

Lowcountry legislators led veto overrides

*All but one voted to restore spending
[FINAL Edition]*

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COLUMBIA--The Lowcountry legislative delegation led the push to override Gov. Mark Sanford's vetoes, an analysis of votes showed.

All nine senators and all but one of 19 House members in the delegation voted a majority of the time to keep the line-item spending Sanford wanted to cut. The exception was Rep. Ben Hagood, R- Mount Pleasant, who sided with Sanford 89 percent of the time.

"I agreed with his principles," Hagood said, who voted to cut even local projects in the budget. "I think the budget we were presented with was a good budget. But what the governor asked us to do is take an even better fiscal approach to budgeting."

The closest to Hagood was Sen. Chip Campsen, R-Isle of Palms, who fell short because he voted to keep many local projects and higher education items. Campsen cast four fewer votes to sustain than he did to override the vetoes.

The governor recently praised both Hagood and Campsen as "taxpayer heroes."

Sanford's 163 vetoes drew much attention last week from lawmakers, who rebuffed the governor as they voted to restore 153 items to the \$5.8 billion state budget bill. The clash reignited simmering tensions between the Republican governor and the GOP- dominated Legislature.

The House's budget writer, Rep. Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston, took heat from the governor's office for his votes. Sanford singled him out for voting to override more times than Democratic Leader Harry Ott, refuting Harrell's stance as a fiscal conservative.

But Harrell wasn't alone. Four other Republicans also voted to override more than Ott.

Rep. B.R. Skelton, R-Six Mile, was at the top of the list, not Harrell, according to a comprehensive computer-assisted analysis by The Post and Courier.

Lawmakers said the overwhelming support for overrides indicates that the wide-ranging vetoes created coalitions among lawmakers.

The House fundamentally rejected Sanford's vetoes, as 63 of 123 representatives -- a majority -- voted nine times out of 10 to override.

The story is even worse in the Senate, where 40 of 46 members overrode nine out of 10 vetoes.

Furthermore, the typical vote on a Sanford veto didn't draw close to the number needed to sustain the cut. An average of 22 House members and four senators voted to uphold a veto, the analysis shows. In order to sustain, 36 House members and 16 senators are needed.

Members of the local delegation were among those voting to override. And for good reason, they say. Sanford vetoed about \$20 million earmarked for the Lowcountry.

"It's very hard for members to vote against particular projects in their districts," said Rep. Jim Merrill, R-Daniel Island.

"For instance, it would be hard for me to vote in favor of (keeping) Charles Towne Landing in the budget and not supporting (an override) when a project came up in another member's district."

The newspaper's study took the recorded votes from the official House and Senate journals and put them into a computer database for analysis. It did not include the eight votes reconsidered by the House. Also, it does not take into account the times where lawmakers later changed their vote, or were not present to vote.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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