

## **South Carolina Senate Democratic Caucus**

### 2009 Legislative Agenda

Senator John C. Land, III: "It's time we move past our current state leadership's legislative agendas designed to distract us from the problems Main Street South Carolina faces. South Carolina Senate Democrats are proud to offer a promising vision for our state's future. We are offering initiatives designed to get us moving forward as soon as possible. It's time for South Carolina's public servants to work to make the progress our citizen's are demanding."

#### **Jobs**

Democrats know that in order to position our state for an economic recovery we must invest in the basic needs of hometown South Carolina. That commitment in the future begins with investing in our education needs, our health care needs and providing a level tax field for all businesses – large and small.

#### **Public Education**

A solid public education system is the foundation for a strong, prosperous state and nation. What we are willing to invest in our public schools is a direct reflection on our commitment to future generations. Senate Democrats will be pushing to make our commitment to schools stronger by scrapping the "minimally adequate" standard – a standard that currently guides the General Assembly to only do what is necessary to comply with a federal court mandate. For too long our state's leaders have been operating under this shameful standard that has short-changed our students and limited their educational potential. It's time to us to raise our standards and do what is right for the school children of South Carolina.

In addition to raising our commitment standards to our schools, we will once again be standing ready to combat any attempts by out-of-state special interest to drain public dollars out of the classroom. Private school vouchers are not the solution to improving our schools. Democrats will be there to fight their attempts to bankrupt our schools. Parents, students, and teachers deserve voices that will stand up for them.

#### **Health Care**

Access to affordable health care is a struggle for too many South Carolinians. Currently, 700,000 South Carolinians are living without health insurance. These are our neighbors, our friends, and our family members. And as we continue to move toward more uncertain economic times, this number is likely to increase. The time for solutions is now.

Last year the General Assembly attempted to increase the state's cigarette tax for health care. The plan that passed both the House and the Senate would have created greater choices for working families and employers to find health care coverage. Unfortunately, Governor Mark Sanford opposed this bi-partisan plan and it was killed by his veto pen. Thanks to Mark Sanford, South Carolina enjoys the dubious distinction of having the country's lowest cigarette tax and having nearly one in every five South Carolinians with no health insurance.

We will try again this year to pass a cigarette tax for health care and Senate Democrats will be there pushing for the dollars to go to the health care needs of working South Carolina families.

#### **Tax Reform**

As we re-evaluate our priorities, we must take a look at our state's tax system. Our current system has become an entanglement of exemptions and exceptions. Tweaking the system here and there has only left our state with an ever more cumbersome tax system that has shifted the tax burden to working families.

Democrats have pre-filed legislation that will establish a bi-partisan tax study commission. The commission will be charged with evaluating our current tax system, examining the numerous state sales tax exemptions, reviewing local revenue laws and reporting back to the General Assembly with recommendations for reform.