



The VOTER

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

Government Web Site Review

Sunshine Week was celebrated by the LWVGB with a report on a review that a Web Review team undertook. Six members of the team looked at 19 local government web sites. President Slay wrote an editorial for the Birmingham News, printed on March 13. The team, consisting of Virginia Randolph, Ida Tyre-Hyche, Amanda McGriff, Diane Marks, Don Marks, Sarah McDonald and Connie Arnwine presented the findings at the member meeting on March 15. Several members also attended local government meetings to highlight Sunshine Week, Alabama Open Meetings Law and to report on the web review, encouraging the governments to use their web sites for communication. Members who visited local governments included Virginia Randolph, Leonette Slay, Ida Tyree Hyche, Diane Marks and Cyron dys Jackson. Certificates were given to three governments for having sites that supported open government. They were Birmingham, Hoover and Vestavia Hills.

The results of the assessment revealed that one of the sites no longer had a web site on the Internet. One site had a web site but nothing was posted. Of the 17 governments with web sites 14 listed the meeting dates, times and locations for the council/commission but many did not list the meeting dates of other committees. Most of the 14 listing meetings also listed the agenda but only 8 some or all of the time posted the minutes of the council/commission meeting and rarely any other committees.

Elected officials were listed but 5 had no phone nor email address for the officials, while one had email addresses but no telephone numbers and two had telephone numbers but no email addresses for citizens to communicate with the elected officials.

Nine of the 17 web sites offered at least some information on taxes.



Public records for some items, like property tax, were available readily in a few instances on-line. Five of the 18 had current public record information and how to request public records, including contact person and process. None had the rating for Freedom of Information Act compliance with the number of requests, number filled and reasons for denials.

While a few listed requests for bids for contracts only one listed contacts but they were out of date.

Five listed audits but only one provided results for both performance and fiscal audits

Seven of the 18 indicated the specific web site manager and a couple

Join us at our April 28 Annual Meeting @ 6:30pm Dale's Restaurant in Vestavia

Prior to the 2011 Business Meeting, please review the documents at www.lwvgb.org/members.

Consider coming early, if possible, to place your order.

We look forward to seeing you there!!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 22, 2011: Earth Day.

April 28, 2011, 6:30pm: Annual Meeting, Dale's in Vestavia Hills.

April 30-May 1, 2011: LWVAL Convention, hosted by Mobile and Baldwin County LWVs.

May 3, 2011: LWVGB Board Meeting, The Community Foundation Building, 2100 1st Avenue North, 11:30am.

June 11, 2011: 9am-3pm, Board Orientation & Planning Meeting, 320 Albemarle Drive, Hoover.

more indicated a company rather than a web site manager. Two dated the information so for the rest it was difficult to know if it is current.

Some have outstanding information about zoning and building codes along with the submission process. A couple allow for on-line submission and tracking of the information. A few do not have information for zoning and building or other business licenses etc.

Current budgets were displayed for six governments and they each also included the previous years' budget. Of the six, four showed payroll with positions or groups of positions indicated, the others did not. There was no listing of payments to determine details of transaction or information on how to obtain this information. The State web site does show more detail about budgets. An interesting aspect of budgets was that the larger government entities, for the most part, were the ones displaying details in the budgets. Cities that probably have fewer departments and easier budgets had no information.

Eight of the sites offer at least some transactions on-line but some of those do not indicate that they operate with a secure server or disclose the existence or non-existence of cookies and the issue of privacy. A few with transactions allow for tickets to be paid on line and little else. Two without transactions on-line did have information about privacy and the

security of the server.

Some sites had a community feel with openness for citizens and information for civic activities. Some sites were easy to navigate and others required doggedness to finally find the information.

It was an interesting task for the team and information about the local communities was learned. The group thought it would be good do this again, with some changes suggested by those who attended the Member meeting. It was suggested that an award may be given next year to the government with a site that provides the best information and an open government approach.



League of Women Voters of Alabama Convention Mobile, Alabama Friday, April 29 – Sunday, May 1, 2011

For registration and full agenda, see <http://www.lwval.org/members/index.html>.

Our first educational session on Saturday will focus on the environmental issues from the Gulf oil well blowout, followed by a panel on energy, water, and environmental management issues affecting all of Alabama. Our evening speaker is Jim Sumner, Director of the Alabama Ethics Commission. We are pleased to have such timely topics and knowledgeable speakers.

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| 11:45-1:00 (Lunch) | Dr. Melitza Crespo-Medina, Post Doctoral Associate, Joye Research Group, University of Georgia Department of Marine Sciences. Offshore Ocean Aspects of the Gulf Oil Well Blowout. |
| 1:15-2:45 | Restoring the Gulf and Recovering from the Deepwater Horizon Events Moderator: Bethany Kraft, Executive Director, Alabama Coastal Foundation Panel: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Melitza Crespo-Medina, University of Georgia Department of Marine Sciences |

- Dr. George Crozier, Dauphin Island Sea Lab
- Judy Haner, Marine Program Director, The Nature Conservancy Alabama Chapter
- Casi Callaway, Executive Director & Baykeeper of Mobile Baykeeper
- Pete Tuttle, US Fish and Wildlife Services, Department of Interior Case Coordinator for Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Recovery
- Bob Higgins, (invited) Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance

3:00-4:30

Selected Alabama Environmental Issues

Moderator, Hattie Kauffman, Board Member, League of Women Voters of Alabama
Panel:

Joyce Lanning, LWVAL Natural Resources Chair, LWVUS Climate Change Task Force

- State and National Legislation
- Alabama Energy Policy
- LWVUS Climate Change Task Force

Cindy Lowry, Executive Director, Alabama Rivers Alliance

- Alabama Water Policy

Adam Snyder (invited), Executive Director, Conservation Alabama and Conservation Alabama Foundation

- Environmental Management in Alabama, ADEM, EPA and issues in governance and permitting -
- Mines, Landfills and more

6:00-7:00

Delta Cruise or no-host cocktails, Original Oyster House on the Causway

7:00-9:00

Banquet, James L. (Jim) Sumner, Jr., Director of the Alabama Ethics Commission

The League and Public Transit

Senator Linda Coleman from Birmingham has filed a bill in the current Alabama Legislative Session, to further public transit in this area.

Senate Bill 357 will re-establish an authority to oversee public transportation in the

Birmingham metropolitan area. This bill specifies that the

metropolitan Jefferson County area has enough existing dedicated funding income from all sources at this time, to draw down federal matching funds and establishes an authority to implement transit throughout the area. Go to

<http://www.lwvgb.org/resources/SB357-int.pdf> to view the bill. The most current status of SB357 can be found at <http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/>, then click Bills > Status > then enter SB357.



Visiting Local Governments

By Virginia Randolph, Observer Corps

I visited Shelby County on the evening that people came out to oppose a road through their community for the proposed limestone quarry in Vincent. Even standing room was at a premium. People spoke with passion but not with vitriol. People presented facts but not falsehoods. It was a wonderful time to speak on the review of web sites and Sunshine Week and remark about democracy in action. When the League conducts a project and attends local government meetings, people seem to realize that we are sincere and have the best of interests in good government and citizen participation.

The President's Corner

By LWVGB President Leonette Slay



"Make your opinions count"

Remember that the LWVGB annual meeting occurs on April 28 (see the calendar). The Bylaws committee will be asking for your approval of some significant changes, and the Nominating committee will put forth a slate of officers and board members to lead us during the coming year. Make a special effort to join us, as this meeting provides our members the opportunity to meet and talk with new leaders. Members can also provide valuable input on local programs and priorities for the coming year. We will consider your input during our annual planning meeting on June 11, so if you cannot attend the annual meeting feel free to email or call me with your suggestions.

On Sunday, May 1, from 1-5, LWVGB will partner with the Birmingham Botanical Gardens to celebrate Earth Day. Joyce Lanning has developed several creative and interactive ways to deepen our understanding of environmental challenges, and we have opportunities for volunteers who only have a couple of hours to share. This promises to be a great event to share with your children and grandchildren on a spring afternoon in the Gardens.

This will be my last column as president, as I revert back to my position on the board next month. Thanks to both our excellent board members and to our members who continue to provide good ideas, innovative initiatives, and enthusiastic support for the League's goals.

Leonette

Mark your calendar!

Earth Day Celebration at Birmingham Botanical Gardens

May 1, 2011 from 1-5 PM – Volunteers needed for 1 or 2 hour shifts from 12:30 to 5:30

On Sunday, May 1 from 1-5PM, the Birmingham Botanical Gardens will celebrate Earth Day and the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham will be part of the event. The Earth Day theme is A Billion Acts of Green, which has the goal of amassing one billion sustainability actions in advance of the global Earth Summit in Rio in 2012. With over 45 million actions already recorded, this largest-ever environmental service project is working to show that change can happen when individuals join in taking action.

We will have laptops to access the easy-to-use online registration tool at act.earthday.org so those who choose to can register an Act of Green - large or small. Simple individual gestures like riding a bike instead of driving, washing laundry in cold water or larger commitments like a home weatherization project or investing in energy-efficient appliances are all welcomed. This would be a good time to calculate your ecological footprint using the interactive Earth Day Network simulation.

A fun event for children will be creating carbon dioxide in a balloon by mixing vinegar and baking soda and snuffing out a candle with the gas. This provides a brief window of opportunity to talk about CO2 and its importance in warming the planet. We also plan simple crafts for youngsters.

To volunteer, contact Leonette Slay, lwslay@cs.com or 823-7315 or Joyce Lanning – jalanning@bellsouth.net or 870-0808. Thanks to those of you who've already volunteered. You can get on-the-job training on May 1, but we can arrange a demonstration prior to May 1 if you have any questions.

New Member Profile

WELCOME New Members!

Meet Wanda Godfrey, a new LWVGB Board Member. Wanda is an AT&T retiree. She grew up in Virginia, but has also lived in Ft. Lauderdale, FL and Chicago, IL. She lives in the Glen Iris neighborhood and has called Birmingham home since she moved here in 1988. Wanda enjoys tennis, singing, traveling, and reading and she loves to meet new people. She said she joined the League because "it's a good way to stay connected with what is happening." Wanda is looking forward to being an active participant on the Board and to meeting other League members! Welcome Wanda!

Welcome to new member Barbara O'Donnell Powell of Vestavia Hills!



Legislative Update

Many legislators are focusing on constitutional reform this year.

Former Speaker Pro Tem, Demetrius Newton has sponsored HJR 34 in the House, a Resolution which calls for a constitutional convention. Senator Roger Bedford has sponsored SJR 27, in the Senate, a Resolution that calls for a constitutional convention. Both Resolutions are in their respective Rules Committees.

Here are the members of the Rules Committee in the Senate and home contact information: Call them at home and ask their support for SJR 27, especially if one of them is your senator!

Find your legislators at www.legislature.state.al.us and write in your zip code in the space provided.

Senator Scott Beason, Chair of Gardendale 205 325-5308
Senator Jimmy Holley, Vice Chair of Elba 334-897-5181
Senator Roger Bedford who is the sponsor of Russellville 256-332-7709
Senator Ben Brooks of Mobile 251-666-7116
Senator Gerald Dial of Lineville 256-239-9939
Senator Priscilla Dunn of Bessemer 205-426-3795
Senator Vivian Figures of Mobile 251-457-4567
Senator Rusty Glover of Semmes 251-649-0511
Senator Tammy Irons of Florence, 256-766-9201

Senator Arthur Orr of Decatur 256-260-2147
Senator Trip Pittman of Montrose 251-621-3555
Senator Paul Sanford of Huntsville 256-539-5441
Senator Jabo Waggoner of Birmingham 205 822-7443



Here are the members of the Rules Committee in the House of Representatives. Please contact them for support of HJR 34.

Rep. Blaine Galliher, Chair, of Gadsden 256-442-7517
Rep. Ron Johnson Vice Chair of Sylacauga 256-249-9489
Rep. James Buskey of Mobile 251-208-5480
Rep. Barbara Boyd of Anniston 256-236-7423
Rep. Craig Ford of Gadsden 256-547-2727
Rep. Victor Gaston of Mobile 251-639-2555
Rep. Lynn Greer of Rogersville 256-247-1055
Rep Todd Greeson of Ider 256-632-3963
Rep. Mike Jones of Andalusia 334-222-5367
Rep Richard Laird of Roanoke 334-863-2424
Rep John Merrill of Tuscaloosa 205 349-2020
Rep. Kerry Rich of Albertville 256-293-8485
Rep. Oliver Robinson of Birmingham 205-849-6765
Rep. Elwyn Thomas of Oneonta 205-237-4672
Rep. Randy Wood of Anniston 256-820-6700



Senator Arthur Orr sponsored SB 112, a constitutional amendment which will eliminate the racist language from our Constitution. It has passed through committee with a unanimous vote and is now in the Senate Rules Committee (above). Contact members of the Senate Rules Committee and ask them to support SB112.

Rep. Mike Hill has sponsored HB 181, a constitutional amendment which will allow limited home rule to counties that vote to accept it. This bill will not allow the counties to raise taxes or fees. Senator Jabo Waggoner plans to sponsor a similar bill but has not filed it yet.

Hill's bill, HB 181 is in the County and Municipal Government Committee whose members are as follows:

Rep. Steve McMillan Chair of Bay Minette 251-948-5575
Rep. Randy Wood Vice Chair of Anniston 256-820-6700
Rep Demetrius Newton of Birmingham 205-324-6053
Rep. George Bandy of Opelika 334-749-0051
Rep. Alan Boothe of Troy 334-566-5742
Rep. Napoleon Bracy of Prichard 251-622-8118
Rep. Owen Drake of Leeds 205-699-6655
Rep. Allen Farley of McCalla 205-960-7526
Rep. Jeremy Oden of Vinemont 256-736-6026
Rep. Patricia Todd of Birmingham 205-567-9410
Rep. Dan Williams of Athens 256-232-8993



Rep. Paul DeMarco has sponsored HB20, a constitutional amendment which will modernize the banking article and eliminate outdated sections of the article. His bill made it through Committee and is now in the House Rules Committee (above). Please call and ask the members to support HB20.

DeMarco has also sponsored HB21, a constitutional amendment which will update the corporate articles. It addresses corporations in Alabama and is in the Transportation, Utilities and Infrastructure Committee. The members of that committee are as follows:

Rep. Mac McCutcheon, Chair, of Capshaw, 256-655-3764
Rep. Victor Gaston Vice Chair of Mobile 251-639-2555
Rep. Richard Laird of Roanoke 334-863-2424
Rep. George Bandy of Opelika 334-749-0051
Rep. Richard Baughn of Lynn 205-893-5815
Rep. Mac Buttram of Cullman 256-297-2286
Rep. Merika Colenan of Birmingham 205-428-4535
Rep. Joe Faust of Fairhope 251-928-5445
Rep. Mike Jones of Andalusia 334-222-5367
Rep. Yvonne Kennedy of Mobile 251-438-95009
Rep. Bill Roberts of Jasper 205-388-7679
Rep. John Robinson of Scottsboro 256-609-8292
Rep. Kurt Wallace of Maplesville 334-259-4076



Rep Patricia Todd has sponsored HB 207 that would allow a small percentage of taxes and fees from motor vehicles to be used for public transportation. It is in the Ways and Means Committee whose members are as follows:

Jim Barton, Chair of Mobile 251-666-0112
Steve Clouse of Ozark 334-774-9122
Richard Laird of Roanoke 334-863-4249
Merika Coleman of Birmingham 205-428-4535
Victor Gaston of Mobile 251-208-5480
Lynn Greer of Rogersville 256-247-5059
Laura Hall of Huntsville 256-859-2234
Ken Johnson of Moulton 256-301-9200
John Knight of Montgomery 334-229-4286
Wes Long of South Guntersville 256-582-2878
Mac McCutcheon of Capshaw 256-655-3764
Mike Millican of Hamilton 205-921-3214
Charles Newton of Greenville 334-382-8700
Elwyn Thomas of Oneonta 205-274-2316
Greg Wren of Montgomery 334-395-0123



Sustainability – Local Governments at work

By Joyce Lanning

The League of Women Voters of Tuscaloosa April meeting was devoted to sustainability, with Joyce Lanning as speaker. Sustainability depends on implementing policies and strategies that meet society's present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Given the changes in Congress, addressing climate and energy issues which impact how sustainable our economy is will likely have more impact at state and local levels. Many local governments are taking action. Look for an article in next month's voter on sustainability activities of local governments in our area.

Board of Directors, 2010-2011

Leonette Slay, President
Nancy Ekberg, 1st Vice President
Angelyn Simmons, Secretary
Amanda McGriff, Treasurer
Joyce Lanning, Director
Leonette Slay, Director
Ida Tyree-Hyche, Director
Joan Burroughs, Public Relations
Ginny Randolph, Voter Services
Karen Threlkeld, Editor - *The Voter*
Connie Arnwine, Nominating Committee Chair
Jean Johnson, Off-Board Technical Director

QUOTABLE QUOTES

A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song.

~ Maya Angelou

Caged birds accept each other but flight is what they long for.

~ Tennessee Williams

Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

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