



# The Mobile Voter



*A Publication of the League of Women Voters of Mobile, Alabama*

*The League of Women Voters, a national, nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences policy through education and advocacy*

## WINTER ACTIVITIES

**LUNCH WITH THE LEAGUE** – An opportunity to socialize with League members and listen to guest speakers presenting issues of importance to the League. Luncheons are held the **third Wednesday** of the month from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Marriott Hotel on Bel Air Boulevard. The buffet lunch is \$16.00. RSVP to (251) 662-3386 or [lovjan42@comcast.net](mailto:lovjan42@comcast.net). **(Please note that the January Luncheon date has been changed to Friday, January 17).**

**MONTHLY STUDY GROUP** – In-depth objective study of a selected issue held on the **second Monday** of the month from 5:30-7:00 p.m. at the home of Jane Gordon, 2116 Sheffield Ct., Mobile 36693, (251) 662-3386. Light refreshments served.

**VOTE 18** - Schools are calling and scheduling our national award winning young voter engagement program. Contact Myra Evans to learn more: [bobalouiemom@yahoo.com](mailto:bobalouiemom@yahoo.com) or (251) 666-7914.

**January 17** – 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Lunch with the League at the Marriott Hotel. Our featured speaker is Food & Water Watch's Renee Maas who will help us to understand what we are eating when we eat genetically modified or engineered foods, which are becoming increasingly prevalent on our grocery store shelves. RSVP to (251) 662-3386 or [lovjan42@comcast.net](mailto:lovjan42@comcast.net).

**January 17** – We will be doing Vote 18 at McGill-Toolen High School all day and we need volunteers. Even if you cannot commit to the whole day, we welcome any time you have to bring this interactive voter education program to high school seniors. Vote 18 is fun for the presenters as well as for the students, so contact Myra Evans at 666-7914 or [bobalouiemom@yahoo.com](mailto:bobalouiemom@yahoo.com) and let her know that you will help!!



## **President's Letter**

Well, here we are back from Christmas break and getting back to a life with schedules and work to do. I hope everyone had a happy and healthy holiday and is now ready to get "back to business!" We have a lot of things that need our attention as we go forward into the new year, and we will need willing participation from as many members as possible. Please decide to be an enthusiastic participant in our many endeavors.

League of Women Voters US has requested that all chapters set up a Planning Meeting in January or February, so that suggestions for the national agenda can be submitted by the deadline in March. I will be asking some members to head up the effort to set up this meeting, either as a physical meeting or as an online chat, and to establish an agenda. I will have Elisabeth MacNamara's President's Message forwarded to the membership, so that anyone who does not subscribe to this newsletter can read the information about Program Planning and offer suggestions for us to consider sending to National. We will need some "thinking outside of the box" here!

We also have the National Convention on the horizon, June 6-10 in Dallas, Texas. We are currently entitled to two voting members, based on our membership count, but we might possibly be able to send a couple of others as observers.

There is also an opportunity for members to request to participate on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, March 10-21 in New York City. The deadline on applying for a chance at this is January 15th and the spaces for LWV representation are limited, so please let me know as soon as possible if you have any interest so that your name could be submitted.

We are also having a variety of opportunities to volunteer for Vote18 for the Spring presentations to as many schools as possible. This was one of the first projects I volunteered for when I joined LWV, and it is still one of my favorites. There is something about spending 45 minutes with a group of teenagers that adds some fun to your day and always provides some entertainment when you hear their perspective on our government and the issues of the day.

Finally, all of the papers on our new study topic of Agriculture/Genetically Modified Organisms are now posted on the LWVUS website and are begging to be read by all of us. This seems to be a very controversial topic for us to consider in detail, so we all need to educate ourselves as much as possible. We had a superb presentation of the issues involved at our recent Study Group by one of our newer members, Renee Collini. All present got an in depth understanding of GMO's and why they are always in the news. A great benefit to League membership is the ability to keep your mind active by learning in some detail about current issues about which otherwise you might be ignorant.

A long message this month, but so many ways to expand our consciousness and to benefit our community in the process. Happy New Year to one and all!

***Andrea Pennington, President  
League of Women Voters of Mobile***

## Burton LeFlore & Bradley Byrne Debate in the Only AL-01 debate at McGill-Toolen High School.



Republican Bradley Byrne and Democrat Burton LeFlore fielded questions from the student body of McGill-Toolen Catholic High School on December 4, 2014, in a candidate's forum co-sponsored by the **League of Women Voters of Mobile**. The crowd was largely composed of teenagers, and the candidates respectfully pointed fingers on hot-button issues ranging from the Affordable Care Act to gun control.

It was the first debate between the two parties in Mobile without a second Republican candidate. Byrne beat Tea Party Republican Dean Young in a run-off election November 5 by roughly five percentage points, after the two emerged from a larger group of nine GOP candidates over the summer.

The students' questions highlighted issues important to younger generations or Catholics, in particular. For example, the only question about the Affordable Care Act pertained to the provision requiring employers to cover contraceptives, a method of birth control not sanctioned by the church.

Students were allowed to ask direct questions and walked up to a microphone to pose them. The first had to do with the fear of the job market upon graduating, or looking for a job after college.

Byrne said he would reduce taxes on businesses to promote growth, and that he wants to help spur the city's future growth, especially with Airbus coming in. "Our congressman plays a critical role in economic

development. That is something that really excites me," he said.

LeFlore took a different approach, quoting late President John F. Kennedy. "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," he began. "You have to focus on training yourself for the job. A liberal arts degree today is worth nothing. These employers want specifics. They want education, computers, accounting, nursing, engineering. When I taught business law ... we had 100 percent job placement. Our society is all about technology."

The final question of the night was about the nationwide drinking age. The students asked what the candidate's thoughts were on why 18-year-olds were allowed to vote and enlist in the military, but not legally purchase or possess alcohol. Students also asked the candidates' stance on lowering the legal drinking age, one student asked if the candidates supported the legal drinking age being reduced to 18 or staying at 21 as federally regulated even if the voting and military age is 18.

Neither candidate agreed that the drinking age should be lowered. "Voting and drinking is apples to oranges," LeFlore said. "Drinking does not make you an adult. Being a responsible, productive citizen makes you an adult. Getting a job makes you an adult," he said.

"At 18, you can vote, you can be coerced into the U.S. military or many join on their own. We have a problem with alcohol in our society. There is a certain point in your life when you are old enough to make a mature decision, and I happen to believe that the federal government is right," said Byrne.

Bradley Byrne was victorious in the election on December 17 in the in the district that includes voters across six south Alabama counties.

*Welcome New Members!!*

*Dennis Evans  
Barbara Brewster  
Holle Briskman  
Al Pennington*



agriculture from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

On February 10 at the Study Group Meeting, Margaret Gordon will focus on questions developed by the World Health Organization. We meet at Jane Gordon's house on the second Monday of the month, from 5:30 p.m. until 7 p.m. Please contact Jane for directions if you have never been. We'd love to have you join us!

Please feel free to e-mail me at [ginaofinnegan@gmail.com](mailto:ginaofinnegan@gmail.com) if you would like more information.

Gina O'Brien Finnegan



## LWVM Begins Study on Genetically Modified and Engineered Foods

LWV-Mobile has begun its study of agriculture and genetically modified and engineered foods. We hope that you will join one or more of our evening study group sessions to discuss research and articles about this important and fascinating topic.

Genetically engineered (GE) crops became commercially available in the United States in 1996 and now constitute the vast majority of corn, cotton and soybean crops grown in the country. That means that most non-organic processed foods containing sweeteners, oils and preservatives are made from GE ingredients. More recently, biotechnology firms have developed genetically engineered animals, including food animals such as hogs and salmon. Since GE foods are unlabeled and untested, what does the increase of GE foods mean for our health, the environment and the farmers that grow our food?

We started our study last week with an excellent presentation prepared by one of our newer members, Renee Collini, who works as a scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. Renee broke down the definitions of many of the terms involved in this topic and also summarized legislative action (and inaction) since GE food was introduced in our supermarkets.

At January's Lunch With the League, Renée Maas, NC Campaigns Coordinator with Food & Water Watch, will talk about GE foods and the impact they are having on our society and health. Food & Water Watch is a consumer advocacy organization working to ensure the food, water and fish we consume is safe, accessible and sustainably produced. Renée works in FWW's Durham office connecting and educating people in North Carolina and challenging them to stand up for their rights to safe food and clean water. She has a Master's degree in public policy with an emphasis in water resource management and a minor in sustainable



Evening Study Group at Jane Gordon's home

## Legislative Directory App Available and It's Free!



The Business Council of Alabama (BCA) has a free app that lists every member of the Alabama House and Senate. This app gives the user an easy platform to contact members of the 2013 Alabama Legislature. Need to immediately communicate with a legislator? Simply tap on their face or name to open their profile, and then tap on their email or phone number to contact them, in addition you'll also have a direct link to their websites, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages. To learn more, go to: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/bca-connect/id613457727>

### We're in the Money!! (Again)

LWVEF has awarded LWVM \$500 to continue our youth engagement work, primarily Vote 18, this spring coming into the 2014 primary season. The promise is to conduct sessions in at least 5 schools and register about 150 new voters. Ambitious, but with everyone helping, we can do it! A special thank you is extended to Myra Evans for writing and submitting this grant.

Contact Myra at [bobalouiemom@yahoo.com](mailto:bobalouiemom@yahoo.com) if you have some suggestions, connections or want to help in some way. There is room for everyone.

# Save the Date

The 51st National Convention of the League of Women Voters will be held June 6 – 11, 2014, in Dallas, Texas, at the Omni Dallas Downtown Hotel. Plan to join hundreds of national, state and local League leaders from around the country for this lively biennial event - to hear powerful and informative speakers, learn more about the issues important to the organization and the nation, participate in training sessions and join in the discussion and networking that make the League a strong and vital force in our democracy. Go to <http://lwv.org/content/your-guide-lwvus-convention-2014> for more details and for links to register to attend and for accommodations.

### WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU!

January 31 is the deadline for submitting names of our local League members to the National League. If you have not paid your 2013-14 annual dues by then, you cannot be included as a member.

To pay your \$45 dues:

- Go to [lwvmobile.org](http://lwvmobile.org) and pay online using PayPal
- Bring to the January 17 monthly luncheon at the Marriott
- Send by snailmail to: LWV Mobile, PO Box 40602, Mobile, AL 36640

Whichever way you choose, please know that *we need you and hope you'll stay!*

(If you're not sure whether you've paid, email me at [bhardaway@southalabama.edu](mailto:bhardaway@southalabama.edu)). Thank you for all you do for the League and for our city.

Beth Hardaway  
VP Membership

## Observing the PSC

By Barbara Caddell

As you may know, League members have been observing some of the activities of the public service commission since last March. I got interested after Gina Finnegan and I attended the Mobile Gas's "public proceeding," a format which the PSC developed to take the place of the formal rate hearings that consumer advocates had urged. Since that time, I have attended "public proceedings" for ALAGASCO and Alabama Power as well as the official Montgomery hearing for Plains Southcap's newest pipeline request. Of course, I am not alone – Myra Evans of our local league and Joyce Lanning of our state board have attended these meetings as well and are truly "battle buddies." Joyce is the state league's official spokesperson but she has welcomed us and shared her expertise generously with us. Myra has kept our Facebook page and twitter accounts up to date on our experiences.

The League's interest in these proceedings is primarily in the transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in the rate setting process. While we have no position on the best rate-setting formula or way to set utility rates, we do have strong positions about responsible public agency decision-making. We are concerned that the PSC as a public body regulating monopoly industries be as transparent as possible in its deliberations and rate-setting, holding public officials and utilities accountable for their actions and information, and allowing citizens to participate meaningfully in the process

The state league will be releasing a report in the spring outlining our assessment of the rate-setting process. To that end, Joyce is sending a questionnaire to all the participants in these public meetings so that our report can balance our perceptions of the process with the perceptions of other participants. We remain concerned that there are large bodies of information about utility rates that are unavailable to the public, especially Alabama Power's Integrated Resource Plan, a 20-year plan laying out the company's plans. (A story in the Anniston Star can be read at this link <http://annistonstar.com/bookmark/24378375/article>) Just as our interest in the utility rate setting process led us to observe the PSC, your interest in governmental decisions can take you to some interesting places!! I challenge you to find a buddy, observe a local or state board, and see what happens!! Martha Collier needs observers for local public boards and she would welcome your interest. Contact her at 473-9849 or [rcollier55@bellsouth.net](mailto:rcollier55@bellsouth.net) and let your journey begin! If

you want to observe a state board like the PSC, contact me at 438-3048 or [caddellh@comcast.net](mailto:caddellh@comcast.net). Let's get going!!!



to those who helped with the recent election reporting projects. They are: Anne Walsh, Stacey Steiner, Danielle Brown, Al Pennington, Andrea Pennington, Fred South, June Acree, Roe Acree, Barbara Caddell, Martha Collier, Lella Lowe, Kathryn Cariglino, Dee Cariglino, Hank Caddell and Myra Evans.

**Election reporting is the LWVM's only revenue generator. It keeps us from having to hold bake sales and yard sales to raise money for our vital programs.**



You can now join or pay League dues online, using PayPal! Go to the League website – [lwvmobile.org](http://lwvmobile.org) – and follow the appropriate links. Another convenience is the use of our Treasurer's Square Reader on her smart phone to pay luncheon fees and/or dues with your credit card. In both instances, there is a slightly higher charge to cover administrative costs.

### **Program Planning Response Form Online (UPDATED)**

The [Program Planning Response Form](#) is now online! Every two years state and local Leagues and ILO's participate in the LWVUS Program Planning process by making recommendations concerning program issues. The Program Planning process is an important League tool for identifying issues for study, review and update or concurrence. Read the [Program Planning Leaders Guide](#) to assist you in your January/February 2014 Program Planning meeting. If you have questions on the program planning process please email [progplan@lwv.org](mailto:progplan@lwv.org).





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