

A WILD RIDE

The 2021-22 legislative session has been a roller coaster ride. Now that the regular session is largely over — although special summer sessions loom to complete the budget and to attempt to pass a draconian abortion prohibition bill — we can, with the help of our advocates Lynn Teague and Janelle Rivers, assess the winners and losers.

VOTING

Voting, elections, and election security were top of mind for the League and the Legislature. More than 50 bills on voting — many seeking expansive changes — were introduced in this session. At the end, one omnibus bill was passed and signed into law by Gov. Henry McMaster as Act 150.

That bill established no-excuse early voting in South Carolina — something the League has long advocated for. Another significant positive is the requirement for risk-limiting audits, the “gold standard” for elections, according to Lynn.

Although bipartisanship often feels like a fragment left over from a bygone era, Lynn points out her appreciation of House Majority Whip Brandon Newton for his “great degree of responsiveness... The most responsive negotiation that I can remember in recent history.”

But there were other less-positive provisions, including changes in absentee voting witness requirements, and the lack of a provision to provide for “notice and cure” of inaccurately filled out ballots.

What most concerns Lynn, however, is a very broad legislative “gag order” on state election officials. “They are to say nothing negative publicly about our election laws. We’ve gone from having what was supposed to be an independent

agency answerable to voters and citizens to something that is very clearly under the thumb of partisan politicians,” explains Lynn. “That’s very disturbing.” This limitation is critical, especially when it comes to how honest the SEC members can be when talking to the press and to the public about election issues.

Because of some of the absentee by mail process changes, Lynn notes, the League recommends that “even if you have a legitimate excuse, the process is now sufficiently complex that the chances you will have your ballot thrown out for technical defects, or not received in time, are high. For people who can vote in person (either early or on Election Day), they should do that.”

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

This is a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Through two approved resolutions South Carolina adds its approval to a nationwide effort to convene an Article 5 Constitutional Convention. It sounds harmless enough, but that is far from the reality. The broader bill focuses on reining in the authority and powers of the federal government, fiscal responsibility, and term limits.

Lynn’s translation of reining in the government, based on public comments by supporters and legislators? “Do away with the Commerce Clause in the Constitution.” That would take the handcuffs off business and slap them on the government. The Commerce Clause has enabled important federal powers to protect us including those that integrated lunch counters and motels across the South and the EPA’s protection of our vulnerable environment. “They want the federal government out of things like school integration, women’s

rights, or LGBTQ rights. The message for business would be “Do what you want to the environment, to consumers, to workers.”

And fiscal responsibility? “That means gutting Medicare and Social Security,” she explains.

The narrower resolution states it would be limited to a balanced federal budget. Supporters have made clear that they mean reduced expenditures, not restoring any part of taxes on corporations and the wealthy. “If you cut the federal budget this much,” she says, “it would do all the things the broader bill would do because there would be no funding to enforce regulations or non-discrimination laws.”

The approval of 34 states is required to call this convention. South Carolina becomes the “28th or 29th state,” Lynn adds.

EDUCATION

Several bills trying to limit what can be taught to students in grades K-12 were filed. After lengthy debate and public

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Where Are We Going?

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cheshire Cat to Alice in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. The mysterious cat’s rejoinder is often paraphrased by organizational planners to read, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any path will get you there.”

I confess: I’m a planner. Any organization looking to achieve results needs to set a course, evaluate progress, and make any needed course corrections. As a Will Rogers famous remark reminds us, “Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

Good planning also involves creating a vision for our desired future.

Planning is hard in uncertain times as none of us has a crystal ball, and our environment can change rapidly. When LWVUS began its Transformation Journey prior to its 100th anniversary, its purpose was to ensure that the League of Women Voters would be vibrant and relevant in its next one hundred years.

At our state Council meeting on May 14, we considered—in the context of decades of declining League membership nationwide and LWV’s 2018 Transformation Roadmap—how we in South Carolina can build a vibrant, engaged and diverse volunteer organization to ensure our future. (See “2022 State Council” in this newsletter.) I also introduced and kicked off LWVSC’s strategic planning process.

Good planning begins with a clear understanding of the organization’s

mission. A mission statement answers the question, “Why and for whom do we exist?” LWVSC’s mission is that of LWV nationwide: “Empowering Voters and Defending Democracy.” Our board is considering the second part of the question: who are our primary and secondary “customers”? What is our role as a statewide organization?

Good planning also involves creating a vision for our desired future. To inform our vision, LWVSC will be scanning our external and internal environments and soliciting input from our “stakeholders”—local League leaders, donors, and partners. We began this process at Council by asking attendees to identify what LWVSC does best and what LWVSC should or could become if we build on those strengths.

Once we examine collected data and input and answer the question “What do we want to create,” our next step will be to determine what we need to do to get us where we want to go. That is, what goals will we set to achieve our desired vision?

Our board will convene for a strategic planning retreat in August to answer these questions and will spend the fall laying out strategies, action plans, measures of success, and necessary resources—both human and financial—to implement our



plans. Our work will, then, inform a 2023-2025 budget to be considered by delegates at our 2023 state convention in Columbia.

Strategic planning also has ramifications for selecting leadership. What are the skills needed of our leaders to advance our strategic plans?

This kind of planning is hard, but it is the necessary work that any organization needs to do to advance its mission. I hope your local Leagues engage in similar strategic thinking to guide your efforts and help us build a vibrant, growing, diverse and engaged organization that will be empowering voters and defending democracy for years to come.

—Nancy Williams, LWVSC President

Stand Up for Reproductive Rights

The likely decision of the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade* is devastating for American women.

Rejecting a long-established precedent, the Court is likely to return us to pre-1973 days when women of means traveled out of state or to another country to get an abortion while poor women resorted to self-inflicted abortions or the back street—with horrific results.

As a consequence of this decision, many unfortunate women will be forced to bear children they don’t want or can’t care for. Others will die.

Justices supporting this decision say that the word “abortion” appears

nowhere in the U.S. Constitution. Shamefully, neither do the words “woman” and “women,” whose value and rights to privacy and personal autonomy this decision would trample.

The League of Women Voters of South Carolina has long supported women’s access to comprehensive reproductive health care and women’s rights to make the most intimate and personal decisions that are best for themselves and their families.

In the days to come, South Carolina’s General Assembly will be deciding whether to address new and more extreme abortion restrictions in a special

Legislative Update

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testimony, the House passed a consolidated bill: the South Carolina Transparency and Integrity in Education Act. The act includes prohibiting “certain concepts” from being taught, ways to punish teachers who violate the act, public review of curriculum “and materials,” and asserting that parents are “the primary source of the education of their children...” The bill failed in the Senate and may not make it out of the joint conference committee where it now sits, according to Janelle.

“It’s a very partisan, culture war bill,” she explains. “It’s a memory bill. If you control people’s memory of events, you control the narrative of history, and control things going forward.”

One bill that did pass is labeled a “scholarship” act. But, again, another wolf in sheep’s clothing. The bill provides \$5,000 scholarships to up to 5,000 Medicaid families to send their children to private school. But the funded amount falls short of what that move would cost, and does not take into account books, transportation, and other costs, making it unlikely many Medicaid families would be able to take advantage of the program. Once the Medicaid families’ applications have been handled, the bill provides for distribution of the remaining funds to any South Carolina family without means testing.

One bill that sounds bad, but Janelle calls a “practical necessity,” would allow schools to hire “non certified” teachers. Schools are struggling to find and retain teachers. “The Legislature has funded education poorly and teachers have not been respected, to the point that the pipeline is pretty slim,” she explains. Fewer people are going into public education and women, long the mainstay of the profession, “can get a lot more respect and make a lot more money doing something else.”

Janelle sums up the Legislative year for education this way: “There was a lot of lip service, but it did not match the reality of what was passed.”

LIGHTNING ROUND

A very fast look at some of the other important issues and how they fared.

- The “personhood” bill that would have declared a fetus to be a person at fertilization (putting contraception and in-vitro fertilization for couples trying to conceive at risk) failed. But the bill requiring doctors to provide misleading and inaccurate information to patients going through a “medication abortion” was passed. A bill to remove sales tax from menstrual products, commonly known as the “pink tax,” failed. But pharmacists are now able to prescribe birth control to women. If this seems incongruous to you, Lynn explains:

“More moderate Republicans will tell you they want to support contraception access because they oppose abortion.”

- State workers got six weeks of paid family leave but the bill left out teachers, who are not technically state employees.
- Equal pay. No.
- Hate crimes legislation. No
- Medical marijuana. No.
- Removing racially offensive monuments from State House grounds. No.
- Medical professionals can refuse to treat patients based on personal conscience. Passed.
- Medicaid expansion. No. Lynn points out: “Even Arkansas passed Medicaid expansion.”

If it seems like a lot of big bills failed, you’re not wrong.

Lynn sums up the session this way: “We celebrate the passage of early voting, realizing a longstanding League goal. However, the heavy emphasis on ‘culture war’ issues — part of a larger effort to return our state and nation to the 1950’s — has been an ongoing barrage fueled by fear and hate.”

League members should plan to continue this fight, as the General Assembly plans to return this summer to pass a no-exception abortion prohibition.

— Laura Haight,
LWV of Greenville County



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2022 STATE COUNCIL: BUILDING LEAGUE POWER

The theme for 2022 State Council of the League of Women Voters of South Carolina was “Building a Vibrant, Engaged, and Diverse Volunteer Organization.” Our keynote panelists were three women who are actively engaged in civic and volunteer organizations throughout the state of South Carolina and the region: Tameika Isaac Devine, community advocate and former Mayor Pro Tem and 20-year veteran of the Columbia City Council; Kara Simmons, Vice-Chair of the Columbia Housing

... the panelists suggested that current members step out of their comfort zone and build 1-on-1 relationships with people outside of the League.

Authority and director and staff member of various nonprofit organizations including the Junior League; and Allison Terracio a staff member of Planned Parenthood South Atlantic and an elected member of the Richland County Council.

The panelists presented ways to not only create a welcoming and inclusive culture, but also provided League members suggestions to engage volunteers who step into—and succeed—in leadership roles within their organizations.

When asked what the League could do to build a vibrant, engaged, and diverse volunteer organization, the panelists suggested that current members step out of their comfort zone and build 1-on-1 relationships with people outside of the League. To do this would require members



to “go to their [other organizations’] parties and events,” explained Terracio. Simmons emphasized that this critically involves the repeated action of “meeting people where they are.”

In a world of competing interests and similar missions among volunteer and nonprofit organizations, Devine emphasized the importance of making room for new people through deliberate and intentional efforts, leveraging their strengths and passions. This genuinely requires a “servant’s heart and collaboration,” she explained.

~Hannah E. Parker, LWVSC Director; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY AWARD 2022: JOHN C. RUOFF

The League of Women Voters of South Carolina is pleased to announce the 2022 presentation of our highest award, the Spirit of Democracy, to John C. Ruoff at May 14 State Council. The challenge is to summarize almost half a century of public service by someone regarded as a model of meaningful work for the public good as well as a personal mentor.

John's doctorate dissertation (University of Urbana-Champaign, 1976) on the social and cultural history of the 19th Century American South with special emphasis on women, the family, demography, and the religious basis of behavior was a fitting prelude to his career. He went on to serve as Executive Secretary of the Illinois Conference of the American Association of University Professors in Urbana, as training coordinator for the South Carolina Legal Services Coalition, as management consultant for Palmetto Legal Services, as staff director for Fairfield United Action, and as an independent consultant.

From 1987 to 2011 John served in various capacities including Executive Director for South Carolina Fair Share, a wonderful organization through which he worked on many issues impacting low income people in our state, from payday loans to welfare reform and health care access. Since 2011 he has been the Principal of The Ruoff Group, providing expert statistical and demographic services, legislative advocacy training, policy research, and analyses to organizations working for a better life for the people of South Carolina. Finally, we are very honored that he is a member of the League of Women Voters of South Carolina.

I first met John when he was brought in to train me and other League members in the wonders of advocacy at the South Carolina State House. His Rules School was an indispensable help to a very green lobbyist, laying out not just what the Rules say but how they are used. Through my ten years at the State House for the League, I have relied over and over on



John's expert, frequently funny, and always wise advice.

Most recently, John was the core of our redistricting team. The League was a leader in public input on South Carolina's General Assembly and Congressional redistricting plans, and he deserves a great deal of the credit for that due to his knowledge of the technical aspects of mapping and the legal and historical context for redistricting. This involved a tremendous amount of very demanding work, often on short notice. Much of that work took place while he was also advising the NAACP on their local redistricting work throughout South Carolina. During one hearing the Senate Redistricting Committee was informed that what they really needed to do was "just download John Ruoff's brain!"

I cannot imagine anyone more deserving of receiving the Spirit of Democracy Award than John Ruoff. He has earned it many times over in his career.

— Lynn S. Teague, LWVSC Vice President, Issues & Advocacy

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Teresa Arnold, New Healthcare Advocacy Specialist



The League of Women Voters of South Carolina is extremely pleased to announce the appointment of Teresa Arnold as Healthcare Advocacy Specialist and registered LWVSC lobbyist.

Teresa Arnold, MSW, recently retired as the State Director of AARP SC where she advocated for older adults to live independently, have access to health care and adequate retirement savings. She started her legislative work as a budget analyst for the SC House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee in 1995. She was the Director of Governmental Affairs for the SC Department of Social Services until 2004, when she left state government to lobby for AARP.

She is also a field supervisor for the USC College of Social Work graduate students, providing supervision to 45 students since 1990. She was awarded Social Worker of the Year and later USC College of Social Work Alumnus of the Year. In 2022, she was awarded the Order of the Palmetto by Governor Henry McMaster for her lifetime work in helping advocate for South Carolinians.

We're delighted to add Teresa's energy and expertise to our state advocacy efforts.



VOTE411: We Asked, They Answered

Many League members are familiar with VOTE411, our award-winning one-stop shop for nonpartisan voting and election information. This year 10 local Leagues (Beaufort, Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, Hilton Head Island-Bluffton, Horry, Oconee-Pickens, Spartanburg, Sumter, and York) are participating by posing questions to candidates—and getting answers! In all, that's involved over 200 candidates and hundreds of questions across the state.

New this year, a mighty SC VOTE411 Inter-League Exchange of almost 30 members has been meeting regularly to share ideas, tips, and support. A special thanks to Keller Baron and David Smith, LWV Columbia Area, for leading the effort.

Also new, LWVUS has launched a VOTE411 campaign to urge all candidates to respond to League questions. Voters deserve to know where candidates stand. You can help!

Enter your address at VOTE411 to view your candidates. Who answered? Thank them. Who didn't? Call on them to respond. It's in their best interest. Sample Tweet/Facebook Post:

As a voter, I want to hear where my candidates stand on the issues. That's why I'm calling on @[candidate] to respond to @VOTE411's Voter Guide so we can be informed before casting our ballot! #LWV VoterGuide

We know an informed voter is a powerful voter. VOTE411: empowering voters with thanks to your support!



The LWV of the Columbia Area Education Fund was one of eight non-profits chosen by Dominion Energy to receive a \$2,000 "Light the Way" award on May 3. Delighted representatives at right: Lady June Cole, President, and Laura Woliver, Board member.

Leagues in Action!

Leagues have been busy across the state. Here's a snapshot:

Beaufort Area: Presented awards to student winners of their scholarship contest to create an educational tool to inform citizens about local government topics.

Charleston Area: Along with a dozen partners across SC, hosted "Expanding Healthcare Access in SC." Recordings available at www.lwwcharleston.org.

Columbia Area: Discussed *The 1619 Project* by Nikole Hannah-Jones at their April public policy luncheon, in concert with the LWVSC Racial Justice Working Group.

Florence County: Tackled "Mental Health in SC" with Dr. Tiffany R. Pressley, assistant professor and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner coordinator, Francis Marion University.

Georgetown County: Planned door-to-door voter education and outreach activities with local partners including the Deltas, NAACP, AARP, and Howard Alumni.

Greenville County: Hosted Derek Tisler, counsel, Brennan Center for Justice's Democracy Program, who discussed national voter suppression efforts and threats to election administrators.

Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Area: Completed Senior Voter Registration events/drives at all local public high schools; initiated social media campaigns for Facebook and Instagram.

Horry County: Arranged indoor digital billboard public service announcements to promote VOTE411 in Myrtle Beach, North Myrtle Beach, and Little River.

Oconee-Pickens Counties: Hosted a well-attended candidate forum for the April 7 Westminster City Council Special Election at American Legion Post 107.

Spartanburg County: Registered voters at eight county public high schools and three private high schools, with plans to register at the Spartanburg Juneteenth Celebration.

York County: Created publicity and materials to promote VOTE411's exciting new presence in York County.

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Established in 1920, the League of Women Voters of South Carolina is a nonpartisan, political organization that encourages people to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. League membership is open to any person who subscribes to the purposes and policy of the League. All members receive the *SC Voter*, email communications and news from their local League.

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As an organization that believes that all US residents should have access to quality, affordable healthcare, we will fight with our reproductive rights allies to preserve the individual rights of women to make their own reproductive choices.

Our League voice must remain strong.

Support the League of Women Voters of South Carolina. Every gift helps.

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