

# The VOTER

July 2012 Edition



LEAGUE OF  
WOMEN VOTERS®  
www.lwv.org



League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham  
<http://www.lwvgb.org>

Special points of interest:

- Next League Membership Meeting in Birmingham will be held in September. Stay tuned for more information.
- Next Constitutional Revision Commission Meeting on July 22 at 9am in Montgomery in Room 617 of the State House.
- ACCR Luncheon Meeting & Update on August 11 at 11am at Samford University in the Moot Court

Inside this issue:

Constitutional Reform	2
Public Transportation Abroad	2
Back to Basics	3
Happy Birthday Title IX	3
League National Convention	4
Alabama's Clean Energy Future	5
FREE ACCR Luncheon Meeting	6

## A Word from the League President

Greetings, Members!

The work of the League continues, and its efforts were celebrated on June 28th, when the United States Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act. The League of Women Voters worked tirelessly to support the Act's passage in 2010, and has vowed to fight for its protection.

The advocacy continues, as Leagues across the US energize members to take the charge and support issues close to their hearts. Locally, in this election year, the efforts of the LWVGB will center on Voter Services, headed by board member Arlene Godwin. During last month's planning meeting, returning board members welcomed our newest Directors and First Vice

President, Trisha Powell Crain. LWVGB made history with the appointment of its first male board member, Michael O'Donnell, who will serve as Treasurer.

Meeting dates were set, portfolios were assigned and deadlines were discussed for upcoming Bylaws and Audit committees. Overall, seasoned League members agreed that we were getting "back to basics" and forging ahead.

While reading this issue, please ask yourself two questions: 1) What do you want from the League, and 2) What qualities or talents do you bring to the League? Please email your responses to [cyrondysjackson@gmail.com](mailto:cyrondysjackson@gmail.com).

If you are available to serve in any capacity with upcoming events, projects or committees, please don't hesitate to contact a board member. Thank you for your continued support of LWVGB, and all that you do!

In League,  
Cyrondys Jackson  
President



## LWVGB Changes to a New Facebook Page

LWVGB is changing over to a new Facebook page! Please go to [www.facebook.com/LWVGB](http://www.facebook.com/LWVGB) and "like" us. The original LWVGB Facebook group page will be "mothballed" soon, but we will

keep you posted on all the League action and project news on the new page.

Why the change? The LWVGB Facebook "group" is a somewhat more restrictive

site and not as open to the public. LWVGB President Cyrondys Jackson and the Board want the LWVGB Facebook presence to be more inclusive. We thank you for your patience as we move forward.

### Constitutional Reform by Nancy Ekberg

At the Constitutional Revision Commission's meeting on Wednesday, June 20, Professor Howard Walthall, provided a discussion of constitutional law that outlined ways in which home rule could be accomplished.

The Commission has appointed member, Greg Butrus, a lawyer with Balch and Bingham to head up a sub committee to discuss all the options that Professor Walthall cited, and report back to the whole Commission at a later



date.

The next full Constitutional Revision Commission will meet August 22nd at 9:30

a.m. in Room 617 of the State House in Montgomery. All meetings are open to the public. ACCR is providing transcripts of the meetings, available on the website of the Alabama Law Institute [www.ali.state.al.us](http://www.ali.state.al.us)

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*Service is the rent  
we pay for being.*

*It is the very  
purpose of life and  
not something you  
do in your spare  
time.*

*~ Marion Wright  
Edelman*

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### Public Transportation Abroad by Leonette Slay

While in southern Chile for a few weeks, I had the opportunity to take two overnight bus trips, and they were a revelation. Chile is 3,000 miles long and its citizens have an average yearly income of about \$8500. Several inter-city bus lines provide safe, inexpensive travel throughout the country. The buses that I rode were "semicamas", meaning that passengers had seats that reclined and other amenities that made for a very comfortable seven hour trip. These buses are double deckers, with the bottom having only eight seats, since the seat reclines 180 degrees for overnight sleeping. An assistant to the bus driver hands out a small pillow and blanket to each passenger and shuts the curtains for the overnight trip. These seats cost about \$50 one way. The upper deck

has more seats, as the seats recline about 120 degrees, and the assistant provides the same services.



The upper deck tickets cost about \$30. As the bus nears its destination, the assistant opens the curtains, collects blankets and pillows, and gives each passenger a juice drink and cookie. I rode on two different bus lines, and both buses left on time and were very clean, as were the bus stations. If we had an opportunity

to travel between U.S. cities in a "semicama", more travelers might opt for bus transportation.



## Back to Basics by First Vice President Trisha Powell Crain

This year, our League will go “back to basics” and focus on areas of the League that are at the heart of our mission: *facilitate citizen participation in government decision-making.*

How do we plan to do this? Well, this being an election year, Voter Services rose to the top of the list. The League will redouble and expand efforts to provide access to voter registration and opportunities to register to vote. Voting is the most basic and direct way that citizens participate in government’s decision-making. Your participation in staffing these events is essential in order to cover as much territory as possible. Look for opportunities to participate in the near future.

Next on the list is reinvigorating the League’s Observer Corps. From the National League publication, *“Observing Your Right to Know”*: an observer is an individual who attends a governmental meeting, notes what happens at the meeting, and reports back to the League and the community. By attending public

meetings of local governmental bodies/agencies, observers learn more about what their government is doing. They learn about the issues facing their community and are empowered to take action, if warranted. They also learn *how* issues are being addressed. Observer programs benefit the community by:

- Creating a civically engaged and empowered cadre of watchdogs;
- Connecting individuals (observers and others with whom their observations are shared) with government;
- Promoting open, transparent and accountable government;
- Connecting elected/appointed officials with their constituents;
- Educating the public about issues impacting their communities and their lives; and
- Identifying areas where action or improvement is needed.

With concerns about the breadth of local news coverage starting in the fall due to staff cuts at *The Birmingham*

*News*, the League’s efforts in this area become even more essential by providing physical coverage at governmental body meetings. Reports will be published, although we are still working on the best way to do that: online, in print, or both.

No special qualifications are needed to become a member of the Observer Corps. League members come to the League with a desire to know more about their local representative government, and this is an excellent opportunity to contribute your efforts to the League and to the broader community. Look for information in the near future about how to get involved in the Observer Corps.

In addition to Voter Service and Observer Corps, we are looking to broaden our membership and recruit new faces to the League. Begin considering inviting potential members to our membership event in September.

We are excited about getting back to basics this year, and count on your help to strengthen our local League.



Read more about the League’s Observer Corps at [http://www.lwv.org/files/LWVEF\\_ObservingYourGovernment.pdf](http://www.lwv.org/files/LWVEF_ObservingYourGovernment.pdf).

## Happy 40th Birthday Title IX!



The League was jubilant when Title IX of the Education Amendments Act was passed on June 23, 1972. Passage of this historic Act was another

step forward in achieving equal opportunity for women. This simple sentence did it! “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

The League is committed to continuing to help protect Title IX as it has over these 40 years. We know that hard-fought gains in civil rights require constant vigilance against attempts to diminish them. But today, we celebrate Title IX and all it has meant to the daughters and granddaughters of those who blazed the trail to this moment!

## League National Convention by Joyce Lanning

LWVAL President Kathryn Byrd lead a seven-member Alabama delegation to the 50<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the League June 8-12, 2012 in Washington, DC. Appropriately, most of the team was from LWV Mobile, which received the Strengthening Democracy Power the Vote award for their highly successful Vote 18 project. See more on their website at <http://www.lwvmobile.org/>. Congratulations LWV Mobile!

The LWVGB was represented by board member Joyce Lanning who spoke to a caucus sponsored by the LWVUS Climate Change Task Force on which she has served for four years. The program covered the recent additions to the national Toolkit for Climate Action which is available on the LWV website at [http://participate.lwv.org/c/9217/t/6398/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content\\_item\\_KEY=3766](http://participate.lwv.org/c/9217/t/6398/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content_item_KEY=3766) - or just search for LWV Toolkit.

With little international or national progress being made to control the emissions and land use changes which are increasing temperatures and acidifying oceans, the LWV is supporting local and state improvements in efficient use of energy in buildings and implementation of renewable resources. The presentation will be available on the LWVUS website. Go to the [Toolkit](#), or con-

tact [joyce.lanning@gmail.com](mailto:joyce.lanning@gmail.com) for more information.

The LWVFL was commended in a presentation by Attorney General Eric Holder for its role in filing an amicus brief in a Justice Department suit successfully challenging the illegal and inaccurate voter purge initiated by the state of Florida.

The LWV is a deliberative body and models the processes it promotes. A half-day each of four days was spent on League process and program and the rest of the time was available for very useful and informative workshops and informal sharing. The major decisions made by the delegates were:

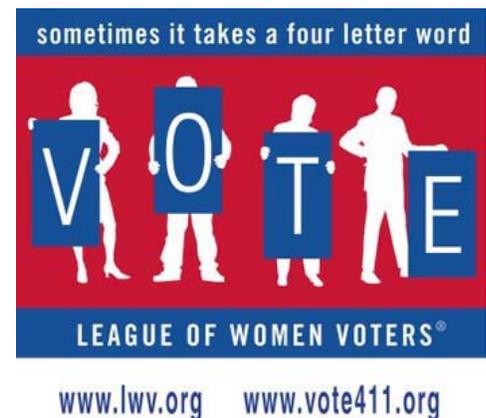
- Raised Per Member Payment due to National for each member from \$30 to \$31.
- Concurred with the LWVDC Sentencing Policy position: The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime. The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.
- Decided to undertake a comprehensive program to educate members and communities on the issue of campaign finance in order to inform our education and legislative efforts as needed.
- An additional motion calls upon the LWVUS Board to

“advocate strongly for all appropriate, duly-considered measures .... to set reasonable regulations on campaign contributions and expenditures; and insure that elections are determined by the voters. How to address the impacts of the Citizens United decision was a major topic of discussion.

- Approved a new study to review and update the LWVUS agriculture position, which dates from 1988.
- Retained all other current LWVUS Positions in Representative Government, International Relations, Natural Resources, and Social Policy. For a full report on the results of the Convention, see <http://library.lwv.org/events-series/convention-2012>

Lanning suggests that anyone who has the opportunity attend a National Convention do so. “You will learn more about the LWV programs and procedures and be energized and informed.” She reports returning home with a broader perspective and even greater dedication to our programs while feeling the support of members all over the country who are making democracy work for all in their own communities.

Watch Videos from the 2012 LWV National Convention at <http://lwv.org/blog/watch-videos-convention-2012>.



## Transparency Encouraged in Planning for Alabama's Clean Energy Future

Matt Bowden, Alabama Power Vice President for Environmental Affairs, and Joyce Lanning, LWVGB Board Member and LWVAL Natural Resources chair, spoke on July 28 to over seventy people gathered at the Birmingham Harbert Center for The Women's Network meeting.

Mr. Bowden explained the company's activities and expenditures – over \$3 billion – to bring the company into compliance with Environmental Protection Agency regulations under the Clean Air Act. The act requires EPA to use the latest science to protect human health by requiring that harmful pollution be contained.

Recognizing that the Clean Air Act had been successful in reducing health-harming pollution while electricity use and the economy grew, Mr. Bowden questioned the benefits of imposing new requirements, especially under short time frames. The company is pursuing alternative energy, especially wind, and has plans for spending another \$1 billion on coal-plant controls by

2016, even as they convert to natural gas to take advantage of the cleaner-burning fuel and lower prices.

Dr. Lanning pointed out that Alabama's power residential bills are third highest in the nation due to our price and use, and that had we been Georgia Power energy consumers in 2010, customers would have saved almost \$463 million that year. This may or may not be an appropriate comparison, due to differences in costs in the two states. However, Alabama has no state energy plan as many other states do, and the Integrated Resource Plans required of utilities are inaccessible to us, even with proprietary portions removed. Due to the processes used by our Public Service Commission, which regulates our monopoly utilities, there is very little opportunity to impact decisions being made about our energy choices or prices.

As one example of possible improvement, Lanning pointed out that energy efficiency should be treated as a resource – a first fuel – when

determining how to meet projected demand, and Alabama Power could expand its efforts in that direction to help reduce customer energy use and bills.

Citing the League's longstanding tradition of transparency in public decision-making, she called for citizens to come together for policy changes which would require appropriate stakeholder input in the development of a state energy plan for our clean energy future. Also, other utilities and states allow citizens greater access and an ability to impact utility Integrated Resource Plans and Public Service Commission rate decisions – access which should be also available to Alabamians.

The [Alabama Environmental Council](#), with Lanning as a contractor, is working to expand options for a clean and energy-efficient future for Alabama. Joyce Lanning can be reached at [joyce.lanning@gmail.com](mailto:joyce.lanning@gmail.com) and AEC at <http://www.aeconline.org/>.



**You are cordially invited to attend a FREE Annual ACCR Meeting named after founder, Bailey Thomson, on August 11th from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at Samford University in Birmingham.**

This will be held instead of the Bailey Thomson Award Luncheon, which will be held next year. The meeting is free and open to the public. It will update us on what is happening with constitutional reform, particularly the new Constitutional Revision Commission, legislation that needs our vote in November, and plans for legislation next year. We will also learn about ACCR plans to educate and organize this reform movement throughout the State. The meeting will be held in the Moot Court Room of the Cumberland School of Law, which is co-sponsoring this event.

Featured speakers at our meeting will be Dean John Carroll of the Cumberland School of Law, Professor Wayne Flynt, Governor Albert Brewer, retired Executive Director of the Alabama Law Institute Bob McCurley and some of the early leaders in this movement. We will let you know what the new Commission plans as it reviews Article IV, the Legislature. This article can bring changes to county governance and is a great hope for reform for our state.

Keep in mind that there will be three constitutional amendment reforms on our ballots in November. They include elimination of the racist, unconstitutional language, revision of the banking article and revision of the corporations article. They all need our support!



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 under-

### **Lest We Forget by Voter Services Chair Arlene Godwin**

Property-ownership, religion prerequisites, citizenship standards, literacy tests, poll taxes, race, and gender bias—all of these are past hurdles to inclusion in the American voting process. Each were challenged by a few in order to ensure the rights of many. They were challenged, not just as acts of morality or for political posturing, but to promote democratic posterity. Specifically, legislative milestones constitutional amendments 15 and 19, serve as edicts, “officially” declaring the worth of certain groups as valuable members of a co-citizen collective, who despite

demographic differences such as race and gender, inhabit the same nation and are bound together by more things common than different.

Voting on every scale, fundamentally impacts how citizens are represented in matters of state. However, major elections, such as the impending 2012 Presidential election, should particularly remind us of those who took up the suffrage charge on our behalf. We can honor their efforts by holding firm to the baton that has been passed, serving as catalysts for change by educating current and potential

voters, volunteering at voter registration drives, and working as poll monitors. Too, we are all obligated in this regard, not only to those who share our own personal political creeds or who rally behind the same causes we support, but to all citizens. Lest we forget, our role is not to control voting trajectory, but to preserve and safeguard the very right to vote.

