

## From the Director

After eight years, “change” seems to be the order of the day. But don’t expect those in power in South Carolina to relinquish their stranglehold on our ailing democracy. Real change here will require persistence, commitment and pulling together toward a common goal. We have a real chance for change, but we have to make it happen.

For 14 years, the Network has built a national model for state-based movement building. (Google progressive network and our home page is the top hit out of 12.5 million). The 61 organizations that belong to the Network Education Fund provide the skeleton for this movement. Individuals like you must provide the muscle.

Consider renewing your dues as an individual member. Fill out the form on the back and drop your check in the enclosed envelope. Or you can hit the “Donate Now” button on our Web site.

Let us know if you want a receipt for a tax-deductible donation beyond annual dues, and we’ll put that money in the Education Fund to support our policy work.

These are tough times, and like other nonprofits we are feeling the pinch. But we also feel a sense of momentum from our work in the last elections (see stories inside), and there is so much more we want to accomplish.

Please help grow the grass-roots in South Carolina.

— Brett Bursey

Don’t miss our statewide meeting March 7! See back.



## Network moves its offices into historic Simkins House

The Network has set up shop in the Modjeska Simkins House in downtown Columbia. We have been using the space for our monthly Midlands meetings over the past year, thanks to Historic Columbia Foundation, which has managed the property since 2007. In February we signed a lease to rent the house, and are now holding regular office hours there.

When Foundation Director Robin Waites handed over the keys, she said, “Modjeska must be smiling right now.”

Ms. Simkins was the matriarch of the state civil rights movement. Her work spanned six decades, until her death in 1992. The home where she lived for 60 years sits on a lot at 2025 Marion Street just off Elmwood. It served as office and meeting place, and housed visiting civil rights advocates, including Thurgood Marshall.

“The place has a really good vibe,” said Midlands Co-ordinator John Dawkins. “I’m excited to be moving into a space with so much history.”

Network Director Brett Bursey said, “We haven’t given up on owning our own building, but this is a gracious offer that is a good fit for us right now. Having offices right

downtown will allow us to work with interns and volunteers, and will keep us more engaged with what’s happening in the city and in the State House.”

The Simkins House is fully accessible, has two offices, a kitchen, a sun room, a proper front porch and two meeting rooms — which we invite our member groups to use.

One of the first groups to express interest in holding meetings at the Network’s new headquarters is the Greater Columbia Central Labor Council. It has been meeting at the of-

fice of the state AFL-CIO, which is in the process of moving outside of Columbia.

“The timing is perfect for us,” said SC AFL-CIO President Donna Dewitt, who serves as Network Co-chair. “We’ll have a place to hold meetings as well as access to office space when we are in Columbia to lobby or attend hearings,” she said. “I think it’s going to be a vibrant place for our Network members to congregate and collaborate.”

Bursey said, “I worked closely with Ms. Simkins for 25 years, and was proud that she called me one of her children. It seems a wonderful opportunity to keep Modjeska’s spirit alive.”



Modjeska Simkins

If you are interested in using the House to hold your group’s meetings, call us at 803-808-3384. For photos and relevant links, see our blog at [scpronet.com/wordpress](http://scpronet.com/wordpress). ♦

**House warming party**  
**March 7, 5:30pm**  
Modjeska Simkins House  
2025 Marion St., Columbia  
Come help us celebrate!

# Network pushes for universal Internet service

On April 15, South Carolina has to present a plan for the use of the state's educational broadcasting capability that will be "excess capacity" due to the switch to digital broadcasting.

Because South Carolina is the only state that owns all the educational broadcasting licenses, we have the unique opportunity to be the first state to provide free wireless Internet to all citizens.

The 67 licenses owned by SC ETV — and the taxpayer-funded infrastructure — are paid for, so the capability for statewide, free Internet is in hand.

Universal access to the Internet would be the single most significant thing we could do, at no cost to

taxpayers, to improve educational, health care and employment opportunities for all South Carolinians; regardless of income or geographic location.

The legislature created the Educational Broadband Service Commission to oversee what is referred to as the "educational broadband transition."

The state plans to lease the broadcast spectrum to private telecommunications companies and put the estimated \$5 to \$8 million annual revenue in the general fund. The actual and future value of the spectrum is unknown.

While we agree with the public/private partnership leases, we submit that the state's priority concerns may not be reflected in the terms of the leases or the use of the revenue.

We call on the Commission, the Joint Bond Review Committee and the Budget

and Control Board to use South Carolina's educational broadcast capabilities to:

- **Create a "lifeline broadband service" that would provide a free univer-**

**sal access tier of Internet service for all citizens.** This service would be at a level below subscription services and would introduce scores of thousands of new consumers to the Internet. These new users would provide a source of new customers for expanded subscription services to the lease holders

- **Establish a "Citizens Trust" that would use a percentage of the lease revenue to provide tools and training for citizens to access the Internet.** Start with the quarter of a million children who can't afford lunch.

The state of Tennessee recently contracted with AT&T for a \$600 million upgrade of its broadband network for schools and governments.

The investment South Carolina started making in the 1950s puts our state ahead of Tennessee and other states that are now making major expenditures in educational broadband services.

We need to wisely leverage our investment to the benefit of our citizens and our future. ♦

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South Carolina, through its already established Educational Broadcast capability, has the unique opportunity to lead the nation in closing the "digital divide."

## Meet your new leaders

At its Nov. 15 Summit, the Network board voted into office six people to its Executive Committee. They are:

**Co-Vice-Chair — Melissa Harmon:** Melissa is a full-time student at Columbia College with aspirations of pursuing a law degree in the future.

**Vice-Chair — James Holloway:** James has been a community organizer for 30 years, and was elected to the Saluda County School Board in 1988. In 2003, he organized the Riverside CDC that bought an abandoned school which is now the site of vibrant community meetings and after-school programs that operate year-round.

**Co-Secretary — LaMar Wheeler:** LaMar has volunteered for a variety of community service organizations in the Midlands. Her passion lies in fighting for women's reproductive rights and protecting children.

**Treasurer — James Carpenter:** James Carpenter works as a computer programmer and business analyst in the insurance industry.

**Member at large — Scott Sargent:** Scott is developing a farm in Blythewood, and is interested in working with an enthusiastic group people to create South Carolina's first student cooperative house.

**Emily Stanek** of Coalition of New South Carolinians was elected to serve as the Network's **Youth Co-ordinator**, but has since stepped down. The seat is open; if you know anyone under 30 interested in serving, please let us know.

After several years of able leadership, we are sad to announce that the Rev. Dr. Bennie Colclough has resigned as Co-Chair, due to increasing demands on his time at his church and pastoring inmates at the Department of Corrections. We have been inspired by Bennie's 40 years' commitment to social justice, and we will miss him greatly. ♦

## Labor allies honor Co-chair Donna Dewitt

On Dec. 6, friends, family and colleagues gathered at the International Longshoreman's Hall in Charleston to thank SC AFL-CIO President Donna Dewitt for her years of service to the labor community in South Carolina.

The event was also a fundraiser, with the \$30,000 raised going toward a new building, which will be named for Donna.

Donna is Co-chair of the SC Progressive Network. We couldn't be more proud of her accomplishments nor more grateful for our long association. ♦



*SC Professional Firefighters President Mike Parrotta congratulates SC AFL-CIO President and Network Co-chair Donna Dewitt.*

# Network works to promote civic engagement through statewide Missing Voter Project

One of the Network's most successful projects to date has been its Missing Voter Project. The campaign was launched on the belief that when citizens are not engaged in the political process, their government is not responsive to their needs.

Toward that end, the Network started the Missing Voter Project in 2004 to teach groups and individuals how to use state-of-the-art tools and strategies to maximize

their voter registration and mobilization drives. The MVP is a nonpartisan campaign that seeks to find the nearly 1 million eligible SC citizens who are not registered, and to mobilize another one million who are registered but vote infrequently.

The United States ranks behind 137 other nations — between Armenia and Nigeria — in the percentage of citizens voting. In the 2004, slightly less than half our state's voting-age population turned out for the presidential election, putting South Carolina 42nd in US voter participation. In 2006, for mid-term elections, slightly more than a third showed up at the polls (35 percent).

"While we are busy trying to export democracy around the world, ironically, too many of us are not practicing it here," said Network Co-chair Rev. Dr. Bennie Colclough.

The MVP is designed to take voter registration beyond traditional party building or drumming up support

for a specific campaign or candidate. It is a long-term effort to engage new voters in a larger movement for social change based on citizen empowerment.

The MVP is a civic engagement program with a special emphasis on minority youth. Since 2004, the MVP has provided street maps identifying unregistered and infrequent voters in minority precincts throughout rural South Carolina, and has registered more than 6,000 voters. About half of South Carolina's black population is registered, and about half of those registered turn out to vote. The service has been offered statewide to other nonprofits to enhance their voter registration work.

During our registration drives, the Network collected information from new voters about the issues important to them, and they will be offered the opportunity to get involved with organizations working on those issues.

The MVP is built on the idea that registering and voting is simply the first step to building power at the grassroots level. Our intention is to create a movement of voters with enough power to help set political priorities that meet their needs rather than the needs of politicians and corporate interests. ♦



*Missing Voter Project trainer Kamau Marcharia helps Shamiaka Johnson navigate precinct maps at a training in Winnsboro, where the project was launched.*

## 2009 voting reform bills aim to increase participation

The Network is working to promote legislation to make voting easier and more accessible in South Carolina. Here is a summary of those bills.

**Early Voting Centers (S 369):** Would require counties to have at least one Early Voting Center open to register and vote for 15 days before an election through the Saturday before the election. This would eliminate the need for a voter to have an excuse to vote early.

**High school poll workers (S 370):** Would allow more students to be poll workers (the ratio is now one minor to three adults). Students could get class credit. The Department of Education supports the bill. There is a shortage of SC poll workers, and the average age of poll workers during the 2008 election was 72.

**Provisional Ballots Count County-wide (S 368):** Currently, if a voter's name isn't on the list of voters at the precinct, the voter casts a provisional ballot that is only counted if the voter is in the right precinct. This bill would allow a provisional ballot to count if the voter is in the right county, as in most other states.

**Elections Study Commission (S 366):** A Commission will "investigate barriers to registration and voting, error rates and

voting machine reliability, review state expenditures and federal grants related to voting, and propose ways to make the electoral system more efficient, accurate, verifiable and accessible." Oversight of our election process is now provided by those paid to run the process.

**SC Universal Registration Act (S 367):** The state Department of Education would ensure that all 17-year-old students have the opportunity to register. Also, the State Election Commission, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Pardons, Probation and Parole shall insure that upon completion of a prison sentence, citizens who are not otherwise ineligible to vote, receive a voter registration form with a letter explaining that their voting rights have been restored.

**Proportionally award electoral votes (S 365):** Would award one electoral vote to the top presidential candidate in each of our state's six congressional districts. The remaining two electoral votes would go to the overall vote winner. This would end the safe state/swing state dichotomy and make all votes equal, no matter the state residence of the voter.

For details on these bills, see [www.scpnet.com](http://www.scpnet.com) or call 803-808-3384. ♦

# JOIN the SC Progressive Network

Individual members agree to support the Network's mission and pay annual dues of at least \$25; \$10 for seniors and students. (Dues are not tax-deductible.)

**Mission:** The purpose of the SC Progressive Network is to promote — through education and action — human, civil, workers' and reproductive rights, environmental protection and government reform.

I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to the terms above, and submit this application to join.

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

- Add me to the Network's email list to receive twice-monthly updates about Network events.
- Individual dues (pay to SCPN)
- Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation, above dues, payable to the SCPN Education Fund:

**Don't miss our statewide gathering of SC progressives  
March 7, 10am-5pm, Columbia**

**St. Timothy's Episcopal, 900 Calhoun St.**

**FREE • nonmembers welcome**

**Check [scpronet.com](http://scpronet.com) or call 803-808-3384 for details.**



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