



February, 2008

Board of Directors
League of Women Voters of
Greater Birmingham
205 583-5000
admin@lwvgb.org

Virginia Randolph, President

Nancy Ekberg, 1st Vice President

Cissy Bennett, Secretary

Sarah McDonald, Treasurer

Kaydee Erdreich-Breman,
Transit

Paulette Rowe,
Health

Beverly Nelson,
Observer Corps Jefferson County

Leonette Slay,
Environment

Kathryn Kerchof, *Editor*
The Voter

Betty Warnock,
Nominating Chair

Yvonne Brakefield,
Nominating Committee

Jean Johnson,
Off-Board Technical Director

Ann Smith,
Off-Board Observer Corps Water
Works

Karen Threlkeld
Off-Board Voters Service

Get Ready for Lots of Action! -- A Note from the President

The holiday season passed and the Greater Birmingham League was back in action with

- **interviews** of our local Alabama delegation to the State Legislature,
- **assisting** at the Jefferson County Registrar's Office,
- **observing** at the various government meetings,
- **submitting** our Immigration Study Response and a letter to the LWVUS. The Board felt there were some issues left open by the study.
- **beginning** the LWVAL Initiative and Referendum Study at the first of two meetings. The second meeting will be February 28th and you will want to be there. The January meeting was excellent. Nancy Ekberg and Amanda McGriff provided an interesting and informative session. They obviously had spent some time on the topic.
- **reviewing** the national Program and submitting a report to the Board from Ann Smith and Becky Sylvester. The Board accepted their report for no changes in the LWV Program. We will post their recommendation on our website as the report is concise but informative.
- **providing** web based blogs for our issues. During the Program Planning process Jean Johnson posted the information from Ann and Becky on the LWVGB Dialogue web site. While we have not had too many responses yet on this web site, it certainly has potential for each member to provide thoughts and questions. Information on Initiative is also posted now. We will be posting information on our LWVGB Program and need your input here. Please be sure to see the article from Jean Johnson on how to use the web site so that you will feel comfortable in participating. We welcome your thoughts on any of our projects. It is YOUR League.

The Board discussed some issues that came up with the February 5th Primary election and decided that we will suggest some study issues to LWVAL. Issues that were of concern were half-day options for poll workers, enforcement of the requirements of the autoscan and ramps at each poll location for people with assistance needs, education of poll workers and citizens for understanding ballots and rights.

Put **May 3** on your calendar. The LWVAL Council meeting will be in Birmingham and we hope you will want to participate.

Ginny

Welcome New Members

Fred Habeeb of Mountain Brook, **Wanda Godfrey** of Birmingham and **Carol Lewis** of Hueytown, who is a returning member! We look forward to seeing you at upcoming meetings.



The Voter



Legislative Interviews

The LWVGB members interviewed members of the local Alabama Legislature about issues the legislator thought would be important, bills they were going to introduce and the stance each would take related to Constitutional Reform, PAC to PAC transfer and judicial selection. These were opportunities for the League to meet with the legislators. Some feedback included admiration for the League's study and report submitted a year ago on the operations of the Legislature. Thanks to LWVGB members Cissy Bennett,, Karen Threlkeld, Sarah McDonald, Kathryn Kerchof, Leonette Slay, Audrey Salgado, Judith Deegan and Virginia Randolph who interviewed one or more legislators. Also the Junior League of Birmingham assisted and thanks go to Sissy Hembree and Deidra Perry.



Give a Piece of Your Mind... Dialogue!

Have you spoken with your fellow League members recently? You can “speak” with all who are online if you’d like. That’s about 80% of the Birmingham League and a high percentage of the state League as well. Visit the local and state web logs (blogs), LWVGB Dialogue and LWVAL Dialogue, respectively, and add your comments to the ongoing League conversations. Current topics include Initiative and Referendum, LWVGB Program Review, and LWVUS Program Review. Coming soon – AL Legislation. What would you like to add?

To access a League blog, go to:

www.lwvgb.org/lwvgbdialogue/ (for the LWVGB Dialogue) or

www.lwval.org/wordpress/ (for the LWVAL Dialogue)

Your username is your first name initial + last name, all in lower case. For example, Jane Doe’s username is jdoe. If you do not know your password, simply click on “Lost your password?” and you can request that a password be emailed to you. (When in the Dialogue, you can change your password to make it more memorable.) Or, contact Jean Johnson (870-3063 or jjohnson@lwvgb.org) to set you up with the password of your choice and get you on super fast!

So, come join in the conversation! The League Boards need your grassroots input in order to best represent you. And what better way to give a piece of your mind to all your fellow Leaguers? Let’s Dialogue!

Jean Johnson -- LWVGB Technical Director



News from Natural Resources Committee....

Major court ruling impacts AL water supply

On February 4, the Federal Appeals Court for the District of Columbia overturned a lower court decision, and threw out a 2003 agreement that Georgia reached with the Army Corps of Engineers for water rights to a major federal reservoir (Lake Lanier). Judge Judith Rogers ruled that the agreement violated the Water Supply Act. **GOV Bob Riley** called the ruling "**the most consequential legal ruling in the 18 year history of the water war**" with Georgia and one of the most important in the history of Alabama. Georgia requires more water to serve the increasingly urban Atlanta area, and officials within the governor's office are considering an appeal to the Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals, in its reversal of the US District Court, noted that the diversion of about 22% of the reservoir's water to the Atlanta area, as proposed by the agreement, would directly impact Alabama and Florida, which are downstream from Georgia.



Spring Hike in Tannehill

Mark March 15 on your calendars and join your League colleagues for a spring walk in Tannehill State Park. We have also extended an invitation to members of the Tuscaloosa LWV to join us. The trail is easy, generally level, and has benches placed throughout the walking area. After our morning hike, you may want to continue a discussion over coffee or lunch at the Tannehill restaurant or look at historical exhibits of Alabama's past. The March Voter will contain our meeting time, location, and directions to Tannehill State Park. See you there!

Leonette Slay, Natural Resources Chair



Help Us Hit the Bulls Eye at the AL Legislature

The LWVAL Advocacy Team is trying to target their advocacy efforts at the AL Legislature this year. Please help by letting them know who your legislators are. You can do this by submitting this brief online Member Survey Form at: www.lwval.org/LWVALAction/LWVALadvocacy-survey/

It takes just a few words and a click. This can greatly help the Birmingham League in targeting its advocacy efforts for local legislation, too. Thank you for your help.

February 2008

All you need to know about Alabama Constitutional Reform is available at www.constitutionalreform.org

Did You Know???

Did you know that two bills are now in the Legislature calling for a constitutional convention for Alabama?

One is **HB 308** sponsored by Speaker Pro Tem Demetrius Newton and 15 of his colleagues from both sides of the aisle. The other is **SB 243** sponsored by Senator Ted Little and 18 of his colleagues from both sides of the aisle. This is historic because it is the largest number of co-sponsors this movement has ever seen, and it is a real non-partisan effort at reform.

If the legislators pass these bills this Legislative Session, voters will vote to approve or reject the bill in June of 2010, the same time as the Alabama Gubernatorial Primary Election. Then if the voters pass the bill, the delegates will be elected in the following November at the Gubernatorial Election. This means there will be more than two years to get the message out to the public that a new constitution will be in their best interests.

As Leaguers, our job right now is to contact our representatives and senators and ask them to vote in favor of SB 243 and HB 308.

Nancy Ekberg



Documentary Being Made on Voting

The LWVGB has been approached by **Melanie Jeffcoat**, who with her husband is making a movie regarding voting, focused on the Birmingham area. Melanie grew up as the daughter of a California League member. She and her husband are filmmakers, and when they reached Birmingham, they saw the need for a film recognizing the importance of citizen voting. They hope to have the non-partisan film ready for distribution in early September, so it highlights the importance for voting in the November election.

Melanie is looking for any descendants of **Pattie Ruffner Jacobs** or **Hattie Hooker Wilkins**, or other suffragettes from Alabama. If you know any, please give the League a call (583.5000).

Voters Service

Virginia Randolph made a presentation on **Preparing to Vote** for the Eastwood Civitan group on January 11th. This active group was interested in being prepared to vote, and taking an active role in encouraging members to vote.

Judith Hand, Jean Johnson, Kaydee Erdreich-Breman, Heather Forson, Cissy Bennett and Sarah McDonald were among the members who helped at the Jefferson County Registrar's Office prior to the Primary Election. Additionally the Junior League also helped and representing the Jr. League were Kimberly Yearout, Jackie Wuska, Tanisha Marshall and June Clark.

Nell Hunter, the Registrar for Jefferson County indicated that the number of new people to register was much higher than usual. After the election she indicated that Jefferson County had a 44-48% voting turnout which was outstanding.



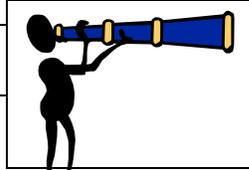
Legislative Update

Several pieces of legislation related to elections, ethics and constitutional issues are being introduced in the 2008 session of the Alabama House and Senate. These are the first tier of issues identified by the LWVAL for legislative issues. The **Birmingham News** reported on February 8 that bills that passed the House include:

- Ban on PAC to PAC transfer,
- Ban pass-through pork and the spending of state funds by an agency at the direction of a legislator,
- Requirement that all legislators receive ethics training

Since these are LWVAL priority this year, we will be contacting members for any action needed. Additionally a bill of interest, especially to LWVGB has passed the House. This is the bill aimed at improving transportation and establishing a five-member commission to manage the Department of Transportation. All the passed bills will go to the Senate.

To follow bills introduced in the legislature of importance to state League issues, read the LWVAL Legislative Report at www.lwval.org/LWVALAction/ALIssues.html. Or to check on any state legislation, visit ALISON at: alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/acas/Alisondefault.html You may search for bills by number, general topic or committee or by the author introducing the bill. There are many bills introduced. We are also going to follow some of local interest such as the Steel Coils bill and hopefully a bill to allow Jefferson County to have a County Manager.



Birmingham Water Works Observer Corps Report

HB113 has been introduced by Representative D. Newton, which allows any Class 1 municipality (Birmingham) to collect the sewer bills for any sewer system owned by the county in which the municipality is located. If passed, it would allow sewer bills to be collected under the same terms as the water account. Most significantly, it allows for the discontinuation of water service for failure of the customer to pay a sewer bill.

The Riverview sewer system, which serves about 12,000 residents, has been sold for \$22.5 million to a Los Angeles-based company. According to BWWB chairman Anthony Barnes, the plant has been "losing money for years". Upgrading to meet governmental regulations has been expensive and would have cost \$30 million more if the facility had not been sold. Sale of the Moody Sewer Plant should be completed in about a month.

A meeting with water board officials and members of the nursery industry was scheduled for Jan. 31, to discuss continued conservation efforts. Hotels and restaurants have also been contacted to ask for their help in reducing water usage.

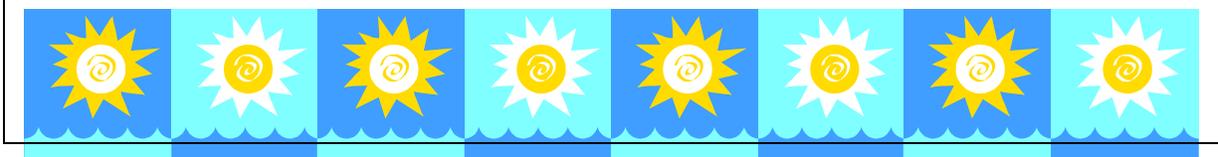
Bids are being taken for a 5.3 mile section of the Carson Loop Pipeline Project. This is phase 6 of the project which, when complete, will deliver up to 8 million gallons of water per day, through a 36-inch pipeline 15 miles long, from the Carson Filter Plant in northeastern Jefferson County to customers served by the Shades Mountain Filter Plant in the heavily-populated southern portion of the system. Between 2000 and 2007, phases 1 through 5 have been completed at a cost of \$23.7 million. Phase 6, beginning this year, will cost an additional \$10.2 million.

There will be a vacancy on the Birmingham Water Works Board in November 2008.

Ann Smith, BWWB Observer

The Voter

February 2008



Open Meetings Law and Sunshine on Government

LWVGB will have **Open Meetings** as the topic for our **March 27th** meeting which falls just after the **March 16-22 Sunshine Week**. The LWV is part of a national initiative that calls attention to the threats to “sunshine” or transparency in government information and decisions. The LWV stance is that we have the right to know what our government is doing, and our having access to public records and government meetings is vital to our democracy. We may want to track potential environmental hazards, or to attend a meeting where decisions about land use are being made. The existence of “sunshine laws” which are also referred to as open meeting laws, afford us access and create government transparency.

These laws are only as good as we, the people, demand that they be. Finding information about how the government is serving the public has always been somewhat difficult. But in the post-9/11 age, these challenges are even greater. In the name of homeland security, “sunshine laws” and the opportunities for citizens to gain access to information have been constricted. As our elected Representatives in Washington work to bring about greater transparency through ethics, lobbying, and other reforms, so must we understand and participate in the upholding these laws. With that in mind we will have a meeting March 27th at 6:30 pm at the Homewood Library. Our speaker will be **Felicia Mason**, executive direction of the Alabama Press Association. The APA was instrumental in getting the Open Meetings Law passed during the 2005 Alabama Legislative Session and received the Jane Katz award from LWVAL for their work. Felicia was in the forefront of that effort.

Make sure to mark your calendars for this important and informative meeting.

Virginia Randolph

Lively Initiative Study

The January meeting on allowing Alabama to enact legislation that would circumvent its elected officials through the Initiative process, was divided. The division came during arguments in favor of Initiative and arguments against it. In this country, 24 states have voted to allow the Initiative process and the rules each state enacted through their enabling legislation, vary like night from day. In addition, six of our colleagues' Leagues have weighed in on how they feel about their state's process. On the one hand, the process can allow citizens to enact laws their legislators refuse to touch and thus practice true direct democracy. On the other hand, moneyed interests can try to buy legislation through paid petition gatherers and unintended consequences can occur. One great quotation states that "an entire state's laws can be changed by the visionary or the vindictive."

The February meeting will bring all the arguments to a head as we ask you, the members, to reach consensus on 28 critical questions about this issue. It should be very lively.

Join us on **February 28th** at the Homewood Library in room 116 at 6:30 p.m. All background information is available on the LWVAL web site at www.lwval.org/leagdemoc/ir_study_packet/

Nancy Ekberg

Immigration Study Completed

We completed the Immigration study in November, and at the January board meeting the Board suggested we send a letter to LWV regarding our concerns with the study. There were many concerns regarding the questions at our meeting, and we decided to focus on what we would want from the national League. We asked for a continuation of the study to address the number of people we welcome through legal immigration, the issue of amnesty and employment issues.

LWVGB Program for 2008-2009

At our Members Business meeting **April 24th**, we will vote on our **LWVGB Program** and make decisions. We would like to streamline this process and ask members who are able to access the internet to begin the process on our LWVGB Dialogue web site. Look at our positions and respond to whether you wish to retain the position.

- Are there any positions that we may want to drop? Which of our positions should be our top priority (top 3-5)? Are there areas that need revisions with some further study?
- Are there new areas that need study?

Visit www.lwvgb.org/lwvgbdialogue. See the article on page 2 in this **Voter** for your identification and password.

Member Profile – Leonette Slay

Anyone who reads the **Voter** and attends LWV meetings knows that Leonette Slay has a broad range of interests. She is an avid hiker and reader. In addition, she often shares with our membership observations she makes in her far-ranging travel. We are very sorry that Leonette will be moving to Columbia, South Carolina this spring. Alabama's loss will be South Carolina's gain.

Leonette was raised in West Point, Mississippi and she attended Millsaps College. After college she was awarded a scholarship to attend the new LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin, where she received a master's in public affairs. She worked in the Texas legislature for two years before joining the Army where she has been active or Reserve for 32 years in April.

Leonette has served in Arizona, Kentucky, Kansas, Virginia at the Pentagon, and three years in Germany as a military intelligence officer.

In addition to being a super league member, Leonette finds time to be a Big Sister.

Leonette joined the LWV in 1974 while she lived in Austin. The League was extremely active and visible in the community. She has found that joining the League has been a fast way to meet smart, involved citizens who have thoughtful researched opinions and solutions. Leonette plans on joining the League in Columbia this spring. Leonette expressed that the most important mission of LWV is citizen education and keeping government accountable.

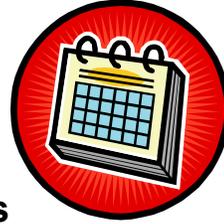
We will miss you in so many ways. Best of everything and keep in touch!



Leonette Slay presenting Immigration Study



Leonette and Ginny Randolph November 2007



LWVGB Upcoming Events

Month	Day	Event	Time	Location
February	14	LWV 88 th Birthday		
February	28	LWVGB Membership Meeting: Initiative Study	6:30 pm	Homewood Library Room 116
March	4	LWVGB Board Meeting	6:00 pm	Auxiliary Room Burns Chapman Hall Samford
March	15	Spring Hike	TBA	Tannehill State Park
March	27	LWVGB Membership Meeting: Sunshine and Open Meetings Law	7:00 pm	Homewood Library Room 116
April	24	LWVGB Member Business Meeting	5:30 pm	Richard's BBQ & Grill 2409 Acton Road, Bham
May	3	LWVAL Council	9 am-4 pm	TBA
June	13-17	LWV Convention		Portland Oregon

LWVGB
P.O. Box 530522
Mountain Brook, AL 35253

