

Senate draws redistricting battle lines

Jackson, Leventis oppose expense, McConnell defends it; filibuster possible

By AARON SHEININ
Staff Writer

The S.C. Senate has neither the money nor the time to waste on drawing new district lines for its members, state Sen. Darrell Jackson said Tuesday.

The Richland County Democrat decried his colleagues' attempts to rush through a plan to create new districts — with deep cuts to education spending looming in a difficult state budget debate to come.

"Johnny lost his teacher, but guess what?" Jackson asked the Senate. "We're paying some lawyer to write Senate districts when we already have districts to run with."

Under questioning from Jackson, Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell, R-Charleston, said the Senate has paid an outside lawyer about \$15,000 or \$20,000 to create new district maps

for the 46 senators.

"The money we've spent hasn't been enough to pay for one teacher," McConnell said.

But one dollar is too much, Jackson said, considering the state spent more than \$1 million on lawyers for redistricting in 2001. And, with the NAACP promising to challenge any new plan in court, those expenses will only rise, Jackson said.

No decision on the proposed maps was made Tuesday, as Jackson used Senate rules to delay any vote until today. But a vote today is not a sure thing, either, as Jackson threatened to hold the Senate floor in a filibuster all day to prevent a vote.

McConnell said more than 40 of the 46 senators — including most Democrats — support the plan. It would take 31 votes to force Jackson to sit down and

SEE SENATE PAGE B5

SENATE

FROM PAGE B1

bring a vote, but it was unclear Monday whether Democrats would vote to silence one of their own. Republicans hold a 25-21 edge in the Senate.

Redistricting is the process by which lawmakers draw the lines that form their own districts. It is important because it impacts voting trends and affects communities by adjusting their state representation.

Normally the state redraws lines for the House and Senate every 10 years using new Census population data. The General Assembly did this in 2001, but that plan was vetoed by then-Gov. Jim Hodges and challenged in federal court.

The court threw out the lawmakers' plan and drew its own maps. All 124 members of the House of Representatives ran on the court-ordered plan in 2002. But the 46 senators are not up for re-election until next year and Republican leaders in the Senate want to create their own maps.

Jackson and state Sen. Phil Leventis, D-Sumter, argued against the new plan.

"I said to (McConnell) months and months ago that we should not be taking up reapportionment and spending any money when we are indeed firing teachers and firing state employees," Leventis said. "We are ill-advised to fight this fight."

SENATE REDISTRICTING

A proposal to redraw S.C. Senate districts would make the racial makeup of most Republican districts more white and most Democratic districts more black. In South Carolina, black voters have historically voted overwhelmingly Democratic. Here's how the black population of some Midlands districts would change under the Senate plan:

District 18 — Sen. Ronnie Cromer, R-Lexington: -7.35 percent

District 19 — Sen. Kay Patterson, D-Richland: +1.22 percent

District 20 — Sen. John Courson, R-Richland: -3.87 percent

District 21 — Sen. Darrell Jackson, D-Richland: +4.69 percent

District 22 — Sen. Warren Glese, R-Richland: -2.6 percent

District 23 — Sen. Jake Knotts, R-Lexington: +1.08 percent

But McConnell argued that the plan improves upon the court's maps. As drawn by the court, 130 voting precincts

statewide are split into one or more Senate districts. The Senate plan, he said, leaves no precincts split.

"We can heal those districts," McConnell said.

The proposal also would make the racial makeup of most Republican districts more white and most Democratic districts more black. In South Carolina, black voters have historically voted overwhelmingly Democratic.

While the Senate proposal protects all 46 sitting Senators, it particularly shores up the district of Sen. Ralph Anderson, D-Greenville. Under the court plan, Anderson's district became much more Republican, but the Senate plan makes it more Democratic.

State NAACP director Dwight James said his organization opposes the Senate plan because there has been no public input into the new district lines.

"It's worth it to challenge because we believe it should be a more open process," James said Tuesday.

College restructuring proposal unlikely to pass

Plan that would give schools more autonomy has met several obstacles

By JEFF STENSLAND
Staff Writer

With only a few days left in the legislative season, the plan to deregulate South Carolina's colleges and universities through a major restructuring appears dead.

The proposal, spearheaded by the state's three research universities, would have granted colleges more power by eliminating the Commission on Higher Education, the agency that coordinates South Carolina's 33 public institutions.

But a contentious Senate debate over the state's budget and disagreements among the technical colleges, the four-year colleges and the research universities have stalled the plan.

At issue was whether the commission should be replaced by another body charged with coordinating the three sectors of higher education, whose missions range from providing technical job training to conducting cutting-edge scientific research.

The four-year institutions and

technical colleges believe such a body is needed to settle program disputes among institutions and set broad higher education policy objectives.

But USC, Clemson University and the Medical University of South Carolina want to go it alone, fearing a new board would replicate the Commission's flaws and impose regulatory stumbling blocks to their larger economic development goals.

Instead, the three schools proposed a new agency, made up

SEE COLLEGE PAGE B5

COLLEGE

FROM PAGE B1

mostly of their own trustees, to coordinate their activities.

James Hudgins, director of the state's technical college board, said the failure of colleges and universities to reach a consensus on the future of higher education in South Carolina is unfortunate.

"I was disappointed we didn't start a dialogue between the sectors earlier to come to agreement everybody could live with," he said. "It seems like we missed an opportunity."

Just last month, with the backing of business leaders and key legislators, an overhaul of higher education appeared imminent.

The House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill to grant the research universities autonomy from the commission, enabling them to cut land deals with private investors and issue bonds for construction of research facilities.

But with the protracted budget debate taking place in the Senate, the body is unlikely to take up the issue this year.

The research universities, and particularly USC, appear to be the big losers.

USC was banking on deals with private investors to construct two new research facilities as part of its planned 5 million square foot research campus. But those plans hinged on the blessing of the General Assembly.

Rick Kelly, USC's chief financial officer, said the school hasn't abandoned all hope.

"The president has asked us to look at other ways we can do

this... but we don't know if we'll be able to or not," he said.

Officials at the state's Commission on Higher Education, which could have been axed by the Legislature as part of a deregulation deal, are breathing a sigh of relief.

"We're very pleased the General Assembly has not taken the action of removing one group of institutions and separating them from the rest of higher education," said Commission spokesman Charlie FitzSimons.

The commission is charged with approving new degree programs, doling out scholarship money and tracking overall performance of the state's colleges.

If the research universities

continue to insist on autonomy, it's unlikely they will fare any better next year.

Gov. Mark Sanford has promised to veto any plan that doesn't include an overarching board to oversee the state's colleges. At the same time, the technical colleges and four-year colleges are expected to resist any plan that leaves them under the commission's control but spins off the research universities.

For now, Hudgins said the fate of the technical colleges is in limbo.

"The big three (USC, Clemson and MUSC) carry more political weight than the rest of us put together, so we'll wait and see what approach they take," he said.

Hog farm bill sent to full Senate

A bill prohibiting counties from strictly regulating poultry and cattle farms — but allowing them to pass tough hog farm rules — is going to the S.C. Senate for consideration.

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved the bill Tuesday after weeks of debate. But the committee agreed that the bill should only apply to chicken,

turkey and cattle farms, rather than hog farms. The committee also dropped a proposal to have the bill apply to a range of laws, not just those governing animal farms.

Judiciary Committee member Bob Waldrep, R-Anderson, said senators believe the threat of pollution from hog farms is far greater than from poultry or cattle farms. As a result, they agreed to allow counties to continue to adopt local laws that regulate swine farms more strictly than state law, he said.



STATE HOUSE
ROUNDUP

The bill now goes to the full Senate, with little more than a week left in the legislative session. The bill does not apply to local zoning laws, but to specific laws counties would adopt governing chicken and cattle farms.

The farm lobby has been pushing the Legislature to block counties from imposing regulations on animal farms that are tougher than existing state pollution and setback requirements. Critics have said counties need the ability to regulate more tightly than the state because animal farms can pollute the air and water.

House approves redistricting plan

The S.C. House gave key approval to its own redistricting plan Tuesday.

House members then gave second reading to a Senate bill that makes changes in both House and Senate lines.

While the House's 124 members ran for election on a court-ordered plan in 2002, the state's 46 senators weren't up for re-election until 2004. Senators approved changes to those court-drawn lines last month, saying they eliminated split precincts.

House members did the same last week and sent their plan to the floor for debate.

If it passes, Gov. Mark Sanford can veto it or sign it into law.

Car seat inspections available today

The Richland County Sheriff's Department will offer free inspections of children's car seats today at the Target Store, 10204 Two Notch Road.

The inspections from 9 to 11 a.m. are being done with the Buckle Up South Carolina campaign.

Inspectors generally take about 20 minutes.

Senate backs cigarette tax hike

House leaders oppose increase

By James T. Hammond
And Tim Smith
STAFF WRITERS

COLUMBIA — With the state facing one of its worst budget crises, the Senate went home Tuesday no closer to solving a health-care and education funding shortfall that could cost the jobs of thousands of teachers and medical care for scores of poor and elderly people.

Backers of a 53-cent per pack increase in cigarette taxes won a strong 32-13 vote. But with just five legislative days left in the session and House leaders strongly opposed to any tax increase, the new tax faces an uphill battle for passage.

The Senate refused 13 Tuesday to table, or kill, an amendment to impose the much-discussed 53-cent per pack cigarette tax increase. It was the first vote

What's your view of the proposed cigarette tax hike and other budget cuts? Sound off on this issue in our message boards by going to GreenvilleOnline.com.

But Gov. Mark Sanford repeated his vow to veto any tax measure that does not include his income-tax reduction plan. And House leaders promoted a federal grant of \$140 million as a one-year fix for Medicaid spending, making the cigarette tax unnecessary this year, they said.

Despite the favorable vote in the Senate for the cigarette tax, such a bill would face very high parliamentary hurdles to become law this year, Senate President pro tem Glenn McCom-

well said. The federal grant contained in President Bush's tax-cut legislation "pulled the rug out from under" any new state tax proposals this year, said McConnell, who opposes the cigarette tax increase.

Democrats, who are a minority of 21 members in the 46-seat Senate, are holding out for the cigarette tax without the Republican governor's income-tax cut. And some Republicans, including

debating tax increases," Williams said at a news conference Tuesday.

Immediately after the House leaders addressed the media, Sanford and Senate Republican leaders took to the podium in the first floor gallery of the State house.

Several hundred health-care workers packed the lower lobby in support of the cigarette tax coalition's campaign to urge the governor, House and Senate to support the 53-cent-per-pack increase to provide a recurring source of funds for Medicaid.

"Medicaid provides funding for children, elderly people in nursing homes, money for people's prescriptions, and cuts would really impact the state of South Carolina's budget," said Cynthia Nixon, a social worker at Palmet-

to Baptist Hospital in Columbia. Sanford met with Republican and Democratic senators throughout the afternoon, a spokesman said, and remained optimistic despite Tuesday's vote.

"We've said all along, this is one in a series of votes, you're going to see on different components of the governor's plan," spokesman Will Fols said. "In as much as he can continue to engage the process, rest assured the governor is going to do that."

Hours before the vote, Sanford urged senators to pass his plan and to stop political posturing.

"This is the day when political games need to stop," he said to the applause of cigarette tax supporters who gathered at the Statehouse to lobby their cause. "We have to push this thing over

the top today because it's critical for all of South Carolina."

Sanford said the promised one-time federal funds won't solve the Medicaid problem because the money is only available for two years and can't be used to match federal funds.

He said he had already committed on his plan by offering not to start the tax credits until 2006.

"We have continually looked for middle ground in this issue," he said.

Senators hat Thursday rejected Sanford's plan 26-18 while the governor was en route to Bermuda to endorse a yacht race from South Carolina.

Sanford said Tuesday he and other supporters of the plan spent the weekend lobbying senators to turn votes around.

"I think we have a better shot than we had last week," he said. Sanford warned he would veto any stand-alone bill to raise cigarette taxes or any "job-killing sales tax increase."

His plan, he said, would help turnaround a "jobs and economic crisis" which now plagues the state and nation.

"The people of South Carolina voted for change — and a central part of that change was long-term income tax relief," he said. "Right now they're not getting that change from a lot of lawmakers. It's time we moved our state forward with a renewed investment in our economy — not backward with more political grandstanding."

TAXES

FROM PAGE 1A

Lexington Sen. Jake Knotts, oppose any tax increase. Knotts held the floor Tuesday when the Senate adjourned, vowing to talk the measure to death.

It takes 28 votes in the Senate to cut off a filibuster, and Senate Democratic Leader John Land of Manning said he told the governor Tuesday if Republicans could get 24 votes to sit Knotts down, he believed he could line up the remaining four.

Land said Tuesday afternoon after meeting with Sanford that "no door is closed" in negotiating with the governor and the Senate Republican leadership about the governor's income-tax reduction plan.

"I will do whatever is reasonable and responsible to bring about a fully funded Medicaid program," Land said.

The General Assembly is famous for its 11th-hour deals, and even with just five work days left, Land would not rule out agreement between the Senate and the governor.

But the House of Representatives is another hurdle. House Speaker David Wilkins, R-Greenville, has vowed to oppose any tax increase this year.

"Back in March, the House took a firm position against raising the cigarette tax without first reforming the Medicaid program. Our position has been validated and we now must use this time wisely to implement our reform package and continue to study our tax structure before

COURIER

House gives 2nd reading to redistricting plan

COLUMBIA — The House gave key approval to its own redistricting plan Tuesday.

Then House members gave second reading to a Senate bill that makes changes in both House and Senate lines.

While the House's 124 members ran for election on a court-ordered plan in 2002, the state's 46 senators weren't up for re-election until 2004. Senators approved changes to those court-drawn lines last month, saying they eliminated split precincts.

House members did the same last week and sent their plan to the floor for debate. If it passes, Gov. Mark Sanford can veto it or sign it into law.

"I think we have a better shot than we had last week," he said.

Sanford warned he would veto any stand-alone bill to raise cigarette taxes or any "job-killing sales tax increase."

His plan, he said, would help turnaround a "jobs and economic crisis" which now plagues the state and nation.

"The people of South Carolina voted for change — and a central part of that change was long-term income tax relief," he said.

"Right now they're not getting that change from a lot of lawmakers. It's time we moved our state forward with a renewed investment in our economy — not backward with more political grandstanding."

Senate OKs new district lines

Bill faces tougher fight in House, opponents say

By AMRON SHERMAN
Staff Writer

The S.C. Senate gave overwhelming support Wednesday to new district lines for its members, but opponents vow the bill is a long way from being passed.

By a 39-6 vote, the Senate agreed — after two days of delays and filibustering — to new districts for all 46 senators that will take effect with the 2004 elections. The bill is set to receive final Senate approval today.

It still must be approved in the House — a prospect that becomes more difficult starting today.

"It's now in the hands of House members, who are going to have to decide if they're going to let a plan pass without a public hearing," said state Sen. Darrell Jackson, D-Richland, one of the six senators to vote "no."

He and others argued that the new lines are unnecessary because federal judges drew new district lines in 2001 after the Senate's previous attempts were challenged in court. There also has been no public input into the new lines, Jackson said.

Senate President Pro Tem

Glenn McConnell, R-Charleston, said the changes do not benefit Republicans or Democrats, but, rather, clean up lines the court drew. The court plan leaves more than 130 voting precincts in the state split between two or more Senate districts. The Senate plan eliminates all the split districts.

"It's a big deal because we just passed a plan with major bipartisan and biracial support," McConnell said. "We heal all the pretexts across the state, which have caused confusion and long lines at the polls."

Five of the eight black senators

SEE DISTRICT PAGE B5

Senate Democrats delay redistricting bill's move into House

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Senate Democrats successfully delayed passage of a redistricting bill to make it unlikely the GOP-favored plan will get approval in the House this year.

After two days of delays and filibustering, the Senate redistricting bill received approval on second reading Wednesday. But final passage of the bill was set for Friday — after the deadline to get Senate-passed bills considered without a two-thirds vote of the House.

Many Democrats do not want to change district lines. House Minority Leader James Smith said it's more important to pass a sound budget.

"We will oppose taking this bill up," said Smith, D-Columbia. "It simply is inconsistent with what our duties and obligations are."

House and Senate district lines typically are redrawn every 10

years to update with new Census population data.

The Republican-controlled General Assembly approved a plan in 2001 that was vetoed by Democratic Gov. Jim Hodges. Lawmakers failed to override the veto, prompting a month-long trial that cost taxpayers \$1 million in legal fees. A federal court threw out the lawmakers' plan and drew its own maps.

All 124 members of the House of Representatives ran on the court-ordered plan in 2002. But the 46 senators are not up for re-election until next year, and Republican leaders in the Senate want to create their own maps, saying the court's lines divide too many precincts.

The court plan splits 130 precincts in one or more districts. The Senate plan splits no precincts, said Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell.

DISTRICT

FROM PAGE B1

vote for the plan.

But state Sen. Phil Larentis, D-Sumter, who voted against the bill, said the Senate plan is far from a sure thing in the House.

House rules say it takes a two-thirds vote of the members present to consider a bill received from the Senate after May 1. The House will not receive the Senate bill until Friday.

While 15 of 21 Democrats voted for the bill in the Senate, House Democrats believe the bill will not receive such positive support in the House.

"I hope not," said House Minority Leader James Smith, D-Richland. "Our first and foremost duty

is to the people of our state, not to protect our own electability."

If the vote were held today, Smith said, the bill would fail to receive the two-thirds it needs.

There are 123 members of the House and one vacancy. The bill needs 82 votes to move forward. With 51 Democrats and 72 Republicans in the House, 10 Democrats would have to support the bill if all Republicans vote for it.

Redistricting is the process by which lawmakers draw the lines that form their own districts. It is important because it impacts voting trends and affects communities by adjusting their state representation.

Normally, the state redraws lines for the House, Senate and the state's six congressional districts

bill's move into House

not begin until next Tuesday.

Meanwhile, senators agreed not to give the reapportionment bill third reading until Friday.

"There are some folks over in the House ... who are nervous. Nialles Larentis, D-Sumter, spread out part-perwork and maps to begin his filibuster."

Jackson said it's too expensive to go through the process during the current budget crisis. Senators should focus on debating the state's \$5.2 billion state budget, which was on the calendar behind the reapportionment bill, he said.

"The budget is more important than drawing our individual lines," Jackson said.

Wednesday's agreement now clears the way for the Senate to take up the budget, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said he could bring up the budget Thursday, but that debate likely would

take up the budget, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said he could bring up the budget Thursday, but that debate likely would

take up the budget, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said he could bring up the budget Thursday, but that debate likely would

take up the budget, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said he could bring up the budget Thursday, but that debate likely would

every 10 years using new Census population data. The General Assembly did this in 2001, but that plan was vetoed by then-Gov. Jim Hodges and challenged in federal court.

The court threw out the lawmakers' plan and drew its own maps. All 124 members of the House of Representatives and six U.S. House members ran on the court-ordered plan in 2002. But the 46 senators are not up for re-election until next year, and Republican leaders in the Senate want to create their own maps.

The new Senate plan only affects the 46 Senate districts, not the S.C. House or U.S. House seats.

POST COURIER

Voter coalition chapter to hold forum today

The Charleston County Chapter of the S.C. Coalition for Black Voter Participation will host a political forum at 7:30 p.m. today at Gelberstein Community Center at 2449 Beason St.

The forum, which will be held in the Charleston Heights neighborhood, is designed to give candidates in the June 12 city election a chance to voice opinions on issues facing the city.

Today's forum will be held for candidates running in districts 10, which has seven candidates and is the most populated race. A previous forum for candidates in districts 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9 was held at City Hall.

The mayor and all 10 council seats will be on the June 12 ballot. A total of 29 candidates have signed up to run. For more information, call 554-7302.

Staff and wire reports