even rose to his defense.

McConnell is beyond reproach, said Sen. Dick Elliott, D-North Myrtle Beach.

"This very much erodes the credibility of the chamber," said Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence.

Purday said workers compensation reform is the top priority of the chamber and its members. Rate increases are hurting business across the state and legislators have to be held accountable, she said.

"We have a high level of frustration with the process," Purday said.

The subcommittee finished its work and the bill will be considered by the full Judiciary Committee at 2:30 p.m. Tuesday in Room 308 of the Gressette Senate Office Building.

DOT reform

The Senate, which debated Department of Transportation reform briefly each day, took action on two amendments from Sen. Ray Cleary, R-Murrells Inlet.

Cleary proposed a ban on electing commissioners who are legislators or related to legislators, and forbidding more than one person from a county serving at the same time. Both passed with no opposition.

The Senate will continue debate this week, and the House is also set to debate its version of a DOT reform bill. The same version was attached to the state budget, but without debate, to ensure that it receives action in the Senate.

Shrine Bowl marketing

Rep. Jackie Hayes, D-Hamer, is trying to get \$100,000 allocated from the Parks, Recreation and Tourism budget for promoting and marketing the Shrine Bowl of the Carolinas.

He did not get a specific allocation for it during the budget debate but said he thinks something can be worked out.

Hayes, whose district includes part of Horry County, is a high school football coach who said he has played and coached many times in the Shrine Bowl, an event for players from both Carolinas.

"It's the biggest high school all-star game in the Southeast," and has a \$3 million to \$4 million impact on the area where it is held, he said.

The tourney is up for bids every three years, and Myrtle Beach is among the bidders for it. But the promotional money would be used no matter where the event ends up, Hayes said.

He said about \$500,000 is needed for marketing.

And besides the local benefit of hundreds of visitors for the bowl, all the proceeds go to the Shriners hospital for children, he said.

Conservation Bank

Horry House members failed twice Wednesday in budget amendments that would allow Conservation Bank money or purchases to be used to make up for the 27 acres of wetland expected to be destroyed by the Interstate 73 crossing at the Little Pee Dee Heritage Preserve.

"It allows us to kill two birds with one stone," said Rep. Alan Clemmons, R-Myrtle Beach, those birds being preservation and compensating for preserve loss. The proposal was killed 56-52.

This week:

River shacks | The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee will consider a bill that will rid the lakes and rivers of so-called river shacks in public water.

The bill allows a five-year phase-out but some members say they think it should be shortened or eliminated.

The committee meets at 2:30 p.m. Wednesday in Room 410 of the Blatt House Office Building.

Nuclear waste | On Tuesday, a subcommittee of Agriculture and Natural Resources will consider a bill by Rep. Billy Witherspoon, R-Conway, that would keep the low-level nuclear waste facility at Barnwell open to all users rather than closing to only a few next year. The panel meets at 2:30 p.m. in Room 410 Blatt.
