

State budget heads to House floor

Senator filibusters for common-law marriage to stay

By Zane Wilson - zwilson@thesunnews.com
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COLUMBIA --House members worked all day Tuesday on the \$7 billion state budget, but made no significant changes in the version sent to the floor by the Ways and Means Committee.

The budget trims most agencies because of the economic slowdown.

That leaves little wiggle room in the spending plan, and attempts to change it were few compared to years when there is more money.

Rural lawmakers tried several ways to get some money into the budget for the Rural Infrastructure Bank that was created last year.

The bank was not funded.

Rep. Nelson Hardwick, R-Surfside Beach, is a member of the Rural Caucus and voted with mostly Democrats to fund the infrastructure bank. The attempt lost 56-51.

Left in place on the budget were \$1 million each for a Seacoast Medical Center expansion and Interstate 73/74; \$500,000 for Shared Care; \$250,000 for Little River Medical Center; and \$50,000 for the Beach Ball Classic.

The \$12 million for tourism promotion also was untouched, although there were attempts to use some of it for other purposes.

The House will take up special orders, known as provisos, on how money is to be spent today.

Members said they expect to give the spending plan a second reading today and a third reading Thursday, sending it to the Senate earlier than planned.

In other action, a conference committee on a proposed immigration reform bill met briefly but made little progress.

In the Senate, members failed to stop Sen. Luke Rankin's filibuster against ending recognition of common-law marriages.

Rankin, R-Myrtle Beach, is an attorney who said people should continue to have the right to seek help from the courts in disputes if they have a common law marriage.

The bill under discussion would end formal recognition of those marriages, Rankin said.

Sen. Jim Ritchie, R-Spartanburg, said most states no longer recognize the old common-law system, and that "we need to transition the state to a modern practice."

"I think the common law has worked," Rankin said.

People who believe they are protecting vulnerable women by requiring a marriage certificate in cases such as claiming an estate or life insurance policy will have the opposite effect, he said.

A vote to force him to stop talking against the bill failed 19-20, and the Senate adjourned with him holding the floor.

The members of the immigration conference committee agreed on a provision that gives local law enforcement agencies the power to enforce federal immigration laws, if they reach an agreement with federal officials.

Also, a Senate committee sent to the floor a bill that would require all candidates, including those for local office, to pass a drug test.

Contact ZANE WILSON at 357-9188.