

YEAR END LEGISLATIVE REPORT FROM REPRESENTATIVE TODD ATWATER

BUDGET (Where's the Infrastructure???)

It's not easy to spend \$7 BILLION but, by golly, we tried – and we spent every last penny!

I did not vote for this budget for a number of reasons but primarily for the following:

First, when the final budget was considered by the House, the “pay raise” for the General Assembly was in it. I felt strongly that it was a ‘midnight add-on’ that received no serious debate and was an attempt by some to ‘sneak’ it by you – the taxpayer. Nope – I will not be a part of any such shenanigans;

Second, ROADS, ROADS and INFRASTRUCTURE. Last year I warned/feared/was leery of leveraging \$50 million into nearly \$1 billion for roads for three reasons. First, bonded indebtedness is “IN DEBT” – today's project with tomorrow's dollars – and assumes we will not have needs in the future. Second, because it provided an excuse not to continue to confront the deteriorating roads and bridges. Sure enough, it looks like we forgot to include new dollars for infrastructure this year. Out of nearly \$300 million new dollars we did not dedicate it to our failing infrastructure!

Third, when I ran for this office I committed to you that I would not support a budget that went beyond growth in population and the consumer price index. This budget is \$70-\$90 million dollars beyond that. So, at the end of the day, I could make those at the Statehouse happy or I could keep my commitment to you...that's an easy choice.

Now I'm not saying that our budget writers and leaders didn't do a good job addressing some much needed areas – they did. Nor am I saying there were not some really great items in the budget – there are. I recognize that it is a tremendously difficult task to prioritize the spending for our state and its 4+ million people. What I am saying is that I could not support what I consider to be fundamental violations of the trust you should expect in your elected officials when it comes to your money.



ETHICS REFORM (wink, wink)

H. 3945 passed the House but did not make it through the Senate in the final days of session. It contained some really good reforms and I support each of them:

- Expanded income disclosure – required reporting of the source of any private income (I already do this voluntarily);
- Banned “Leadership PACs”;
- Financial Records – allowed supervisory committees the ability to review bank records and substantiate quarterly disclosures;
- “Black Out” period – required candidates to file a final pre-election report 48 hours (not 20 days) before the election;
- Increased regulation of lobbyists;
- Increased ethics enforcement and penalties;
- Increased Restrictions on Expenditures – limited how campaign funds could be used for travel and associated expenses that fall within the scope of official duties (I do not reimburse myself for such expenditures as I feel contributions are made to me for election purposes not ‘official duties’).

HOWEVER, unless and until we provide for an independent investigative body for true and meaningful oversight, we have NOT passed ‘ethics’ reform. I voted against the bill for this very reason. Human nature being what it is (and see the above regarding infrastructure as a recent example), I had serious doubts that if it passed the Senate this year, the General Assembly would have the will power to pass real reform next year. Let's see if we can carry the momentum next year and pass REAL reform.

GOODBYE COMMON CORE!

We are out! Finally, we agreed on legislation that would remove South Carolina from the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balance assessment consortium.

We all want high education standards in South Carolina. Unfortunately, federal overreach and Washington bureaucrats took over Common Core in an attempt to exert more power and influence. I believe we are capable of developing our own South Carolina standards that will be better than Common Core.

EMMA'S LAW

One of the bright points of the year! Finally, we passed Emma's law. In celebrating the life of Emma Longstreet, the General Assembly took a step toward reducing driving while under the influence. Let's not waste the momentum. Let's continue to crack down on DUI. We need to continue to pursue laws that stop protecting the so called 'rights' of the drunk driver and start getting serious about the right of the innocent victim to not be in peril because someone chooses to drink and drive.

Side note: I am proud to have been named a Legislator of the Year by Mother's Against Drunk Driving.

5-YEAR REGULATORY SUNSET

In an epic display of - "politics as usual" or "you can't go wrong with the status quo" - we did nothing to combat the spreading virus of regulations. I introduced H. 3228, which would 'sunset' any new regulation after five years. Meaning, if a regulation is good then we should keep it, and the promulgating agency can easily re-submit it before it expires. If it is harmful or just a burden without benefit, it would simply go away.

I attempted to pull the bill out of committee; have a hearing and re-

introduced the bill for consideration to no avail. I was able to add it as an amendment to a Senate passed bill on the floor of the House (it passed 103 - 0). Sadly, before the ink was dry, the Senate struck it from the bill - no hearing, no discussion - GONE! They can sneak in a pay raise but cannot even discuss lifting or lightening the burdens on our businesses...wow... I'm speechless. I plan to reintroduce and fight for this simple but highly effective common sense solution.

There is so much we can do if we would simply apply common sense, not protect fiefdoms and the status quo, not legislate by anecdote and remember it's not the governments money it's yours. You actually did build that - or at least overpaid for it - so, let's get government out of your way.

TEXTING AND DRIVING

Yeah! Cheer! We finally have acknowledged that distracted driving is dangerous driving. Texting while driving has been proven to be more deadly than drunk driving, and is the #1 killer of our teenagers. While the fine is a modest \$25, we have implemented statewide, uniform criteria and eliminated the hodgepodge of municipal ordinances popping up in South Carolina.

OTHERS

Obviously, this is only a sample of the issues we considered this year. There were quite a few others. Some passed and some did not. If there is an issue you are particularly interested in knowing more about, please let me know and I will be happy to get you additional information.

It truly is an honor to serve House 87. I work hard to represent you in a way you can be proud. However, the best way for me to represent you is to hear from you. Please, do not hesitate to reach out and let me know of the issues important to YOU.

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