

The VOTER

August 2012 Edition



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®
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League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham
<http://www.lwvgb.org>

Birmingham City Schools – The Struggle Continues

By Trish Crain

Special points of interest:

- Next League Membership Meeting in Birmingham will be held in September. Stay tuned for more information.
- Homewood Candidate Forum cosponsored by LWVGB and the Homewood Primetime Organization, Aug. 7, 6:30 p.m. Homewood Senior Center 816 Oak Grove Rd. Homewood, AL 35209
- ACCR Luncheon Meeting & Update on August 11 at 11am at Samford University in the Moot Court Room.

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The Tuesday, July 24, Birmingham Board of Education meeting proceedings were under the control of State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice for the first time. Six of the nine Birmingham board members were in attendance; three were unable to attend due to work commitments. The meeting was held at the Central Office at noon rather than the standard 3:30 p.m. meeting time at Bice's directive. Work sessions will now be held on the second Tuesday of the month at 5:30 p.m. at the Central Office. Community Voice, where community members are given the opportunity to address the board, will be held during the work sessions only. Regular meetings will be held on the fourth Tuesday of each month. Members of the board expressed their desire to move the meeting time from noon to a time later in the day to allow more community members to attend. Bice said he would consider that request.

During the meeting, Bice asserted his authority on two separate items: (1) the financial plan designed to help build Birmingham City Schools' reserves to \$17 million, or one-month's operating expenses, and (2) the personnel actions that resulted from the imple-

mentation of the plan. Each time, the board voted 2-2-2, with 2 "yea's", 2 "nays", and 2 abstentions. These items would have failed to pass had Bice not overturned the votes to implement the plans.

Bice stated that Birmingham City Schools will open on August 20th for the 2012-2013 school year. He praised the principals in the schools for their ability to open school on time given the state of flux in which the system has been operating since the Alabama State Department of Education began investigating board governance, and academic and fiscal concerns last April.

Birmingham City Schools' enrollment was 24,721 during the 2011-2012 school year. The Birmingham board passed a \$250+ million operating budget for fiscal year 2012 (October 1, 2011, to September 30, 2012). There are 51 schools in operation: seven high schools, 11 middle schools, nine K-8 schools, 23 elementary schools, and one alternative school for grades 6 – 12. The Birmingham Board of Education is an elected board comprised of nine members, elected by district along the same lines that are in effect for the Birmingham City Council. The

next board elections will be in 2013.

A city's school system greatly contributes to the health of a community. Please stay attuned to what is happening in our greater Birmingham area's largest city school system. The courts are now involved, and the situation is very fluid. As of this writing, the Birmingham Board of Education is subject to two restraining orders: one states the board cannot interfere with the state intervention, the other states the board cannot fire Birmingham superintendent Dr. Craig Witherspoon. The Alabama State Department of Education formally took control of Birmingham City Schools on June 27, after the Birmingham board failed to pass a required cost-cutting plan at their June 26 meeting.



BIRMINGHAM
CITY SCHOOLS

We have a responsibility in our time, as others have had in theirs, not to be prisoners of history, but to shape history.
~ Madeleine K. Albright

Watch the PBS premiere of "The Barber of Birmingham" on Thursday August 9, 2012 at 10:00pm. This documentary follows barber and civil rights veteran James Armstrong as he witnesses the fulfillment of an unimaginable dream: the election of the first African-American president.
Read more at <http://barberofbirmingham.com/about/about-the-film/>

Historic First Constitutional Reform Meeting by Nancy Ekberg

For the first time, the new Constitutional Revision Commission is bringing its message of reform to the public. Come and learn what they have done and plan to do.

When: Saturday, August 11th from 1:00 to 4:00

Where: Samford University in Birmingham. Moot Court Room in the Cumberland School of Law in Robinson Hall map: http://www.samford.edu/uploadedFiles/home_content/BW_Campus_Map_Alphabetical.pdf

Why: To share, inform and get feedback from the public on reforms for Alabama's 1901 Constitution.

Event is sponsored by ACCR and the Cumberland School of Law.



Speakers include:

Wayne Flynt, historian, author, professor at Auburn University and editor of the online Alabama Encyclopedia

John Carroll, professor, former federal judge and Dean of the Cumberland School of Law

Albert Brewer, professor, former Governor, President of PARCA and Chair of the Constitutional Revision Commission.

Bob McCurley, newly retired Executive Director of the Alabama Law Institute who is Coordinator of the Commission

Patricia Todd, Representative, Alabama House and member of the sub committee revising Article IV of the

Constitution dealing with local laws

Craig Baab, Senior Fellow at Appleseed

No need to register...just come. Free and open to the public. We need your input.

Fall Election Activities & Voters Service

There are ten statewide constitutional amendments. LWVAL board members will draft language for the Vote 411 web site which explains in plain English what happens if the proposed amendment passes or doesn't pass. Although LWVAL will be advocating for several amendments, language on the Vote 411 web site will be neutral and factual. Discussion of "get out the vote" activities included media outreach, social media and letters to the editor by local leagues.

The board decided not to participate as state coordinator in National Voter Registration Day September 26 but to encourage local Leagues push registration and education about the current requirements for voting throughout the fall up until the deadline.

Candidate questionnaires for Vote 411 will be sent again, including Chief Justice and Public Service Commission races.

LWVAL will continue to work with Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program to check local polling places for compliance with accessibility requirements. Six members assessed polling places for the last election.



www.lwv.org www.vote411.org

An Amazing Woman You've Probably Never Heard Of

It's a long way from Cambridge, MA to Kandahar, Afghanistan. But for reporter-turned-activist Sarah Chayes, it turned out to be the right journey.

Shortly after 9/11, Harvard-educated Chayes was working as a Paris-based correspondent for National Public Radio. In light of world events at the time, she agreed to a short stint in Afghanistan.

Chayes was so moved by the Afghani people and their struggles that she ended up staying and became committed to helping rebuild Afghanistan. She accepted an invitation from the Afghanistan government to help run "Afghans for Civil Society", an aid organization created to rebuild what had been destroyed during the years of Taliban rule.

In 2005, continuing her commitment to rebuilding the Afghan economy, Chayes cre-

ated a foundation called "Arghand", a cooperative that promotes the use of local crops, such as pomegranates, to produce highly sought-after natural soap and beauty products, in an effort to replace the country's dependency on opium poppies as a cash crop.



Read an article penned by LWV President Elisabeth MacNamara about Voter Protection at <http://lwv.org/blog/connecting-dots-voter-photo-id>

Interfaith Environmental Initiative of Alabama 2012 Forum

"Efficiency and Conservation - What Works", is scheduled for October 10, 2012, at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

LWVAL has been a supporter in the past, and will again support this important event.

All are welcome to attend - cost is \$30 which includes lunch.





League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham

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League of Women Voters Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Making Democracy Work!

League of Women Voters Education Fund Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters Education Fund works to encourage the active and informed participation of citizens in government and to increase understanding of major public policy issues.



Don't forget to vote!
Municipal Elections are scheduled for August 28, 2012.

Birmingham Comprehensive Plan by Joyce Lanning

Although the LWVGB is a Greater Birmingham organization, the central city impacts the whole area. The Birmingham comprehensive plan, which is currently under development, will set out a 20-year policy and strategic framework for the City of Birmingham.

"Guided by an overall vision that embodies the unique personality, culture, and heritage of our community, the planning process will establish a set of goals, policies, strategies, and implementation actions to achieve the plan's vision for Birmingham's future. This will be the city's first full comprehensive plan since 1961."

LWVGB members can take the opportunity to learn from and add to the planning process now underway. We can monitor the process and the product

and determine where there is a fit between the plan and our program. Joyce Lanning attended a review of chapters 4, 5 and 6 on Green Systems and encourages all citizens of the Greater Birmingham area to evaluate and support the plan components most important to you.

The **Resources** page includes an excellent City of Birmingham Data Book. Chapters are grouped in the sections below, and drafts are currently being reviewed by participants from previous planning sessions. An overview of the plan vision and principles, endorsed May 22, 2012 by the City Council, can be found at http://www.birminghamcomprehensiveplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/111108_BirminghamVisionPoster-DRAFT-

[LO.pdf](#) .



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