



# The VOTER

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

APRIL-2012



## Mark Your Calendars for our Annual Meeting

The LWVGB will host its Annual Business Meeting on Tuesday, April 17, 2012, at Sweet Tea, Birmingham's newest meat and three. The meeting will take place from 6pm until 8pm. Items on the "menu" include Election of Officers and Budget Committee Report. Sweet Tea is located at 2205 3rd Avenue South Birmingham, Alabama 35233. Please come to the private dining room when you arrive.

Documents relevant to the Annual Business Meeting are posted in the folder: <http://www.lwvgb.org/members/lwvgb-business-2012/>. Please contact Jean Johnson (email: [jjohnson@lwvgb.org](mailto:jjohnson@lwvgb.org)) if you have any problems accessing the online documents.

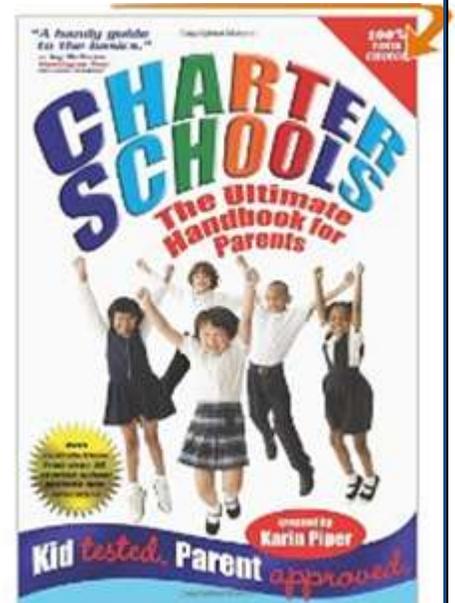
For more information on Sweet Tea, go to [www.sweettearestaurant.com](http://www.sweettearestaurant.com), and view the menu and pricing.

What:	LWVGB Annual Business Meeting
When:	April 17, 2012 from 6pm-8pm
Where:	Sweet Tea Restaurant 2205 3 <sup>rd</sup> Avenue South Birmingham, AL
Cost:	Dutch treat (Entrée+ 1 veggie = \$7.45 plus tax)

## League of Women Voters of Alabama Speaks out on Charter Schools

The LWVAL does not take a position on whether legislation authorizing charter schools in Alabama should or should not be passed. However, its membership believes that charter school enabling legislation should at minimum include the following:

1. An explicit statement that all charter schools operating within the state are public schools, and, in general, are subject to oversight guidelines governing all public schools..
2. An explicit statement that all charter schools operating within the state operate under the authority of the enabling legislation and the policies and procedures developed by the appropriate supervising authorities designated within that legislation or appropriate federal law.
3. Designation of the State Board of Education and local school boards as the agencies authorized to grant and deny petitions to establish charter schools.
4. Prohibit private schools, religious schools, home schools, virtual schools, and for-profit entities from creating or managing charter schools.
5. Limit the number of charter schools established in a public school system. Among other things, such a limit would reduce the fiscal impact on existing public schools. One possible mechanism would be to make the limit proportionate to and based on a percentage of the total number of students within that school system.



6. Set a minimum and maximum size for charter schools with exemptions possible if sufficient justification is made.
7. Permit some flexibility in general oversight guidelines that all public schools are under (e.g., allow waivers for teacher certification for those with documented alternative training/experience in a specialty area and/or teaching methods).
8. Guarantee equal access to charter schools by students of all social, economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.
9. No specification of allowable curriculum approaches or teaching models or methodologies. These decisions should be made by the organizers of the charter school and appropriate professionals, as reflected in the charter itself..
10. Academic accountability required throughout the duration of the charter, with at minimum the same testing regimes as required of other Alabama public schools. Additional assessment measures should be applied where appropriate (e.g., portfolios in art-focused programs, technical skills tests). The academic accountability information should be disseminated to parents, the community, local board of education, the Alabama State Board of Education, and appropriate accrediting bodies (where applicable).



LWVAL believes that transparency enhances acceptance of governmental decisions and support for public institutions. Therefore, easy public access to information about each charter school should be guaranteed. Examples of information that should be public include, but are not limited to: charter petitions, chartering decisions, school structure and operations, finances, governing body membership, curriculum, and assessments of academic performance.

More information is available online at <http://www.lwval.org/news/>.

The LWVAL Program has been updated to include the new position statement on charter schools enabling legislation. The direct link is:

[http://www.lwval.org/LWVALCoreDocs/General/LWVAL\\_Program.htm#charterschools](http://www.lwval.org/LWVALCoreDocs/General/LWVAL_Program.htm#charterschools)

## Judicial Candidates Forum

Sixteen judicial candidates addressed a group gathered at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens on Tuesday, March 6, a week before their primary. All but two of the ten races on the ballot were represented by at least one candidate. Five candidates running in November, but uncontested on March 13, also came to speak.



Each was given a minute and a half for an introduction and then each responded to three questions which they had received earlier in the day.

Views on the greatest areas of need throughout the system of justice varied only slightly as most felt that financing reductions are affecting court procedures, especially as bailiff and other positions have been cut. For Family Court, some suggested mediation as a way to cut costs, shrink caseloads and have a better outcome. Others were taking on more of the work of creating orders themselves as well as relying on electronic filing. Uniformity and consistency across jurisdictions were also noted as needs, as well as diversity on the bench.

Judicial independence, according to several of the candidates, is built into the three systems of government. However, in practice, it can require courage, and the ability to treat each situation on its own merits, not based on who is before you that is more familiar or has been critical of past decisions.

Asked to reflect on the balance between a judgeship being a partisan elected position and the impartiality required by the canon of ethics, in general, they felt no compromise to their impartiality, saying that nothing outside the courtroom

should influence what happens within it. However, most considered partisan races unfortunate and inappropriate especially because of the problem of appearances. Some suggested that a merit system - as practiced in two thirds of the states for at least some of the judges - would be preferable to elections and especially partisan elections.

The League of Women Voters is committed to educating voters, and greatly appreciates the time and dedication of each of the participating candidates in helping us get to know more about them and the issues as they see them. For voter information, go to [www.vote4111.org](http://www.vote4111.org).

## Sunshine on Government 2012

Do you need to pay a parking citation... at 2am? Or, would you like to know if a hotly debated zoning issue was passed by your City Council? Perhaps, you'd just like to see the latest budget for yourself? The answers might be one click away, or maybe not according to research conducted by the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham during its **Sunshine on Government 2012** online project.

In conjunction with Sunshine Week (Openness of Government Operations), the LWVGB reviewed four local government websites to determine its usefulness for citizens and openness of operations. The Sunshine on Government's committee members developed an "Evaluation Tool" based on items chosen by the League. They included the following:

- Contact information for the government
- Elected officials' information
- Committees and composition
- Meetings, notices, agendas, minutes
- Public records FOIA
- On-line transactions
- Budgets
- Business licenses, building permits, zoning information
- Web site management



This year's Sunshine on Government project allows members to "attend" a virtual membership meeting online to discuss the project. Members can interact as in a traditional meeting by posting comments and replies. "What better way to inform our membership and promote transparency in government, than to launch this project online?" said LWVGB President Ida Tyree-Hyche, Esq. "It is available anytime, and all that is needed is internet access." The project and online discussion can be found at [www.lwvgb.org/learn-vote/sunshine2012](http://www.lwvgb.org/learn-vote/sunshine2012).

Committee members for the **Sunshine on Government 2012** project included Connie Arnwine, Joan Burroughs, Amanda McGriff, Anne Mitchell, Jean Johnson, Yvonne Brakefield and LWVGB President Hyche. The committee was chaired by Virginia Randolph.

## Ecuador's Environmental Challenges

A recent trip to Ecuador to visit a family member working with the United States Agency for Economic Development underlined the tension found in every country between two major pressures: extraction of natural resources and preservation of an environment that will support lives now and in the future.

There has already been damage to indigenous lands based on previous oil extraction. Currently the Ecuadorian government is pushing for foreign investment in open pit mining for valuable copper and gold resources in the face



of a constitutional commitment to the rights of nature and the responsibility to protect land for current and future generations.

Ecuador is one of two countries (the other is Bolivia) which have recognized the rights of nature in their constitutions. Though very difficult to enforce, it nevertheless introduces another issue into the conversation: *"The right to fully respect its existence and to maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes."* See: <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/ecuador-archives-49/3105-large-scale-mining-to-test-rights-of-nature-in-ecuador>

When I asked for an off-the-record assessment of the development help Ecuador needs most right now, I was told that they need assistance preparing to adapt to the changing climate already in the pipeline, including sea level rise and fresh water scarcity. As for mining, it's assumed that it will go forward, but the hope is that assistance in employing best practices to avoid the worst contamination could help mitigate some of the undesirable impact.

Assistance in adaptation to a changing environment in the future and best practices for managing the Earth's resources are certainly both important goals for any nation.

## Natural Resources Report for April 2012

LWVAL Council meets in Montgomery May 5. There will be a short discussion on climate change impacts, especially the higher pollen counts associated with warmer weather. A photo-op (something to sneeze at) will be part of 350.org's campaign to raise awareness about impacts of climate change. See [www.climatedots.org](http://www.climatedots.org).

The LWVGB Natural Resources Director, Joyce Lanning, is also working with LWVAL on revision of 1998 Environmental Management Facts and Issues on LWVAL website, and will meet with Kathy Byrd on Wednesday, April 4.

Joyce attended the Alabama Rivers Alliance Water Rally near Fairhope, Alabama March 16-18, and met with allies about prospects for improved energy policy and planning in Alabama. She plans to continue that effort but not representing LWVAL or LWVGB.



On March 19 in Montgomery, she attended the Subcommittee on Energy Efficiency and Conservation of the Joint Permanent Legislative Committee on Energy Policy on March 19; met with David Rountree, staff to Public Service Commissioner Terry Dunn; and met with John Free, director of the Electricity Policy Committee of the PSC.

She continues to monitor legislation mandating a comprehensive water management planning process for Alabama which is supported by the Alabama Rivers Alliance. It may be introduced after Legislative Water Committee meeting April 18.



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## Constitutional Reform

As of the date this article was written, HB302 (which will allow for home rule in counties) has not been discussed by the County and Municipal Government Committee of the House. It will come up in the next couple of weeks and the chairman, Rep. Steve McMillan says he plans to hold a public hearing when it comes up so people can voice their opinions of the bill. That date will be publicized to League Members when it is available. The committee meets Wednesdays at 1:30 p.m. in room 617 of the House.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Demetrius Newton and it is patterned after the

bill sponsored by Senator Del Marsh in 2003. That bill followed the recommendations of Governor Riley's Alabama Citizens Commission on Constitutional Reform. The bill also follows the one sponsored by Rep. Mike Hill last year which had several changes resulting from the County and Municipal Government Committee recommendations as well as those from the Association of County Commissions of Alabama and Alabama Power.

The Constitutional Revision Commission will begin to meet again after the Legislative Session is completed, probably the first of June. Minutes from their seven meetings so far as well as the transcript of the last one which was a public hearing, are available at [www.ali.state.al.us](http://www.ali.state.al.us)

## Public Transportation

Alabama Transit Coalition, a coalition of organizations working for transportation, includes the League on its Steering Committee. The group is monitoring transportation legislation in the Legislative Session.

The Legislature has approved the Alabama Transportation Infrastructure Bank bill championed by Gov. Bentley. This is a bill that will use bonds called GARVEE bonds to fund highway and bridge construction. Fortunately, Senator Rodger Smitherman saw to it that a portion of the funds should also be used for public transit.



Also, we are watching HB109 from Rep. Patricia Todd which would allow the extra two cents that is not now collected on the sale of cars and boats and trailers, to be collected and spent on public transit. Currently, sales taxes on cars and boats and trailers, are only two cents instead of the four cents charged on all other products sold in Alabama. This bill would collect that additional two cents to bring sales taxes on these items up to the level charged on all other products.

### FOREVER WILD

The Forever Wild campaign for passage of a constitutional amendment on November 6, 2012 has officially kicked off.

Check out the campaign on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/alabamiansforforeverwild](http://www.facebook.com/alabamiansforforeverwild) and on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/#!/AL4ForeverWild>.

They are also in the process of updating the web site ([www.alabamiansforforeverwild.org](http://www.alabamiansforforeverwild.org)), which will also provide us with additional information and tools throughout the campaign.

## Save the Date – 2012 LWVAL Council

2012 LWVAL Council  
Saturday, May 5, 2012  
Montgomery, AL

Council packet (including registration form) is at <http://www.lwval.org/leagdemoc/LWVAL-Council-2012/registration-packet.doc> (Requires LWVAL member user name and password. Contact Jean Johnson ([jjohnson@lwvgb.org](mailto:jjohnson@lwvgb.org)) for the login information.)

## Join Us for the LWVUS 50th National Convention in Washington DC on June 8-12, 2012

If you are interested in attending the National Convention, please contact one of the LWVGB Directors. A great program will be presented, starting with a great pre-convention workshop entitled "Power Our Voice To Power the Vote" on Friday, June 8th at 2 PM and concluding with the final plenary on Tuesday, June 12th at noon.

More information is available at <http://www.lwv.org/member-resources/council-and-convention>.

### Board of Directors, 2011-2012

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Cyron dys Jackson	1st VP, Director - PR/Communication
Joan Burroughs	Secretary, Director - Health
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Michael O'Donnell	Chair - Nominating Committee
Jean Johnson	Technical Director (Off Board)
Donald Marks	Social Media (Off Board)
Diane Marks	Social Media (Off Board)

### QUOTABLE QUOTES

"I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say:

I never ran my train off the track and

I never lost a passenger."

~ *Harriet Tubman*

"There are two ways of spreading light:

to be the candle or the mirror

that reflects it."

~ *Edith Wharton*

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