

## Committee chaired by Leatherman passed \$7 million hike for university with ties to senator

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S.C. Senate president pro tempore Hugh Leatherman – arguably the state’s most powerful lawmaker – has a science building on Francis Marion University’s campus named after him.  
By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

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The Florence County Republican is an emeritus member of the university’s board of trustees. His daughter has been an at-large board member since 2016 after the Legislature easily elected her over an incumbent.

Leatherman also is the longtime chairman of the budget-writing Senate Finance Committee, which in April quietly added \$7.1 million to Francis Marion’s budget for the fiscal year that started July 1.

Republican Gov. Henry McMaster last week vetoed parts of a budget proviso collectively authorizing the \$7.1 million – \$5 million for a medical and health education classroom complex and \$2.1 million for the honors college.

In his written veto message, McMaster noted the proposed funding “represents special treatment above and beyond what was afforded to any other higher-education institution.”

McMaster said the Legislature already had allocated nearly \$50 million from the state’s capital reserve fund – a constitutionally mandated “rainy day” fund that lawmakers [typically raid](#) annually for their favorite projects – to South Carolina’s universities on “an equitable and pro-rata basis.” Francis Marion will receive \$3 million from that fund for its medical and health education classroom complex.

If lawmakers override McMaster’s budget vetoes when they are expected to return to Columbia in September, Francis Marion’s total budget for 2018-19 would jump to more than \$78 million – a 16 percent hike from last fiscal year’s authorized budget.

The total budget includes “other” funds – tuition and fees – which lawmakers decided this year to move “off budget” for all public universities and colleges, as recently [revealed](#) by the South Carolina Policy Council, The Nerve’s parent organization.

The Nerve on Thursday left a written message for Leatherman seeking comment on the Francis Marion provisos. As has been his standard practice with The Nerve, he did not respond.

Besides those provisos, legislators also will have to decide whether to override McMaster’s vetoes on other budget provisos, including one that would create a massive “data warehouse” containing sensitive information on children and adults in South Carolina. The governor’s veto of that proviso came several days after The Nerve [raised privacy concerns](#) about the controversial plan.

The proviso was first passed in April by the Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Leatherman.

It would create the “South Carolina Industry, Workforce and Education Data Warehouse,” purportedly to “prepare the state’s current and emerging workforce to meet the needs of the

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state's economy." Under the plan, lawmakers and their staffs would have access to "internet-accessible secure analytic query tools" for the proposed database, which would be managed by the state Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office.  
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Appointments to the RFA's three-member governing board are controlled by Leatherman, the governor and the chairman of the budget-writing House Ways and Means Committee.

In vetoing the "data warehouse" proviso, McMaster said it would provide "no official oversight for the decisions made by the data warehouse committee, no requirement that citizens consent to their personal information being released and quite frankly no one to say 'no' or 'pull the plug' before it's too late."

McMaster, however, did not veto another annually renewed budget proviso reauthorizing the "South Carolina Health and Human Services Data Warehouse." Created in 2002 and managed by the RFA, the database contains, among other information, "medical claims data" provided by the state Department of Health and Human Services, including the names, dates of birth and medical treatment records of Medicaid patients, an agency spokeswoman earlier told The Nerve.

McMaster issued a total of 42 vetoes on the 2018-19 budget compared to 41 vetoes on the 2017-18 budget, including the rejection of parts of a proviso directing a collective \$750,000 to the nonprofit Charleston Library Society and South Carolina Children's Theatre. The budget earmarks were sponsored by three House members, including Rep. William Cogswell, R-Charleston, who sits on the governing board of the Charleston Library Society, as The Nerve first [reported](#) in March.

For the second straight budget year, lawmakers will have waited past the start of the fiscal year to act on the governor's vetoes. They didn't take up McMaster's vetoes on the 2017-18 budget until January of this year; final votes on several vetoes didn't occur until March.

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