



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 ó 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. Reservations required. Call or email Jane Gordon at 251-626-3386 or lovjan42@comcast.net.

MONTHLY STUDY GROUP ó Please join us on the second Monday of each month for our evening study group sessions. We are looking at voter suppression and dilution for the first half of our program year. Evening study group is not only enlightening and informative but also quite enjoyable. We begin with an array of treats and appetizers and light conversation. We meet at Jane Gordon's house, 2116 Sheffield Court, from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m.

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

February 9 – 5:30 p.m. – Evening Study Group ó We plan to discuss transparency in government ó Jane Gordon's Home, 2116 Sheffield Court.

February 10 – 5:30 p.m. ó LWVM Board Meeting (location to be announced).

February 18 - 11:30 a.m. - Lunch with the League ó Dr. Jaclyn Bunch, University of South Alabama political science professor, will discuss transparency in local government. Reservations required before noon on Monday. You may be held responsible for payment if you make reservations and don't attend. Call or email Jane Gordon at 251-626-3386 or lovjan42@comcast.net.

March 9 - 5:30 p.m. ó Evening Study Group ó Transparency in government-continued ó Jane Gordon's Home, 2116 Sheffield Court.

March 10 – 5:30 p.m. - LWVM Board Meeting

March 25 – 11:30 a.m. – Lunch with the League - Alabama School Board Member Mary Scott Hunter will talk about transparency on the state school board and opportunities for citizen involvement. Please note that this is a change from our regular third Wednesday.

President's Letter



When in the course of human events it becomes necessary to get things done, you must rely on trusted members to do what needs doing. With apologies to Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence for the borrowing of some very impressive language, your president has been called upon to request some important assistance from many of you. Consider this as an invitation to anyone of you to whom I have not spoken to volunteer to participate in our end-of-year wrap up activities!

Jan Cade and Cora Cade Lemmon have graciously agreed to co-chair the annual meeting, with volunteered help from Mary Ann Merchant and Betsey Wooten. A place, time, menu, speaker and annual report have to be accomplished by this group before the end of April. If any help should be requested from others of you, please respond positively whenever you can.

In the same vein, Jane Gordon has agreed to chair the Nominating Committee to arrive at a new slate of proposed officers and board members for our group. If you are approached by Jane or her committee members and asked to consider taking a position, please give careful thought to a positive response. We need everyone--just a few individuals cannot run the Mobile League. We are pleased and proud that each of you decided to join our effort, and we would like to give appropriate recognition to new members and others who have not very actively taken part. We want to expand our active membership to as great an extent as possible. The Nominating Committee would really love to hear from individual members who would like to accept a board position or work as an officer and get to know others in the organization better. A couple of very valuable board members volunteered themselves to the on the board last year, and have made a significant difference in the group this year! There is lots of fun to be had and new friendships to be forged. I know this personally, because I accepted the presidency after I had only been in the League for two years. I had a tremendous amount to learn, and I was very nervous, but I have made wonderful friends in the process.

Mary Ann Wilson accepted my invitation to chair the Budget Committee. She, along with Treasurer Barbara Caddell, will be needing committee members to provide input into how we should allocate usage of the funds we have for the next year. All these things occur at the same time of year, as this business must be taken care of at the annual meeting in late April.

We are hoping to see each of you at the annual meeting and hope to have a fun evening planned for everyone. Make plans with your group of friends to be a part of it.

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

Welcome New Members!

**Marie Herman
Lorrinn Woods
Dainne Smith-Yoder
David Underhill**



AL.com forum offers community solutions to Alabama's prison problem

By Casey Toner | ctoner@al.com

MOBILE, Alabama -- Something has to change. At least that's what activists, community leaders, other residents said during a forum on Alabama's troubled prisons held Monday at the AL.com office. About 50 people attended the two-hour event. They posed questions and possible solutions for the prison system.

The problems with Alabama's prisons are clear enough. At nearly double the existing capacity, the state prisons draw almost \$374 million annually from the state's depleted general fund. It is to the point where State Sen. Cam Ward, Prison Reform Task Force chairman, has pledged to bring a package of prison reform bills to the State Legislature for approval in the upcoming session.

The U.S. Department of Justice also issued a letter to state officials in January that alleged that guard-on-inmate sexual abuse occurred at Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women for nearly two decades. "I am appalled," said Wayne Verry, a Foley resident who first read about the prisons on AL.com. "I am just absolutely angry at what I have been reading about the conditions in the prisons. I'm a taxpayer and this is being done on my behalf with my money."

Christopher McCauley, David Mathews Center for Civic Life executive director, moderated the discussion and encouraged the crowd to take inventory of the many challenges facing the state's prisons.

One difficulty is that many Alabamians are unsympathetic to inmates' woes, said Alabama

Auditor-elect Jim Zeigler. "There's a huge amount of people that say Alabama prisons should be worse, there should be more punishment, they should be meaner to

them," Zeigler said. "It's a huge percentage of Alabamians that believe that."

A popular solution among the crowd was to expand drug, mental health, and military courts to provide alternative treatment to offenders. Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant recently signed a prison reform bill that allows circuit courts to expand programs for military veterans.

Tommy Dews Jr., Mount Olive Baptist Church associate minister, said a military court is needed because he has seen many veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder behind prison walls. "There's a lot of them back there," said Dews, a Vietnam War veteran. "I promised my (military brothers) back there, I would never let them be forgotten. They earned it and they did serve their country."

Another problem identified was the legal defense available to poor offenders. Al Pennington, a local attorney, said that paid attorneys can put more focus on a case that court-appointed attorneys who may be juggling multiple cases at once. "I hate to admit this, but if someone hired me, I was willing to work a lot harder than if the judge said 'Al, I need you to do me a favor,'" Pennington said.

McCauley, the forum moderator, asked if those present would consider new taxes to give Alabama's prison system the money it needs to make systemic changes.

Andrea Pennington, League of Women Voters of Mobile president, said she was in favor of raising taxes instead of letting the state Legislature gut the court budget to make ends meet. "We're going to have to raise taxes," she said. "If people are willing to do that, we'll have some real progress."

Near the end of the forum, McCauley asked participants to reflect on the discussion and what they took away from it.

"We know we have a serious problem and we know we have to do something about it," said **Betty Jones, a member of the League of Women Voters of Mobile**. "We tried to do that tonight."

AL.com partnered with the David Mathews Center for Civic Life to host the forum. Leadership Mobile and the **League of Women Voters of Mobile** co-convened the forum.

Civil Rights Leader Joe Reed and Representative Randy Davis Discuss Redistricting at November Luncheon



Brendan Kirby | bkirby@al.com By Brendan Kirby | bkirby@al.com

MOBILE, Alabama --- After seizing control of the state Legislature in 2010, Republicans in charge of drawing new political boundaries marginalized black voters in an attempt to get rid of white Democrats, a civil rights leader said Wednesday.

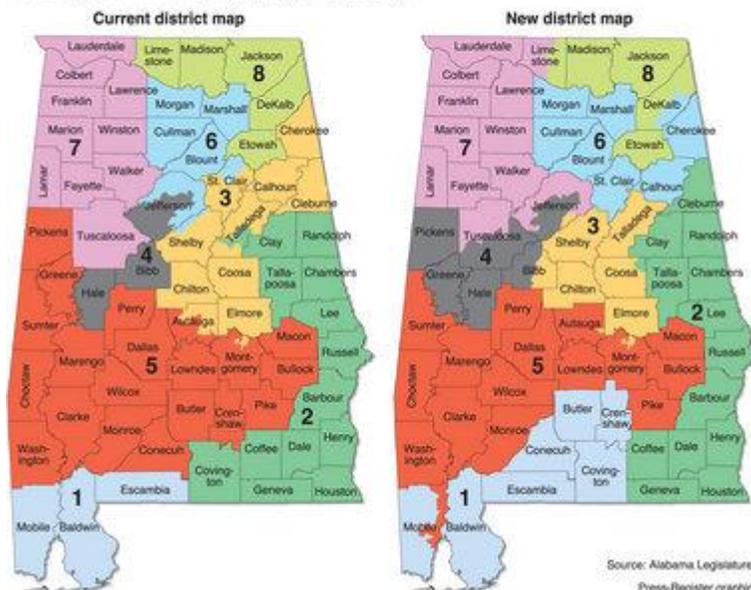
Speaking at a **Mobile County League of Women Voters** luncheon, Alabama Democratic Conference Chairman Joe Reed said Republican mapmakers created unnecessarily large black majorities in a handful of state House and Senate Districts, which had the effect of removing reliable Democratic voters in districts held by white Democrats. "I don't know why they went about it in this way. They already had complete control," Reed said. "That wasn't good enough. They wanted to go further. Their goal was to get rid of every white Democrat and pack and stack all blacks in the corner."

Whatever the intention of Republicans, this month's elections played out largely the way Reed describes. When the dust settled, only one white Democrat remained in the state Senate. The ranks of white Democrats receded in the House, as well.

State Rep. Randy Davis, a Daphne Republican who spoke to the women's group later, said lawmakers were trying to comply with the Voting Rights Act. He pointed out that the U.S. Department of Justice approved the plan, which maintained the same eight majority-black Senate districts under the previous plan and added an extra majority-black district in the House. Davis, who served on the committee in charge of redrawing the lines, said lawmakers attempted to preserve the majority-black districts and reduce the population variation from district to district. Democrats had allowed districts to differ by plus or minus 5 percent from; Republicans held it to plus or minus 1 percent.

Changing state school board districts

In an effort to maintain a majority of black voters in state school board District 5, the city of Mobile and some county land to its north will be taken from District 1, under a redistricting plan approved by the Alabama Legislature. The change has garnered some controversy.



Alabama Democratic conference Chairman Joe Reed pointed to state Board of Education District 5 in the newly redrawn map, right, as an example of improper "packing" of blacks. Davis acknowledged political considerations, but said race was not the primary factor. "It was to protect incumbents," he said.

The state is required to draw new political lines every 10 years, following the census, to equalize the number of residents in each district. The Alabama Democratic Conference and others challenged the plan in federal court, arguing that it amounted to unconstitutional racial gerrymandering. A three-judge panel in Montgomery approved the plan, but the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to review that decision. The justices heard oral arguments last week.

On Wednesday, Reed accused the Republicans of failing to consider alternatives that would have met the constitutional requirements while allowing African-Americans who were not in majority-black districts to have enough numbers to "influence" the elections of white candidates. "It was a farce the way they set up this plan," said Reed, noting that advocates of alternative plans received just three minutes to testify at public hearings. "It took me three minutes to clear my throat." Reed said the Republicans' desire to jack up black percentages in majority-minority districts led to some strange results. He pointed to state Board of Education District 5, which has a tentacle that connects black areas of Mobile with a district based in Montgomery. "That was stacking the blacks," he said.

Reed also cited House District 90, which includes southern Montgomery County, all of Crenshaw and Butler counties, and pieces of Conecuh and Escambia counties. The district sprawls over a larger territory in order to maximize the black share of the population, he said. House District 90 notwithstanding, Davis said he believes the current map reduced the number of counties in most districts. "We got a lot more compact," he said. Davis also defended the process. "Anybody who brought a plan to the table, we accepted their plan," he said. "We let them debate their plan, and then we voted up or down." Davis said the dispersion of large public housing complexes in big cities spread out the minority population, making it more challenging to prevent reducing black voting strength in majority-minority districts. "It's harder to find (black residents) and protect the 26 (majority-black House) districts," he said. Davis said the rise of Republicans - and corresponding fall of white Democrats - is not a product of the most recent redistricting. He noted that when he won his first election in 2002, he was one of 34 Republicans in the House. Now, there are 72 Republicans. And most of that increase occurred in the previous districts, culminating with the GOP's takeover of the Legislature in 2010.

As for the lawsuit, Reed said he feels confident based on the way oral arguments went last week. He said he wishes Alabama could work out its differences without having to resort to lawsuits but added that blacks historically have needed the judicial system to safeguard their rights.

"We want the playing field to be level. And we have never gotten a playing field level except through the courts," he said.



1st photo – League Members Mary Ann Merchant, Beth Marietta Lyons and Charletta House with Rep. Barbara Drummond (2nd from left) at November luncheon

2nd photo –Greeters Rella Snetsinger, Jane Gordon, Beth Hardaway, and Barbara Caddell



Why Are Women's Voting Rights Still An Issue?

By Hannah McCulley

<http://theodysseyonline.com/tennessee/why-womens-voting-rights-still-issue/78186>

99 congresswomen, 7 federal executive cabinet members, 72 statewide executives, and 249 mayors— members of the American female population hold all of these positions.

America has come so far since the 1920 culmination to the fight for women's suffrage. There are still many Americans, however, who do not view females as an equal voice in the country's political realm. In recently filmed Fox News' "The Five," host Kimberly Guilfoyle suggested that young women should excuse themselves from voting in midterm elections for similar reasons that many think they should be excused from jury duty— because they don't share the same "life experience" as older women.

"They're like healthy and hot and running around without a care in the world," she stated. "They can go back on Tinder or Match.com."

With this sexist point-of-view taking over many adolescents' TV screens, Internet web pages and Facebook posts, it is troublesome of what the future holds for women voters. However, data shows that in every election since 2000, more women who were eligible to vote have shown up to vote than men who were eligible, according to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP).

What are viewpoints like this teaching our country? Discouraging any young person to vote is a shame in itself, but specifically targeting young women is an outright disgrace to the progress America has made since the early 20th century.

Fortunately, there are many groups fighting to change these stereotypes that some have yet to overcome, whether it be towards gender or age. One of these groups is **The League of Women Voters**. This group is making continuous strides to change and improve the status and reputation of female voters across the United States. The League was founded in 1920, shortly after the women's

Suffrage movement was passed. They have worked effortlessly at a national level through more than 800 states and local Leagues. The group formed during the movement to secure the right for all women to vote. The League is now working to expand participation and give a voice to all Americans, women and men. Their main goal is to make democracy equal for all citizens or to at least educate as many people as they can about the voting system and process.

The League focuses on three main issues: voting rights, improving elections, and DC voting rights. They advocate for proactive reforms, which include expanding early voting and online voter registration, ensuring existing pro-voter laws are followed and advocating against barriers to the voter registration process.

"The stigmas toward women voters arise from their being women, not from their being voters per se. Overcoming the stigmas toward women— e.g., that they are not as smart as men and not as capable of thinking independently— is a long process," explains League of Women Voters member, Mary English, Ph.D.

Because voting is the core of democracy and one of the only ways to have one's voice be heard in the American society, the League focuses on increasing the amount of registered voters there are, educating voters, especially at high schools and colleges, and, most importantly, educating voters.

Not only is voting participation important to America's democracy, but having educated and informed voters is equally key to making sure elections and voting run to their full potential and effectiveness. The League educates voters about candidates in federal, state and local races each year. They even occasionally host candidate debates across the country, which allows voters and League members to gain an inside perspective of the election process.

Dr. English explains how the stigma toward women voters has partly formed because until the mid to late 19th century, females didn't even have the opportunity to go to college. The males in families were favored over females and expected to be the "breadwinners" of the family. Women were thought to be too "weak" to tackle and understand serious political matters.

Overcoming female stereotypes is not something that can be accomplished simply in a year or even a decade. By further educating today's young women, the League of Women Voters hopes to produce strong, knowledgeable and reasonable women who can hold their own in a political debate, and at least have the basic confidence to go vote.



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