5 for 2005

The Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging has five major initiatives for the coming year, which we are calling "***5 for 2005***."

1) The first involves addressing the health and safety needs of our senior population. We are seeking the creation of a loan forgiveness program for medical students going into geriatrics. Currently, a six-month's wait is required to schedule an appointment with a geriatric physician because South Carolina does not have enough geriatric physicians or geriatric psychiatrists.

The most pressing initiative we will be undertaking this year is the addition of six Long Term Care Ombudsmen to bring the state up to the national average in terms of beds to ombudsmen. The Silver Haired Legislature, representing a cross-section of our seniors from every county in the state, has deemed the shortage of Ombudsmen to be the most pressing need within the senior community, and Governor Mark Sanford has included this provision in his newly released executive budget. One of those six new ombudsmen will coordinate a new volunteer ombudsmen program that will be a quality of life assurance program

2) Our second major initiative will be working with the General Assembly to provide taxpayers with a tax credit when they purchase Long Term Care Insurance. Currently, 22 states, including our neighbors in Georgia and North Carolina, provide this type of credit, and the federal tax code provides for one as well. We believe that the availability of such a credit will make long term care insurance both more attractive and more affordable to *all* of our citizens, while at the same time allowing the State of South Carolina to continue to provide basic services to our growing senior population.

3) The third area we feel needs to be addressed is the taxation of bingo gaming in our state. Currently, bingo vendors are licensed, but each year fewer are paying taxes to the state. Our office administers grants that use bingo tax revenues to fund senior center

construction and home-based direct services to our most vulnerable seniors. These revenues have been decreasing, and at this time we are encouraging operators, charities and regulators to help us stabilize these revenues. We will do all we can to work with them to develop a solution that makes everyone happy.

4) Our fourth major goal is to involve a wide cross-section of our state's business, civic, and non-profit leadership in the fight to assist our seniors. In this regard, Lieutenant Governor André Bauer has named a Commission for Aging Review and Evaluation, or CARE Commission. This group will report directly to him and help identify ways to enhance senior services, streamline costs and generally make our state a better place for seniors to live. Dr. Mick Zais, President of Newberry College, has graciously agreed to chair the commission.

5) Finally, we are committed to the Palmetto State's active participation in the White House Conference on Aging, to be held in the nation's capitol in October. This event takes place just once every decade, and it is our plan that South Carolina's innovative and leading edge support for our seniors be showcased as a model for state governments across the country. In advance of the national meeting, we will be holding a South Carolina White House Conference on Aging in April. We believe that our participation in both meetings will enable us to continue to shine a bright light on the needs of our seniors, now and in the future.