

Would you support a South Carolina teacher's strike for better wages, benefits, and/or increased education funding?

Judi Buckley (House 17), Leola Robinson-Simpson (incumbent, House 25), Hao Wu (House 19), Bruce Wilson (House 25), and Carrie Counton (House 19) answered 'yes' at a May 17th forum.

In addition, I want to get bi-partisan support to amend Act 388. While I understand the intent behind this bill (to reduce property taxes), the unintended consequence is that small businesses, vehicle owners, second homeowners (landlords) and a few others bear the burden of funding our schools. When school districts need more funding to accommodate growth and pay raises, they have no choice but to raise taxes. To amend Act 388 will require political will and courage but it is critical that this gets addressed.

2. Name at least one policy that failed to pass this legislative session that you would support next session.

There were three similar bills (one in the Senate, two in the House) that addressed the affordable housing crisis called The South Carolina Inclusionary Zoning Act. None of them made it through both Chambers, despite having bi-partisan support. I feel confident it will be brought back and I will fully support it.

3. Have you read the recently released Transit Development Plan? If so, do you believe it would adequately address Greenville County's public transportation needs and how would you fund it?

This is a Local question but want to respond anyway. I have read it and I do believe it will adequately address the current public transportation needs. However, the plan will have to be revisited and adjusted as the needs change in the future. Funding needs to come from a dedicated revenue stream so I would welcome collaboration between federal, state, local and business partners to identify this source. The lack of public transportation is critical and is responsible for many of the hinderances in Greenville County, so I would be eager to help find a funding source so this plan can be made a reality.

4. Have you researched or do you know what constitutes a living wage in Greenville County? If yes, do you support policies that would raise wages and what are those policies?

I have researched this and according to a calculation done by MIT, a living wage in Greenville is \$10.75/hour. However, this is just for the basic costs of living and doesn't include anything outside of groceries, housing, transportation and medical costs. This doesn't account for pre-prepared food or eating out, vacations, saving for retirement, etc, so clearly this "living wage" isn't adequate.

I think the greatest path to increasing wages is to create healthier schools so that our graduation rates go up, support higher education and tech/career schools in ways that made them more accessible and affordable, and increase the minimum wage.

5. What does affordable housing mean to you?

Affordable housing is housing that doesn't cost more than 30% of your income, no matter what income range you're in. As referenced in my response to question #2, bring this bill back and seeing it get signed in to law is of utmost importance. Also, as referenced in #1, landlords pass each and every tax increase on to renters – so renting is often not an option for individuals or families because it has become unaffordable. Again, Act 388 MUST be amended.

6. In April, under pressure from the state's utilities, the S.C. House killed a residential solar bill that would have lifted the 2% cap on rooftop solar. If you were in office, how did you vote and why? Had you been in office, how would you have voted and why?

I would have supported a lift in the cap. If the amendment to lift the cap in the current budget bill that's being debated passes, this is a good start toward major expansion.

Follow-up: What will you do to promote renewable energy?

I will collaborate with other lawmakers, members of the Public Service Commission, and renewable energy experts (and any stakeholder who needs to be at the table) to come up with ways to expand the use of clean energy in a way that is sustainable and doesn't place undue costs on non-renewable users.

7. How can we encourage businesses to set up shop in South Carolina/Greenville County without resorting to tax giveaways that rob our treasuries of necessary funding for schools, affordable housing, transportation and infrastructure?

I appreciate and support the tax incentives that are currently in place because without them, the companies that have moved to SC probably would not have otherwise – so I don't look at them as though they're robbing our treasury. However, I do think the program needs to be revisited to see if there are ways we can still be attractive to outside companies while protecting the interest of South Carolinians. And again, we need to amend Act 388 so that smaller businesses aren't subject to tax increases each time our education department needs more funding.

8. How are we going to prepare at the state and local level for the redistricting that will take place in 2021?

There needs to be more transparency and public input at every level of the redistricting process. I have read the transcripts from the Senate and House hearings that were held for the public in 2011 and that was a grievance that was aired several times. This process cannot be done in a vacuum since the end result will affect everyone in the state in one way or another. I would advocate for having a non-partisan, independent committee be responsible for redistricting as to avoid conflicts of interest and other issues.

Commented [MOU]: I don't know much about redistricting; you might want to reach out to Lawson Wetli with League of Women Voters if you haven't met her already. She's the redistricting guru.

9. Do you support the legalization (or decriminalization) of marijuana in South Carolina? Explain.

I fully support decriminalizing marijuana, as too many people have been jailed for minor possession. I would also support the full legalization if the majority of the voters supported it through a ballot initiative.

10. Is there a Republican policy position with which you agree? If yes, which policy and why?

If a policy position makes sense, I support it regardless of party. When I was a Senator I called myself the "common sense Senator" because I supported legislation that was for the greater good, and did not support bills that were redundant, unconstitutional, unenforceable, unfunded, or that would disenfranchise any one group of people.