

Cody Mitchell column
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to construction much quicker. The goal is simple: get roads built faster, reduce delays, and help families spend less time stuck in traffic and more time at home.

The bill also takes a practical approach to addressing congestion through optional "choice lanes," giving drivers the freedom to choose a faster route when they want it while keeping all existing lanes in place at no additional cost to taxpayers. Because these projects can be privately funded, the legislation helps expand infrastructure capacity without raising taxes. It also frees up more state transportation dollars for rural roads and other critical infrastructure needs across South Carolina.

S.831 also includes common-sense reforms designed to modernize how major road projects are delivered, including phased design-build authority that accelerates construction timelines and reduces unnecessary delays. Budget Work Continues
The House continued work on the state budget last week after receiving Senate amendments, moving one step closer to delivering \$1 Billion in tax relief while investing in South Carolina's core priorities. The House budget remains focused on responsible, conservative budgeting that supports infrastructure, public safety, education, workforce development, and economic growth without expanding government.

Key investments included in the budget include:

- Major funding for road improvements, bridge modernization, and interstate construction projects
- Investments in law enforcement, emergency communications, and public safety infrastructure
- Increased support for teacher pay, school safety, and workforce development programs
- Funding for scholarships and job training opportunities to strengthen South Carolina's workforce
- Support for local community organizations, volunteer emergency services, and programs serving families across the state

As negotiations continue between the House and Senate, House Republicans remain focused on delivering a final budget that keeps South Carolina financially strong, invests in core priorities, and puts more money back into the pockets of taxpayers.

Fargo's Law

Last week, the House concurred with Senate amendments on "Fargo, Hyco, Rico, Coba, Wick, Mikka, and Bumi's Law" (H.3034), sending the bill to the Governor's desk. This legislation strengthens protections for K9 officers and horses that serve alongside law enforcement officers across South Carolina. These highly trained animals play a vital role in protecting officers, tracking dangerous suspects, locating missing individuals, and helping keep communities safe every day. The bill increases penalties for individuals who seriously injure or kill police animals, ensuring stronger accountability for crimes committed against these dedicated law enforcement partners. By passing this legislation, South Carolina is sending a clear message that attacks on the animals who serve and protect alongside our officers will not be tolerated. South Carolina continues standing firmly with law enforcement and all those who help protect our communities.

Small Business Regulatory Freedom Act
The Small Business Regulatory Freedom Act (H.3021) officially passed the Senate last week with amendments and now heads back to the House. This legislation is focused on cutting unnecessary regulations, reducing burdensome government red tape, and making it easier for South Carolina's small businesses to grow, hire, and succeed. House Republicans remain committed to creating a stronger business climate that supports job creators and keeps South Carolina economically competitive.

Truth in School Grading



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The Public School Truth in Grading Bill (H.5073) officially passed both chambers and was sent to the Governor last week. This legislation ensures grades reflect what students actually earn, not provide shortcuts that can hurt long-term success. Parents deserve an honest picture of how their child is performing, and schools should maintain strong academic standards that prepare students for college, careers, and real life. The bill restores integrity to GPAs and graduation data while reinforcing accountability across our education system. Real accountability today creates real opportunity for our students tomorrow.

Strengthening Protections Against Child Exploitation

Last week House Bill H.4804, the Sexual Exploitation of a Minor Penalty Increase Bill passed on the Senate floor and is headed to the Governor's desk. This legislation closes dangerous loopholes, increases penalties for offenders, and ensures repeat offenders face mandatory prison time. Protecting children remains a top priority, and South Carolina

continues taking strong action to hold predators fully accountable. Protecting Election Integrity

The House also passed the Citizens-Only Voting Constitutional Amendment (S.582), which would ensure that only United States citizens can vote in South Carolina elections. As other states like California, Vermont, and Maryland move toward allowing non-citizens to participate in certain local elections, South Carolina is taking action to protect the integrity of our elections and make clear that voting is a right reserved for American citizens only. This constitutional amendment reinforces secure elections, strengthens public confidence in our system, and ensures our laws are clearly enforced. As always, I appreciate the opportunity to represent you and to keep you informed about the work being done in Columbia. I welcome your feedback and encourage you to reach out if you have any questions or would like more information on these or other issues before the General Assembly.

AJ VS GREENVILLE TECH CHARTER(2ND PLAYOFF GAME)



AJ #3 Alex Trimnal kicks a corner kick for The Lady Vols.....
AJ GIRLS WIN 2-1. (Gwynn Leaird)

Kershaw THE NEWS-ERA ATHLETE OF THE WEEK



Gwynn Leaird Photography

AJ VS PELION BOYS SOCCER(2ND PLAYOFF GAME)

AJ #5 Curt Thomas Horton kicks the ball and scores for The Volunteers.....AJ BOYS WIN 6-1

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