



The Voter

January 2009

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Greater Birmingham
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New Year; New Goals!

Happy New Year! I hope 2009 turns out to be an especially good year for you.

While there are many ways you may volunteer with the League, I want to bring to your attention a way you may now participate in our democracy. The incoming President and Vice-President have set up a web site to receive your ideas. Let's make use of this and see how it works. You may go to www.change.gov. Currently there are several issues on which we are being asked to comment. Several of our other elected officials have web sites and email and do pay attention to what we send them as citizens. Make your voice heard. Citizenship doesn't stop after voting.

At the Spring 2008 Member Business Meeting, the Birmingham League set as one of our highest action priorities participation in activities to enable state legislation that would put a professional county manager in place for Jefferson County. LWVGB will review such bills with respect to LWVGB's position on county government. The League developed the position in 1986 and we finally see a possibility for this. Your Board of Directors has developed a strategy to seek opportunities to lend support and advocate for such legislation. Now, YOU have opportunities to participate and help us make this a reality. Please check out the information in the article about volunteering and about the December luncheon.
article continued on next page

DIRE WARNING!

LWVGB Members:

The end of January is the time when we must drop from our rolls, and cease from mailing information about our League, to anyone who has not renewed their dues for the year 2008-2009.

As you know, dues are \$45.00 for the year per person, and \$60.00 per year for two members from one household.

Dues should be mailed to:

LWVGB
P.O. Box 530522
Birmingham, AL 35253

Please send in your dues.

We don't want to lose you!!

Judge Johnson and his granddaughter Natalie Johnson, and Nancy Ekberg at LWVGB Holiday Luncheon



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New Year; New Goals (continued from first page)

Our meetings continue to be interesting. November's member led meeting made me so proud of our Observer Corps. The December Holiday Luncheon was not only fun, but Representative Paul DeMarco was engaging, as he discussed issues of the Alabama Legislature, including a bill establishing a professional county manager for Jefferson County.

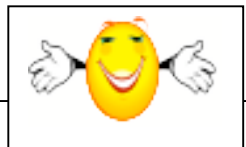
We have an interesting study on Off-Site Voting for our January meeting followed by another study in February on the National Popular Vote Compact. I hope to see you all there offering your opinions.

Joyce Lanning reported on exciting activities underway with the National League in Climate Change issues and we look forward to learning more from her as this Committee develops tools for us to use locally.

Ginny



Virginia Randolph introducing Rep Paul DeMarco at the LWVGB Holiday Luncheon



Welcome to three new members:

Joan Hamby Burroughs of Birmingham, Angelyn Simmons of Birmingham and Cathryn Hunt of Birmingham

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January Member Meeting Off-Site Voting Study and Consensus

As we completed the Election Season 2008, the study of off-site voting issues in Alabama was released. We will be discussing this at our January meeting.

**Thursday January 22
6:30 p.m**

Homewood Library, room 101

It should be a lively and interesting discussion. Issues to be covered include

- Early voting
- Voting at other than the local poll location or convenience voting
- Vote by mail
- No-excuse absentee voting

We will cover what is done in other states. For example Alabama is among the 23 states that require an excuse to vote absentee. The rest allow absentee voting without an excuse.

Please plan to read the Member Information and review the Consensus Questions prior to the meeting. These are available on the LWVAL website at <http://www.lwval.org/> Click on "Off-Site Voting" in the left column. You will need the LWVAL Members' username and password to access. All LWVGB members will receive an email with this information. You may also email to vrandolph@lwvgb.org to request the username and password.



Alabama Transportation Coalition Working on 2-1-1 Expansion

As you know, the League is part of a statewide public transportation organization called Alabama Transportation Coalition. This follows a very successful *Transportation Means Business Conference* held in Montgomery two years ago and includes organizations from throughout the state. Among projects this organization is pursuing, is expanding the current statewide 2-1-1 call centers that are now used for social service calls, to include requests for rides. The 2-1-1 number was created by the Federal Government for people to use who have social service needs just as the 9-1-1 number is used for emergencies. The service in Alabama is handled and funded by the United Way offices throughout the state. The number could be expanded to include a service that matches riders with ride providers but it will require planning and funding for software to accomplish the match-ups. The goal would be to increase the cars and vans that provide rides, *thus increasing jobs*, as well as aid more people who need rides.

Nancy Ekberg

Holiday Luncheon – Fun & Informative!

Alabama State Representative Paul DeMarco, as guest speaker at the 2008 Holiday Luncheon held at the Birmingham Ronald McDonald House on December 6th, shared his expectations for the coming 2009 General Session of the Alabama Legislature which convenes on February 3. He specifically discussed a county manager proposal for Jefferson County. At this time the proposal is for a statute that would create a county manager for Jefferson County. DeMarco is working with several of the county delegation legislators to work out a bill that they can collectively agree will work. A statute will allow the legislation to be approved by the local delegation and voted on by the Legislature but not require the vote by the citizens of the entire state as constitutional amendments require. The Greater Birmingham League has a long held position (1986) in favor of the use of a professional county manager and is preparing to advocate for League positions during the upcoming session (see article on Volunteering).

We thank Rep. DeMarco for his support for professional management in Jefferson County.

The Luncheon was a delightful time at the Ronald McDonald house. Kathryn Kerchof and Cissy Bennett made arrangements, plus Nancy Ekberg assisted them with making the room festive.



Carol Saint Lewis and Judith Hand looking festive in the picture on the left.

Ruth Wright, Dot Baker, Judith Hand, Leslie O'Neil and EJ Stephens, all past presidents of LWVGB, attended the Holiday luncheon held on December 6th at the Birmingham Ronald McDonald House.

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Volunteering with LWVGB

We have several areas for you to volunteer this month.

1. County Manager support letter
2. County Manager press conference on Tuesday January 27th at 9 a.m. on the Jefferson County Courthouse
3. Meet with a local legislative delegation member to advocate for a professional county manager.

County Manager Letter: Please write before the end of the month to your State Legislators and tell them to support a bill to have a Professional County Manager for Jefferson County. The letter may be as short as you wish. It is best in your own words and it may be hand written or typed. Write the letter in your own name as a constituent and please **not** as representing the League. Below are some points you may want to use in writing the letter. You certainly do not need to use them all.

A professional county manager will:

- have the skills to organize and monitor the county business across the board, including asking important questions to assist the County Commissioners plan and lead the County effectively.
- have the skills to get out of the current financial crisis and proceed further as the County needs someone well versed in government finances.
- be educated to properly advise the county on financial transactions, grants and employee management.
- coordinate all the departments to enable across the board equity and efficiency for all areas of the County.
- receive directly the reports of department heads and hence the political aspect is removed and each department functions with equity for all areas of the County.
- report to the County Commission which will continue to make policy decisions. This will allow the Commissioners time to respond to all areas of the County and County departments. Commissioners will remain the political connection to the citizens.
- improve the public's perception of the management of County government.
- reduce the direct authority commissioners have over county departments and hence would allow commissioners to avoid the details of daily problems and focus on the County's major issues and problems.

Writing Letter suggestions:

- Choose 1 or 2 talking points and make your case straightforward and simply.
- Address only this issue in the letter (don't try to make comments about other issues that the legislator may or may not agree with)
- Be positive
- Be short in length
- Ask for action: "please support...."
- Identify yourself as a citizen in the legislator's district. Please do not identify yourself with the League.

If you have family or friends who will write in support of a professional county manager, please encourage them.

County Manager Press Conference; Please plan to join us for a press conference/demonstration on the steps of the Jefferson County Courthouse prior to the County Commission meeting. It may be cool so please wear warm clothes. We just need a crowd of people to help support our advocacy for a Professional County Manager, per our Position on Urban Government.

**Tuesday January 27, 2009 from 9 a.m. – 10 a.m.
Jefferson County Courthouse
716 N Richard Arrington Jr. Blvd**

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Lobby Your Delegate!

Meet with Local Delegation Member: We need some volunteers to go with a board member to ask the legislative member to support a bill for a professional county manager. This will be scheduled around yours and the legislative member's schedule. The meetings will take place before January 30th. It will take about 1 hour or less. Contact Ginny Randolph if you are interested.



Lanning's Environmental Update

It has been a challenge and an honor to serve as a member of the LWVUS Climate Change Task Force which has been working over the holidays to generate a one-page document entitled "The United States Must Take Aggressive Action To Cut Its Greenhouse Gas Emissions To Stabilize Earth's Climate". Once approved by the board, the document will be used to brief the Lobby Corps on climate change for their work on Capitol Hill. Also, we are working on a climate change grassroots kit to send to all Leagues for their congressional meetings, lobbying visits and community education work.

The opening paragraph of the document states that the evidence is clear that human-induced climate change is underway.

The emission of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases—primarily by the burning of fossil fuels—has increased the blanket of heat-trapping gases in Earth's atmosphere. Global temperatures have risen approximately 0.8°C (1.4°F) above pre-industrial levels, and this small increase is already causing significant adverse effects. These effects—documented by the world's leading climate scientists and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—include rising sea levels, intensified storms, higher global temperatures, and severe droughts and floods that are already having adverse impacts on human health, food supplies, and ecosystems, as well as national economies.

The bottom line is that we support adoption by the U.S. of a firm, verifiable cap that reduces greenhouse gas emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2020 and 80-100% below 1990 levels by 2050. An accompanying information sheet spells out the important aspects we think any cap and trade legislation should include. Among them are that it should be comprehensive in scope, as close to the production of the carbon-based fuel as possible, and have no 'loopholes'.

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Lanning Recruits for Environmental Committee

(Continued from previous page)

At the state level, I represent the Alabama League on the Environmental Issues sub-committee of the Alabama Permanent Joint Legislative Committee on Energy. I've only managed to attend a few meetings, but will be in Montgomery for the next meeting of the full committee on Tuesday, January 27, 2009 2:00-3:00 in the Joint Briefing Room on the 8th Floor of the Alabama State House. Immediately following the meeting, the Energy Committee will hold a press conference to release the 2009 Legislative Energy Initiative of ten to twelve bills.

One bill I find promising would establish income tax credits for the installation of certain energy efficiency equipment in residences or commercial property up to a maximum of \$500 for residences and \$1,000 for commercial property for an individual taxpayer.

I'm actively recruiting colleagues who would like to participate with me in the Natural Resources/Environment/Climate Change work of the League. Please contact me if you have any interest in learning more about the information above or opportunities to get involved. I welcome you to join our team. **Joyce Lanning**, 870-0808 or jalanning@bellsouth.net.

Concerning a Constitutional Convention: Will There Be One?

Bills and Resolutions to bring a constitutional convention to Alabama will be filed for the 2009 Legislative Session that begins February 3rd. Speaker Pro Tem of the House, Demetrius Newton and Senator Ted Little will again offer legislation. The reasons that we have decided to offer Bills *AND* Resolutions is to give more chance for passage, since a Resolution is easier to pass than a bill. A Resolution requires only a majority vote to pass even if the House and Senate have not passed the budget. A bill requires a super majority to pass if the House and Senate have not passed the budget. The reason is that a Resolution does not have language stipulating the requirement of funding, whereas a bill must have funding language. But if a Resolution is passed by the Legislature and then the people, it is incumbent on the Legislature to agree to vote for funding to pay for the convention. It is unlikely that a Legislature would ignore the people's vote by not providing the funding.

Also, although there has been talk of mounting a "Just Vote No" campaign over all constitutional amendments in order to bring the state to its knees, the Board of Directors of ACCR Inc. voted to *NOT* support that idea. Their philosophy was that some very good legislation could be lost in the effort, and if we ever got the Legislature to pass a constitutional convention bill or Resolution in support of a convention, that too, could be voted down.

Nancy Ekberg



LWVGB Upcoming Events

January 19 Monday		Women Suffragists Protest for the first time at the White House in 1917. & Martin Luther King holiday & National Day of Service http://www.usaservice.org/
January 22 Thursday	6:30 p.m.	Member Meeting Homewood Library Room 101 Off-Site Voting Study
January 27 Tuesday	9:00 a.m.	LWVGB Press Conference on the Jefferson County Courthouse Steps
February 3 Tuesday	6:00 p.m.	LWVGB Board Meeting call 583.5000 for directions
February 14 Saturday		League of Women Voters 89 th birthday
February 26 Thursday	6:30 p.m.	Member Meeting Homewood Library Room 101 National Popular Vote Compact Study

LWVGB
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Mountain Brook, AL 35253

