

House opts to change control of bridge cops -- Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - April 28, 2010 - page A 02

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BATON ROUGE -- The House voted 95-2 Tuesday to give oversight of the **Crescent City Connection** police force to State Police starting Aug. 15.

Lawmakers approved House Bill 493 by Rep. **Patrick Connick**, R-Harvey, a vocal critic of the span's operations since he took office in 2008. The bill now heads to the Senate for debate.

Rep. Jim Morris, R-Oil City, tried to amend Connick's bill to extend the tolls on the **Crescent City Connection** through the end of 2017 to give State Police a reliable financing source for the bridge police.

The tolls will expire in 2012 unless the Legislature extends them.

Connick got the House to reject Morris' amendment, with 72 opposed and 22 in favor. He called Morris' proposal "slick" and a way to kill his bill,

"We can't extend the tolls before we clean it up," Connick said. "The CCC is a boondoggle. ... This is crazy."

Connick's bill would give State Police the authority to change the way the bridge's 35-member police force operates. The bill would transfer money to oversee the police force from the Department of Transportation and Development, the agency that now oversees the bridge patrols, to State Police.

Connick pointed out that the entire CCC Division in the transportation agency has been stung by audits for the way it has handled contracts and managed the New Orleans division from Baton Rouge. The department says it has made changes and has been more attentive to the span's operations in recent months.

"This bill gives us accountability," Connick said, pointing out that the bridge collects about \$50,000 a day in tolls.

Rep. Jeff Arnold, D-Algiers, tried to amend the bill to give State Police the authority to conduct a study of the bridge police's operations in a performance audit. If the audit recommended that State Police take over the CCC police, then they would be authorized to do so.

Arnold's proposal was defeated 76-15.

"This is not a typical State Police duty," Arnold said.

Without the amendment, Arnold said, "this is telling them we are going to shove it down your throat whether you like it or not."

Connick said State Police Superintendent Mike Edmonson is on record saying that if lawmakers charge him with oversight of the bridge's police, he will do the job asked of him. Connick said no one would be fired from the bridge's police force but officers could be redeployed under the more watchful eye of the "chief law enforcement officer of the state."

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