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County lobbyists recap legislative initiatives

Sidney Allen of Butler Snow gave a detailed presentation at Monday night's meeting of the Madison County Board of Supervisors about initiatives pushed during the previous legislative session. Butler Snow was hired last year by the county to lobby on its behalf.

According to Allen, the biggest initiative was SB 2920, which provides up to \$100 million in revenue bonds for the Madison County Economic Development Authority.

"Probably the highest profile issue that a lot of people saw was a bill we introduced half-way through the session that our delegation introduced to both sides...which provides \$100 million in revenue bonds for MCEDA to issue on behalf of a company that is already located here," Allen said, referring to a possible Nissan expansion.

MCEDA Executive Director Tim Coursey told supervisors that plans with the Mississippi Development Authority are still in the works and could not provide any further information on an upcoming expansion.

"When we have some further discourse with MDA and Nissan, we will find out a whole lot more but the project is moving forward," Coursey said.

Allen emphasized that the revenue bonds would not be financed by the county or the state, but rather through leasing. He said that the bill has passed through both the house and senate and is currently on the governor's desk waiting to be signed.

Another successful initiative that passed was a \$1 million bond to help finish funding the Lake Harbour Expansion Project. Allen said it would cost \$2 million to finish the project, however, due to limited funding in the bond bill they were only able to obtain half of the cost. He added that the county was only three transportation projects in the state that received a portion of the \$196 million of the bond bill that was passed.

"This year was very limited in the bond bill," he said. "Last year there was no bond bill in the state legislature. This year was very limited - \$196 million total, which included all of the IHL projects. We are going to get a million of that.

"We are one of three transportation projects in the state that got any of the bond build this year and we got a higher percentage than any other projects did so we are happy with it," he continued. "Of course, it is not everything we asked for but the leadership really stepped up and the house and the senate were important in getting this set up."

Allen noted that one issue that presented that did not make it all the way through the house was the Citizens for Economic Development Act, a local option sales tax that the city of Ridgeland has been wanting to push for a while. Allen said that under the conservative leadership it was made clear that the bill was not going to be signed into law.

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