

'Pretty good chunk of change' could help SC's retirement system, one official says

Matt Moore

GREENVILLE COUNTY, S.C. —

A winning Mega Millions ticket sold in Simpsonville will mean unexpected millions for more than just the ticket holder.

The State of South Carolina will collect 7 percent of the winnings as individual income tax.

If it's the \$878 million cash option that's selected, that's about \$61 million lawmakers will have access to.

"It's a pretty good chunk of change," said South Carolina's Comptroller General Rick Eckstrom.

Eckstrom doesn't direct how money is spent, but he is in charge of making sure it is spent the way it's budgeted.

That doesn't stop him from giving advice.

"We should put it where we already spent the money," he said, referring to the state's retirement system. "We have a huge unfunded liability."

In August, Eckstrom [gave the same advice](#) about a \$117 million surplus from the previous fiscal year.

"The State Retirement System retirement plans are underfunded by \$24 billion," he wrote then.

Eckstrom notes it might not seem the new-found income tax revenue would fill that gap, but it is a "pain-free option when we don't have any options that are pain-free."

The other option he said needed consideration: saving the money.

"The General Assembly would be wise to resist any "spending spree" temptation, considering instead using some or all of the surplus revenue to shore up the state's all-important rainy-day balances," Eckstrom wrote in August. "Restraint now could avert a crisis in the lean years that are sure to come."

He doesn't expect lawmakers will make long-term stability the priority with the extra income tax cash.

"Money in the pocket burns a hole," Eckstrom said.

The state expects to bring in more than [\\$4.4 billion](#) in individual income tax, but that money is spoken for through the budgeting process. There are no restrictions on how the extra \$61 million is spent.

"I don't fault them for taking a short-term view because they are responsible for an annual budget," Eckstrom said. "I wish they would also look at the long-term issues."

As for funding the retirement system, "It seems the state should've been buying lottery tickets," he said.

Eckstrom, a Republican running unopposed to hold on to his position in next month's election, isn't allowed to buy lottery tickets. No constitutional officer can.

[Follow this story](#) to get instant e-mail alerts from **WYFF** on the latest developments and related topics.