

The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham

April, 2008



The Voter

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League of Women Voters of
Greater Birmingham**

205 583-5000

admin@lwvqb.org

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Getting Down to Business! -- A Note from the President

You are invited and encouraged to attend the LWVGB Annual Business Meeting 5:30 p.m. April 24, 2008 at Richard's Bar-b-Que and Grill on Acton Road. We will take care of League business and very importantly begin planning for activities for this coming year. We have election of officers and a budget to pass. And one of the best benefits is we have an opportunity to talk with women and men who believe in the concepts of political participation from voting to serving in governmental office. These women and men know that participation is what keeps our democratic republic open. For the meeting you will want to review the recommendations for Bylaw changes, program planning, budget and nominations which were included in last month's *Voter* and are still available on-line at www.lwvqb.org. So please plan to attend.

The Observer Corps has been busy attending governmental meetings and seeing issues that need some attention. We have begun work on support of a Jefferson County Manager and on an issue that may have been an inappropriately closed meeting in another governmental body. We see the need to have an observer at the Birmingham Board of Education meetings. They are managing a number of important issues for the education of children. Other areas where we would like to ask members to volunteer are to be an observer at the Hoover Board of Education Meetings, and city council meetings in other cities in the area. If you would be willing to give a few hours a month to visiting these meetings, observing and keeping us informed, please call the League at 583.5000 or e-mail vrandolph@lwvqb.org. This is such an important area for the League and where we can effect changes as needed.

We have an opportunity to participate easily in the LWVAL Council biennial meeting. May 4, 2008 we will meet at the Birmingham Zoo and discuss issues for the State League. Sarah McDonald is making the arrangements as the LWVGB hosts the State League and she could use some help. If you are available to help, please call 583.5000 or email vrandolph@lwvqb.org. The meeting will include the business of the State League but also discussion of judicial independence, advocacy issues and workshops. You are invited to participate. See the article on the LWVAL Council for details and make your reservations early.

Ginny

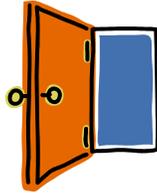


PART-TIME COUNTY OBSERVER

The Observer Corps desperately needs a person to cover meetings of the Jefferson County Commission on Tuesdays at 10:00 A.M. when our regular observer is not available to attend. Long-time Leaguers and Newcomers welcomed. Orientation available. Benefits include: lots of first-hand knowledge, being part of an enthusiastic group, sharing information with the League. No resume required.

Please respond to Ann Smith 823-4749.

The Voter



Alabama Open Meetings Act

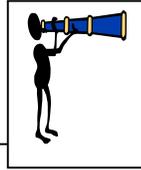
Felicia Mason, Executive Director of the Alabama Press Association (APA), was the featured speaker at the LWVGB membership meeting in March. Ms. Mason presented an overview of the Alabama Open Meetings Act (OMA), passed in 2005, and shared information on the work done to create this piece of legislation. The APA was central to this work, engaging members of local and state governmental bodies and school boards for input into and review of the proposed legislation.

The League of Women Voters of Alabama was also a staunch supporter of the proposed legislation. LWVAL testified on related issues before the House Judiciary Committee and recognized APA with a public service award for its work on OMA.

A copy of the OMA can be accessed online at www.ago.state.al.us/documents/open_meeting.pdf. Additional information about APA can be found at www.alabamapress.org.



Felicia Mason, Executive Director of APA addresses March meeting of LWVGB



Observer Corps Busy Observing!

Nine members of the Observer Corps met during Sunshine Week in March to report on recent discussions and decisions by seven local governmental bodies.

Nancy Sales and Amanda McGriff, who observe meetings of the Birmingham City Council spoke about the purchase of 15,000 laptop computers for school children approved by the council, zoning issues, and the Fair Park development proposed by the mayor which will include track facilities, natatorium, theater, a hotel and retail stores.

Our observers cover several transit-related boards. Ruth Wright and Carolyn Wynn reported on a March meeting of the Transportation Citizens Committee, an advisory committee to the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Please see Ruth's report in this Voter. Kaydee Erdrich-Breman observes the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), which advises the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority and functions as an advocacy group for transit users. At two hearings, which will be held in April, MAX riders will be able to voice their concerns to the TAC and also a representative of the BJCTA. Kaydee reminded us that neither Jefferson County nor the state provides funding for the BJCTA.

In Birmingham Water Works and Sewer Board news: expect to see the word "sewer" dropped soon from the official name of this board. The two small sewer systems, which the board has owned, have been sold. A 1700- acre strip mine is proposed for the Mulberry Fork of the Black Warrior River, which would have a wastewater discharge 800 feet from the BWWSB's intake. In order to allow lakes Inland and Purdy to refill more quickly, most of our water in recent months has come from the Black Warrior. A report concerning the progress toward reducing water loss from the BWWSB system was presented at the March 27th water board meeting.

Nancy Ekberg attends meetings of the Personnel Board of Jefferson County (PBJC). This 3-member board has operated for 26 years under a federal consent decree, which may soon be lifted. A bill, which would make significant changes to this board, has cleared the House of Representatives and moved to a Senate committee. It calls for a 7-member board and abolishes the 16-member Citizens' Supervisory Commission that presently appoints the personnel board. The Jefferson County Mayors Association has pushed for the changes. They feel the proposed make-up of the new board will be more representative of the area and give municipalities more input.

Beverly Nelson and Nancy Ekberg are our long-time observers of the Jefferson County Commission. Beverly got directly to the heart of the county problems saying, "the fault is in the structure". The League has a long-standing position in favor of a county manager. There are 2 bills in the legislature authorizing the hiring of a manager for Jefferson County. Our observers agreed that it was time to act on this issue and asked the League board to consider taking action based on our position. As a first step, Ginny Randolph, speaking for the LWVGB, wrote a letter to the editor that appeared in the April 3, **Birmingham News** supporting the hiring of a qualified professional to carry out the administrative functions of county government.

Ann Smith, Observer Corps

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Observer Corps: Transportation Citizens Committee

At the March 19 meeting of the TCC, 4 new members were added, two from the City of Birmingham and two from N/NE Jefferson County.

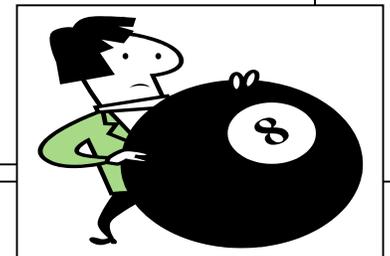
The committee approved two Federal grant applications under "Jobs Access and Reverse Commute" (JARC) and "New Freedoms" programs:

- Alethia House: \$392,591 (match \$266,521) to provide transportation to employment sites for low-income inner city residents (includes recovering addicts, released prisoners and others). The grant is to expand the fleet, hours of service and service area from a 10 to a 20 mile radius from the city center.
- Cooper Green Hospital: \$20,000, including \$10,000 matching funds to continue to provide bus/Clastran fares to low-income, elderly and disabled to insure access to care.

Air Quality: Under EPA's new ozone standard both Jefferson and Shelby Counties are in violation. The committee received the 2008 auto emissions testing schedule from Alabama Partners for Clean Air.

U.S. Highway 280: An expedited update of the Bus Rapid Transit Plan included in the MPO's (2006) 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan will be done. This is in contrast to ALDOT's 2007 concept for construction of an elevated roadway.

Submitted by Ruth Wright



Observer Corps: Monthly meeting of Elected Officials

Senator Jabo Waggoner held his monthly meeting for elected officials on Friday, March 28th at Alagasco's Midtown Center. Following the general meeting, Jefferson County Legislators and the Jefferson County Commission, together with persons from the Birmingham City Council and many interested persons, heard a PowerPoint discussion of how the County got in the situation it now finds itself, and then began a discussion of how to get out of it. The crux of the story is the bond problems in Jefferson have hurt other Alabama communities that have tried to get bonds approved.

Four solutions were offered, three of them will hurt the County and its residents. The fourth solution is by far the most workable. Here were the options discussed:

1. default of payment resulting in bankruptcy;
2. raising sewer rates (they have already raised more than 300 percent in the past 10 years);
3. or raising taxes (which the County cannot do without a legislative decision.)
4. There is one possible solution that is less onerous, and that is to use the current \$117 mil. from sewer ratepayers plus the \$27 mil not used in the one cent school construction sales tax, to negotiate with bond holders to broker a better deal for debt payment.

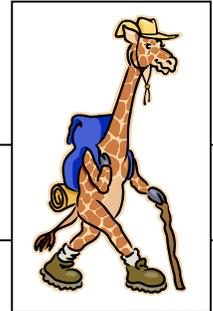
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Observation Corps: Monthly Meeting of Elected Officials

Continued from page 4

This use of that excess in the sales tax would require approval from the Jefferson Legislative delegation, because the one cent sales tax was part of a loophole the County found to raise money, and it requires the money must be spent on school construction. In addition, the original tax was levied for 14 years, but the use of it for sewer debt would require keeping the tax for several more years. So the Jefferson delegation will have to pass a bill, *unanimously, or it will go to the entire Legislature*, to allow the excess money to be used for something other than school construction and extend the length of time the tax can be collected. Some in the audience noted that the sales tax was collected from Summit and other area shoppers who do not all live in Jefferson County, and so the burden would not be borne solely by Jefferson residents. Not all on the County Commission or in the Jefferson Legislative delegation were in favor of allowing the excess sales tax money to be used for anything other than school construction, even though it is money left over after schools received their portion of the money. Another possible solution offered, would be to require all residents who are now on septic systems, to go on the County sewer line and thus spread the sewer payments to more users. No solution was reached at the Friday meeting.

Nancy Ekberg observes these meetings for the League



State Council has Moved to the Zoo!

The LWVAL State Council has changed its venue to the Education Classroom at the Birmingham Zoo. (So appropriate considering the political high jinks of the day.)

Registration will begin at 9:30 with rolls, juice and coffee being served. The meeting will commence around 10:15. The business meeting will be held in the morning session. All Birmingham members are encouraged to attend the whole meeting.

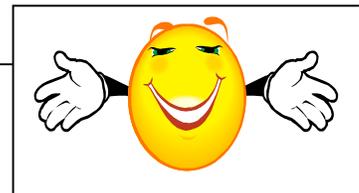
A box lunch will be served at noon, followed by a presentation by Mark White, president-elect of the Alabama Bar Association.

Several workshops are still in the planning stages. One will be on the topic of Health Care. A second may be short presentations by local Leagues on some particularly successful project. The meeting will end about 3:30 pm.

Total meeting cost is \$22.00. Lunch only is \$14.50. Meeting only is \$8.00. Registration forms are available on the LWVAL website at www.lwval.org/leagdemoc/LWVALCouncil-2008/. You may also call Sarah McDonald at 967-2829 for reservations. (For member access help, call Jean Johnson at 222-2097.)

Welcome New Member

Welcome to new member Leatha Gilbert of Hoover.





Jefferson County needs a professional county manager. Please help!

If you are a citizen of Jefferson County, please call your legislators, both house and senate, and ask them to pass legislation that would provide for the hiring of a professional county manager for Jefferson County. As always, please make this call in your own name and not in the name of the League.

The role of the legislative body (i.e. Jefferson County Commission) is to enact laws, establish policies, and appropriate funds. But for efficient and cost-effective operation, Jefferson County also needs a professional county manager, one who is accountable to the total electorate, to carry out the Commission's policies and administer county operations under its direction.

If you are not sure who your legislators are, use the [Find Your Legislator](#) feature in the left column of the Alabama Legislature's home page:
<<http://www.legislature.state.al.us/>>

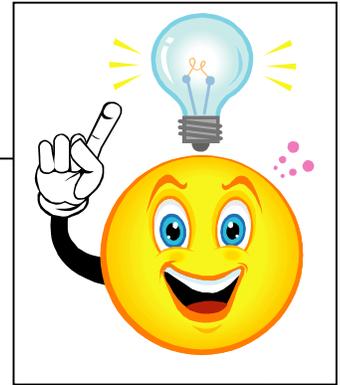
Legislators are generally in Montgomery on Tues., Wed., and Thurs., so these would be the best days to call.

Thank you in advance for answering this call to action!

LWVGB Supports Minimum Requirements for Judges

Paul DeMarco is sponsor of a bill (HB 464) Supreme Court Justices, Court of Civil Appeals, and Court of Criminal Appeals, and as circuit court judges and district court judges; minimum times of licensure as attorneys as qualification of office. This bill stipulates minimum requirements for judges as qualification for office. You may write your State Senator and ask that he or she support the bill as it has passed the House and should be going to the Senate.

April, 2008



LWVGB Annual Business Meeting

5:30 p.m. April 24, 2008
Richard's Bar-b-Que and Grill
Address and map <http://www.richardsbbqandgrill.com/directions.php>

We have a good slate of officers and directors being nominated for 2008-09 and you may nominate more from the floor. We will take care of the League business including adopting a budget with your input. We want your suggestions for board direction for this coming year. The coming year is a major election year so your direction is important.

There is not a reservation form. Just come and order some supper if you want, and indicate that you are with the League in the meeting room on the right.
We look forward to seeing you there.

Alabamians Want to Have a Constitutional Convention

Dear League Members,

Just wanted you to know that a majority of your fellow citizens want Alabama to have a Constitutional Convention.

A recent poll shows that a majority of Alabama citizens want their legislators to allow citizens to vote on whether or not to have a Constitution Convention.

The poll, taken this month by Capital Survey Research Center, asked 599 citizens from throughout the State if they wanted their legislator to allow Alabama citizens to vote on whether or not to have a Constitution Convention.

The positive attitude toward a Constitution Convention existed in all categories of those questioned. The categories included regions of the state, party affiliation, church attendance, gender, race, age, rural, urban and income level.

The results show that 70.5% of Democrats and 55.3% of Republicans are in favor of a Convention. Regionally, north Alabama showed the highest favorable percentage with 64%, while middle and south Alabama followed with 65.1% and 52.3%, respectively. The poll showed 63% of responders in rural counties were also in favor of a Convention.

African Americans were the most supportive of a Convention (74.5%); however, a majority of the Caucasians polled were supportive (61.8%). All ages supported the Convention; however, the ranges of 22 to 34 years of age and 56 to 65 years of age showed the highest percentages of 70.2% and 70.7%. Higher support came from those with higher incomes; however, all income levels showed a majority supported a Convention.

Bills that would allow voters to approve or reject holding a Constitution Convention are currently in Rules Committees in both Houses of the Alabama Legislature. HB 308, sponsored by Speaker Pro Tem Demetrius Newton and 18 other representatives, passed the Constitution and Elections Committee and is now in the Rules Committee of the House. SB 243, sponsored by Senator Ted Little and 15 other Senators, passed the Judiciary Committee and is now in the Senate Rules Committee.

"These poll results confirm that the growing grassroots momentum of voters, students and organizations from all parts of the State and all walks of life desire all legislators to simply trust the people by passing HB 308 and SB 243 to Let the People Vote," said Lenora Pate, State Co-Chair for Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, Inc.

Both bills, along with more information on ACCR's historic legislative efforts, education endeavors, organizational regions, and other items of interest can be found at ACCR's website - www.constitutionalreform.org

Nancy Ekberg



LWVGB Upcoming Events

April	24	5:30 – 7:30	Member Business Meeting	Richards Bar-B-Que Off Acton Road & I-459
May	3	9:30 – 3:30	LWVAL Council	Birmingham Zoo – Education Classroom
May	6	6:00 – 7:30	Board Meeting Transitional	Samford University— Chapman Burns Hall
May	22	7:00 – 8:30	Member Meeting	Homewood Library 116
June	13-17		LWV Convention	Portland OR
TBA			Planning Session	

LWVGB
P.O. Box 530522
Mountain Brook, AL 35253