

CO-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our league is not giving a Spirit of Democracy Award this year so I would like to sing my praises to the many league leaders who have stepped up to "Make Democracy Work." **Ruth Reed** has served as co-President for the last three years, wearing every hat imaginable. She has presided at general and committee meetings,



Linda Gahan

attended governmental meetings, testified at legislative meetings, set up countless Zoom sessions, participated in candidate forums, mailed the VOTER, and organized a new communications group to improve our Facebook, website, and conversations with the press. **Janet Marsh** has chaired the SAFE group, improving our communication and knowledge of the workings of our Election Commissions in the two counties. She had served on the communications group, advocated for league positions with legislators and recruited new members into active roles in the league. **Sandy Land** had led the Health Care working group in a comprehensive study of health care for the underserved in our two counties and is researching Medicaid expansion. **Janie Shipley and Matt Saltzman** have led the redistricting efforts to make the process equitable for all. **Carolyn Bishop-McLeod** heads up DEI leading to a program that broadened our vision of the LGBTQ community as well as her work with SAFE to strengthen our relations with the Election Commission. **Ellie Taylor** leads the environment working group to keep us up to date on climate change and renewable energy beside serving on the health care working group and acting as secretary. **Sarah McNeill** has stepped up as candidate forum organizer and has moderated several debates. **Alice Flower** has led the Vote 411 effort to provide voter information on candidates running for elected office. **Cheryl Lee** continues her mission of voter registration of high school students despite the restrictions and safety

Continued on next page

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Co-President's Message
- Calendar of Events
- Preview of May Meeting
- Michael Ellison: Dwayne Eubanks
Emeritus College Fellow
- March Meeting: Access to Healthcare
Observing the Oconee Election Board
Meeting
- Nominating Committee Report
- Making SC an Energy Democracy
- Whatever Happened to Money?
- Bitcoin Poses a Danger to our Planet

THE VOTER

League of Women Voters Clemson Area
*Serving the Citizens of Oconee and
Pickens Counties*
P. O. Box 802, Clemson, SC 29631
my.lwv.org/south-carolina/clemson-area

OFFICERS:

Ruth Reed, Co-President
Linda Gahan, Co-President
Jill Gemmell, Vice-President
Ellie Taylor, Secretary
Elaine Laiewski, Treasurer

ELECTED DIRECTORS:

Buzzy Adams
Kathy Bargeron
Carolyn Bishop-McLeod
Sheila Crawford
Sandy Land
Janet Marsh
Sarah McNeill

APPOINTED BOARD:

Mike Ellison, *Voter* Editor
Alice Flower, Vote411
Eleanor Hare, Policy Advisor
Cheryl Lee, Voter Registration
Allison Ranson, Webmaster
Janie Shipley, Policy Advisor
Holly Ulbrich, Policy Advisor

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 3	Pickens County Board of Voter Registration & Elections, 4:30 pm at Pickens County Administration Facility, 222 McDaniel Ave, B-9, Pickens, SC 29671.
May 14	LWVSC State Council Meeting, Girl Scouts of SC Mountains to Midlands Leadership Center, Columbia, 9 a.m.- 3 p.m.
May 17	LWVOP Annual Meeting, Occasions at Wedgefield, 6 p.m. Wine, hors d'oeuvres, dinner, music, fellowship, business meeting. Cost \$20 per person. Reservations by May 3 to Cheryl Lee (cheryl_lee1234@bellsouth.net).
May 19	Webinar by Ted Volskay on Combatting Climate Change – It's Now or Never. Zoom. 7-8 p.m. See LWVSC website for details on registration.
May 24	LWVOP Board Meeting at 5 p.m. by Zoom.
June 7	Pickens County Board of Voter Registration & Elections, 4:30 p.m. at Pickens County Administration Facility, 222 McDaniel Ave, B-9, Pickens, SC 29671.
June 14	SC Primary Day, 7a.m. -7p.m.
June 23-26	LWVUS Convention, Sheraton Downtown Denver in Denver, Co. Hybrid meeting, \$300 registration.

CO-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

issues imposed by the pandemic. **Sheila Crawford** keeps us updated on efforts of NAACP to bring social justice and equal voting rights to all citizens. **Elaine Laiewsky** has kept us solvent through the pandemic and paid our bills. **Elizabeth Vogt** continues to layout beautiful and informative *VOTERS* with help of **Michael Ellison** as editor. **Holley Ulbrich and Eleanor Hare** are our mentors for league policy and keep us up to date on many issues including bitcoin mining. Cheers to these league members who make our league a vibrant and active organization working for democracy.

Submitted by Linda Gahan

In This Issue: Cryptocurrency

Both **Holley Ulbrich** and **Eleanor Hare** have submitted articles on cryptocurrency. Clearly cryptocurrency is becoming a financial system that is going to require “good governance” and hence is an appropriate topic for the League to consider. Holley, the economist, addresses the broader issues and Eleanor, the computer scientist, first became concerned when people she knew were attacked by ransomware. That led to awareness of the dramatic effect of Bitcoin mining on climate change. We are sure that these articles will not be the last we hear on this topic in the *Voter*. Please see articles on pages 7 and 8.

PREVIEW OF MAY MEETING

Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Pickens and Oconee Counties

Tuesday, May 17, at 6 pm
Buffet dinner at 6:30 pm

Occasions at Wedgefield

1551 18 Mile Rd
Central, SC 29630

We are delighted to announce our first in-person meeting since before Covid!

Dinner will be followed by the business meeting to vote on a slate of officers and the budget for 2022-2023, our program, and updated bylaws. We plan also to review local League work. The program will be renewing friendships over good wine, compliments of our Board members. Friends and family are welcome.

Contact **Cheryl Lee** to reserve your place: cheryl_lee1234@bellsouth.net
Reservation deadline: May 3, 2022

The cost of \$20 per person will be collected at the door. Email **Ruth Reed** at reed.juniata@gmail.com or call/text 814 251 4163

- if you would prefer to check in by Zoom
- if you need a ride
- you can provide a ride.

Dwaine Eubanks Emeritus College Fellow: Michael Ellison

The designation as a Fellow is based on the extent and quality of unremunerated service to the Emeritus College and/or Clemson University.

Mike Ellison was recognized as an I. Dwaine Eubanks Fellow for his leadership, work, and strong dedication to serving the Emeritus College and Clemson University. He has served on the awards committee since 2018 and continues to serve on the College's Advisory Board. Mike received the Theodore von Kármán Fellowship of Exploratory Research Space (ERS) at RWTH Aachen and is known for his multidisciplinary Clemson research group on Biologically Inspired Advanced Materials, aka The Spider Silk Group. Faculty from several departments worked in this group and it was a great example of collaboration across academic disciplines. The Kármán Fellowship exemplifies international collaboration.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IN OCONEE AND PICKENS COUNTIES

“Dollars and Sense: Health Care for the Underserved in Our Community” was the subject of the LWVOP monthly meeting/program held on March 15, 2022, via Zoom. The 2021-2023 Program for SCLWV on health care calls for action related to

1. access to a basic level of quality healthcare.
2. a national health insurance plan with support for Medicaid expansion.
3. reproductive health and rights; and,
4. efforts to address life-style related health issues.

Members of the Health Care Team of LWVOP provided an overview of the health status and the availability of health care experienced by residents in our two-county area. Data from DHEC’s Biostatistics and Behavioral and Risk Factor Surveillance System were used to highlight health care needs in the Counties (<https://gis.dhec.sc.gov/chp>). According to DHEC, 14.8% of Oconee and 16.1% of Pickens County residents delayed seeing a doctor in the last year due to cost.

Information was provided about current sources of health care for those who are uninsured and underinsured. DHEC operates public facilities in Seneca and Pickens with services (including immunizations, family planning, STDs, and more) with charges determined locally. Federally qualified health centers (Foothills in Pickens and Rosa Clark in Oconee) provide primary care, including mental health services, with charges based upon income and ability to pay. Several free clinics (<https://www.scfreeclinics.org/>), including Clemson Rural Health, offer primary care. These organizations refer patients for specialized consultations and services which may be available for the low income uninsured and underinsured through PRISMA’s Access Health. The costs these programs incur for charging/billing as well as for writing grants and managing targeted programs were highlighted as a consequence of not having a national health service or system.

Attendees were also updated on the efforts of LWV at local, state, and national levels to advocate for improving the availability of health care for all. LWV of the Charleston Area is developing a model and resources other Leagues can use. They are building a movement by engaging with partners while putting together statewide data and persuasive arguments to improve access to health care, with a particular focus on Medicaid expansion. Their Website includes a section dedicated to Healthcare Access with links to Webinars to educate the public and fact sheets that can be used for advocacy: <https://my.lwv.org/south-carolina/charleston-area/issues/healthcare-access-sc>. LWVSC has created a Working Group on Health Care Policy which sponsored a webinar on January 20 as part of the annual LEAD program. At the Convention later this year the LWVUS will consider a proposal from New York to update the national position on Health Care through the concurrence process.

Any LWVOP Member wanting more information or who wishes to participate in the Health Team’s work -- Medicaid expansion, reorganization of DHEC, reproductive health and rights, public health during emergencies -- or other health care issue, is encouraged to contact the Team. Zoom meetings are held on the second Tuesday of every month from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

OBSERVING THE OCONEE ELECTION BOARD MEETING

The Westminster City Council election was certified, and the voter turnout was 11%.

Any changes in polling places will be delayed until January 2023, to avoid having to make the change between the June primary and the November general election. Changes to by-laws include allowing board members to attend via phone or other electronics. Members may not miss more than 3 meetings.

Conditions for absentee ballots will likely remain as they are since legislation (H 4919) is still under debate. Absentee voting starts May 14 for the primary, and as it stands, an excuse is required to vote early. Being “ancient” (over 65) counts as an excuse.

Next Oconee Co. Election Board meeting will be held on July 21.

When asked what the League can do to help, the chair responded that poll workers are always needed, and that we might consider "adopting" a polling place as a group. Other groups have done so and then donated their earnings (\$130 per worker for the full day's work) to their organization.

Submitted by Buzzy Adams

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

Co-president: to be nominated

Vice President: Holley Ulbrich (off board) & Eleanor Hare

Board members:

- Lillian Boatwright
- Janet Marsh
- Pat Spurlock
- Cherie Walker

Nominating Committee:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Sarah D McNeill | (815) 535-7494; sdmcneill@live.com |
| Allison and Bill Ranson | (864) 878-3988; allison.ranson@gmail.com ;
bill.ranson@furman.edu |
| Sandy Rosche | (864) 654-4185; smrosche44@gmail.com |

RECAP OF APRIL MEETING: MAKING SC AN ENERGY DEMOCRACY

Penny Cothran spoke at our April LWVOP meeting to answer the question Is South Carolina Ready for a True Energy Democracy? As the South Carolina coordinator for Sierra Club's nationwide "Ready for 100" Campaign, Cothran has used her position to help South Carolina communities work toward an equitable and just transition to 100% clean, renewable energy for all.

Cothran spoke about our current South Carolina energy supply system which is dominated largely by two powerful companies: Duke Energy and Dominion Energy. Their regional transmission organization (RTO) runs an electric power system that coordinates, controls, and monitors a multi-state electric grid. They are fueled by a combination of coal, oil, natural gas, and nuclear plus a projection of 5-10% of energy coming from renewables (hydro, wind, and solar) into 2030. In addition, South Carolina has a state-owned electric and water utility called Santee Cooper (also known as the South Carolina Public Service Authority) that came into being during the New Deal as both a rural electrification and public works project. It created two lakes and cleared large tracts of land while building hydro-electric dams and power plants. As another power provider it utilizes energy produced from coal, nuclear, oil, natural gas, and hydroelectric along with a few other renewable sources. From its headquarters in Moncks Corner, Santee Cooper supplies power to the cities of Bamberg and Georgetown, 30 large industrial customers, and Charleston Air Force Base. Santee Cooper also generates some of the power distributed by South Carolina Electric Cooperatives.

Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina, Inc. (ECSC) is a statewide service and trade association made up of 20 Co-ops that operates the largest electric distribution system in the state. More than 1.5 million South Carolinians, representing 800,000 accounts in 46 counties, use electricity distributed by electric cooperatives. ECSC and its member organizations are all private nonprofit businesses owned by their members. Cooperatives purchase the energy they distribute from a variety of sources but have also created a large network of community solar installations across the state. Community solar is renewable energy that is locally produced for Co-op consumer-members who want it. It is fully reviewed at www.myscsolar.com.

South Carolina is now studying the possibility of allowing a program called Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) also known as Community Choice Energy as an alternative to the investor-owned utility supply systems. It allows local entities in the United States to aggregate the buying power of individual customers within a defined jurisdiction to secure alternative energy supply contracts. The CCA chooses the power from renewable generation sources on behalf of their consumers, something individual buyers may be unable to do. The main goals of CCAs have been to either lower costs for consumers or to allow consumers greater control of a green energy mix. With large-scale battery storage technology rapidly improving, electric utilities can better balance the flow and timing of renewable electricity. Large batteries store energy when it's breezy and sunny then use it at night and during cloudy weather.

Cochran encouraged our LWV members to support initiatives in our communities to expand energy from renewable sources. Those who are members of Blue Ridge Electric Coop can find information on their website to enable greater participation in member governance. Our Environmental Working Group will inform LWVOP members concerning legislation that promotes energy democracy.

Submitted by Ellie Taylor

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MONEY?

Bitcoin, as most of you know, is a way of making payments and storing financial assets that escapes the oversight of governments (at least so far) because it is a digital currency that rests in virtual world. Creating bitcoin costs real resources, with significant consequences for the health and wellbeing of humans and the earth's climate. It expends enormous amounts of electricity to "mine" the components of the bitcoins, which are created on giant computers located in "mining" cities near cheap electricity. The electricity used could be put to far more important ventures while creating a block of bitcoin greatly enriches its creators. The market price of a bitcoin is currently over \$40,000.

Recently, a team of economists estimated the costs of producing bitcoin that are imposed on people other than the owners/creators. The primary cost to creators is the amortization of the capital equipment required and the electricity and workers to produce it. The increased costs consist of higher mortality due to pollution, climate change, and health damages. These costs amount to 37-49% of the coin's value, depending on where the production is located.

However, those costs are not borne by the producer, but by the rest of us. They are what economists call externalities. Noise and air and water pollution are familiar examples of externalities. Because the owners do not have to pay these external costs in the absence of regulation, they will overproduce goods and services that create negative externalities.

The process used by economists to determine those numbers is called cost-benefit analysis. Economists add up the costs of producing X and the benefits of producing X and either subtract the costs from the benefits or take the ratio of benefits to costs to determine whether a project is worthwhile. When cost-benefit analysis is used in public sector projects, like building a highway or creating a new park, all costs and benefits are included, so the externalities are part of the cost. For a private firm, however, the decision makers only include the costs they pay. The purpose of much regulation, especially environmental regulation, is to require that the firm bear those costs as well—sometimes known as full-cost pricing. Bitcoin is not regulated and does not bear those costs.

The bitcoin industry is gulping up huge amounts of electric power (see the article by Eleanor), and that electric power creates significant externalities in its production, especially if it is derived from fossil fuels. In the Christian Bible there is a famous quotation: "The love of money is the root of all evil." (I Timothy 6:10.) I'm pretty sure the author of this quotation could not foresee bitcoins, but he certainly would have supported the idea that producing a form of money that does great harm to innocent bystanders—humans, animals, earth—while greatly enriching its creator would be a clear application of that claim.

Submitted by Holley Ulbrich

Holley Ulbrich authors a blog. If you are interested in subscribing to her free blog, which covers a wide range of topics, the web address is <https://goldenyearsblog.net/>.

BITCOIN POSES A DANGER TO OUR PLANET

“Bitcoin uses more electricity than many countries.” (*The New York Times*, 2021), Bitcoin used more electricity than Finland, a country of 5.5 million. Every year the amount of carbon dioxide generated by cryptocurrency mining increases by 30.5 metric tons, making it a significant contributor to climate change.

Bitcoin is a virtual commodity that exists on the internet. It is accessed by the owner using a password. The password is called a “wallet” and the Bitcoin is stored in a special kind of data structure, called a blockchain. Ownership is acquired by transfer of existing Bitcoin or by “mining” new Bitcoins, a process in which special-purpose computers attempt to be the first to solve a mathematical problem. “Mining” requires large quantities of electricity to operate the computers and to dissipate the heat generated.

The “mining” process: Thousands of special-purpose computers simultaneously attempt to solve a mathematical problem. Large fans blow the heat away, preventing over-heating and fires. When one of the computers finds the solution, that computer claims its Bitcoin and stores information in the blockchain. Then, all the computers throw away all the computing they have done and simultaneously start searching for the answer to the next problem. The solution to the mathematical problem has no other use.

The computers are designed to solve the Bitcoin problems and cannot be adapted for other use. Over the past decade the algorithms have been continuously refined to solve this one type of problem. The lifetime does not exceed two years and used computers contribute to the problem of disposing of e-waste.

Bitcoin is attractive to some because:

1. Large swings in the value and the prospect of increasing value appeal to the gambler in all of us.
2. As originally designed, Bitcoin transactions have a seller and a buyer, but no middleman, thus removing the ability to trace and regulate transactions. The infamous Silk Road website used Bitcoin to buy and sell heroin and other drugs. Also, hackers require that ransoms be paid in Bitcoin. (If digital currency did not exist, how would ransomware hackers receive payment without it being traced?)
3. Some people use the direct transfer feature to avoid paying fees to banks, governments, and other entities.
4. Two countries, El Salvador and a small country in Africa, have adopted Bitcoin as a currency.

Link to NYTimes article:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/09/03/climate/bitcoin-carbon-footprint-electricity.html>

Submitted by Eleanor Hare