



League of Women Voters of the Columbia Area

# LEAGUE LINES

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[www.lwvcolumbiasc.org](http://www.lwvcolumbiasc.org)

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## CALENDAR & NEWS

### NOVEMBER

**6** (Tu) – ELECTION DAY  
VOTE

**15** (Th) – 11:45 AM

Public Policy Luncheon

T B A

### DECEMBER

**6** (Th) – Evening

HOLIDAY SOCIAL

Watch your In-Box  
details to come

# VOTE

We, as co-editors, wanted to avoid sending ANY distractions that might keep you from going to the polls on

**Tuesday, November 6.**

This special Issue is devoted to items related to **VOTING**, so no one can use the excuse that they had to stay home to read *League Lines*!

Regular November *League Lines* with information on the Public Policy Luncheon, Prez Says, Holiday Social, and other items is forthcoming.

To renew or initiate League membership ON-LINE:

Go to [www.lwvcolumbiasc.org](http://www.lwvcolumbiasc.org), click on “JOIN US” in left menu, and choose your level of membership.

2012-2013 Board: President - Rita Paul; 1<sup>st</sup> VP - JoAnne Day (Legislative Action); 2<sup>nd</sup> VP – Sally Huguley; Secretary – Martha Roblee; Treasurer – Pat Davy; Directors – Sej Harman (Communications/Membership); Marilyn Knight; Sarah Leverette (State Liaison); Lynn Teague (Advocacy). Nominating Committee (2013-2014): TBA. Off-Board: Voter Services - Carol Medich; Website - Teri Evans; Environmental Affairs - Chester Sansbury; *League Lines* - Suzanne Rhodes / Sej Harman (Co-Editors).



## **League of Women Voter of the Columbia Area Agenda for Action – Public Policy Positions**

### **Transportation – Richland County Transportation sales tax increase**

The LWV of the Columbia Area supports the ordinance to levy and impose a 1% sales and use tax, within Richland County, to finance the costs of county transportation-related projects, including mass transit systems, highways, roads, greenways, bike paths, and sidewalks.

The LWV of Columbia also supports the issuance by Richland County of general obligation bonds not to exceed \$450 million, payable from the 1% sales and use tax, to fund the county transportation-related projects.

**Background/Action:** This position was adopted and approved by the Board of Directors in September, 2012

(see Hayes Mizell’s article below in support of the Penny Tax)

**TRANSPORTATION REFERENDUM:** If you have been reading the local newspaper, watching television, or listening to your friends and neighbors, you *know* that the transportation referendum is a complicated and contentious issue.

There are **two parts** to the referendum: The first part asks for a “yes” or “no” on **whether there should be a sales tax increase**. The second part of the referendum asks for a “yes” or “no” on **whether Richland County can issue \$450 million in bonds** that will enable work on the roads and more adequate support for the bus system to begin sooner rather than later. The bonds would be repaid with revenue from the penny tax.

There are organized forces in the community working for and against approval of the referendum. The LWV Columbia supports the referendum.

**Hayes Mizell**, a continuous member and supporter of the League since the 1960s, spoke recently in support of the Penny Tax to his Sunday School class. Excerpts of his thoughtful remarks are below.

### **“The Interests of Others”**

On November 6, voters in Richland County will vote “yes” or “no” on a referendum that proposes to increase the county sales tax by one penny on the dollar. This tax would be in effect for 22 years, or until it produces revenue of \$1.07 billion, whichever comes first. Of this total amount, approximately 61% would be allocated for improvements to highways, paved and unpaved roads, streets, intersections, and bridges including related drainage system improvements; 28% would be allocated for continued operation of mass transit services provided by Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority including implementation of near,

mid and long-term service improvements; 8% would be allocated for improvements to pedestrian sidewalks, bike paths, intersections and greenways; and 4% would be used for administrative costs.

When voters look at their ballots, they will see it is necessary for them to vote separately on two parts of the referendum. The first part asks for a “yes” or “no” on whether there should be a sales tax increase. The second part of the referendum asks for a “yes” or “no” on whether Richland County can issue \$450 million in bonds that will enable work on the roads and more adequate support for the bus system to begin sooner rather than later. The bonds would be repaid with revenue from the penny tax.

If you have been reading the local newspaper, watching television, or listening to your friends and neighbors, you know that the transportation referendum is a complicated and contentious issue. There are organized forces in the community working for and against approval of the referendum.

I am here this morning as a citizen who believes that Richland County voters should approve the proposed tax increase. On the other hand, having reached my current age, I know that on any given issue, those who support it are rarely 100% right, and those who oppose it are rarely 100% wrong. This is all the more reason, it seems to me, for voters to be thoughtful in deciding how they will vote, and to be as confident as they can be that their vote will move Richland County forward.

Public discussion around the referendum has surfaced a troublesome issue. It appears that among many voters, there is widespread distrust of Richland County Council. It is arguable whether Council is any

better than or any worse than most other institutions of representative government. Certainly, it is not perfect. Like all elected officials, Council members are not immune to mistakes in judgment, myopia, blind spots, and self-interest. However, what seems to get lost in the public debate about the transportation referendum is that we, the voters of Richland County, elected, and in some cases re-elected, members of County Council. If people are disappointed in Council, or angry about decisions it has made, then the appropriate action is to vote against Council members when they offer for re-election. In fact, on November 6, voters will have that opportunity because there will be candidates for Council on the ballot. Of course, another approach is for those who are dissatisfied with Council's performance to run for Council when current members are up for re-election. It appears, however, that very few citizens have an appetite for taking advantage of such an opportunity. That is the fault of the body politic, not the fault of County Council.

Therefore, is voting against the referendum an appropriate way to express dissatisfaction with Council, if one believes such dissatisfaction is warranted? I don't think so. A "no" vote on the referendum may yield short-term emotional satisfaction for some voters, but it will do nothing to address the very real transportation issues facing this county.

It is bad enough that mistrust of County Council may result in the referendum's failure, but the mistrust has collateral effects that are even more corrosive. For example, in 2006 County Council appointed a 39-member Transportation Study Commission composed of citizens broadly representative of major constituencies throughout the county. Caroline Whitson, the president of Columbia College, chaired the executive committee of the Commission. The Commission's 2008 report to Council was the basis for the 2010 transportation referendum, which was defeated, and its recommendations are also reflected in the projects and priorities that the current referendum would fund, if approved.

Also, in 2011 city and county governments reorganized the Central Midlands Transit Authority to improve the agency's leadership and accountability. Among its citizen members are Caroline Whitson, Mac Bennett, president of the United Way of the Midlands, and Lill Mood, a veteran member of the local League Women Voters, and a citizen-advocate for better public transportation.

Finally, in response to calls for County Council to be a good steward of public funds, Council has agreed

to establish a Transportation Penny Oversight Committee. If the referendum passes, Council will appoint 15 members to the Committee, none of them elected officials. The Committee will be charged with making an annual "State of the Penny Address" to the public, and it will otherwise "review, comment on, and provide recommendations on the Transportation Penny to Richland County Council." Also, if Council seeks to add new projects not currently on the project list, or if it seeks to reorder priorities of projects, it will have to seek the Oversight Committee's recommendations.

My point is this: It is quite one thing to mistrust County Council, but it is quite another thing to mistrust Caroline Whitson and other diligent and long-suffering citizens who for many years have labored in good faith, studied our community's transportation needs, made recommendations, and advocated for improvements. It is one thing to mistrust County Council, but it is quite another thing to mistrust the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority that has been re-organized and working for barely more than a year to improve the bus system. It is one thing to mistrust County Council, but it is quite another thing to mistrust the citizen-based Penny Transportation Oversight Committee that has not yet been appointed and has had no opportunity to carry out its charge.

In other words, mistrust of local government is not confined to County Council. It extends, either directly or by implication, to citizens of integrity—non-elected officials—who have been, are now, and will be working to ensure that Richland County's transportation needs are met. Bob Dylan famously sang, "you gotta serve somebody." It is equally true that you gotta trust somebody.

There are probably many reasons why this mistrust exists. Perhaps it is all because of some past County Council decisions and authorized expenditures of tax revenue. Perhaps it is because of the anti-government zeitgeist. Perhaps it is because of civic illiteracy. Perhaps it is because people fear a loss of control over their lives and their pocketbooks. Whatever the reason, people seem to want absolute guarantees, and veto power, regarding what will be done, when it will be done, who will do it, and what precise outcomes will result. There may be good reasons people seek such guarantees, but there are few arenas of life, particularly civic life, where such guarantees exist. There never have been. Perhaps the only practical antidote is for all of us, in our personal and civic lives, to extend greater measures of understanding and trust to others.

But there is a more specific reason I will vote "yes" on the referendum.

Since 2002 when South Carolina Electric & Gas turned over the bus system to local governments, the CMRTA has had no stable, long term funding, and it has operated on a hand-to-mouth basis. This spring, when the system faced a severe financial crisis, local government officials negotiated an agreement to provide the CMRTA with subsistence funding that would carry it through the 2012-2013 fiscal year. As result of the cost-cutting that agreement required, the CMRTA had to reduce bus service by 40%, and buses now cease operation at 7:30 p.m.

Each day, 6800 people use the bus system. They depend on the buses because they have no other way to get to work, post-secondary education, medical appointments, or shopping. Most of these people are either the working poor or near poor. Dr. David Hughes, a Clemson economist who is a member at Trenholm Road United Methodist Church, has gleaned from extant research that the average income of bus riders is \$16,500. On average, the percentage of bus riders in poverty is twice that of other commuters and they are twice as likely to use food stamps. People who take the bus to work have an average commute of 39 minutes, well over twice the commuting time of 18 minutes. As if these burdens are not enough, the CMRTA provides no signage to help riders negotiate bus schedules and bus stops, and it provides no place to sit and no shelter for those waiting for the bus. Because of these indignities, the only people who use the bus system are those who have no other options. This won't change unless are significant improvements in the bus system so it not only serves current rides more effectively, but attracts new riders as well.

And if voters don't approve the transportation referendum, County Council has no "Plan B." The CMRTA's funding will terminate at the end of the current fiscal year. Leaders may come up with a stop-gap measure that will enable the bus system to limp along as it now does, or riders will be left in limbo while elected officials and the public decide whether there should be a public transportation system at all.

Some of you may be thoroughly schooled in the history and details of the transportation issues now before us. I am not. Like most average citizens, I have to develop and be comfortable with my own reasons for my position on the transportation referendum. As I have indicated, I have decided to come down on the side of trusting, rather than not trusting, leaders who have put this issue before us.

**Excerpts of remarks to the New Generations Sunday School Class at Shandon United Methodist Church in Columbia, SC on October 28, 2010.**

## HELP NEEDED



*Carole Cato* reports that the **Richland County Election Office** is swamped and would really appreciate help from League members.

**Contact Lillian McBride at the Voter Registration Office - 576-2240.** 2020 Hampton Street on the lower left side of the County Building.

## Voterheads.com Launches to "Start Some Good"...

*League member Katherine M. Swartz, CAE*, who is Vice President, Leadership Development and Community Involvement at the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce and Executive Director, COR | Columbia Opportunity Resource passed along a **NEW RESOURCE** for voters: Voterheads.com.

**Voterheads.com held their launch party to "Start Some Good"** on Tuesday, October 30, 2012 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM. Below is information about this initiative:

**Voterheads.com** is looking to "Start Some Good" and have fun doing it! We're raising funds to help us accelerate development and get our beta out for *Richland and Lexington Counties*. We've teamed up with StartSomeGood.com (Kickstarter's sister site for social entrepreneurs) to make it happen. The "launch party" was hosted by Columbia's IT professional development organization, IT-oLogy, and featured live presentations from Voterheads founders, Karl McCollester, Matt Hudson, and Mike Switzer, as well as details about the Voterheads "Start Some Good" campaign.

**Voterheads.com is a citizen participation/voter education web site dedicated to changing the way America votes and participates in government.** Their goal is to provide user-friendly candidate research in the form of a **sample ballot with links to news, blogs, etc. on each ballot name and item**, as well as an ongoing social media platform and alert service to provide users with information and the ability to vote and comment on local public meeting agenda items that they have an interest in.

For those of you who are interested, please consider doing one or all of the following:

- Share the **Voterheads "Start Some Good" campaign** with your friends and family.
- Make a contribution at the **Voterheads "Start Some Good" campaign**.
- Tell us what you think about Voterheads. **Send us an email:** [mikeswitzer@voterheads.com](mailto:mikeswitzer@voterheads.com)



### **Lexington County Council**

2nd and 4th Tuesdays at 4:30 PM  
2nd Floor County Administration Building  
212 South Lake Drive                      Lexington, SC 29072

For confirmation of meeting dates, please call  
785-8103 or check website [www.lex-co.com](http://www.lex-co.com)



### **Richland County Council**

1st and 3rd Tuesdays at 6:00 PM  
2nd Floor County Administration Building  
2020 Hampton Street                      Columbia, SC 29202

**For more information, please contact the Clerk of  
Council Office @ (803) 576-2061 or check:  
[www.richlandonline.com/departments/countycouncil/index.asp](http://www.richlandonline.com/departments/countycouncil/index.asp) or [www.rcgov.us](http://www.rcgov.us)**