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Lighthouse *newsletter*



An e-newsletter from the League of Women Voters of Hilton Head Island/ Bluffton Area



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY

Making
Everyone's
Vote Count

WHEN: 10- 12 p.m. Wed., April 11

WHERE: The Unitarian Universalist
Congregation of the Low Country,
110 Malphrus Rd Bluffton SC

LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING & GERRYMANDERING

What nonpartisan strategies, techniques, and actions can we use to

create equitable and fair voting districts?

Using the issue of redistricting and gerrymandering, this program will begin with a general overview of the issue of gerrymandering and its impact on South Carolina voting districts, followed by a summary and update on the SC House Bill 4456 to create an Independent Redistricting Commission. We will then talk about some of nonpartisan strategies, techniques and actions we can use in our efforts to create equitable and fair voting districts. During the second half of the morning we will break into small groups to discuss and practice applying these techniques to civic engagement and advocacy around the issues of redistricting and gerrymandering as it applies to the Hilton Head/Bluffton area.

Join the League from **10-noon on Wednesday, April 11, at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 110 Malphrus Road, Bluffton**, for this practical and timely session.

~MaryAnn Bromley, Chair, State Issues & Advocacy

Message from the Co-President



I first voted in the presidential election of 1968 and have voted in every national, state, and local election since then. When my son was in elementary school, I took him to the polls as a lesson in democracy.

Because I view voting as a citizen's responsibility, I was shocked to learn from a newly naturalized citizen born in the Soviet bloc that she did not intend to vote because it was her "right not to vote."

Sadly, like this woman, far too many fail to vote. In the mid-term elections of 2014 less than 37 percent of eligible voters went to the polls, the lowest turnout in 70 years. According to *The New York Times*, 102 million people didn't vote in the 2016 presidential election—far more than voted for any single candidate.

People who abdicate this responsibility have a short and imperfect understanding of American history. In the early days of our democracy only landed men could vote. It took many years and constitutional amendments to extend the franchise to include men of color and women. Indeed, people have lost their lives in wars in order to make the world safe for democracy.

Recent developments portend a turn in the tide. The 2016 election has motivated

thousands to become political activists, with an impressive number of people deciding to run for office. The February 14 gun murder of 17 students at another American high school, energized students to lift their voices to enact common sense gun laws.

Our League will be building on that energy when we visit our local high schools this spring to register students to vote. At Hilton Head Island High School alone, over 20 volunteers will have visited 21 classrooms by the time this newsletter is published.

Even though we go to town halls, call or write our representatives, march in the streets, and share our opinions on social media, all of these activities amount to little if we fail to vote.

Voting matters.

~Nancy Williams, Co-President

Vote Saturday, April 21 on the School Bond Referendum

We urge you to vote on the Beaufort County Schools bond referendum to fund new schools on Saturday, April 21. The League has not taken a position on the referendum. However, click below and scroll to “Information on Coming Ballot Referendum” for the exact wording of the bond referendum and a Question/Answer sheet.

[Click to read about the School Bond Referendum](#)

March 14 School Funding Meeting

More than 60 members of the League and the general public turned out to hear about the basics of funding our schools. A panel of three plus a moderator presented the topic. Moderator Dr. Barbara Nielsen, a League member and the SC Superintendent of Education from 1990 to 1998, introduced the panel members: Josh Gruber, Interim Administrator of Beaufort County; Tonya Crosby, Chief Financial Officer of the Beaufort County School District; and Dr. Holley Ulbrich, distinguished professor emerita of economics at Clemson University and current Co-President of the SC League of Women Voters.

Gruber started by reminding everyone that Beaufort County is one of the fastest growing areas in the state. Its population was about 120,00 in 2000 and is expected to be about 190,000 to 200,000 in 2020. Among those settling here are many retirees as well as many families with school-age children. Probably a large portion of the newcomers will settle in

the Bluffton area, the fastest growing section of the county. It will gain an expected 40,000 to 80,000 homes in the next few years. Okatie will also quickly increase in population. Because of all this growth, many new schools will be needed. The big question is how they will be financed.

Crosby, who grew up in the local school district and has children in the public schools, stated that Beaufort County has the sixth largest school district in the state. In the district are 22,000 students, 1,700 teachers, and 3,000 other employees. The number of students increases by about 1 percent each year. About 60 percent of the students qualify for the free or reduced price lunch program.

In all, the per pupil school cost is \$9,800 a year. Local taxes supply about two-thirds of the funding. One-third comes from the state, and a small percentage from the federal government.

SC Act 388, passed in 2006, eliminated property taxes for school operations on owner-occupied homes, and replaced that revenue with a property tax relief check from the state, funded by an increase in the sales tax. There are a number of problems in distributing state funds equitably associated with this property tax relief.

The challenge for school districts is to have enough money to meet growth needs, foster diversity, educate students with disabilities and those whose first language is not English, attract quality teachers, and meet unfunded mandates.

Ulbrich titled her part of the presentation "Education Funding: A Lawsuit and Two Catastrophes." The lawsuit refers to the one the poorer school districts filed against the state to get a larger share of revenue for their areas. The first catastrophe was giving owner-occupied homes property tax relief (Act 388). The second catastrophe was the great recession. The resulting unemployment and slipping business income resulted in lower tax returns to the state. Ullbrich also commented that the state lottery does not supply extra income to the schools because its funds go for scholarships.

Ulbrich urged that to gain more funds for education, the state needs to overhaul the Education Finance Act. She discussed a variety of possible measures, including reducing the number of exemptions from the sales tax, transfer taxes, and taxes on internet sales. It is important to contact your local and state officials to ask them for EFA reform.

The question period brought up a variety of ideas. Among them were: give more control at the local level regarding how funds are spent, and have developers contribute more in impact fees to help finance the schools that will be needed by the new residents.

Miss the presentation? Watch it here! [School Funding Part One](#), [School Funding Part Two](#).

Education experts (left to right) Barbara Nielsen, Tonya Crosby, Josh Gruber and Holley Ulbrich address the crowd on March 14. School funding is everyone's business! Don't forget to vote on the school bond referendum on Saturday, April 21.



Save the Date: May 9 Annual Luncheon

You, too, can run and win elected office. Just do it!

On Wednesday, May 9, the League will hold its annual meeting and luncheon at Belfair. Social time begins at 11:15, the annual meeting at 11:45, lunch at 12:15, and the program about 1 pm.

The program will feature several local League members who have run for elected office. They will talk about the challenges of running and offer advice to would-be candidates. We hope that their accounts will inspire other women to “throw their hats into the ring.”

Watch your email for more details about food choices, the price, and where to send reservations.

~Joan Kinne-Shulman, Vice President, Program Chair

Celebrating Women's History

Sacagawea, Billie Jean King, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Condoleezza Rice were among the guests on March 18 when we celebrated Women's History Month at the home of Fran and Bill Bollin. At least their likenesses were there as League members tried to guess their new identities as part of our getting better acquainted and honoring American women—both living and dead—who have made significant contributions in the world of politics, sports, the arts, and social activism. On a beautiful spring afternoon, we enjoyed each other's company while enjoying wine, delicious hors d'oeuvres, and chef Bill's gazpacho and banana pudding. Many thanks go to the Bollins for opening their beautiful home on Mackay's Creek to the League.



Top, left to right: Bill and Fran Bollin (hosts), Nancy Williams and Joyce Braude.
Below: Ruth Wilwerding, Dot Law, Sandy Stern, and MaryAnn Bromley.

Member in the Spotlight: Flo Rosse

How did you end up in the Lowcountry?

When I retired from teaching in the Arlington, VA public schools my husband, Ed, and I decided on Hilton Head for our retirement years. We had vacationed here and appreciated the greenery and sunshine. Florida was too paved over for us.

What sparked your civic engagement?

As a teacher, I became very involved in teacher politics in Arlington. In addition to teacher pay, class size and classroom needs were paramount to my colleagues and me. I was elected President of the Arlington Education Association and through that and the Virginia Education Association I came to understand the impact of politics on education. That did it for me.

For many years I worked toward improving schools and education through politics. When I came to Hilton Head I continued those efforts in being a part of the first organization of the Democratic Club here. Much more followed as I was elected to the Beaufort County School Board and subsequently ran for the SC legislature from District 123. Although I did not win I was proud to enter the race.

Why the League?

The League of Women Voters is important to me as a former government teacher because of its efforts to register voters and inform the public about candidates by holding forums and following legislation and policy matters. It is right up my alley! The members are a great group of intelligent people whose nonpartisan efforts are a welcome respite for thinking people.



League members are a great group of intelligent people whose nonpartisan efforts are a welcome respite for thinking people.

~Flo Rosse

Welcome, New League Members

We are delighted to recognize those who have recently joined the League of Women

Sharon Butler Irene LaVigne Linda Sheets

Making Democracy Work® by educating, engaging, and protecting voters and voters' rights.

Thank You!

We thank the following individuals who made donations to help our League "Make Democracy Work.®" We invite others to join their ranks and will publish a growing list of donors each month.

Carrie Chapman Catt Society (\$300+)

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- Mary Ellen Hannan
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- Sally McGarry
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- Karen Wilber Wessel
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Donations may be mailed to LWVHHI/BA, P.O. Box 23862, Hilton Head Island, SC 29925.

Note: We are only able to acknowledge donations made by check. If you have been left off this list in error, please email our [Treasurer](#).

Monthly Calendar of Events

BOARD MEETINGS

Board meetings are held at 10 am at Palmetto Electric Cooperative on Mathews Drive on Hilton Head Island, unless otherwise noted. All members are welcome at Board meetings.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

April 5 – Board Meeting

April 11 – "Making Everyone's Vote Count." Legislative Redistricting & Gerrymandering: nonpartisan strategies, techniques and actions, 10 am, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Lowcountry, 110 Malphrus Rd, Bluffton. Guests welcome.

April 21 – Vote on the School Bond Referendum

May 3 – Board Meeting

May 9– Annual Meeting/Luncheon, 11:15 am social time, Belfair. "You, too can run and win elected office. Just do it!" Details to follow via email.

League Joins March for Our Lives, March 24



Officers and Board 2017-2018

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Jan Billingslea

Membership: Flo Rosse

Natural Resources/Land Use:

Sally McGarry

Newsletter: Mary Agnes Garman

Nominating: Fran Holt

Webmaster: David Rice

Voter Service:

Ruth Wilwerding, 843-671-5562



Know a Potential New Member?

Forward this newsletter, print out the [membership form](#),
or bring a prospect to the next League event. Better yet, do all three!



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Our mailing address is:

P.O. Box 23862 | Hilton Head Island, SC 29925

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