

Title: **Lawmakers have no excuse for lengthy budget delays**
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Lawmakers have no excuse for lengthy budget delays

The legislative session and the special extended session have ended, and we still don't have a state budget.

Currently the budget sits in a conference committee, where lawmakers seem to be agonizing over the differences between the House's \$27.41 billion spending plan and the Senate's \$27.42 billion spending plan. There are a few minor differences in how the money is spent, but lawmakers aren't saying what particular policy area is responsible for the holdup.

So what are they blaming?

Well, according to Sen. Hugh Leatherman, it's because they shortened the session by three weeks.

Funny he isn't mentioning the week-long break both chambers took – which just happened to coincide with the Heritage golf tournament in Hilton Head – or all the time routinely wasted throughout the legislative session.

However, the real culprit actually is state law – the one lawmakers aren't following.

According to the law, the Senate and House appropriations committees are supposed to

Guest column

Hannah Hill

If lawmakers would have just followed the law, they could have gotten the budget passed weeks ago.

start with the governor's budget proposal instead of writing one themselves and hold open, joint committee meetings to work through it section by section.

Instead, this is how it works: House Ways and Means subcommittees formulate their budgets and send them to the full Ways and Means Committee, which then produces its own version of the state budget. Then the Senate Finance subcommittees and committee go

through the same process, producing its own version.

Holding joint open hearings would abbreviate this lengthy, duplicative process. Instead of a series of subcommittee meetings on each side hearing testimony from the same state agencies – the most time-consuming part of the budget process – the whole thing could happen once. After that, the appropriations bill could go straight to the House floor, then the Senate floor, with both chambers having already worked out a lot of their differences.

In other words, this process would more than make up for the three weeks lost in last year's session-shortening bill, not to mention making it possible for concerned voters to follow the process and see exactly how the money is spent. And lawmakers could still have gone to Hilton Head.

If they would have just followed the law, they could have gotten the budget passed weeks ago.

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