



February 2007

## The Voter

### League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham

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### A Different Option for County Government

At the LWVGB January meeting, Shelby County Commissioner Ted Crockett and Shelby County Manager Alex Dudchock discussed the governing organization that helps manage the fastest growing county in Alabama.

The nine Shelby County Commissioners serve as a board of directors to set policy, oversee county finances and make appointments. Reporting to the Commission are the County Attorney, County Engineer and the County Manager, who functions as the county's chief executive officer.

The position of County Manager was made possible when the Alabama State Legislature approved a measure allowing Shelby County limited home rule. Alex Dudchock, who was already employed as the county's personnel director, assumed the position in 1993. Since instituting this form of management, Shelby County has paid off its debts and eliminated the one-cent sales tax used to finance the repayment.

With an estimated 171,465 residents in 2005, Shelby County has approximately 26% of the population of Jefferson County; however, for the five year period from 2000 to 2005, the Shelby County population growth rate was 20% higher than Jefferson County. (Jefferson County census estimates showed a population decline of -0.7% for that period.)

The LWVGB has supported instituting a county manager form of government in Jefferson County since 1985. Before the November 2005 election, the three Republicans on the Commission (Bettye Fine Collins, Jim Carns and Bobby Humphryes) supported changing to a county manager form of government in their campaigns. *The Birmingham News* has published numerous articles, both from citizens and *News* editorial staff, calling for a county manager. In his column of January 28 headlined "Big changes must begin with power," local news reporter John Archibald wrote about the LWVGB meeting on this topic.

It is important for us to make clear to our elected officials that we expect action to bring about the organizational change necessary to hire a county manager for Jefferson County. Inside this issue of *The Voter*, you will find an open letter to our Jefferson County Commissioners. To make our collective voice heard, we ask that each League member living in Jefferson County contact the County Commissioner for your district and Bettye Fine Collins, as Commission President, about this issue. Contact information for each commissioner is included in this issue. We can all stand together to make a difference for Jefferson County!

### February Membership Meeting

Thursday, February 22  
Homewood Library  
6:00 pm  
Global Climate Change  
Joyce Lanning, PhD

## ***An Open Letter to the Jefferson County Commission***

February 21, 2007

Dear Commissioners Collins, Langford, Smoot, Carns and Humphries:

The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham has supported instituting a county manager form of government for Jefferson County since 1985. We were encouraged when Commissioners Collins, Carns and Humphries made hiring a county manager part of their campaigns for the November 2006 elections.

Last spring Commissioner Carns, while serving in the state legislature, sponsored a bill that would require Jefferson County to hire a county manager. He told *The Birmingham News* in January 2006, "I represent Jefferson and Shelby County as a state legislator. I watch both county commissions work. I see the benefits of the Shelby County manager versus the lack of those benefits for Jefferson County." We understand that Commissioner Carns is supporting a similar bill in this legislative session.

We agree with Commissioner Carns' assessment. Since hiring a county manager to oversee routine county functions, Shelby County has paid off debt and made major infrastructure improvements without borrowing. This month the Shelby County Commission approved comprehensive measures to govern its growth. Conversely, Jefferson County's debt load balloons, developers exert undue influence over zoning decisions and our county operations are under scrutiny of federal investigations into bribery and corruption. We believe the county manager form of government is a better way of protecting the people's interest.

We thank you for your service to Jefferson County and seek your input on how we can assist in bringing about this change to our county government structure. We look forward to working with you to benefit this great county and its citizens.

Sincerely,  
Yvonne Brakefield  
President, LWVGB

### ***Contact Your Jefferson County Commissioner***

The open letter from Yvonne Brakefield, LWVGB president will be sent to each Jefferson County Commissioner. If you are a resident of Jefferson County, please support this effort by contacting Bettye Fine Collins, Commission President, and the representative for your district, if different. Note that you are contacting them *as a voting constituent* (not as a member of LWVGB) and want to inform them of your *personal* desire to improve our county government by hiring a county manager. "Talking points" are included in "A Different Option for County Government" and "An Open Letter to the Jefferson County Commission" in this newsletter. A map of commission districts is available at [www.jeffcointouch.com](http://www.jeffcointouch.com).

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b><i>Jefferson County Commission</i></b><br>Jefferson County Courthouse<br>716 Richard Arrington Jr. Blvd. North<br>Birmingham, AL 35203                                       | <b><i>Jim Carns</i></b><br>Commissioner of Environmental Services<br>325-5503<br><a href="mailto:carnsj@jccal.org">carnsj@jccal.org</a>                |
| <b><i>Bettye Fine Collins</i></b> , President<br>Commissioner of Finance and General Services<br>325-5070<br><a href="mailto:collinsbfine@jccal.org">collinsbfine@jccal.org</a> | <b><i>Larry Langford</i></b><br>Commissioner of Health and Human Services<br>325-05504<br><a href="mailto:langfordl@jccal.org">langfordl@jccal.org</a> |
| <b><i>Bobby Humphries</i></b><br>Commissioner of Roads and Transportation<br>325-5555<br><a href="mailto:humphriesb@jccal.org">humphriesb@jccal.org</a>                         | <b><i>Shelia Smoot</i></b><br>Commissioner of Information Technology<br>325-5074<br><a href="mailto:smoots@jccal.org">smoots@jccal.org</a>             |

**LWVGB PROGRAM  
RECOMMENDATIONS FORM  
2007**

**STUDIES**

**If you would like to propose an item for study by LWVGB, please describe the item and the scope of the study you recommend.**

**Proposed New Study Item:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Scope of the recommended Study:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Ongoing Study of Healthcare for the Uninsured and Underinsured in Jefferson County:**

This study focuses on true access, especially as it applies to preventive care and follow-up for chronic situations. Acute care may be considered at a future date.

**EXISTING SUPPORT POSITIONS**

1. Check **Keep** if the position statement should be readopted as written.
2. Check **Drop** if the position should be removed from the state's program because it is no longer useful. Please explain briefly.
3. Check **Update** if the basic position remains current and useful for advocacy or action, but modifications are needed. Please explain briefly the changes you recommend.
4. Check **Restudy** if the conditions, assumptions and facts in the existing position make it no longer usable and the issues need to be examined. Use *Additional Comments* to clarify what you recommend.

**I. Government:** Use the choices: **Keep** \_\_\_\_ **Drop** \_\_\_\_ **Update** \_\_\_\_ **Re-study** \_\_\_\_ for **each position below.**

- A. Urban Government
- B. Jefferson County Government

**Comment:**

**II. Transportation:** Keep \_\_\_\_ Drop \_\_\_\_ Update \_\_\_\_ Re-study \_\_\_\_

**Comment:**

**III. Education:** Keep \_\_\_\_ Drop \_\_\_\_ Update \_\_\_\_ Re-study \_\_\_\_

**Comment:**

**IV. Administration of Justice:** Keep \_\_\_\_ Drop \_\_\_\_ Update \_\_\_\_ Re-study \_\_\_\_

**Comment:**

**V. Natural Resources: Use the choices: Keep \_\_\_\_\_ Drop \_\_\_\_\_ Update \_\_\_\_\_ Re-study \_\_\_\_\_ for each position below.**

- A. Air Quality
- B. Water Quality
- C. Surface Mining
- D. Parks and Recreation
- E. Hazardous Materials (excluding nuclear)
- F. Nuclear Materials

**Comment:**

**ITEMS FOR EMPHASIS:** (These are existing items for emphasis. The items below can be modified, dropped or kept. New items for emphasis may be added.) **Indicate Modify, Drop or Keep.**

**1. Member education on the position supporting a county manager form of government for Jefferson County** - a member education on the effect of the current operation of Jefferson County Government on accountable, efficient, cost effective and responsive government. Members should be informed through Voter articles and a general meeting. Estimate of people needed: a board chair and a County Commission observer.

Modify: (Recommendation) \_\_\_\_\_

Drop: (Why) \_\_\_\_\_

Keep: (Your thoughts) \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Informational updates on transportation and national resources** issues in the metro area; review of League transportation and national resources positions to determine if they cover the issues; and, identification of opportunities for action.

Modify: (Recommendation) \_\_\_\_\_

Drop: (Why) \_\_\_\_\_

Keep: (Your thoughts) \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_



Dr. Joyce Lanning

**February Meeting  
Global Climate Change  
Thursday, February 22, 6:00 PM  
Homewood Library**

Global climate change, a topic of much discussion, and some controversy, will be the subject of the LWVGB monthly meeting on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Joyce Lanning, Ph.D., will discuss the conditions of global climate change and suggest ways individuals, businesses, schools, and other organizations can be a part of the solution to the growing crisis of global warming. Dr. Lanning is a retired Professor of Public Health at UAB, where she taught in the Masters Program in Health Care Organization and Policy. We encourage you to attend this timely meeting and to bring a friend or colleague.

**Public Transportation**

"*Transportation Means Business*," a statewide conference on the need for public transportation is scheduled for April 18<sup>th</sup> in Montgomery. The event will be held from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., in the capitol city's Embassy Suites Hotel. Featured speakers will include Norman Mineta, former National Secretary of Transportation and Governor Bob Riley. The conference is sponsored by the Alabama Road Builders Association, Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce and others. More information will follow, but check out [www.transportationmeansbusiness.org](http://www.transportationmeansbusiness.org).

Nancy Ekberg is representing our League in the planning committee which includes more than thirty organizations and governmental units. Montgomery's "Envision 2020" is coordinating the event. The Jefferson County Commission and The Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce are sponsors.

**Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, Birmingham Region  
Membership Meeting  
Wednesday, February 28, 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM  
Alagasco Midtown Center, 20 South 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Birmingham**

The meeting agenda includes a review of ACCR's accomplishments and plans for the upcoming state legislative session. Participants will have opportunities to exchange ideas and talk with legislators. Lunch provided for \$5. Contact Nancy Ekberg at [nanekberg@aol.com](mailto:nanekberg@aol.com) or call 205 967-2897 if you plan to attend.

**LWVGB Program Recommendations**

The local League board is preparing its recommendations to the Annual Business Meeting that will take place April 19<sup>th</sup>. One area of preparation is recommendations we will make on the LWVGB program. The LWVGB program includes the existing positions taken on issues after study and member consensus, study (existing or new study) and issues for emphasis. We invite you to advise the board of your program recommendations by completing the attached form (insert page) which describes the current LWVGB program, including a list of the titles of existing program positions.

Contact Yvonne Brakefield on 205-516-8235 if you need the most recent copy of the LWVGB program positions or view online at [www.lwvgb.org/about.html#positions](http://www.lwvgb.org/about.html#positions).

Your input is requested by February 28<sup>th</sup>. Please send your program recommendations form to Yvonne Brakefield, 3451 Cliff Rd., Birmingham, AL 35205.

Thank you!

LWVGB Program Study Committee  
Becky Sylvester  
Kate Long  
Yvonne Brakefield

| <b>LWVGB Calendar of Events</b>         |   |                    |
|---|---|--------------------|
| Thursday,<br>February 22 <sup>nd</sup>  | <b>LWVGB Membership Meeting</b><br>"An Inconvenient Truth"<br>Dr. Joyce Lanning, PhD.<br>Homewood Library<br>1721 Oxmoor Road<br>Room 101               | 6:00 PM            |
| Wednesday,<br>February 28 <sup>th</sup> | <b>ACCR Birmingham Region Membership Meeting</b><br>Alagasco Midtown Center<br>20 South 20 <sup>th</sup> Street   | 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM |
| Wednesday,<br>March 7 <sup>th</sup>     | <b>LWVGB Board of Directors Meeting</b><br>Auxiliary Room, Chapman Burns Hall<br>Samford University   | 6:00 PM            |
| Thursday,<br>March 29 <sup>th</sup>     | <b>LWVGB Membership Meeting</b><br>"It's a Thick Book"<br>Homewood Library<br>1721 Oxmoor Road<br>Room 116  | 6:00 PM            |
| Wednesday,<br>April 18 <sup>th</sup>    | <b>Public Transportation Statewide Conference</b><br>"Transportation Means Business"<br>Embassy Suites Hotel<br>300 Tallapoosa Street<br>Montgomery, AL | 7:30 AM – 3:00 PM  |
| Thursday,<br>April 19 <sup>th</sup>     | <b>LWVGB 2007 Annual Business Meeting</b><br>Nabeel's Imported Foods<br>1706 Oxmoor Road<br>Dessert Room  | 6:00 PM            |

**LWVGB**  
3451 Cliff Road South  
Birmingham, AL 35205

