



# 2004

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## PREVIEW

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# The State

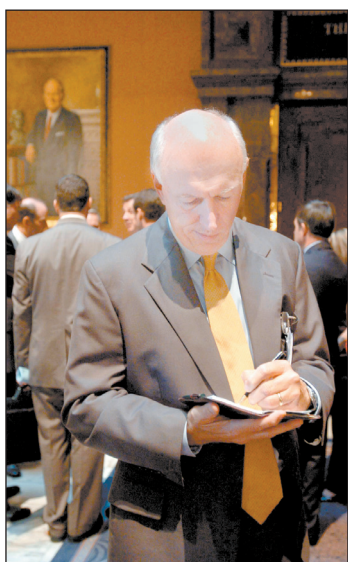
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### INSIDE BUSINESS



## LEADING THE PACK

Who has spent the most money lobbying in South Carolina — and did it pay off?

## ART OF THE DEAL

Call it a "business lunch," or call it a "power lunch" — it's where Columbia's deals are made.

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## Agencies decline to report lobbying

'Liaisons' aren't lobbyists, some state officials say

By CHRIS ROBERTS  
Staff Writer

Some S.C. agencies with lobbyists on their payrolls have stopped filing reports with the Ethics Commission, making it harder than ever to know how much of your tax money is spent to influence the Legislature.

Those agencies say a reinterpretation of ethics laws means the same employees who once filed financial reports as "lobbyists" are actually "legislative liaisons" who do not have to disclose their activities.

Government agencies spent \$2.2 million to lobby the Legislature between January 2003 and May 31, according to reports they filed with the S.C. Ethics Commission. Those lobbying were nearly 40 state agencies, local governments and public universities.

The real amount spent on lobbying is likely hundreds of thousands of dollars more but cannot be determined. While most universities and local government agencies still file reports, just nine of 17 state agencies that filed reports in 2001 did so again this year.

Some of those state agencies stopped lobbying. At least one started — the Judicial Department, which paid \$35,000 to a contract lobbyist this year.

SEE REPORTS PAGE A14

# Firefighter shortage puts area at risk

FIRST OF THREE PARTS

By JOHN O'CONNOR and J.R. GONZALES | Staff Writers

Recent fires in Richland, Lexington counties show lack of volunteers is 'recipe for disaster'

Local fire departments are struggling to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters — a shortage that is compromising service and forcing re-examination of recruiting policies.

Some departments strain to find enough volunteers to meet le-

gal requirements for fighting fires — especially during daylight hours.

It's "... a recipe for disaster because we don't have enough people to do the job out here," Columbia Fire Capt. Allen Derrick said.

This summer, two incidents have underscored the demands on vol-

unteer firefighters, who serve hundreds of thousands of residents in Richland and Lexington counties.

On July 25, a better response from volunteers could have minimized damage to a house in north Richland County, according to a Columbia fire report.

And in June and July, a series of lightning-sparked fires left Lexington County departments scrambling to cover for each other.

Experts and fire officials blame the volunteer shortage on the time commitment required, increased training requirements and people feeling less responsible for serving their communities.

"What it means is that the response you get to the fire at your house will vary generally by time of day," Columbia Assistant Fire Chief Bradley Anderson said. "If your fire occurs in the evening, you're likely to get a better turnout of firefighters."

The Columbia department not only serves the city, but also has a contract to oversee service for unincorporated Richland County, where nearly all firefighters are volunteers.

The local losses are part of a wider trend. The number of volunteer firefighters has decreased about 10 percent nationally over the last 20 years, according to the National Volunteer Fire Council. The problem is compounded by increased demand for service, stricter safety standards and rapid suburban growth in the Midlands.

From July 2003 through June 2004, the 15 stations handled 4,727 calls, or 22 percent of all calls the Columbia Fire Department handled during that time.

The volunteer shortage is more severe nationally than in South Carolina, said Jim Bowie, executive director of the South Carolina Firemen's Association. Still, he questions whether S.C. departments are addressing the problem adequately.

Federal safety regulations put into place in 1999 increased to four the number of firefighters needed to fight a fire, but most departments prefer a higher number.

Firefighters must work in pairs,

SEE VOLUNTEER PAGE A8



TIM DOMINICK/THE STATE

Volunteer firefighter Jay Hendrix rushes to a firetruck after an alarm at the Batesburg-Leesville station.

## Pivotal undecided voters find Bush, Kerry lacking

### INSIDE

A look at S.C.'s delegates as they prepare for the start of the Republican National Convention

INSIDE  
IMPACT



By STEVEN THOMMA  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

**WASHINGTON** — There are only about 2.6 million of them, but they could hold the future of the nation in their hands.

They are the undecideds, voters who haven't firmly made up their minds between George W. Bush and John Kerry. If this year's election is as close as ex-

pected, they are likely to decide it.

They are still open to either man, a penetrating new survey shows, but they have two main complaints: They don't like President Bush's war in Iraq, and they simply don't like Sen. Kerry. Said Kurt Trachte, 47, a construction worker from St. Charles, Mo.: "I massively want Bush to lose, but I don't like Kerry."

Yet nearly 9 out of 10 say they're

certain to vote — although most plan to wait until the final days, if not hours, to decide.

In perhaps a bad omen for Bush, more of the undecideds voted for him in 2000 than for Democrat Al Gore, indicating Bush hasn't persuaded them to stay with him after four years in of-

SEE UNDECIDED PAGE A13



**WEATHER**  
A couple of showers and a storm likely. High 86, low 70.  
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## DEFINING NEO-SOUL

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REPORTS

FROM PAGE A1

Yet many agencies kept doing what they had done before but determined they did not have to disclose their activities after reinterpreting how state ethics laws applied to them.

State Sen. Phil Leventis, D-Sumter, said he was troubled by the lack of disclosure. The ethics law was written in the 1990s, after 17 lawmakers pleaded guilty or were found guilty of corruption in a federal investigation.

"The light of day cleanses a lot of things," he said. "The more disclosure, the better."

State agencies have long had employees whose job is to track legislation and represent the agency before lawmakers.

"It's an important job," said John Crangle, who is executive director of S.C. Common Cause and who played a role in toughening the state's ethics laws in the 1990s. "Agencies feed a lot of factual information and explain the consequences of lawmaking to lawmakers. It's not necessarily nefarious." Leventis agrees.

"Sometimes you hear tales of woe by lobbyists about the industry they represent being put upon by regulations, and it may not be absolutely true in every case," he said. "You need the (regulating) agency there to provide another side of the story."

The agencies prefer the term "legislative liaison" to refer to employees who deal with lawmakers.

"We've always viewed our role as to provide information," said Jim Knight, a spokesman for the S.C. Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. "It's their (lawmakers') prerogative about funding because the governor and Legislature sets the budgets and priorities."

The general counsel of the Ethics Commission says it's often a matter of semantics.

"Liaison" so often is having direct communication with lawmakers to change or to pass regulation, which is lobbying," said Cathy L. Hazelwood. "It's the 'L' word — 'lobbying' — that agencies want to avoid, even if lobbying is what they are doing."

One lawmaker who leaves office next year said he sees no distinction between "liaison" and "lobbyist."

"It's all lobbying," said Larry Koon of Lexington, a House member for 29 years before losing a re-election bid in June's Republican primary. "The only difference is that taxpayers are paying for it."

As a vice chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee — which plays a key role in setting budget priorities — Koon said he has been subject to plenty of lob-

"The light of day cleanses a lot of things. The more disclosure, the better."



STATE SEN. PHIL LEVENTIS, D-Sumter

bying by state agencies.

"If anything, they (lobbyists for state agencies) have been a lot more aggressive because there has been less money to go around," he said.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

The "Operation Lost Trust" scandal — the federal sting that revealed widespread corruption among lobbyists and lawmakers in South Carolina — led to fundamental changes in state ethics laws. One rule required lobbyists to file reports with the Ethics Commission, and many state agencies followed that rule.

Some of those agencies stopped in the past few years — saying a close reading of state law means they don't have to file.

Among the agencies that quit disclosing lobbying was the S.C. Department of Revenue. In 2002, it reported \$47,000 in lobbying expenses — a portion of the salaries paid to two staffers who represent the agency before the Legislature. It hasn't filed since.

Revenue spokesman Danny Brazell said the agency filed reports when then-Gov. Jim Hodges' administration asked them to, but it stopped after the administration reinterpreted the law.

"We're not there to lobby or promote ourselves or ask for more money," he said.

He notes the law's definition of lobbyist excludes people who are "performing professional services" in drafting laws or people who only appear before legislative committees.

But Hazelwood, the Ethics Commission's counsel, points to another part of the law that says state employees are lobbyists if dealing with lawmakers "constitutes a regular and substantial portion" of their job.

"It's self-regulated," she said. "All we can go by is the reports, and there are fewer agencies who are registering."

She said the commission has no plans to ask state agencies to re-register, but commissioners are scheduled to meet in September.

Reach Roberts at (803) 771-8595 or mroberts@thestate.com.

State agencies retain outside lobbyists

Groups beyond Sanford's control use them despite governor's wishes

By CHRIS ROBERTS  
Staff Writer

Gov. Mark Sanford's ninth order after taking office in 2003 told his 13 Cabinet agencies they could not hire outside lobbyists anymore. The result?

Two Cabinet agencies cut lobbyists. Other government agencies kept doing whatever they wanted to do.

State agencies had 15 outside lobbyists under contract as of July, according to filings with the S.C. Ethics Commission. That is down from 22 in late 1999, but it's still 15 more than Sanford wants.

On the last day of this year's legislative session, while mingling with lobbyists at the State House, Sanford said he did not oppose lobbying by businesses and private groups. But, he said, he did not want state agencies "using tax dollars to lobby to get more tax dollars."

Revenue director Burnie Maybank said he and other agency heads who did not hire outside lobbyists "secretly applauded the governor because it helped level the playing field for everybody."

But state agencies beyond San-

GOVERNMENT LOBBIES ITSELF

Local governments and agencies reported spending nearly \$2.2 million to lobby the S.C. Legislature since January 2003. These agencies reported spending at least \$100,000.

Agency	Spent, Jan '03 - May '04
1. State Ports Authority	\$206,923
2. City of Columbia	\$152,230
3. Jasper County	\$134,250
4. Health and Environmental Control	\$115,287
5. Medical University of South Carolina	\$113,316
6. Technical College System	\$111,604
7. College of Charleston	\$111,249

Some agencies that did not file reports with the S.C. Ethics Commission but have legislative liaisons on staff: Department of Revenue and Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation

SOURCE: S.C. Ethics Commission

state agency from hiring outside lobbyists again passed the House but died in the Senate.

"It takes on the status quo, so it faces a fight," said the bill's sponsor, state Rep. Jim Merrill, R-Charleston, a longtime Sanford ally.

"When you have that many lobbyists who are affected by legislation ... and all you need is one senator to stop it, you're not a good lobbyist if you can't get one senator on your side."

Merrill said he will try again when the new session begins in January. Sanford spokesman Will Folks said the governor will continue to support the bill.

"They (state agencies) may say it's more cost-effective to hire a lobbyist, but it circumvents the legislative process," Merrill said.

Staff writer James McWilliams contributed to this story.

GAMECOCKS AND TIGERS AND WRITERS — OH, MY!

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NEW GOLF SHOP CONSTRUCTION

The Golf Headquarters store located at 189 Harbison Blvd. announces a major renovation and expansion project. Soon, construction crews will be improving and adding to the existing location. Plans include an expanded shoe area, demo area, accessory walls, more lighting, and much more space to improve displays and selection. The store will remain open during the entire project. Completion should be by the end of October.

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