



The VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM
<http://www.lwvgb.org>

JULY-2011

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS GREATER BIRMINGHAM ANNOUNCES THE ORGANIZATION'S POSITION ON IMMIGRATION



“While there are too many unauthorized immigrants living and working in the shadows of our society, “ said Ida Tyree Hyche, Esq., new president of The League of Women Voters Greater Birmingham, “too many of our leaders are using the immigration issue as a platform to incite intolerance and fear. “ The League of Women Voters believes that immigration policies should promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. The organization further believes there must be provisions made for qualified persons to enter the United States on student visas, and all persons should be treated equitably under the law. “We are a nonpartisan organization that has fought since 1920 to improve our systems of government and impact public policies through citizen education and advocacy, “ said Ms.

Tyree-Hyche. “ Our position on immigration is one that calls for a path to citizenship for current unauthorized immigrants.”

The League of Women Voters supports federal immigration law that provides an efficient, expeditious system (with minimal or no backlogs) for legal entry of immigrants into the United States. In achieving overall policy goals, the League supports a system for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status, including citizenship, by paying taxes, learning English, studying civics and meeting other relevant criteria. While policy reforms, including a path to legal status, remain unachieved, the League does not support deporting unauthorized immigrants who have no history of criminal activity.

“The League advocates diversity and inclusion, ” said Ms. Tyree-Hyche. “Intolerance disaffirms the vitality diversity brings to our Nation.” The full immigration policy approved by the national League's Board of Directors was studied by the organization's membership for more than eighteen months. The policy achieved member consensus through a survey of the nearly 850 local Leagues. The full position is available at www.lwv.org. For information about The League of Women Voters Greater Birmingham, visit their website at www.lwvgb.org.

SUMMER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August 2, 2011: LWVGB Board Meeting, The Community Foundation Building, 2100 1st Avenue North, 11:30am.

August 30, 2011: Special election to fill District 45 seat vacated by the death of Rep Owen Drake, Leeds, and the District 48 seat vacated by Rep Greg Canfield, Vestavia Hills, when Governor Bentley appointed him to head the state development office.

September 13, 2011: LWVGB Board Meeting, The Community Foundation Building, 2100 1st Avenue North, 11:30am.

September 27, 2011: Bessemer city election to vote on renewal of 4.7 mill property tax that expires in Oct. this tax funds about 4% of the school's budget.

Thousands Rally in Support of Alabama's Immigrant Communities

LWVGB Joins Faith-based Efforts in Opposition to Controversial New Law

The streets in and around Birmingham's Linn Park has felt the steadied march of protesters in the past - from the peaceful demonstrations led by civil rights foot soldiers, often beaten bloody at the hands of local police, to anti-war sit-ins and demonstrations nearly a decade later. The park served as an ideal setting in early July for faith-based organizers to gather an estimated 11-thousand supporters in silent protest of Alabama's new immigration law.

Called the "strictest immigration law in the nation," and signed by Governor Robert Bentley in June, HB 56 is modeled after Arizona's controversial law. It requires employers to verify and report employment status using the federal E-verify system, allows law enforcement to request proof of immigration status (failure to do so could land a person in jail and face state charges and possible jail time,) make the transporting of an illegal immigrant a crime and require school systems to verify and report immigration information on school-age children.



Legislative supporters of the bill say undocumented immigrants have placed an unnecessary and costly burden on Alabama taxpayers, strained government budgets that provide social services and affected employment numbers. However, supporters of Alabama's immigrant communities say "patchwork" immigration reform is not what is needed, and that state lawmakers should work with the federal government to achieve comprehensive reform.

Several LWVGB members participated in the silent march and candlelight rally, including Nancy Ekberg, Helen Rivas, Connie Arnwine, Kaydee Erdrich Berman, Mary Lynn Bates and Cyrondys Jackson.

Summer Brings a Break from Alabama Politics concerning Constitutional Reform

But it is time to plan for the future!

As you know, we have two pieces of legislation that passed: one is the Constitutional Revision Commission that is charged with finding nine citizens that represent the diversity of the State, to work with the Governor, President Pro Tem of the Senate and Speaker of the House to revise Articles of the 1901 Constitution on a schedule that will tackle three Articles a year until 2014. The citizens to be appointed by the elected officials have not been named yet. The Governor is expected to be the last one to appoint his three nominees and as soon as he decides, all nine will be made public.

The constitutional amendment to remove unconstitutional language passed in both Houses and it will appear on everyone's ballots in November of 2012. We will need to educate the public on the need to vote in favor of that amendment.

Now we must concentrate on rewriting the Legislative Article. The Commission legislation mandates that the new Commission must rewrite that Article in 2012. The good news about that is that some are looking at the possibility of including Home Rule into the Legislative Article. Anyone who is interested in assisting in determining how Home Rule could be included should contact Nancy Ekberg.

Celebrate Your Right to Know This Month, Encourage Open Government

Thursday, July 21st at 10am, Jefferson County Commissioners will hold a "closed-door" meeting with its attorneys to discuss, according to Birmingham News columnist Barnett Wright, "pending litigation... if

the commission pursues a certain course of action." That's it. No further explanation provided. These types of closed-door meetings have been commonplace in Jefferson County lately, as commissioners and attorneys struggle to free the county from the albatross that is the more than 3.2 billion dollar sewer debt owed to creditors.

Last month, Attorney General Luther Strange, along with state finance director David Perry, met individually with commissioners at a Birmingham law firm to discuss the county's growing financial problems. Following the meeting, elected commissioners had no comment regarding the discussions or the meetings.

Local watchdog groups continue to criticize our government officials for their lack of transparency, even going as far as avoiding open meetings or public meetings to discuss public issues, funding and dissemination of information covered under the Freedom of Information Act.

FOIA, enacted in 1966, "provides that any person has a right, enforceable in court, to obtain access to federal agency records, except to the extent that such records (or portions of them) are protected from public disclosure by one of nine exemptions or by one of three special law enforcement record exclusions."

The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports citizen participation and the Citizen's Right to Know, as stated by the National Board: "The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government. The



The League further believes that governmental bodies must protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible."

To learn more about FOIA, visit the website at www.foia.gov, and to learn more about the League's stance, go to www.lwv.org. Most importantly- Get Involved!



BLACKSTONE'S GUIDE TO
**The Freedom of
Information Act 2000**
Second Edition



My Summer Vacation Using Mass Transit

Contributed by Leonette Slay



After research, your intrepid frugal traveler and LWV member decided to incorporate mass transit into my recent vacation to Seattle and Vancouver. Because of the high cost of flying from Birmingham to Vancouver, I opted to fly into Seattle and take the Greyhound bus to Vancouver. Not only was it a relaxing, scenic and very inexpensive (\$34 one way) option, it afforded me a chance to have a quick look at three Washington towns and their commitment to mass transit. I also rode the Seattle light rail system to get from my downtown Seattle hotel to the SeaTac airport (\$2.75 versus \$34 for a taxi). See below for more exiting details! (I used government web sites for facts and figures.)

The Seattle Greyhound station is a little down at the heels but is conveniently located near many downtown hotels and other transit connections. The bus left on schedule and had five stops before arriving in Vancouver, including a thorough inspection at the Canadian border. The trip takes four hours, but the border exam can delay the bus, which is what happened on the return trip as passengers included citizens of Germany, Canada, and China.

Our first stop was in Everett, 25 miles north of Seattle and the home of Boeing and the USS Abraham Lincoln. Everett has a population of almost 100,000 and boasts mass transit since 1893. From 1910-1939 Everett connected with Seattle via the Seattle-Everett Interurban Railway. Since 1969 Everett Transit has provided bus service within the city, operating 46 buses and 18 paratransit buses. Other transit companies offer commuter rail and bus service to Seattle and Bellevue. AMTRAK also provides inter-city service. All the bus and train connections are consolidated at the clean, aesthetically pleasing Everett Station.

The second stop, Mt. Vernon, is 56 miles from Seattle, and a town of almost 32,000. Despite its small size, it has both a local and inter-county bus service, and another beautiful, clean transportation hub called Skagit County Station, where Greyhound, AMTRAK, and the city bus are all available.

Our last stop before the border was Fairhaven-Bellingham, population almost 81,000. This town is the terminus of the Alaska state-run ferry system and also offers ferry service to the San Juan Islands. Fairhaven station serves the AMTRAK Cascades line as well as Greyhound and the local bus line. Our driver gave us a 10 minute break here, and many of us scrambled into the gourmet coffee shop for a fresh sandwich or pastry. The county (Whatcom) recently upgraded Fairhaven's bus service to every 15 minutes along five major corridors. Fairhaven-Bellingham has 34 fixed routes.



My previous foray into Canada was by car, and the procedure for bus passengers proved markedly different. We each had to take our luggage into Customs and offer it for inspection. Border agents also wanted to know our specific destination and lodging.

Our last stop before arriving in Vancouver was Coquitlam, a suburb of Vancouver, population 121,000. This was not a hub, but a Greyhound station only.

Vancouver has no freeways going into or through the city. A proposed freeway was rejected in the 1960s by a coalition of community leaders, citizens, and planners. While cars provide primary transport, Vancouver has the longest automated light metro system in the world and an extensive network of bike routes (a bike symbol next to a street sign helps identify these routes). It also seemed to have bus stops on practically every other street downtown. The transit station provides both train and bus service and is located in a beautiful, immaculate building convenient to downtown.

I started and ended my holiday in Seattle, where voters in 2006 passed a nine year \$365 million transportation funding package. Twenty million will be invested in transit to add bus trips, speed up buses, and improve waiting areas. The City of Seattle and King County pay for bus service. The goal is reliable transit every 15 minutes or better, 18 hours per day, 365 days per year. Like Vancouver, the Seattle buses seemed to be all over downtown, with signs showing which lines the stop serviced. However, I did not see many covered waiting areas, a shortfall considering Seattle's weather patterns. I walked several blocks to take the light rail to the airport. It offers 11 stops between downtown and the airport and takes 35-40 minutes. The train has reserved space for luggage and bikes, and inspectors walk through the train checking tickets. There is also a security presence at the stations, which proved helpful for the befuddled tourist.

So, I judge my mass transit adventures to be a success and recommend that you consider trying out alternative transit when planning your next adventure.

Meet the Board: Cyrondys Jackson

Cyrondys Jackson has worked as a journalist in the Birmingham-Metro area for more than 10 years covering stories for television, radio, print and online. A graduate of Miles College, Cyrondys is an active member of her community, and also works in higher education. In her spare time, Cyrondys enjoys traveling with family and friends.



On December 20, 1963, President Johnson accepted the Report of the President's Commission on Registration and Voting Participation. Seated next to the President is Commission member Mrs. Robert J. Phillips, national President of the League of Women Voters.

Board of Directors, 2011-2012

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Michael O'Donnell	Chair, Nominating Committee
Jean Johnson	Technical Director (Off Board)
Donald Marks	Social Media (Off Board)
Diane Marks	Social Media (Off Board)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

What do I think of Western civilisation? I think it would be a very good idea.
~ Mahatma Gandhi

It is easy to take liberty for granted, when you have never had it taken from you.
~ Author Unknown

People with clenched fists can not shake hands.
~ Indira Gandhi

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