



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

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League of Women Voters of South Carolina Holds 2011 Convention in Sumter

Arizona Chief Justice Ruth McGregor (ret.) and South Carolina Treasurer Curtis Loftis were featured speakers.

Columbia, SC- "Empowered for Action: Staying True to Our Mission in South Carolina" was the theme for the 2011 League of Women Voters of South Carolina convention. Hosted by the League of Women Voters of Sumter, the convention was held May 14 - 15 and attended by over 70 members and guests from local Leagues across the state.

A special focus of the convention was the League's statewide initiative on Ensuring Independence and Increasing Diversity in South Carolina's Courts. The speaker at the Saturday Banquet was the Hon. Ruth V. McGregor, retired Chief Justice of the Arizona Supreme Court. Justice McGregor presented a national perspective on judicial independence and diversity. She told attendees that she was very pleased to be in South Carolina and that the League has shown it will fight for judicial independence. Justice McGregor told attendees, "The judicial process should be made as transparent as it can be. One of the most valuable evaluation processes is when the public is involved." Justice McGregor served on the Arizona Supreme Court from 1998 until 2009 and was the Court's Chief Justice from 2005 until retirement. Prior to appointment to the Arizona bench in 1998, she served as law clerk to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

The banquet also included the presentation of the League of Women Voters of South Carolina 2011 Spirit of Democracy award to retired South Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Ernest A. Finney, Jr.. Justice Finney, the state's first African-American Supreme Court Justice since Reconstruction, was honored for his commitment to to a fair and impartial justice system. Accompanied by Mrs. Frances Finney, his wife of 57 years, the Justice commended the League for its efforts to ensure judicial independence and diversity. "I want you to know you are on the right side of this issue." he stated.

S.C. Treasurer Curtis M. Loftis, Jr., addressed delegates on the topic of the importance of transparency and openness in government. Mr. Loftis stated, " South Carolina has got to change the way we budget money and we have to be more business-like in the delivery of services." He continued, "When we spend your money you should know about it. " Mr. Loftis told attendees that the League plays an important role in addressing critical issues facing South Carolina. He stated that he was very pleased to be invited to speak at convention and asked for the membership's support of his efforts to revamp the state's retirement system.

Spirit of Democracy Awards were also presented to two outstanding League leaders: Sarah Leverette, one of South Carolina's first women lawyers and a tireless fighter for open, effective government; and Mary Ann Deku, whose name has been synonymous with voter outreach since the 1970s in Spartanburg County.

Other convention highlights included: a panel on the judicial selection process with Circuit Court Judge W. Jeffrey Young, Rep. J. David Weeks, Pee Dee Citizens Committee on Judicial Selection member Janet R. Lynam, S.C. Women Lawyers Association leader Sarah Leverette, and Charleston School of Law Professor Constance Anastopoulo; a panel on South Carolina's electronic voting system with Rep. Joseph Neal, computer scientists Duncan Buell and Eleanor Hare, and citizen activist Frank Heindel; a presentation by Dr. Jane Brailsford on iCivics, a program in South Carolina schools to educate the next generation of voters.

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The successful two-day gathering gave League members across South Carolina an opportunity to celebrate the League's accomplishments in making sure voters are registered, informed and confident in the political process, discuss important policy issues, and plan the League's next two years in South Carolina.

Peggy Brown and Barbara Zia were elected by the group's leaders to take the helm of the LWVSC for the next two years. A long-time state conservation leader from Florence, Brown pledged to continue the League's commitment to bringing more citizens into the political process, and to member-driven, research-based advocacy on difficult issues that the League is known for in South Carolina.

Zia, a Mount Pleasant resident, served as state president from 2007 to 2011. She expressed excitement about sharing the responsibilities of the presidency with Brown and stated, "Today's busy schedules demand that we seek more focused, flexible, and streamlined alternatives to League leadership."

Zia and Brown affirmed that the League will advocate on issues prioritized by leaders at convention: education, ensuring citizen access to voting, reforming the state tax system, transportation, criminal and juvenile justice, redistricting, natural resources, and increasing diversity and independence in the state's judiciary. Group leaders also adopted: a 2-year study, Evaluating Teachers Based on Results; a new position of support for considering illegal drug use as a public health issue; and a resolution opposing drilling for oil and gas off the South Carolina coastline.

For convention highlights, go to www.lwvsc.org

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages. Join us in making democracy work!