



# The VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM  
<http://www.lwvgb.org>

DECEMBER 2016

## PRESIDENT’S PARAGRAPHS

Jean Johnson

The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham congratulates all who voted in the election on November 8<sup>th</sup>. You, all 305,018 of you in Jefferson County (and the many voters in surrounding counties) contributed to the results of the presidential election and made a significant contribution to the results of our statewide elections. Your votes greatly influenced changes in the Alabama Constitution. Your votes influenced who will be prosecuted for alleged crimes and who will sit on the bench in Jefferson County to interpret the law and judge those cases. Voting is no small power, and you exercised it. Yours is the voice of our democracy.



**The next issue of THE VOTER newsletter will be published in February 2017.**

**Happy Holidays to all our LWVGB members and friends!**

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

Mark your calendar. See this issue or [LWVGB Online Calendar](#) for event details.

- December 15:** Bill of Rights Day
- January 16:** MLK Day of Service
- January 24:** LWVGB Board Meeting
- February 1:** National Freedom Day
- February 14:** LWV Birthday
- February 15:** President’s Day
- February 28:** LWVGB Board Meeting
- March 2017:** Women’s History Month
- March 8:** International Women’s Day
- March 12-16:** Sunshine Week
- March 28:** LWVGB Board Meeting
- April 22:** Earth Day
- April 23-29:** National Volunteer Week
- April 25:** LWVGB Board Meeting
- April 29-30:** LWVAL Convention

What of those who did not vote? One snarky post-election article was entitled, “Non-voters upset over election results. If only there was something they could have done.” You may or may not agree with the results, but if you could have voted and did not, we’d like a moment with you in private – behind the woodshed.

But, let’s not judge and look down on all those who did not vote. In her [statement on election night results](#), November 9<sup>th</sup>, LWV President Chris Carson pointed out, “This is the first presidential election in 50 years without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act.” Voter ID laws made it more challenging for some eligible voters to cast their ballots than in previous presidential elections. Carson added, “The League of Women Voters will continue our work to expand participation in the election process and work to give a voice to all Americans.”

LWVGB will continue to support this national effort to make voting free, fair, and accessible. If you want to do something about voter suppression, if you want to do something about low voter participation, if you want to do something about voter misinformation, then support your League of Women Voters and get involved.

## Investigation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church Bombing Comes to Light

Author T. K. Thorne is a compelling storyteller and a meticulous historian. That is why the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham welcomed Thorne as guest speaker at this year's LWVGB Holiday Luncheon. The luncheon was held on December 3<sup>rd</sup> at The Club atop Birmingham's Red Mountain.

Thorne spoke on her book *Last Chance for Justice: How Relentless Investigators Uncovered New Evidence Convicting the Birmingham Church Bombers*. The book has been listed on the *New York Post's* "Books You Should Be Reading." Now we know why.

*Last Chance for Justice* recounts the investigation of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1963 in Birmingham. It is said that justice delayed is justice denied, but there were those who struggled to bring closure. Ben Herren and Bill Fleming and others worked diligently for five years to put Thomas Blanton and Bobby Frank Cherry behind bars for the rest of their lives. Blanton and Cherry were two of the murderers of Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley, all 14, and 11-year-old Denise McNair. Blanton and Cherry were finally convicted in 2002. Thorne also put us behind the scene in the investigation and trial of murderer "Dynamite" Bob Chambliss who was convicted of this crime in 1977. We thank T. K. Thorne for bringing these people - the four little girls, the heroes, and the vile perpetrators of this heinous crime - to life through her writing.



In the 60's and 70's, T. K. (Teresa) Thorne's mother, the late Jane Katz, was a forceful lobbyist in the state legislature for the LWV of Alabama. In her honor, the "Jane Katz Public Service Award" is given each year by LWVAL to "recognize an individual or organization whose work strengthens democracy."



But there was another side to this woman Jane Katz. Attendees at the luncheon were deeply moved by T. K.'s loving personal story of herself as a young girl and her mother. On one special occasion before a big dinner in the Katz's home, Teresa's little hands did not have the strength or balance to hold two precious home-made pies, and the results were disastrous. Thank goodness, the upside down pie-dump happened out of view from the many guests. Mother Jane did not scold. Instead she comforted and had only kind words for her daughter. She proceeded to create something beautiful and delicious (and sanitary) out of the mess. The secret of this little tragedy remained between mother and daughter. And so we learned that Jane Katz, the legendary woman who was literally feared by legislators on Goat Hill as a ferocious advocate for the League of Women Voters of Alabama, was a very kind, loving (and inventive!) mother. Thank you, T.K., for sharing this personal and moving

story with us.

T. K. Thorne is a retired captain from the Birmingham Police Department and recently retired as the Executive Director of Birmingham's Citizen Action Partnership (CAP) after many years of service. Thorne now spends much of her time on book tours around the country. She is the winner of several awards for her historical nonfiction books *Noah's Wife* and *Angels at the Gate*.

Readers can learn more about T. K. and all of her books at <https://tkthorne.com/books/> Get *Last Chance for Justice* at <https://tkthorne.com/books/last-chance-for-justice/> It is a must-read for students of history and especially the struggle for Civil Rights.

We thank T.K. Thorne for sharing this history and her personal story with us, and Laura Parenteau, for making the books available to League members and assisting her sis T. K.. We also thank LWVGB member Seth Johnson and wife April Smoke Johnson for hosting this 2016 Holiday Luncheon at The Club. We enjoyed a delicious feast and a grand view of our Magic City! And thank you also to Ida Tyree-Hyche, Esq. with assistance from LWVGB VP Arlene Godwin for event photos! See more photos at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lwvgb/albums/72157675721938252>.



## **LWVGB MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OFFER FREE RIDES TO THE POLLS**

### **Chris Underwood, LWVGB Coordinator for Rides to the Polls**

LWVGB had an excellent turnout of volunteer drivers on Election Day, November 8<sup>th</sup>. They consisted of Carmen Lau, Charles Hawkins, Greg and Sally Bergquist, Anne Mitchell, Jean Johnson, and Chris Underwood. Some were League members and some were referrals from other members.

The drivers were eager and sitting on “go” as the hours rolled by. The first call coming in on the League line was from a woman in Center Point. A text went out to our drivers. First to respond were Sally and Greg Bergquist, who picked her up, waited while she cast her vote and took her home again.

Next, Jean Johnson and Chris Underwood headed out to Urban Ministry in West End, where we understood about 5 people needed transportation. However, this turned out to be a non-productive lead that had apparently already been filled. Jean had earlier received a call from the YWCA for more drivers than the NAACP was providing, but this need also did not pan out. Jean also took a call on the LWVGB line from someone needing to know if he was registered. (Alas, he was not.)

Shortly before noon, Carmen Lau texted that one of the party headquarters was receiving lots of requests for drivers. Since this was a request from a partisan group, the volunteers removed themselves from service with the League, but several did participate. It should be noted that the drivers were committed to serve any citizens and offered their service to all regardless of party affiliation. The drivers were committed to driving any and all voters to the polls, but they did not identify themselves as LWV volunteers on those calls.

During the afternoon of Election Day, drivers served in Midfield, downtown at the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue Baptist Church, Brookwood Hospital, Roebuck, Cooper Green Clinic, Pleasant Grove, Brighton and Pinson before the day was out.

Thanks to Jean Johnson for her TV appearance over the weekend on WBRC advertising this project! Also for manning the League phone line on Election Day.

We feel the first year was a good start, due to the enthusiasm of those who answered our call for drivers. Next year, we are planning for more advance preparation, posters at various sites, additional contacts and locations, and greater advertisement of the League phone number.

## **VOTER SERVICES**

### **Maggie Howard, LWVGB Director**

#### **SENIORS DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTING**

More than 32 senior citizens gathered at Shepherd’s Center East on Friday, November 4<sup>th</sup> to discuss the importance of voting and examine the proposed new amendments to the Alabama Constitution. Maggie Howard, co-chair of LWVGB Voter Services Committee, began the discussion with a brief history of the US Constitutional Amendments giving voting rights to ALL American citizens. The session ended with discussion and clarification of the 14 proposed amendments on the Alabama ballot. Attending the event was former LWVAL President Mary Lynn Bates. Mary Lynn’s knowledge of Alabama government and the amendments was a welcomed addition to the presentation.



#### **FAIRFIELD PREPARATORY SCHOOL STUDENTS HOLD MOCK ELECTION**

Last spring, Fairfield Preparatory School participated in the LWVGB’s Youth Voter Registration Project. When we received a request several weeks ago to help with Fairfield’s Mock Election on November 8<sup>th</sup>, the League happily provided “I voted” stickers and “vote today” signs.

Thanks to Ms. Barbara Feagin, vice principal and social studies teacher at Fairfield, all middle and high school students as well as faculty took part in the school election. Fairfield’s polling site was set up like an authentic election polling site. Students were required to check in, present their photo ID, have their name checked off of the roll book, fill out a ballot and place their completed ballot in the “voting machine”. Over 800 students and faculty took part in the day’s activities. (Hillary Clinton won by a landslide!)

# LWVGB PROVIDED ELECTION INFORMATION AND ENCOURAGED GOTV

## Jean Johnson, LWVGB President

In addition to providing registration services, in-person education about the election process, and rides to the polls (see “Voter Services” report by Maggie Howard and “LWVGB Members and Friends Offer Free Rides to the Polls” by Chris Underwood), LWVGB Voter Services provided Greater Birmingham voters with election information and encouraged them to vote on November 8<sup>th</sup>. The League used many tools to inform and motivate citizens to be active participants in their democracy. Here’s a recap.

### #LWVGB social media contest encouraging GOTV

At the suggestion of our student intern Shibani Chakrabarty (Thank you Shibani!), LWVGB conducted a social media contest leading up to the election on November 8<sup>th</sup>. The purpose was to encourage voting, especially among Millennials, and to raise visibility of the League. LWVGB members were also encouraged to participate with an email message. The contest called for citizens to vote and then post a “selfie” photo of themselves on Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram proudly displaying their “I Voted!” sticker and using the hashtag #LWVGB. Those who posted would be entered to win a \$50 Amazon gift card in a drawing to be held following Election Day 2016. Participants were encouraged to do this early in the day so that their friends would be inspired to get out to the polls and do the same. The contest was “advertised” on LWVGB Facebook and Twitter accounts. LWVGB members were also encouraged to participate via email.

The results of this contest in terms of number of participants was somewhat disappointing as there were only about a half-dozen who entered the contest. The winner, Ms. Lillian Bradberry of Center Point, pictured right, was very pleased to win and praised the League highly. (She was also the recipient of a free ride to the polls from LWVGB volunteers Sally and Greg Bergquist.) This contest is still a good idea. It does need promotion – earlier and over a longer period pre-election.



### Voting reminder to Youth Voter Registration students

We contacted our YVR students to remind them to vote with a text message sent out early on Election Day (7:09 a.m.). This was the text: “Vote b4 7pm! Post selfie with ‘I Voted!’ sticker + #LWVGB for chance to win \$50 Amazon gift card! Call 1-888-OUR-VOTE if trouble voting.”

The message went to 236 and was delivered to 214. (89% delivered, 11% failed). These were the same numbers as for a message sent on 10/24/16 with reminder to confirm registration. Because at that time we had many failures with our email outreach to YVR students (resulting from difficulty reading students’ handwriting), we did not repeat that part of the effort to contact the young voters.



### LWVGB contacts with the broadcast media regarding the election

We had several contacts with the media just before and on Election Day 2016.

WBRC Fox6 News - LWVGB received a call from this station requesting an interview on issues of importance to women and the impact they might have on the presidential election. President Jean Johnson gave the interview to Jamiese Price, Fox6 reporter and multimedia journalist, on November 6<sup>th</sup>.

Two reports resulted on the 9 pm and 10 pm news that night. Johnson emphasized that the issues that influence voters are the same regardless of gender - issues such as education opportunities and cost, healthcare, jobs and the economy, and national and global security. Other demographic factors are more influential than gender including income, geographic location, and race, among others. She took this opportunity to encourage viewers to get out to vote and take photo voter ID. She also shared election resources such as LWV websites for information on candidates and amendments, and [alabamavotes.gov](http://alabamavotes.gov).



Also, Melanie Posey, reporter for Fox6 News called on Election Day afternoon to ask if LWVGB was offering rides to the polls. Johnson told her we were. Posey wanted an on-camera interview, but unfortunately, at that time we were on call to give those rides

## LWVGB PROVIDED ELECTION INFORMATION AND ENCOURAGED GOTV (cont'd)

and Johnson couldn't agree to meet her at any given time and place.

WVTM Channel 13 NBC - Tom Allen, Director of Operation/Content, called to get information about organizations offering nonpartisan rides to the polls. We of course told them about our LWVGB effort and offered Chris Underwood's name and the LWVGB phone number. Also, we let them know that Greater Birmingham Ministries was organizing for rides to the polls.

A media release (via LWVAL) went out November 5<sup>th</sup> to encourage voter participation, to remind citizens of the importance of voting, and to offer [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) as the go-to, one-stop-resource for unbiased, reliable election information. The release went to 244 media email addresses statewide with 21 failures. We don't have a report of where the release was used.



### LWVGB social media campaign to GOTV and assure credibility of the presidential election

In addition to the #LWVGB social media campaign described above, LWVGB posted several dozen tweets/retweets and Facebook posts/shares regarding the presidential election. A count was not taken but both Twitter and Facebook were each utilized approximately 2x/day for 2-3 weeks leading up to the election on November 8<sup>th</sup>. We used this medium to encourage voter participation and to assure citizens that every vote would count. This campaign was conducted in response to many accusations that our American democratic elections are "rigged." This greatly concerned the national League. It was feared that this campaign tactic might undermine the perceived validity of the election. LWVGB and many Leagues across the nation responded strongly against these accusations!



### Election information posted on LWVGB website

We kept voter registration, candidate and amendment information, and election day voting information posted on the [LWVGB "Learn and Vote" webpages](#). One important piece of this service was continued access to [Decision 2016](#), the program from the JeffCo Judicial Candidates Forum hosted by LWVGB and AKA Sorority in February 2016. That program



includes the judicial candidate bios assembled by LWVGB Secretary Starr Culpepper (thank you, Starr!), and it offers information that is not available through any other resource - an invaluable resource for JeffCo. voters! The Learn and Vote section of the LWVGB website also included election calendar, access to voter registration and absentee ballots, a "follow-the-money" candidate financing link, access to the League's [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) website where the voter could find information about statewide candidates and the 14 AL constitutional amendments, and more.

### Election Information and Reminders on the LWVGB Phone Line

We used our LWVGB phone voice message to keep current election information available to those who called our League's phone line at 205 583-5000, e.g. "Monday, October 24th is the last day to register to vote in the November 8<sup>th</sup> general election or to change registration information... To learn how to register to vote... press 4." There were sometimes multiple messages posted, and they were changed several times during the election season as deadlines approached and passed and as our election focus changed.



**In conclusion**, we learned much during this election season about what works well and what needs tweaking (and how) as we tried to reach and motivate voters to participate in democracy. We tried a few new ideas - at least new to us - such as the social media "I Voted!" contest, text messaging Millennials to check their registration prior to the registration deadline and then sending a get-out-to-vote reminder on Election Day, and offering rides to the polls. It has been a learning experience and very gratifying. With municipal elections coming in August, 2017 (Birmingham, Bessemer and Mountain Brook), we will have even more opportunities to hone our skills. We hope that you will contribute to the League's work - with your volunteer hours and your ideas! Thank you!

## Board of Directors, 2016-18

Jean Johnson	President (2017)
Arlene Godwin	1st Vice President (2017)
Starr Culpepper	Secretary (2017)
Rev, Albert Hyche	Treasurer (2018)
Mikesha Harvill	Director (2018)
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Ida Tyree Hyche, Esq., Chair  
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Ida Tyree Hyche, Esq., Chair	Advocacy Committee
Haley Colson Lewis	

## QUOTABLE QUOTES

All we are saying is give peace a chance.

~ *John Lennon*

The bad news: Nothing is permanent. The good news: Nothing is permanent.

~ *Lolly Daskal*

## Let's grow the LWVGB Social Network!

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