

Viewpoints

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OUR VIEW

Four amendments play key roles in key areas

Voters of South Carolina will be asked Tuesday to consider four constitutional amendments. When amendments are listed on the ballot, they sometimes are confusing and hard to understand. The four this time may seem that way to some. However, they can be broken down into simple terms.

Amendment One:

Should South Carolinians have a constitutional right to hunt and fish? That may come across as an unnecessary inclusion in the state's Constitution. Some may even think it's frivolous.

It's not. It would guard the right to hunt and fish against any potential legislation that would be restrictive. It may sound trite, but such laws have, for a variety of reasons, been passed in other states. Amendment One would prevent that from happening in the Palmetto State. It also would permit the state to legally provide for proper wildlife management and the protection of private property rights. Those should be supported.

Amendment Two:

This amendment is more significant than it might appear to some. It would guarantee the right to a secret ballot in union organizing elections. That right should be reinforced. Amendment Two would provide that. Beyond union elections, if the right to a secret ballot is denied in that instance, there's an obvious question: if no secret ballot is allowed in union elections, how long would it be before the same thing could happen in other elections?

That may sound far-fetched, but stranger things have happened. It's simply a good move to secure the right to vote in secret, regardless of the situation.

The right to vote in secret should never be compromised in any way. Don't allow it to happen in this state. Keep the balloting secret. Denying it would make it easier for anyone to intimidate voters to vote a particular way. Keeping the right to vote in private should be a constitutional right. It also would help preserve South Carolina as a right-to-work state. This wouldn't apply to votes in the General Assembly, nor should it. For this amendment, however, a "yes" vote is important.

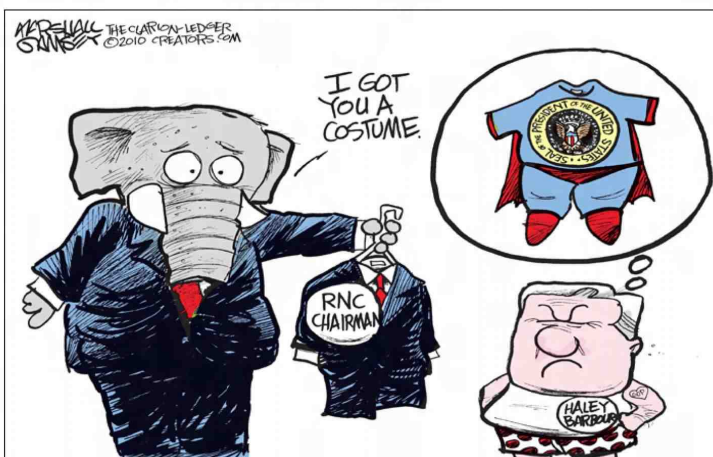
Amendment Three:

It would increase the amount of money state government must keep in the General Reserve Fund, or "rainy day" fund, from 3 percent of the previous year's revenue to 5 percent.

Amendment Four:

This would require that the Capital Reserve Fund's first priority be to replenish the state's General Reserve Fund instead of serving to offset mid-year budget cuts for state agencies.

There are people concerned about Three and Four. They believe that putting more money into the reserve fund is a bad idea during tough economic times. There are pros and cons on both sides of the issue in both these amendments. It's not a bad idea, however, to keep "rainy day" funds for rainy days, and not to be used for any other purpose. Prudent families do it. Why shouldn't government?



Seniors: Fired up and ready to throw the bums out

During his barnstorming around the country in the final frantic lead-up to Election Day, President Obama landed on several college campuses to try and get young voters fired up once again and ready to go to the polls. He would have done better to spend his time in senior centers. That is where the voters are (especially in off-year elections) and they're the ones who are fired up this year. But it's not clear where they want to go. Energized and angry — senior voters are ready to throw out Democratic candidates, but not ready to embrace Republican programs.

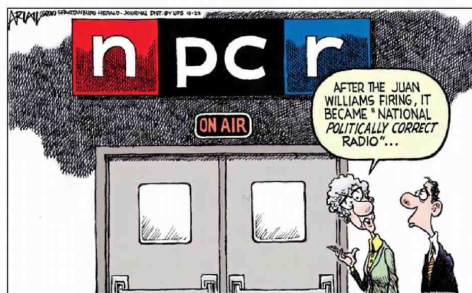


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In a recent ABC News poll, 80 percent of voters over the age of 65 said they are certain to vote this year — compared to just over 50 percent of the 18- to 29-year-old voters — and that's not good news for Democrats. In one poll, older voters favored a Republican congress by 18 points. More than any other age group, those over age 65 say they are more likely to vote for someone who has never held elective office. So much for experience, something you might expect seniors to value. This is a "throw the bums out, bring in the new guys" crowd.

Listen to Chris Bollenbacher, who owns Fred's Breakfast in New Hope, Pa., talking to NPR's Scott Simon: "We should go to Nebraska and get 70 guys that have a lot of calluses on their hands and have been working their whole lives for everything they have and draft them — put them in the White House and tell them, 'You're now in charge of the country.'"

Bollenbacher and millions like him hope new blood in Washington will fix things. And seniors, who are much more pessimistic about the direction of the country than the young, definitely think things need fixing. While less than half of voters under age 30 told the Pew Research Center that they were dissatisfied with national conditions, almost



three-quarters of those over 65 expressed dismay.

Their age is the source of their frustration. People who expected to be able to retire with a nice little nest egg in their retirement accounts or in the value of their homes are now finding that they have to keep working. And they are terrified that if they lose their jobs they will never get another one. They worry that the economy won't turn around in time to help them, and they're not at all sure that times will ever be as good as they once were. An AARP survey of its membership revealed that two-thirds don't believe their children will be better off than they are. One big reason for this sour mood among seniors? The size of the federal deficit, which seniors say they don't want to pass on to their children and grandchildren.

Listening to these voters, Republicans would have reason to believe they have a mandate to tackle that deficit. Good luck. Seniors still balk at any changes to Social Security and Medicare, the enormous entitlement programs they benefit from. That's the reason older voters oppose the new health-care law — they're convinced it will cause cutbacks in Medicare, and the over 65ers are joined by that huge cohort of baby boomers now about to cash in on the program they've paid into all these years. Obama voter Ron

Fraatz, who's 61, told USA Today that the health-care law is the reason he's voting Republican for congress: "I'm getting up to where in another couple of years I'll be in Medicare. So why are they messing around with it and how much is it going to cost?"

Of course it's the cost of Medicare right now that's one of the big drivers of the federal deficit but any attempts to get a handle on that cost, including Republican proposals to provide vouchers for health care in place of Medicare, meet with hostility from older voters. In fact none of the trial balloon policies Republicans have floated this election year garnered a majority from the over 65 set in a Pew survey.

So what's a Congress to do? If Republicans win, how are they supposed to interpret that victory in terms of policy? To get anything done, they would have to compromise with the White House — a dangerous tactic in an election year during which aisle crossers lost their primaries. What do seniors think about that? Unlike voters in every other age group, they say they are less likely to support candidates who are willing to compromise. They might be about to get what they wish for.

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Iran and Obama's legacy

When the midterm election cycle began, the prevailing opinion was that Barack Obama was cleverer and more inspirational than anyone else on the scene. As it ends, nothing appears to have changed.

OH, YES, I know that Democrats have fallen into a peck of trouble and may lose control of Congress. But even if they do, Obama can still storm back to win a second term in 2012. He is that much better than the competition.

In what respects is he enduringly superior? Let's start with the basics. He is much smarter than his challengers in either party, better able to read the evidence and come to the right conclusions.

Over time, his conclusions are likely to stand scrutiny better than those of other politicians. The crucial case in point is his analysis of economic forces. No one would pretend that this is anything but a

daunting situation. The nation is suffering simultaneously from high and persistent unemployment, lagging investment, massive public and private debt and a highly inefficient tax system.

The steps that have been ordered so far in Washington have done nothing more than put the brakes on the runaway decline. They have not spurred new growth.

But if Obama cannot spur that growth between now and 2012, he is unlikely to be re-elected. The lingering effects of the recession that accompanied him to the White House will likely doom him.

Can Obama harness the forces that might spur new growth? This

is the key question for the next two years.

What are those forces? Essentially, there are two. One is the power of the business cycle, the tidal force that throughout our history has dictated when the economy expands and when it contracts. Economists struggle to analyze this, but they almost inevitably conclude that it cannot be rushed and almost resists political command. As the old saying goes, the market will go where it is going to go.

In this regard, Obama has no advantage over any other pol. Even in analyzing the tidal force correctly, he cannot control it.

What else might affect the economy? The answer is obvious, but its implications are frightening. War and peace influence the economy.

Look back at FDR and the Great Depression. What finally resolved

that economic crisis? World War II.

Here is where Obama is likely to prevail. With strong Republican support in Congress for challenging Iran's ambition to become a nuclear power, he can spend much of 2011 and 2012 orchestrating a showdown with the mullahs. This will help him politically because the opposition party will be urging him on. And as tensions rise, and we accelerate preparations for war, the economy will improve.

The nation will rally around Obama because Iran is the greatest threat to the world in the young century. If he can confront this threat and contain Iran's nuclear ambitions, he will have made the world safer and may be regarded as one of the most successful presidents in history.

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