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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
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Volume 38, Number 2  
February 2010

LWVCA President: Della Baker  
*The Voter* Editor: Catherine Mobley

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Tues., February 16	LWVCA General Membership Meeting on Voter Access. 7:00 social time; 7:30 meeting time, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Tues., February 23	LWVCA 2010 Legislative Advocacy Day in Columbia, SC. See page 3 for more details.
Thurs., February 25	LWVCA Board Meeting, Clemson City Council Chambers, 5:00 p.m.
Tues., May 10	<b>**SAVE THE DATE**:</b>  LWVCA Annual Meeting, Tuesday, May 10, Collins Ole Town, outside Central. Cost \$21 per person. Buffet meal provided. See page 2 for more details.

Clemson City Council	1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday, 7:30 p.m.
Seneca City Council	2 <sup>nd</sup> Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.
Pickens County Council	1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday, 7:00 p.m.
Oconee County Council	1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.
Anderson County Council	1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tuesday, 6:00 p.m.
Pickens County School Board	4 <sup>th</sup> Monday, 7:30 p.m. (except July and December)
Oconee County School Board	1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.
Anderson County School Board	3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday, 6:00 p.m.
LWV National Office	202-429-1965 (800-424-2937 for state/ local board members)
LWVCA website	<a href="http://clemsonarea.sc.lwvnet.org/">http://clemsonarea.sc.lwvnet.org/</a>

## President's Message

Several interesting decisions have been made on the state and national levels that should concern us as citizens. Locally, the SC Senate reached a compromise on a controversial Voter ID bill that phases in over two years new requirements for a picture ID in order for a person to vote in South Carolina. The bill also establishes a new 15-day early voting period prior to elections, maintains walk-in absentee voting for 30 days prior to an election and retains mail-in absentee voting beginning at 45 days before an election. The photo identification requirement takes effect Jan. 2, 2012, and the State Election Commission must begin issuing voter registration cards with photo ID by July, 1, 2011, pending state funding being made available for the cards. The compromise proposal must be cleared by U.S. Justice Department and still must go back to the S.C. House for its consideration and passage. The measure was a strike to impair access to a basic American right - the right to access to the ballot box. According to the State Elections Commission, 178,000 registered voters, or 7 percent of the state's 2.6 million voters, did not possess a state-issued photo identification. Many of these voters include the poor and the elderly, who may be stymied in the short term by additional hurdles put in place requiring new proofs of identification. This information was extracted from The State newspaper: <http://www.thestate.com/politics/story/1133041.html>

Nationally, the Supreme Court decision overturned a 20-year precedent saying that corporations could not pay for campaign ads from their general treasuries. Mary G. Wilson, national president of the League of Women Voters commented on the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*.

"The Supreme Court has made a tragic mistake," said Wilson. "Their decision announced today in *Citizens United v. FEC* is constitutionally irresponsible and will surely bring about an anti-democratic revolution in how we finance elections in this country. Today, basic pillars of American democracy have been undermined – that elections should not be corrupted by vast corporate wealth and that the voters should be at the center of our democratic system."

Justice Stevens had it right when he said, in his dissent, 'The Court's ruling threatens to undermine the integrity of elected institutions across the Nation. The path it has taken to reach its outcome will, I fear, do damage to this institution.' "In creating a new constitutional right for corporations to spend unlimited amounts of their shareholder's money to determine the outcome in candidate elections, the Court has unleashed into our elections tremendous sums of money from for-profit corporations that cannot possibly be matched in quantity by contributions from ordinary citizens. The only possible outcome of this is that big money and special interests will have an even tighter grip on our democracy. "Congress and the President enacted campaign finance laws over a series of decades for a reason – to protect our democracy from the perverse influence of big money in our elections. In making this decision, the Court has ignored the best interests of the American public and our representative form of government." Let us continue to speak to the issues of campaign financing and educating the community about its impact.

On a different note, February 14<sup>th</sup> is the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the LWV. You will find in this newsletter, a proclamation that has been supported by several counties in the upstate area and an article that has been distributed to local papers about the League's anniversary. As we continue to address so many pressing issues, we feel that the League will remain viable and relevant for the future. We can do it with your help!

~ Della Baker, LWVCA President

**LWVCA February General Meeting  
Tuesday, February 16**

The ABCs of Advocacy will be the focus of the February meeting of the League membership. We will include late, breaking news on legislation that is being addressed in the General Assembly including issues that we discussed with members of our Legislative Delegations in the November meeting. We will also talk briefly about the latest Supreme Court ruling. We will discuss how each of the local elections offices operate. Members will receive information on the latest advocacy tool that has been made available to us from the LWVUS. ISSUES are the meat of LWV work, and we hope you will join us to see how we can more effectively address issues that matter to us.

*~ Submitted by Janie Shipley*

**2010 LWVCA Annual Meeting**

Our annual meeting will be held in May (the 10th) this year instead of April. This special event will be held at Collins Ole Town in Central. A buffet meal will be provided.

Details will be forthcoming in a future newsletter, but I wanted to explain why we are not adhering to the letter of the bylaws, which call for an annual meeting in April.

When we adjusted our budget year to conform to our board year, starting June 1st, we forgot to take into account how that might affect the timing of the annual meeting. We want to move that meeting closer to the end of our year, so that it really is both a capstone and a transition time. That suggests that May is a better time to hold it than April. So your board is asking both forgiveness and permission, and we promise a proposed bylaws amendment will be offered that gives us more flexibility in the future about the date of the annual meeting.

*~Submitted by Holley Ulbrich*

**2010-2011 Program Priority Topics**

Approximately 22 people attended the January meeting where we reviewed what has been happening in the four national program umbrella areas--Representative Government, Natural Resources, Social Policy, and International Relations. Holley Ulbrich, Donna London, Reggie Turetzky, and Janet Marsh led us through each area in order to help decide where we thought the national LWV should be focusing its attention in the next two years and also what areas we might to address in our monthly meetings. The top vote getters were air quality and health care, closely followed by reproductive choice, with campaign finance reform and children at risk rounding out the top five. We also discussed a proposal for a national education study but didn't sense a great deal of interest.

We will be recommending that we re-adopt our current local positions on education finance, the Pickens County School board at large members, and growth management (new position statement). Eleanor Hare also asked us to affirm a local discovery and action on recycling that includes what is being done, how it can be expanded, a go-see tour to a recycling center, a hazardous waste collection day, and a campaign to encourage recycling. The group strongly supported that proposal. Thanks to all who participated!

*~ Submitted by Holley Ulbrich*

### Going Up the River of Shame Book Discussion Group

Seven of us gathered at Holley Ulbrich's house on January 29th for a lively and wide-ranging discussion of Tom Truitt's *Going Up the River of Shame*, about the Abbeville case on SC school funding that has been in the courts for seventeen years now. Several of us have copies that can be borrowed if you are interested.

*~Submitted by Holley Ulbrich*

### LWVUS President Visits South Carolina

*Below is a report from Mary Wilson, LWVUS President:*

I was pleased to be “on the road” for the League again last week, traveling to North and South Carolina. The trips were an opportunity to meet with League members and leaders, advocate for passage of vital climate change legislation, and sit down with the media about the League’s ongoing efforts in this and other areas. In South Carolina I was able to meet with staff from Senator Graham's office and Representative Clyburn's office. After our legislative meetings, we held a press conference at the South Carolina State House with members of the South Carolina Legislative Women's Caucus and researchers from the University of South Carolina. The event was exciting and generated some great press for my trip and the League's work on climate change. At the end of the day, I was able to take some time to meet with members of the South Carolina League and University of South Carolina Professor Susan Cutter, and Dr. Christopher Emrich (Ph.D., University of South Carolina), coauthors of the groundbreaking report “[Exposed: Social Vulnerability and Climate Change in the US Southeast](#).” The report, released by Oxfam America in late 2009, is the first of its kind to examine the hazards associated with climate change with social variables, revealing the people and places that will most affected by flooding, drought, hurricane force winds and sea-level rise.



*Book Discussion Group participants: Row 1: Ben and Reggie Turetzky. Row 2 (l. to r.): Ellen Magee, Eleanor Hare, Holley Ulbrich and Carl Ulbrich*

### 2010 Legislative Advocacy Day Tuesday, February 23, 2010

LWVSC is co-sponsoring Legislative Advocacy Day on February 23, 2010 with SC AAUW and SC School Improvement Council, with Jean Norman as coordinator. An exciting program is planned on the theme of the impact of health and the environment impact on the school achievement of South Carolina’s children. Though presenters are being finalized at this time, information will soon be available at the following website: <http://www.lwvsc.org/index.html>. We will also do a statewide member mailing in January. Highlights of 2010 LAD and presenters to date include:

- Introduction of "State of Denial," a new film documentary produced by Bud Ferillo (of “Corridor of Shame” fame), to introduce health and environmental issues that impact student achievement and that can be addressed through state legislation and policy;
  - Environmental impact--Nancy Vinson, Coastal Conservation League; and
  - Health impact: Panel discussion moderated by Dr. Tiffany Williams, MUSC School of Nursing, Charleston. Topics include nutrition/obesity, cardiovascular disease, teen pregnancy
- ~Submitted by Della Baker*

## South Carolina Voter ID Bill

### *Partial Legislative History of H. 3418*

As we go to press on February 2, the Voter ID Bill, H. 3418, seems unfortunately well on its way to becoming law. Representatives introducing this bill include Rice. H. 3418 was introduced on February 3, 2009. On February 12, 2009, Rep. Owens added his name as a co-sponsor and on February 26, 2009, Rep. Sandifer added his name.

On February 26, 2009, after consideration of many amendments, H. 3418 was passed on second reading, Yeas 65, Nays 14. Among those voting in favor of the bill were Representatives White, Bowen, Owens, Gambrell, Hiott, Sandifer, Thompson, Cooper, Rice and Skelton. Votes were not recorded for Representative Agnew and Whitmire.

On March 3, 2009, H. 3418 received a third reading and was sent to the Senate. The Yeas were 67, the Nays 44. Among representatives voting in favor were Gambrell, Hiott, Rice, Cooper, Owens, Sandifer, Skelton, Thompson, White, Bowen, and Whitmire. Representative Agnew voted Nay.

On January 26, 2010, H. 3418 received major amendments in the Senate and was passed on second reading, 36 to 2. Senators voting in favor of H. 3418 included Alexander, O'Dell, L. Martin. Only two Senators, Pinckney and Sheheen, voted Nay.

After approval by the Senate, this legislation must return to the House. If still alive after all this, it goes to the Conference Committee which is composed of members from both houses appointed by the leadership. Many changes can occur at each stop. The governor can choose to sign or veto the bill. The legislators have a history of overriding most veto decisions.

### *Some Provisions of H. 3418*

The current version of H. 3418 (January 28, 2010) requires that all voters present a government issued photo ID when voting. This photo ID may be a SC driver's license, other photo ID issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles, a passport, military identification issued by the federal government, employee identification issued by the federal government, South Carolina, or a political subdivision of SC, or a voter registration issued by SC which contains a photo ID. An identification card must be free to a person 17 years or older.

Any qualified voter may cast his/her ballot at an early voting center. Early voting begins 15 days before an election and ends 3 days prior to the election. Paper absentee ballots in all elections are allowed in stated circumstances, including being on vacation on election day or being sixty-five years of age or older.

Absentee voting rules remain the same. To sweeten the deal and create a perplexing situation, the Senate combined Voter Photo ID with a No Excuse Early Voting period of 15 days, to include one Saturday. The SC Election Commission wants Early Voting very badly. The League wants it, also, but not at this high price. Early Voting needs to be a separate piece of legislation.

### *League Opposes This Legislation*

H. 3418 is unnecessary. South Carolina is already one of 25 states that require identification to vote at the polls, and SC election officials have testified that they know of no cases of voter impersonation in recent history. This is a solution to a problem that does not exist.

The primary reason the League opposes this bill is that it places a large impediment to voting in the path of some qualified voters –primarily those who are older and who do not drive. These are exactly the people who will also have difficulty getting to the county seat to obtain their photo

IDs. One reason that polling places are in neighborhoods is to make voting more accessible. Requiring people who do not drive to go to the county seat to obtain an ID that allows them to vote certainly makes voting more difficult. It is estimated that this bill has the potential to disenfranchise 178,000 registered voters.

Implementation of this bill will be expensive. At a time that school districts across South Carolina are laying off teachers because of the budget shortfall, our legislators are passing a bill that is estimated to cost over \$1,000,000 to implement – a bill that is completely unnecessary. South Carolina election officials do not know of any cases of voter impersonation in recent history. (Yes, I said it again!)

If the legislature wants to do something meaningful about voting problems, they should consider replacing our touch-screen voting machines with a system that actually allows the vote to be recounted. The current method of “recounting” the vote, as required by law, is to add the precinct totals together a second time. Only paper absentee ballots are actually recounted. ~Submitted by Eleanor Hare

**Reassessing at Point of Sale**

This op-ed by Holley Ulbrich, LWVCA board member, appeared in *The State* on January 17th. The League opposes changing the present practice of reassessing property to market value without a cap when it is sold. That change would result in significant revenue loss to local governments.

*“Objections to point-of-sale defy economics”*

The argument being put forth for a plan to tax newly sold property based on an artificially low value rather than the value at which it is sold relies mostly on equity, or fairness. But this equity argument for repealing point-of-sale reassessment shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the economics of the real estate market.

Consider a simple example. Suppose you own an apartment complex assessed at \$2 million. The property is taxed based on 6 percent of the value, or \$120,000. If the property tax rate is 250 mills (about the state average), the current tax bill is \$30,000. Now, if you sell it for \$2.8 million, the assessment will increase to \$168,000 and taxes to \$42,000. Furthermore, taxes will remain that high. Everyone involved in this debate agrees about these facts.

Here's where the disagreement starts.

Realtors argue that reassessment at point of sale means that deals don't happen. But for that to be true, it would mean that real estate prices do not adjust to reflect future property tax obligations. That's hard to believe.

Here's what really happens. A tax increase makes the property less valuable, so the buyer demands a lower price to compensate for the tax increase. The fair sale price would drop to, say, \$2.5 million. The seller gets a smaller capital gain, and the buyer gets a lower purchase price to offset higher tax liability.

Where is the unfairness to the seller, or buyer? We have a 15 percent cap on the taxable value a property can increase every five years unless it's sold. As long as the owner doesn't sell, he pays taxes on less than the market value of the property. If the property is not sold, the assessed property value will go up to no more than \$2.3 million at the next reassessment, and taxes will increase to a maximum of \$34,500. The owner enjoys a deferral of the rest of the tax increase. Local government will never recoup those lost tax revenues. The obligation to pay for local government is shifted to other property in the form of either higher mill rates or reduced public services. Even if the owner sells the property at a lower price because of reassessment at point of sale, he still gets a capital gain, but only \$500,000 instead of \$800,000.

Proponents of the bill to let new buyers keep this artificially low assessment, H. 3272, also argue that since property that is sold will pay more taxes than a similar property that is not sold, reassessment at point of sale discourages sales of existing properties. But if the value of the property has increased by more than 15 percent over five years, eventually the owner will want to sell and reap that gain, even if it is reduced by reassessment.

If the owner doesn't sell, it doesn't affect anyone other than real estate agents, who see fewer transactions; no jobs are created or lost either way. But what about new construction? If construction costs are rising, a similar newly constructed apartment complex would be assessed at \$2.8 million or more. So while the assessment cap may discourage sales of existing properties, the lack of reassessment to market value at point of sale could discourage new construction. Unlike turnover of existing properties, new construction creates jobs.

The problem is not reassessment at point of sale but the assessment cap itself, as other states with assessment caps have learned. Assessment caps create inequities in tax liabilities between property that is sold and reassessed at market value and property that is not sold. Assessment caps were promoted as a way to protect property owners from being forced to sell their property because of increased property taxes due to rapidly rising market value. But reassessment at market value just reduces the amount of capital gain when the owner does finally sell the property.

If we want to protect property owners from forced sales because of higher property taxes, we can follow the example of other states that offer income tax rebates for property taxes in excess of a certain percent of income. That policy targets those in need of relief while the rest of us pay our fair share of the cost of providing public services, based on the value of property we own.

~Submitted by *Holley Ulbrich*

### LWV Still Strong After 90 Years

Ninety years ago, Carrie Chapman Catt first proposed a League of Women Voters to “finish the fight” and work to end all discrimination against women. Thus, the League of Women Voters was founded on Valentine’s Day in 1920, six months before the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving women the right to vote. Today we are a grassroots organization with 850 Leagues throughout all 50 states.

Although the League is known widely for our voter education efforts, the League of Women Voters of the Clemson Area has been an institution in the upstate area for 42 years, working on issues involving Education, Growth Management, Natural Resources, Criminal Justice, Campaign Finance Reform, Child Welfare, Local Government, Voter Access, and much more. The League is strictly non-*partisan*, but we have always been political, advocating to effect change at the national and local level.

As we enter into a new year, we don’t know exactly what issues will confront the local community. We do know that the League will be there doing what it has been trusted to do for more than 90 years: discuss the important issues, ask the difficult questions and demand accountability from our local government.

Our members join the League because they know that whatever happens to our democracy over the next 90 years, it should be up to us, the people. The League of Women Voters is *the* organization where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement, and this year, on our 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we hope you will stand with us in this work. If we don’t do it, who will?

If you would like to get involved with the League, contact us at <[wm@clemsonarea.sc.lwvnet.org](mailto:wm@clemsonarea.sc.lwvnet.org)> or visit our website for more information: <http://www.clemsonarea.sc.lwvnet.org/>

~ Submitted by *Della Baker, LWVCA President*



## 90TH ANNIVERSARY LEAGUE PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, League of Women Voters of the Clemson Area represents all of Pickens as well as Oconee and Anderson Counties, where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement; and

WHEREAS, the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization, that has fought since 1920 to improve our system of government and impact public policies through citizen education and advocacy; and

WHEREAS, League members are constantly striving to serve their communities to make strong, safe, fair and vibrant places to live; and

WHEREAS, the League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States; and

WHEREAS, the League of Women Voters has always worked to promote the values and processes of representative government; and

WHEREAS, the League of Women Voters collaborates with other organizations to achieve mutual goals, increase civic participation, create lasting change in the community and to Make Democracy Work; and

WHEREAS, the League of Women Voters, for 90 years, has held the public trust by respectfully bringing elected leaders and the public together through non-partisan, civil means and through thoughtfully advancing solutions; and

WHEREAS, this community has benefited tremendously from the countless volunteer hours donated by League members over its 90 year history of enhancing our democracy.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Neil Smith, Chairman of the Pickens County Council, do hereby proclaim the 14th day of February, 2010, as “LWV Making Democracy Work Day” in honor of the League of Women Voters 90th Anniversary and urge all residents of Pickens County to pay great tribute and respect to the League of Women Voters for all they do to make our community healthy, vibrant and strong.

Done in meeting duly assembled this   1st   day of   February  , 2010.

PICKENS COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA  
(SEAL)

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
G. Neil Smith, Chairman, County Council  
of Pickens County, South Carolina

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Donna F. Owen, Clerk to County Council of  
Pickens County, South Carolina

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chappell Hurst, Jr. County Administrator,  
Pickens County, South Carolina