



**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM  
LOCAL PROGRAMS, SUPPORT POSITIONS**

**2007 - 2008**

**Adopted 4/19/2007**

**I. Government**

- A. Urban Government** - Recognizing the interdependence of the city and the suburb, and the importance of area-wide services, and supporting a strong, vital city responsive and sensitive to the needs of its citizens, the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports:
1. The cooperation of city and county governments;
  2. The assumption of a more active role by the suburban cities in the search for:
    - a. Area solutions to issues which transcend jurisdictional boundaries (e.g. water quality, land use);
    - b. Equitable solutions of the funding issues specifically related to persons without money (e.g. transit, housing, health);
    - c. Creative solutions to the problems of the metropolitan area which are related to the urban crises;
  3. Provision by the state government to local governments of the tools they require to solve their own problems;
  4. A broad representative base of citizen participation on independent boards and agencies and effective methods of communication between citizens and the independent boards and agencies.
- B. Jefferson County Government** - The LWVGB believes that the government of Jefferson County must fulfill certain minimum criteria, including equitable representation of the population of the county; separation of legislative and executive powers; administrative accountability to the total electorate; and efficient and cost-effective operation. To meet these criteria, the League supports:
1. Separation of the legislative and administrative functions of county government;
  2. Consolidation of administrative responsibility in a single office responsible to the total electorate by adopting a county manager form of government;
  3. Election of the legislative body by district to 4-year staggered terms on a part-time basis. Commissioners should reside in their districts for at least one year before election and remain residents throughout their terms. Vacancies should be filled by special election.

The

role of the legislative body is to enact laws, establish policies, appropriate funds, and appoint a professional county manager by a two-thirds vote to carry out its policies and administer county operations under its direction.

4. Appointment of a qualified, professional county manager trained in public administration or possessing equivalent managerial credentials. The manager should be exempt from civil service and should serve at the pleasure of the commission.

**Historical Note:** *The present commission form, [reference is to 1985] in combining the legislative and executive functions in one body and dividing specific administrative responsibilities among individual commissioners, lacks both efficiency and the American safeguard of checks and balances between the traditional branches of expanding governments. The consent decree of 1985 changing the commission to five members elected by district, has, in fulfilling the criterion of equitable representation, severely limited administrative accountability to the electorate, as well as decreased operating efficiency by further fragmenting the administrative function. Thus, restructuring of the county government is now imperative. Administrative responsibility must be lodged in a single office accountable to the total electorate, either by at-large election of a county executive or by appointment of a professional manager responsible to the entire county through the commission. While both of these forms are widely used by counties throughout the nation, the inclusion of another elected office appears to exceed the federally approved judicial parameters in effect at this time.*

- II. Transportation** - Adequate public transportation is a vital element in the well being of any urban area, impacting on land use, economic development, air quality, employment opportunities, and mobility for all citizens. As such, it should be considered a public service whose operation is subsidized along with other public services.
- A.** To adequately serve the needs of the area, public transportation should be organized and funded at least on a countywide level, preferably encompassing the entire metropolitan area.
  - B.** An area wide public transportation service should be planned on the basis of needs and efficiency, taking into account such factors as traffic congestion mitigation, air-quality requirements, environmental quality and preferable land use. In order to accomplish this end [added here and removed from the discussion: funding must be area-wide and based on stable and equitable sources] so that service will not depend on the willingness of individual municipalities to purchase service for their communities. LWVGB supports the LWV of Alabama position that calls for a dedicated portion of the state gasoline tax to fund public transportation. Another funding option is a fairly applied occupation tax. LWVGB believes the least preferable source of funding for public transit is the regressive sales tax.
  - C.** A group representative of all suburbs must make the selection of those who represent the municipalities.

**III. Education** - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports effective public education in Greater Birmingham including adequate financing of total needs, extension of public education prior to the first grade, encouraging public involvement in local schools, and encouraging efforts to accredit local schools.

**IV. Administration of Justice** - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports diversion from the criminal justice system of those who could be treated in specific

programs; use of community-base facilities leading to better rehabilitation and successful reintegration of offenders into the community; more uniform sentencing; and greater use of pretrial release, and the protection of basic human and civil rights of prisoners.

## **V. Natural Resources**

- A. Air Quality** - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports the enforcement of existing legislation to reduce air pollution; supports the provision of reasonable incentives and adequate financing for such reduction.
- B. Water Quality** - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports:
  - 1.** Regulations designed to alleviate non-point source pollution;
  - 2.** Mandatory best management practices in development and construction activities;
  - 3.** Zoning and subdivision regulation designed to protect flood plains and prevent flooding;
  - 4.** Assessment of urban runoff to determine water quality problems resulting from urban and industrial runoff.
- C. Surface Mining** - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports forfeiture of bond and denial of subsequent permits to owner-operators not complying with appropriate reclamation.
- D. Parks and Recreation** - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports parks and recreation and the acquisition of more park land for public use and evaluation of proposed sales of park land with respect to potential use of land or money.
- E. Hazardous Materials (excluding nuclear)**
  - 1.** The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham reaffirms the position of the League of Women Voters of the United States that "the most fundamental way to attack the hazardous waste problem is at its source, by restricting the production and use of those substances so toxic that they present risks to health and the environment at every stage of their life cycle. We favor innovative industrial processes that minimize or eliminate the production of hazardous by-products. We support the substitution of less hazardous materials in the manufacturing processes. We endorse recycling and resource recovery wherever feasible."
  - 2.** The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports:
    - a.** Adequate funding to enforce state and federal regulations.
    - b.** Strengthening state regulations so that they are as comprehensive as federal regulations, particularly in the regulation of private, intrastate carriers.
    - c.** More stringent regulations of hazardous materials shipped by air or water.
    - d.** Availability of specialized equipment and trained personnel to handle local accidents involving hazardous shipments.
    - e.** Creating alternative methods to reduce the actual number of hazardous shipments, including the use of transfer stations.
    - f.** Responsibility of local government to help assure the health and safety of citizens and the environment.
- F. Nuclear Materials** - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports:

1. Efforts to focus public awareness on the dangers inherent in any serious accident involving shipments of high level, large quantity fuel and spent fuel wastes, and the inability of emergency procedures to prevent radioactive contamination.
2. Tighter control of transport of nuclear materials and waste, including pre-notification and other regulations that would enhance control.
3. Strengthening federal and state requirements in order to insure the health and safety of citizens and the environment; providing adequate funding to enforce state and federal regulations.
4. The power of local government to regulate nuclear transport in the absence of adequate regulation at the federal and state levels. This regulation might include, if necessary, controlling or banning shipments of high-level, large quantity fuel and spent fuel wastes.

### **Study of Healthcare for the Uninsured and Underinsured in Jefferson County**

This study will focus on true access, especially as it applies to preventive care and follow-up for chronic situations. Acute care may be considered at a future date.

### **Items for Emphasis**

1. Member education on the position supporting a county manager form of government for Jefferson County - a member education on the effect of the current operation of Jefferson County Government on accountable, efficient, cost effective and responsive government. Members should be informed through Voter articles and a general meeting. Estimate of people needed: a board chair and a County Commission observer.
2. Informational updates on transportation and natural resources issues in the metro area, review of League transportation and natural resources positions to determine if they cover the issues and identification of opportunities for action.