

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS WITH A BANG!

The 2025 session of the South Carolina General Assembly began in early January and League lobbyists are racing to keep track!

### Voting and Elections

During the second week of session, Senate hearings were held on four election-related bills. All were sponsored by Senator Campsen, whose work on these significant issues is appreciated. The first, S.35, removes the office of Comptroller General from the constitutional officers of South Carolina elected by the public, and redistributes the functions of that office. The League has been conducting a two-year study of the constitutional officers and their method of selection. Although that position statement won't be final until our Convention, the consensus was so strong within the League that we were able to testify in favor of the bill.



Lobbyists Lynn Teague and Teresa Arnold pose with former Senator Penry Gustafson.

S.36, 37, and 38 deal with election processes and we support all. S.36 would standardize criteria to locate polling places. S.37 would standardize scheduling and processes of municipal elections. S.38 would standardize dates for special elections. Overall, these bills would make voting more predictable, more uniform in processes, and more efficient. These features will benefit voters. At the same time, they will simplify the work of election workers. We believe that they will move forward, and should have progressed by the time readers see this update.

Finally, we appreciate senators Devine and Sutton introducing S.257, a bill to establish uniform responses when polling places fail to open on time. We are working with House members to introduce a parallel bill in the House.

### Energy Regulation

Energy regulation has also returned as a major issue, following half a dozen pre-session meetings of the Senate's Special Committee on South Carolina's Energy Future, chaired by Senator Massey. The committee is continuing its meetings with a session on large energy users and their requests for choice of energy providers, and a session on the impact of AI and data centers, which have made substantial demands on generating capacity while asking for special rates and favored treatment while providing few jobs. League testimony last session highlighted the risky nature of industries like AI in their formative stages, and this has been reinforced by the appearance of the Chinese DeepSeek AI, far more efficient than existing U.S. platforms. Discussions

are ongoing. Meanwhile, the House is considering H.3009, which closely parallels last year's gutting of energy regulation.

### Constitutional Conventions

The ill-advised Constitutional Convention resolutions continue, this time as H.3007 and H.3008. We continue to testify against them. The League regards the convention approach as highly problematic, and the particular goals of these resolutions – congressional term limits and a balanced federal budget – as undesirable.

### Women's Rights

We also are getting ready to deal, once more, with recurring issues such as abortion. Our current 6-week ban isn't draconian enough for many of our legislators. The most extreme ban that would make abortion into homicide has

*Continued on page 6*

Highlights	
<i>President's Message</i> .....	2
<i>It's Convention Time!</i> .....	3
<i>Elections: What We Learned</i> ..	3
<i>LEAD 2025</i> .....	4
<i>Effective Advocacy Toolkit</i> ....	4
<i>Why I Give</i> .....	7
<i>Giving to the League</i> .....	7
<i>League Bookshelf</i> .....	7

# Moving Forward

**A**fter a contentious presidential election and after ten months of working to register voters and get out the vote, many of us were exhausted. A natural reaction was to turn off the TV and tune out political news. However, instead of dropping out, we who care about what happens in the next four years must reflect and reset.

This past month, I participated in a local Martin Luther King Day celebration as did many of you in your communities.

*For there is always light,  
If only we're brave enough to see it,  
If only we've brave enough to be it.*

— Amanda Gorman

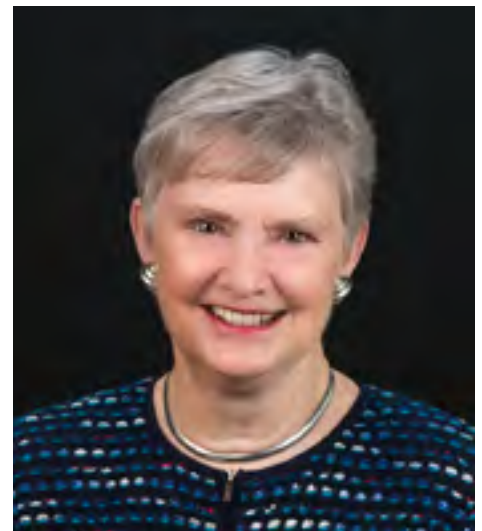
The theme and speeches of that day embodied much of the same sentiment I'm hearing from national League leaders—essentially that we must embrace hope coupled with action and move forward. The local pastor who was honored with the MLK Community Service Award put it best when he said, “Optimism is fleeting; hope is a discipline.” We must plan, organize, and courageously persist when the going gets tough. Rather than

remaining silent, we must—as LWV President Dianna Wynn has said—“speak up and speak out.”

How do we do so while remaining nonpartisan? In fact, some would seek to silence us by accusing us of being partisan when we take political stances on public policy issues. We need to remind any accusers that we work on issues that we have thoroughly studied and that issues themselves are not partisan. The League of Women Voters is open to any person over 16 years of age who shares our passion for empowering voters and defending democracy; we don't ask about anyone's political affiliation. We have been nonpartisan since the League's inception. After 105 years, we are the experts on nonpartisanship, not others.

So how do we move forward?

We will move forward at the state level by focusing on our advocacy priorities at the State House. For the session just begun, our priorities are Making Democracy Work, education, and healthcare. In making democracy work we will be supporting election reforms that increase voters' access, opposing calls for a constitutional convention, opposing efforts to reduce regulations of utilities and supporting rights of women and



marginalized groups. In education, we will be opposing attempts to privatize public education and restrict students' access to books and history. In healthcare, we will be supporting the expansion of Medicaid and protecting bodily autonomy for all. We will take action and let our voices be heard.

We also move forward by working in partnership with other organizations in the democracy and voting rights space, and by enlisting more members and advocates in the fight to protect democracy.

We will move forward as we plan for local elections this year and for mid-term elections in 2026. We will attend city, county, and local board of education meetings. We will educate voters about local issues, encourage our members to serve on local boards and commissions, and even run for office ourselves!

We will move forward at our May 16-17 “Forging the Future” convention in Greenville when we lay out our strategic goals, pass a budget, and elect our leaders for the next biennium.

On February 14, the League of Women Voters celebrated its 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Our path forward has never been an easy one. We have been called upon, working in concert, to defend democracy in the past. According to LWV CEO Celina Stewart, “We may even be called upon to restore democracy,” but what happens tomorrow or next year “is not the end of the story.”

We believe in the power of women, not only to defend democracy, but to create a more perfect democracy.

Onward!

— Nancy Williams, LWVSC President



# WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE 2024 ELECTIONS?

The November 2024 elections are over, and voters have spoken on the national, state, and local elections. While the dust is still settling on the national level, we can take stock of what we've learned in South Carolina.

## What did we learn?

The League was very active during the 2024 election season, from last February when the presidential primaries took place and to last June when the state primaries were held. Despite many local Leagues' in-person voter registration drives and LWVSC's promotion of VOTE411 to help voters learn about voting, the shockingly low turnout for these primaries is something to be concerned about. Four percent (4%) of the registered voters turned out to vote in the Democratic Presidential Primary and 23% of the registered voters decided the nominee in the Republican Presidential Primary. The numbers for the June statewide primaries for the 7 Congressional Districts and all Senate and House seats were even more dismal. Only 13% of registered voters turned out to vote. With many seats uncontested, it's no wonder voters didn't vote. November 2024

was the first statewide election using newly redistricted election districts, which favored incumbents—another reason voters didn't feel the urgency to vote.

## What else did we learn?

While statewide primary results were indeed dismal, the November general election brought 77% of registered voters to the polls. This was a record number for South Carolina, outpacing 2020 by five percentage points. The LWV can take some credit for this. It is said that it takes about three touches to get a voter's attention. Through the persistent and consistent promotion and messaging of VOTE411, social media, League in Action, texting, and our websites, approximately 200,000 voters in SC were touched to register and get out to vote. Once again, the LWVSC engaged the use of the marketing firm, LocalIQ of Greenville, to create a campaign to target young women ages 18-35 across South Carolina who had never registered to vote or had never voted. By raising funds, both large and small, from our members and other donors, we flooded this group with information about VOTE411 on social media. In addition, the organizing team

from the national League made an in-person stop in Charleston during early voting. Along with volunteers from the Charleston League, we met voters both before and after they voted to give them information about what's on their ballot and buttons they could give to other family members, friends, and co-workers to encourage them to vote. We learned what works and will expand these efforts again for state and national elections.

And we learned that presidential election years in South Carolina will engage more voters in the general election but voting in primaries is still problematic.

## What does this mean for this year?

We are facing a very different election season in 2025. Odd numbered years promise that local races will be on the ballot. Local races do not produce the interest and turnout that national elections do. Yet we know that it is these races—city and town mayoral and council races and school board elections—that can critically impact our lives. These races concern issues of development, taxation, local environment, and quality of life issues. School boards manage school budgets, personnel, and increasingly get involved in curriculum and materials. Selecting local leaders requires that voters do their homework, and local Leagues will be there to help. Already, Spartanburg, Greenville, Columbia and Charleston are some of the Leagues who are planning for voter education meetings. We will continue to promote the use of VOTE411 for registering voters. The League encourages every member to be part of the VOTE411 team to educate voters about who is on their ballot. Calling or texting local candidates to remind them to add their information to VOTE411 goes a long way toward engaging voters and thus increasing turnout on election day. Increasing voter turnout Makes Democracy Work®.

— Joan Zaleski, LWVSC Vice President, Voter Services



## It's Convention Time!

Please join League members from around the state as we forge our future at LWVSC's 2025 biennial convention in Greenville on May 16-17. We're planning a day and one half of speakers, workshops, business, and awards at Greenville Tech's Center for Manufacturing Innovation.

For more information about the convention and available lodging, please visit [lwvsc.org](http://lwvsc.org). Registration is open and will continue until April 16.



# LEAD 2025: A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

**L**WVSC's annual League Education and Advocacy Day (LEAD) saw a full house of almost 90 League members from around the state who were educated by an array of speakers on issues ranging from children's and LGBTQ rights to the inequities of the Electoral College.

Lynn Teague engaged Senator Penry Gustafson, one of our state's former five "sister senators," in a conversation about what it's like to serve as a woman in a male-dominated legislature. Gustafson took a principled stand against the abortion ban bill in the last legislative session and, along with Senators Katrina Shealy and Sandy Senn, lost her bid for re-election. Nonetheless, she regrets nothing about her four years in the legislature, takes pride in her service to her community, and encouraged other women to run for office.

In a panel moderated by Teresa Arnold, Senator Katrina Shealy and pediatrician Dr. Elizabeth Mack shared their passion for protecting our state's children. The founder of Katrina's Kids, Shealy said children's issues, which should be nonpartisan, lack advocates because there are no substantial PACs which fund supportive legislators. Dr. Mack, who has witnessed the trauma and death of children in ICUs from gunshot wounds, said the way to protect children was not by creating educational vouchers but by stopping the flow of guns, which are the number one killer of children in our state.

Just as there are too few people who stand up for the rights of children, there are too few defending the rights of the LGBTQ community. Phil Ford, an openly gay lobbyist for several non-profit groups, told us how he tells his own stories—despite personal attacks—to change hearts and minds in our legislature. He alerted us to discriminatory, harmful bills, such as the Parental Rights bill.

In order to give power to our voices,

David Smith, VP of LWV of the Columbia Area, developed and rolled out the Effective Advocacy Toolkit, which can be accessed via LWVSC's website. In addition to explaining this toolkit's capabilities, he engaged the audience in a hands-on activity to demonstrate its usefulness.

The final speaker of the day, Dr. Scott Huffmon, professor of political science and director of the Winthrop Poll Initiative at Winthrop University, illustrated how perceptions created by effective messaging eclipsed reality during the 2024 election. He also shared studies showing that voters discount facts that don't support their viewpoints. In fact, the more facts that don't align with their positions are presented, the more people cling to their opinions. He also showed the



David Smith presents the LWVSC Effective Advocacy Toolkit.



Phil Ford makes an impassioned plea for LGBTQ rights.

disproportionate impact of swing states in determining the results of presidential elections.

Not only were attendees engaged by speakers, but League members learned from and networked with colleagues from other Leagues during morning social time and mid-day lunch. According to some, "This was the best LEAD ever!"

## NEW! Effective Advocacy Toolkit

**Struggling to be heard by elected officials, administrators, or the public? Introducing the *Effective Advocacy Toolkit*: an essential resource for empowering your voice and creating impact.**

Loaded with videos and expert tips, the *Effective Advocacy Toolkit* can help you advocate more effectively on the issues you care about. It's a comprehensive website featuring a wide range of topics accessible through an intuitive menu.

Available on [www.lwvsc.org](http://www.lwvsc.org), this toolkit was launched at LEAD 2025 and is now accessible to all LWV members and the public. Simply navigate to "Advocacy," then "Advocacy Tools," or scan the provided QR code to dive right in. All videos and documents can be downloaded and shared (just not edited).

The *Effective Advocacy Toolkit* was developed by LWV of the Columbia Area based on an advocacy training workshop held in fall 2023 and supported by an LWVSC Empowerment Grant. It is ready to help you elevate your advocacy efforts and amplify your voice. Feel free to share on your social media!

Please contact the developer, David Smith, with any questions or suggestions for improvement at [1stvicepresident@lwvcolumbiasc.org](mailto:1stvicepresident@lwvcolumbiasc.org).

—David Smith, 1st Vice-President, LWV of the Columbia Area





**Bernadette Hampton and Matt Saltzman chat between sessions.**



**Mary Agnes Garman and Patti Winch welcome attendees.**



**Scott Huffmon illustrates the outsized influence of swing states.**



**Gloria Anderson poses a question.**



**League members across the state meet and network.**



**Teresa Arnold moderates conversation with Katrina Shealy and Elizabeth Mack.**



## Legislative Session Begins with a Bang!

*Continued from page 1*

little chance of progressing, but another, H.3457, would prohibit almost all abortions from the time of fertilization except emergencies in which the life or major organ system of a pregnant person is in danger. Similar laws have led to the death of pregnant people, who are apparently regarded as expendable.

*—Lynn S. Teague, LWVSC Vice President  
Issues & Action*

## Education

During the session's first week, the Senate Education Committee rushed the revived Education Scholarship Account S.62 bill through subcommittee and committee and onto the Senate floor for debate. League members who answered our December Action Alert were well-represented in the redacted written testimony posted on the committee's website. This was the only opportunity for public input on this year's attempt to pass a voucher bill that can circumvent the SC Constitution's prohibition against expenditure of public funds for direct aid to private or religious schools.

The bill proposes to use lottery money instead of tax money. It would eventually provide funds equal to 90% of the state's average expenditure for public school students for up to 15,000 applicants from families with incomes as high as 400% of the federal poverty level, currently about \$125,000 for a family of four.

The SC Supreme Court struck down a similar bill enacted last year. Private donors have stepped in to provide money for students who were already drawing funds from the rejected program. Lawmakers are rushing to deliver this modified bill to the Governor's desk in time to distribute the balance of the funds promised to families of students currently enrolled in the disallowed program.

Attempts to restrict curriculum and instructional materials, including access to certain library books are continuing; but much of that controversy has been

moved to the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education. Censorship and restriction of instructional materials will undoubtedly be part of this year's State House debate, whether via budget proviso or a bill like H.3185. In late January, a lawsuit challenging current budget proviso 1.79 for its censorship of subject matter concerning racial inequalities and Black history and culture in K-12 public classrooms was filed in federal district court in Columbia.

Other "culture war" issues are likely to crop up as privatizers and their allies continue to criticize public schools and press for their preferences in curriculum and instructional materials. Finally, the General Assembly will undoubtedly take up at least some of the issues that have made it difficult for public schools to recruit and retain high-quality applicants for teaching positions, such as the need to improve salaries and working conditions.

*—Janelle Rivers,  
LWVSC Education Advocacy Specialist*

## Health Care

In January 2025, Gov. Henry McMaster asked the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' approval to cover parents making between 67% and 100% of the federal poverty level to access Medicaid if they prove they are working or in school for at least 80 hours a month. This is similar to a 2019 SC request, which was denied by the Biden administration.

If this proposal were approved, it would only cover about 10% of the total number of approximately 350,000 that full Medicaid Expansion would cover.

It also only qualifies for the current Federal match of 70% versus the 90% match for full Medicaid Expansion. Nor would the federal incentives of \$700 million+ for accepting Medicaid Expansion be provided to SC.

Recently Georgia instituted a similar program called Pathways to Coverage. The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute concluded Pathways to Coverage is a costly program for Georgia taxpayers. "Since the program was approved through the end of the first year of implementation,



***For over 100 years, the League of Women Voters has been a strong voice in South Carolina. Our three volunteer lobbyists work tirelessly on behalf of LWVSC to follow these bills and to testify on behalf of League positions—50 times during the last legislation session alone!***

an average of \$13,000 was spent per enrollee in combined state and federal funds. Spending on upgrades to Georgia's online eligibility and enrollment system represents the largest proportion of total program costs and was almost five times higher than spending on healthcare benefits for enrollees."

The League will be monitoring the Governor's proposal and look for opportunities to advocate for full Medicaid expansion.

*—Teresa Arnold, LWVSC Health Care  
Advocacy Specialist*

*Editors' note: Testimony by League lobbyists is posted at [www.lwvsc.org](http://www.lwvsc.org) under Advocacy: Legislative.*

# WHY I GIVE TO THE STATE LEAGUE

I rely on the League of Women Voters of South Carolina (LWVSC) to let me know what I don't know and to do what I alone can't do.

I do not know when the legislative subcommittee meets to discuss expanding healthcare to the 340,000 in SC who need it. Our LWVSC volunteer healthcare lobbyist tells us which four or five subcommittee legislators need to be called and when. I don't know my legislator's phone and the talking points that LWVSC provides. But I can help pay the thousands of dollars needed to create and to maintain a system that links our members to their legislators.

I cannot be present to register voters in the places most needed. League members inhabit mostly urban spaces; the unregistered are predominantly rural. Neither am I a whiz at targeting voters via the social media they favor. But I can donate to hiring social media professionals to reach these prospects as LWVSC did last year at a cost of \$15,000.

I cannot depend on my local newspaper or TV news to understand how SC's way of selecting judges and magistrates compromises justice. But I can rely on our experienced lobbyist, who was key to improving the judicial selection process last year, to help make democracy work.

Strengthening democracy in SC depends on all of us doing our part to support LWVSC to do together what we can't do alone. Membership dues alone are not enough to advance our mission. Please join me in making an annual or monthly gift to LWVSC.

—Nancy Moore, LWVSC Director and Sarah Leverette Giving Circle Member

*Strengthening democracy in SC depends on all of us doing our part to support LWVSC to do together what we can't do alone.*

## Help Defend Democracy

There are so many ways to support the LWVSC. Make a gift in a way that is meaningful to you.

### Become a Monthly Donor

Our democracy needs defending every single day. Your monthly recurring donation will provide ongoing support to oppose threats to our democracy.

### Bequests

The bequest is the most common form of planned giving. With a bequest, you may make provision in your will, designating either a dollar amount or a percentage of your estate to the LWVSC. Bequests should be prepared and executed with your attorney's assistance.

### Gifts of IRAs

A qualified charitable distribution (QCD) is a wonderful option for people 70 ½ and older. That's because it allows you to make a gift — from \$100 to \$105,000 — without the distribution counting as taxable income.

This giving option is a direct contribution made from your traditional or Roth IRA to the LWVSC and is a great option if you don't normally itemize your charitable deductions.

### Employee Matching Gifts

Many employers will match employee donations to eligible nonprofit organizations. It's an easy way to double your contribution to us. Contact your employer's HR or community giving department to find out if they have a matching gift program.

Stephanie Wood, LWVSC Treasurer and Johnson & Johnson retiree, understands the value of doubling her dollars to advance our mission of empowering voters and defending democracy: "My contribution to the LWVSC is doubled by my former employer. The process is so easy. I just complete the matching gift application and mail it with my personal contribution."

**Editor's correction: The name of Joan Zaleski was omitted in error as a Sarah Leverette Giving Circle donor in our fall issue.**

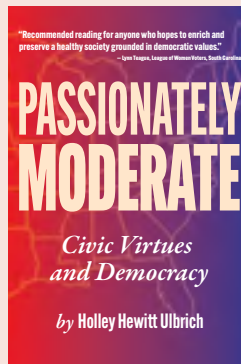
## League Bookshelf

Some of you have read my newest book, *Passionately Moderate: Civic Virtues and Democracy*. Even though this book is grounded in the academic disciplines of ethics and political economy, it's a very LWV kind of book because we Leaguers are practical people. We are passionate about democracy, but moderate because we are willing to compromise and accept decisions that are at least good enough for now.

Political economy is about *how* we make choices in the public sector as citizens and public officials. Ethics is about *why* we make those choices. It is important to remind ourselves why we do what we do as individuals and as a community. Justice, prudence, courage, trust, and hope—these or their absence—drive our collective choices. The *why* of study and advocacy and active participation matters just as much as the *how* and *what*. *How* and *what* lean heavily on political economy, how we make collective choices where at best we get some of what we want and maybe movement in the right direction. In these challenging times, this book can offer you a way to find hope when hope is hard to find, and reason to return to the battle yet again.

—Holley Ulbrich, past LWVSC co-president and author

*Editor's note: This book is available for sale on Amazon and will also be available at our state convention.*



Post Office Box 8453  
Columbia, SC 29202

## SC VOTER

Winter 2025 • Volume 75 Issue 3

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.

Prefer a digital newsletter only? Email us.

President: Nancy Williams

Editor: Nancy Williams

Designer: Christine U. Prado

Published by: *The League of Women  
Voters of South Carolina*  
PO Box 8453  
Columbia, SC 29202  
Website: [lwvsc.org](http://lwvsc.org)  
[league@lwvsc.org](mailto:league@lwvsc.org)



## DEFENDING DEMOCRACY: IT'S UP TO US.

We will never stop fighting for our democracy. That's why we need you to help combat anti-democratic tactics like voter suppression, mis- and disinformation, and partisan gerrymandering.

Our work to educate, advocate, and litigate is critical to protecting our rights and freedoms. We need you to fully carry out this mission. Will you make a gift today to empower voters and defend democracy?

Every voice, and every gift,  
makes a difference.



Donate online: [lwvsc.org](http://lwvsc.org)

Mail:  
LWVSC, PO Box 8453,  
Columbia, SC 29202

