



August, 2007

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League of Women Voters of
Greater Birmingham
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Works

Be a Part of the Plan! -- A Note from the President

In the heat of the Summer your new Board planned the coming year with enthusiasm and bright ideas. It was refreshing to see such passion for our organization and the interest of citizen involvement and awareness. This will be a grand year to participate in activities from voter service to the Birmingham mayoral forum to Observer Corps to topic studies and more. An article on page three of this **Voter** provides more detail on our Planning Meeting.

Under Ann Smith's leadership, the Observer Corps has pushed to the forefront this past year, resulting in an article in **The Birmingham News** about how these volunteers are the eyes and ears of citizens at government meetings. Our observers alert us to issues for comment or advocacy. There are many more meetings that could use observers. If you would like to participate, please call our League phone number 583-5000 or email us at admin@lwvqb.org. We can give you an orientation and get you started right away.

Thanks go to Nancy Ekberg and Betty Warnock for designing and publishing a new Member Brochure. I particularly am attracted to their true statement "The League strengthens and protects Democracy by involvement in civic activity". We can list numerous actions of our local League working at making a difference. Recently, in addition to the Observer Corps discussed above, the Citizens Advisory Board of Birmingham has requested a representative of our League. Yvonne Brakefield is serving and has been selected as Vice Chair of the group's study of the city elections. We have a forum for the candidates for Mayor, and we are partnering with a group of other local non-partisan civic groups.

In June, I had the opportunity to attend the LWV Council meeting in Washington D.C. What a treat to be in a room with so many women and men who are passionate about our democracy and who think with facts before them! The National League is focusing this year's advocacy on campaign finance reform, civil liberties, D.C. voting rights, election administration, ethics and lobbying reform, global climate change, and health care reform. Eleanor Holmes Norton spoke to us on D.C. voting rights with the history, the current status and the wish for citizens of Washington D.C. to be fully represented in Congress. LWV supports this effort. As is often the case, it was the conversation held with others that provided suggestions for us in our own League.

continued on page 2

Birmingham Mayoral Candidates Forum

If you would like to ask a question of the candidates, submit questions for consideration to election-questions@lwvqb.org by August 21st.

When: September 18, 2007

Time: 7:00 p.m. Audience must be seated by 6:30 p.m.

Where: WorkPlay 500 23rd Street South

President's Comments (Continued from page 1)

This year will be an excellent opportunity for us to make a difference in the community through many projects. Each of us must make it an individual priority to join in, participate, and strengthen our democracy.

I am look forward to working with each of you.

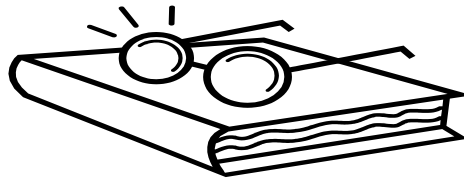
Ginny



On July 28th the LWVGB Board members met for an all day planning meeting: In attendance were Sarah McDonald, Nancy Ekberg, Cissy Bennett, Virginia Randolph, Kaydee Erdreich-Bremen
Not pictured Kathryn Kerchof

Action Alerts

The LWV sends us "**Action Alerts**" to help us respond to issues before Congress. We then forward them on to all the members with email addresses. If you do not wish to be on the receiving end of "Action Alerts", please let us know. Send an email to admin@lwvgb.org and indicate in the email that you would like to be removed from receipt of action alerts. You may sign up with the national League to receive "action alerts" directly. This is available at www.lwv.org.



Committee to review Birmingham's Mayor-Council Act

The Birmingham Citizen's Advisory Board (CAB) has appointed a reform committee of representatives from community organizations to review the Birmingham Mayor-Council Act and make recommendations on how to improve operations of the city government.

Emanuel Ford, President of CAB is credited with the idea of reviewing the Mayor-Council Act. As reported by staff writer Joseph D. Bryant in the July 22nd edition of the *The Birmingham News*, Mr. Ford has become increasingly frustrated with the constant struggle between the Mayor's office and the City Council. "It is obvious this Mayor-Council Act does not work," Ford was quoted as saying. "The document is to serve the people, not the politicians."

Leona Payne, president of the Jones Valley Neighborhood Association, will serve as chairwoman of the CAB reform committee. Other committee members include Mayor Bernard Kincaid; Councilor William Bell; Anne Marie Adams, Jefferson County Circuit Clerk; Reverend Andra Sparks; Margie George, president of the Greater Birmingham Republican Women; Robbie Yarbrough, chairman of the Jefferson County Democratic Party; Jim Williams representing PARCA; Jay Rhodes, an attorney with Baddley and Mauro; and Yvonne Brakefield, member of the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham.

The primary function of the CAB is to serve as a liaison between community neighborhood associations and the City of Birmingham. Additional information about the CAB can be found at <http://www.cpn.org/topics/community/birmingham.html>

August, 2007

LWVGB Board Planning

Thanks to Sarah McDonald, the LWVGB Board met in a delightful setting on a hot day in late July. Despite the heat or maybe inspired by the sizzle the group was on a roll with so many good ideas. Since we had more ideas than people, we felt that we had to prioritize the goals and ideas, but there are plenty for all who want to contribute to our community. The following goal areas will receive the highest priority for action from the local chapter this next year:

- Growth of the Observer Corps
- Voter Service
- Increase the technical proficiency of all members to aid in our activities
- Membership development and leadership
- Public awareness of LWVGB
- Development of the Education Fund

We will also participate in two important studies to reach consensus:

- Immigration (a national study with LWV)
- Initiative/Referendum system for Alabama

We will continue to monitor and provide information or advocacy with the following areas:

- Constitutional Reform
- County Manager form of government
- Health care issues
- Environmental issues

So there are many places to participate. Just let us know (admin@lwwgb.org or 583.5000) where you want to contribute.



Virginia Randolph, President of LWVGB

The Voter

August, 2007



Where Will You Participate?

The League has so many places you may contribute to enhancing our community and making the democratic process work. Select the area or areas where you would like to get involved and send us an email (admin@lwvgb.org) providing your name and area you would like to work with. If you would like to talk (583.5000) with someone, let us know that, and we can explain what is involved. Just like we believe in an informed electorate, we believe in a prepared member. The following are just a few of the opportunities that could use your talents:

Observer Corps

- Jefferson County Commission -- once a month
- Birmingham City Council -- once a month but you may catch it on TV if you live in Birmingham
- Birmingham School Board
- Hoover School Board

Voter Service

- Register People to Vote
- Help at the Registrar's Office the week of election

A Side Note: We are receiving requests for Voter registration in anticipation of both the Birmingham Mayoral election on **October 9** and the upcoming Primary Election scheduled for **February 5**.

Karen Threlkeld registered people to vote on July 14 at Avondale Park for a Young Adult Voting and Community Activism workshop aimed at increasing political awareness and involvement. Due to its success, the group wants to include us again as the workshop is offered in other areas of Birmingham

2007 Mayoral Forum on September 18th

- Timer
- Usher
- Set up and clean up
- Staff the LWVGB table

Studies

- Immigration
- Initiative and Referendum

Public Relations

- Write Press Releases

Ruffner Mountain Hike

LWVGB members had an invigorating hike at Ruffner Mountain on Saturday morning, June 16. We walked the quarry trail and Yvonne Brakefield used her new digital camera to take a number of pictures of native flora. As we got closer to the quarry site, the soil became redder with hematite, Alabama's state mineral and a key ingredient in the making of pig iron. Ruffner has a number of trails with rest benches along the way and some great views of the Birmingham skyline. Consider checking out this nearby urban oasis when you want a hike but don't want to tie up your day in driving to and from your destination. I will explore the possibility of partnering with another League or nonprofit organization with similar environmental goals and would like to hear your ideas. – Leonette Slay



Leonette Slay and Ruth Wright enjoy a hike at Ruffner Mountain



Registered to Vote in Chile? Vote or Face Fine

During a recent vacation trip to northern Chile, I asked my American contact and several Chileans about their rules for voting. According to them, Chileans who register to vote and who are within a certain proximity to their voting place MUST vote in all elections. To be registered and not vote is to be subject to a fine equivalent to 200 dollars. If one is not registered at all, then no fine results.

Our American contact, a missionary who has been in Chile for 10 years, no longer votes in U.S. elections. His explanation was that the Chilean postal system is very problematic (which guidebooks also mention), and he could never get his absentee ballot back in time to meet U.S. deadlines.

Leonette Slay

August, 2007



REPORT OF THE ALABAMA WATER AGENDA – Part 2 Leonette Slay

Earlier this year, the Alabama Rivers Alliance and Southern Environmental Law Center released "*Alabama Water Agenda: Guiding the Way to Healthy Waters*". This is a very readable report which can be downloaded at www.AlabamaWaterAgenda.com.

Last month we discussed Alabama's abundant water resources and challenges faced by the state regarding these resources. This month we will summarize those threats and suggest possible policy initiatives or changes to current policies that will protect all aspects of our water's health.

A. Agency coordination and enhancement: since Alabama has no one agency charged with oversight of health and abundance of our water resources, implementing executive and legislative requirements for inter-agency cooperation is key. The multiple agencies with some authority for water must have clear decision-making processes which require public participation, open dialogue with the public and other agencies, and accountability.

B. Enforcement: Agencies need sufficient authority and funding from the legislature to ensure adequate enforcement and enforcement personnel. In addition, Alabama needs a better way to apply state fines and fees towards water protection and restoration. The public also needs better access to information concerning environmental violations and resulting fines.

C. Funding: Our current state programs that monitor and protect our waters are significantly underfunded. Since most state agencies get their annual budgets through the General Fund, we must talk with our legislators about increasing appropriations to state agencies responsible for our water resources. At the same time, agencies should aggressively apply for appropriate federal matching funds.

D. Instream flow: Alabama needs a watershed protection approach to develop a comprehensive statewide policy concerning instream flow. Such a policy must include the following components: statewide regulation of interbasin transfers, an improved permitting system for water withdrawals, programs to conserve water, a drought management plan, and better flow regimes for new and existing dams. Such a policy will also put Alabama in a better position to negotiate with other states regarding water flow.

E. Stormwater: Since stormwater is the leading cause of poor water quality in Alabama as well as flooding, controlling this threat is vital. Controls include improving permits for stormwater discharges, land use practices that encourage stormwater treatment and reduction, and developing state guidance for local ordinances.

F. Suburban sprawl: Unbridled growth affects waters but also our economy and quality of life. Land use policy, including the principles of sustainable design and development, can result in "smart growth". One way to encourage smart growth is to allow local governments more authority for zoning and development policies. At the same time, watershed-based planning often requires cooperation among multiple governments. One way to promote better planning and development is to provide economic incentives to minimize the negative impacts on Alabama waters from unsustainable development. (This is summarized from *The Alabama Water Agenda*, published by the Alabama Rivers Alliance and Southern Environmental Law Center, Jan 07)

Leonette Slay
Environmental Chair

August, 2007



Solid Waste and mass transit in Seattle

Leonette Slay recently vacationed in Seattle where the city council is considering aggressive solid waste management recommendations known as the Zero Waste Strategy. The intent is to double the rate of recycling and composting in Seattle by 2025. If the city council adopts the proposed changes, plastic foam takeout boxes and cups would be completely banned, shoppers will initially have to pay a penny or more per plastic bag, with the goal of eventually banning all plastic bags in favor of biodegradable ones, and businesses will have to reduce organic and construction waste. In the last 10 years, Seattle has reduced its trash output from 765,000 tons in 1995 to 438,000 tons in 2006.

A side note: Leonette also had the pleasant experience of using Seattle's bus system, which ran every 10-15 minutes on a Sunday, was almost full of passengers, and charged only \$1.25 for nonrush hour, but since she was a visitor, the driver charged her \$.50!



Volunteers Needed! Birmingham Mayoral Candidates Forum

When: September 18, 2007

Time: 7:00 p.m. Audience must be seated by 6:30 p.m.

Where: WorkPlay 500 23rd Street South

Sponsors: League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham, Catalyst, Rotaract, Alabama Black Journalists Association, Sixteenth Baptist Church, WorkPlay and WIAT/CBS 42

What: A forum with questions for the all major candidates for Mayor of Birmingham will be held and also televised on CBS 42.

All candidates who qualify with the City Election Clerk by September 10th will be eligible to participate.

Election: The General Election is October 9 and if a Run-off Election is needed it will be November 6.



Volunteers to help with this forum are needed. If you will be able to help usher, time questions, help with set up or clean up at the end, and/or staff the League table, please let us know by sending an email to admin@lwvqb.org, or calling 583.5000, and leaving a message including your name and telephone number.

August 2007

September & October Chock-Full of Events



Please mark your calendars: September will feature two events for our members, the Birmingham Mayoral Candidates Forum on September 18 at 7:00 and a member meeting at the Cantina at Pepper Place on September 27 at 6:00. The member meeting at the Cantina has been a popular event and so we are continuing it. The Cantina meeting has been our traditional member-bring-a-friend/future member. Plan to round up several friends for an evening of socializing with others who care about the community.

In October we will begin our first study, Immigration. Sarah McDonald will lead us in a study begun by the National League but with some local information added. You may get a head start on the information by going to www.lwv.org and selecting Immigration Study. Download the information. There is a fair amount of excellent papers to read. You will want to read the Immigration 101 the Basics and then the Background Papers. As always our studies result in lively discussion and are an opportunity to engage in dialogue with other intelligent people focusing on the facts of the issue.

Membership Profile: Kaydee Erdreich-Bremen

Kaydee Erdreich-Bremen was born and raised in Birmingham. A graduate of Shades Valley High School and Mary Washington College, Kaydee has had a varied career in government service. Her life has taken her to Virginia, Georgia and California. She has one daughter, and she decided years ago to make Birmingham her home. She has held positions with the Small Business Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, Head Start, and Health and Human Services. Her experience as a tax auditor at the IRS at the age of 23 showed her early in her career the importance of understanding the "details of government". She has had a life-long interest in politics and government. She is particularly interested in the "systems of government". She was drawn to join the League over 25 years ago because of studies the League had conducted. She had discovered on the job that thorough and sometimes tedious study of a process is the only way that one gains insight into the workings of government. It is no surprise to anyone that Kaydee is a big fan of the League's Observer Corps. She presently observes the transit advisory committee. When Kaydee is not studying the intricacies of government, she loves to vacation in Maine. In addition, she is an avid swimmer, and she helps with the swim team at the Lakeshore Foundation. She also sits on the board of the Birmingham Historical Society and is a member of Temple Emanu-El. If you would like to join Kaydee in the Observer Corps she would love to talk to you. You may contact her at admin@lwvgb.org.



Kaydee Erdreich-Bremen



Your Membership Dues

Dear Members,

It is that time of year again! Your dues are due for your League Membership. You will receive a letter from us that will include our elected officials' information called *Your Government at Your Fingertips*, as well as a new member brochure for you to give to a friend. The mailing will also include a self-addressed envelope, which we hope you will use to send in your dues. As you may know, when you join the Greater Birmingham League, you are automatically a member of the Alabama State League and the National League.

We need your continued membership and support to work for:

- A commission manager form of government in Jefferson County
- Adequate funding for childhood education including education before 1st grade.
- Adequate funding for our justice system including community based alternatives to incarceration, family court and juvenile justice system
- Safeguards for our waterways and the environment.
- An equitable tax system
- Campaign finance reform, including restrictions on lobbying, more transparency in funding and an end to PAC to PAC transfers
- A constitutional convention to Alabama to allow the citizens to write a new constitution

Thank you!
Nancy Ekberg, Membership Chair

League Language

(Taken from the LWV [New Member Book](#))

Consensus: The process for reaching member agreement on selected issues that members have studied. Can also refer to the agreement itself.

Local Item: A topic concerning local government, chosen by members for study and action.

Nonpartisan: Describes the League's policy of neither supporting nor opposing political parties or candidates.

Voter Service: The highly visible year-round service of registering voters and giving factual information to voters on candidates and issues.



LWVGB Upcoming Events

Month	Day	Time	Event
September	4	6:00 – 7:00	Board Meeting at Samford Univ, Chapman Burns Hall
September	18	6:30 – 8:00	Birmingham Mayoral Forum at WorkPlay
September	27	6:00 – 7:30	Membership Meeting at Cantina Martin Biscuit Building
October	2	6:00 – 7:00	Board Meeting at Samford Univ, Chapman Burns Hall
October	25	7:00 – 8:30	Member Meeting – Immigration Study – Homewood Library 101

LWVGB
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