

March, 2013



The Mobile Voter

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

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LWVM SPRING 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 \$15.00. RSVP to 432-2492 or lovjan42@comcast.net.

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, 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 or 666-7914.

March 18 – Public Service Commission's public hearing on Mobile Gas Corporation's services – 5:30 p.m. at the Ben May Library's Bernheim Hall

March 20 – Lunch with the League – 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Marriott Hotel at 3101 Airport Boulevard. The LWVM will feature accomplished chemist Dr. M. Allam Baaheth who will speak about his current work involving the removal of carbon from air and green chemistry's importance in improving the environment. His speech will additionally include information about environmental justice. Please RSVP to lovjan42@comcast.net or 656-0130.

April 9 – LWVM Board Meeting – 5:30 p.m., at VIA!

April 9 – House District 97 Special Primary Runoff Election (Adline Clark & Karlos Finley)

April 19 – LWVM Annual Meeting – 6:00 p.m. business meeting; 6:30 cocktails; 7:00 dinner – Marriott Hotel. Guest speaker will be David Perry, Governor Bentley's Chief of Staff. Cost: \$35.00.

April 23 - Senate District 35 Special General Election. Bill Hightower, winner of the recent runoff, will face write in opponents.

April 29 – Monthly study group – 5:30 p.m., at Jane Gordon's home.



Co-President's Letter

I take great pleasure in announcing to you that our League has its own Ruth Shur Fellow – Myra Evans!! The Ruth Shur fellowship is a membership-leadership support program funded by the National League; Ruth Shur fellows mentor state league teams in growing local leagues and developing league leaders. Myra has been so successful in helping our league blossom that we are not surprised that she gained this prestigious position! She will be spreading “the good word” about the League of Women Voters in two states, working with state and local leagues to strengthen local leagues and develop league leaders. Both Kathy Byrd, our state president, and I

wrote strong letters of nomination for Myra but Myra did not need us – her work for the league speaks for itself. She epitomizes the best traditions of the league. Way to go, Myra!!!

I want to thank all the people who worked hard to produce our House District 97 candidate forum at the Via Center on February 21 – especially Mary McGinnis, Wanda Cochran, Myra Evans, Andrea Pennington, Anne Walsh, Cora Cade-Lemon, Charletta House, Aimee Walsh, Beth Hardaway, Stacey Steiner, Fred South, and Gina Finnegan – you are my heroes! It was, in my humble opinion, the Mobile League's most successful candidate event ever – we had great participation from candidates as well as a large crowd of their constituents. Our planners and “doers” had this event running as smoothly as a well-oiled machine! The questions (projected for public and candidate clarification) covered a wide range of issues, enabling voters to make an informed decision. Thanks to a strong moderator, candidates followed the guidelines and had a respectful exchange of ideas. This is the league at its best!

The next few weeks will be very busy ones as we prepare for the end of an eventful and spectacular league year. Our “Lunch with the League” on March 20 will feature Dr. M. Allam Baaheth, a theoretical chemist, who will speak about his current work involving the removal of carbon from air and green chemistry's importance in improving the environment. In addition, there are a plethora of other community-wide meetings: a showing of “Mobile in Black and White” on the 10th, the Hurricane Homeowners Insurance Initiative's survey to complete by the 15th, and a first-ever public hearing on Mobile Gas's services on the 18th at Bernheim Hall. On March 23, the League of Women Voters of Baldwin County will present a “Critical Issues in Coastal Restoration Workshop” at the Foley Public Library from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. By the end of March, we will have drafted a League comment on the proposed statewide water management plan, heard an informed speaker on water issues, continued to provide information about candidates, testified about the need for transparency in the public regulatory process, presented Vote 18 numerous times and registered many new voters, all the while monitoring the legislative session's activities on issues of interest to the league. Whew!

While all this busyness is happening, league members are also working in the background to plan for next year. Now is the time for members to submit program items for consideration; these can be areas of study or areas of focus (if we've already studied an item). The LWVM Board voted this week to propose Health Care in Alabama and Agriculture (genetically modified organisms (GMOs), herbicides, pesticides, etc.) to the membership as possible program items. However, we can still consider other items at the annual meeting. Please add your ideas to the list – the league is truly a grass-roots organization with decision-making from the bottom up.

Our annual meeting promises to be energy-filled. Nan Costello and her committee are in charge of the “nuts and bolts” of things. We will have our usual items of business – nomination of officers as well as the adoption of program ideas and budget to fund them. Kathryn Cariglino and her nominating committee are selecting a slate of officers and directors for us to consider. Please consider what energy you have to share with us and think about what league work you will be willing to do if the nominating committee calls you. A finance committee will also be planning the budget. The highlight of the annual meeting will be our speaker – David Perry, the governor's chief of staff. This is a real coup for the League as Mr. Perry is not on the “speaker circuit” and has consented to speak to us during a very busy legislative session. We look forward to hearing him and asking some tough questions!

In the spirit of the League, I encourage as many of you as possible to attend the Public Service Commission's first-ever public hearing in Mobile at 5:30 pm in Bernheim Hall on Monday, March 18. The League has adamantly advocated for more transparency in the commission's rate-setting deliberations so please come and observe their activities that night as they begin to lift the veil of secrecy from their proceedings.

Hope to see you soon!

**Barbara Caddell,
Co-President**

Democrats vie for House District 97 in freewheeling forum



By [Robert McClendon | rmcclendon@al.com](mailto:rmcclendon@al.com)



A crowded field of Democratic candidates for state House District 97 struggled to distinguish themselves tonight in a candidate forum hosted by the League of Women Voters.

Most appeared well prepared, but several made some flubs that could have cost them credibility in front of the audience of about 100.

All but one of the candidates, Levi Wright Jr., participated in the forum. They were: William Carroll, Adline Clarke, Karlos Finley, Jeffrey Jones, Kim Williams Pettway and Ronnie Williams.

Given the large field, Finley, a plaintiff's attorney, frequently tried to differentiate himself by asking a rhetorical question. "We've all said we want these things, but who is going to go up there and get it done?" Finley showed a solid command of the issues, touting his work on constitutional reform when explaining the need for tax reform in the state.

Carroll, a Mobile City Councilman, tried to win over the audience by showing off his knowledge of city government. He reminded the crowd that he

already has some experience in legislative matters. He worked hard to get the state legislature to approve the Quiet Title Act, which gave the city a legal mechanism for getting clear title on blighted properties, making it safer for potential investors to put money into marginal neighborhoods. However, he may have made a misstep when he claimed that the biggest chunk of the state's general fund budget went to public safety costs such as "police officers" and "FBI" agents, in addition to state troopers. Carroll also said that Southern Company and Sempra, who provide power and natural gas on the Gulf Coast, "need competition," without explaining how that would happen or that utilities are, by their nature, monopolies. Carroll did show a good understanding of Complete Streets, a policy that makes pedestrians, cyclists and mass transit users priorities along with automobile drivers in the transportation funding and planning process.

Clarke, who works for the non-profit arm of the Mobile Housing Authority, and Kim Pettway, a social work instructor, both said that they were unfamiliar with what exactly Complete Streets is. Pettway did well, though, when asked how she would handle Gov. Robert Bentley's refusal to expand Medicaid as part of President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act. She said that she would use her experience in grass roots mobilization to get people involved, to show the governor that people support it.

Clarke did well when it came to setting budget priorities, clearly laying out her agenda, ranking economic development first, followed by education and Medicaid expansion.

Ronnie Williams, an attorney, was generally eloquent, especially on tax reform. "No question there is problem with tax system," he said. "But the larger problem is special interests, which keep reform from happening..." "If I owned 5,000 acres, I'd be concerned about raising property taxes too."

Jeffrey Jones, a habitual also ran in a variety of political races, succeeded mostly in making people laugh. When asked how he would pursue Medicaid expansion, he said, "I like to talk, I don't think they've had a good filibuster up there in a long time."



Vote 411 in 2012: Casting a Vote is Important, Casting an Informed Vote is Better

by Mary McGinnis

The election is behind us, and LWVAL can take comfort in the fact that they provided voters all over Alabama with a wealth of non-partisan information about candidates, explanations about constitutional amendments, voter registration tools, polling place locations and other helpful Election Day information. Headlining the effort was Vote411, a national League tool adopted by the Alabama State League that provided voters with on-line information about their voting options. VOTE411 was a huge success! Nationally, over 2 million unique visitors visited VOTE411 in 2012, and over 570,000 of those visitors viewed the online voter guides. In Alabama, over 6,440 users from 123 cities around the state visited VOTE411!

The League can be proud that its mission to engage the electorate was carried out in an un-biased and professional manner this election season, and thanks to our volunteer efforts, Alabama voters went to the polls armed with more solid information on the constitutional amendments than ever before at their disposal. In the past, finding unbiased and easily comprehensible information on constitutional amendments has been very challenging for voters. LWVAL developed explanations of 10 of the statewide amendments, describing what will happen if a given amendment passes or it fails the referendum.

We received many accolades for our efforts, reaffirming the public perception that the League is a trusted source of non-partisan candidate and ballot amendment information:

“This was an exceptionally accessible and clear-eyed representation of the initiatives and the consequences of passage (as far as it goes). This is a remarkable resource for the citizens of Alabama and I am thankful I had the idea to log on. Keep up the necessary work of democracy! I feel so prepared for the polls tomorrow. Even for the poor localities at the mercy of state-wide judgment -- hey, let's work to change that.” [Peter Mannon]

“I wanted to commend the League for its excellent analysis of the state constitutional amendments on the ballot in Alabama’s General Election. I seldom see an analysis of such depth and fairness regarding these

amendments. Frankly, media outlets in Alabama should highlight your effort and suggest the site to voters. Along with PARCA at Samford University, you should get a royal pat on the back!! Thanks!” [Jess Brown - Professor, Government and Public Affairs - Athens State University]

“I have just read the League’s summary about the Sept 18th vote. It is excellent and I will tell others about the summary. Thank you (all who contributed to the writing of the summary). I am appreciative!” [Mary Elizabeth Perry – Mobile AL Community Volunteer – mother of David Perry, Chief of Staff to Governor Bentley]

“I am proud to be part of an organization that is doing so much to provide voters with the information they need to participate in this election in an informed way.”

While LWVUS worked hard to promote VOTE411 as much as possible through national-level media coverage, paid advertising, social media promotion, and much more, LWVAL did an outstanding job promoting VOTE411 within Alabama with APR radio and ABC TV interviews, newspaper articles, APR blog, Facebook and Twitter.

The Birmingham and Mobile Leagues partnered with their local Libraries in setting up Voter Registration stations which promoted Vote411. Mobile handed out over 2000 Vote411 cards at high schools, colleges and community events. Most local Leagues participated in National Voter Registration Day events and encouraged voters to access VOTE411 for unbiased ballot information.

LWV Mobile supplemented the State races with Local and County races as well, so voters in Mobile County were able to view candidate and amendment information for all the races on their ballots.

Vote411 usage was impressive and should encourage us to seek funding to use Vote411 for the elections in 2014. I expect the website to continue to improve making navigation better and more user-friendly.

I want to thank the State Board for supporting Vote411 and especially Kathy Byrd, Anne Permaloff, Hattie Kaufman, Charlotte Ward, Joyce Lanning, Mary Lynn Bates, Nancy Ekberg, Barbara Caddell, and Gina Finnegan for all their hard work researching and writing (in plain English) the amendment explanations. I want to thank Jean Johnson, LWVAL’s most able technical guru for mastering the software. It was truly a team effort!

Thank you also to all League members for all the hard work you put in during Election 2012!

Second Pivotal Voting Rights Case Heads to Supreme Court

Arizona v. ITC Places Citizens' Right to Vote, Independent Voter Registration Drives at Risk

Washington, D.C. (March 7, 2013) – Today, the League of Women Voters of the U.S. announced its submission of an amicus brief in the critical voting rights case, *Arizona v. ITC*, which will be argued before the U.S. Supreme Court on Monday, March 18. The court is being asked to decide whether the National (NVRA) prevents states from passing laws that restrict the voter registration process.

“This case puts independent voter registration drives like those conducted by the League squarely in the crosshairs of those that want to restrict access to political participation and voting,” said Elisabeth MacNamara, president of the League of Women Voters of the United States. “This is a dressed-up attack on the League and our community partners that are often the only effective means for some voters to get registered and participate in our great democracy.”

“As the grassroots organization that led the push for enactment of the NVRA in order to streamline the crazy-quilt of state laws that made citizen-led voter registration drives so difficult, we are deeply concerned that this case could reverse years of progress,” MacNamara said. “Restricting voter registration is just one way to limit the right to vote,” she said.

The state of Arizona is looking to limit voter registration by mail by requiring every new registrant to provide documentary proof of citizenship, even though the NVRA bars states from adding such restrictions. The streamlined mail registration form is an essential element for independent voter registration drives. The federal Election Assistance Commission has repeatedly held that Arizona’s restrictions are not consistent with the NVRA.

“States should not be allowed to play politics with the voter registration process, the key entry point for political participation in our democracy,” said Barbara Klein, president of the League of Women Voters of Arizona, which is a plaintiff in the case along with many other Arizona organizations. “Congress acted to protect and enhance the right to vote when it passed the NVRA. The U.S. Supreme Court should not step in over 20 years later and overturn Congress’ intention,” she said.

“Approval from the U.S. Supreme Court for state restrictions on voter registration would undoubtedly put that issue in front of state legislatures. Already, several states have sought to restrict voter registration, and we can expect others to try if given the green light by our nation’s highest court,” said MacNamara.

Arizona v. ITC is the second pivotal voting rights case in as many weeks to come before the U.S. Supreme Court. On February 27, 2013, the court heard arguments in *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder*, a case that will decide the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965, landmark legislation that outlaws racial discrimination in state voting practices.

“The importance of these two upcoming decisions simply can’t be overstated,” said MacNamara. “Without a strong VRA, voting rights are left without vital protections. Dismantling the NVRA leaves the voter registration process vulnerable to political manipulation. If states win and voters lose before the U.S. Supreme Court, we can expect to see additional states consider an even broader range of restrictions on voting and changes to electoral systems unparalleled since the days of Jim Crow,” concluded MacNamara.



Mary McGinnis, Lashaundra Smith, Denise Moore and Myra Evans on a field trip to learn more about Steps Coalition and the work they are engaged in around social justice efforts.

Op-Ed on the Shelby County v. Holder Case

by Kathryn Byrd, President LWVAL

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS' BATTLE CRY: "WE DARE DEFEND OUR RIGHTS"

The League of Women Voters of Alabama prides itself in defending the rights of citizens in our state. The motto "We Dare Defend Our Rights" was placed around the Great State of Alabama and on our car tags. It certainly was heard across the state, the country, and even the world, when Gov. George Wallace stood in the "schoolhouse door" 50 years ago to block integration at the University of Alabama. *Fortunately*, significant progress has been made in guaranteeing rights for all. *Unfortunately*, in 2013 the voting rights of all Alabamians—indeed all Americans—are in jeopardy, and the League of Women Voters of Alabama is raising its battle cry loud and clear: **WE DARE DEFEND OUR RIGHTS!**

Why, in this supposedly post-civil rights era, do we need to resurrect this motto again? Dr. Kathryn Byrd, President of the League of Women Voters of Alabama, explained, "On February 27, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court heard the case *Shelby County, Alabama v Holder* to decide the very constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and all its subsequent reauthorizations. If the Supreme Court decides against the VRA, particularly Section 5, the "teeth" giving strength for the enforcement of voting rights could be tossed out, and we could revert to some of the injustices of earlier days."

Section 5, the famous "preclearance section," was based on the pattern of certain states or parts of states having long-term records of voter suppression, including carefully manipulated district lines—at all levels of government-- designed to dilute the voting strength of certain targeted groups of citizens, while enhancing the power of other already more powerful, groups.

For example, powerful white voters in Tuskegee, Alabama, gerrymandered the boundaries of that city in order to remove all but a handful of the city's black registered voters from the city's rolls. Imagine—Tuskegee, the home of Tuskegee Institute's George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington, and the famous black Tuskegee Airmen in World War II. In 1960, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Gomillion v.*

Lightfoot, ruled that Alabama had violated the 15th amendment by doing so. But because of this and similar actions against minorities, preclearance is required by the Justice Department under the VRA before legislative redistricting plans can be put in place in our state.

What does all this mean? Citizens of Alabama need to rise up and defend the rights of citizens to have a fair and equal vote! We should be moving forward, not going backwards, to remove any remaining obstacles in the path of realizing the goals set out in Amendments 14 and 15, guaranteeing equal protection of all citizens' rights, including voting rights, under the law. Byrd noted that the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that neither supports nor opposes political candidates or parties, whose mission is "the informed and active citizens participation of citizens in government." Byrd concluded, "Voting rights are the key to achieving this goal."

*The League of Women Voters of Alabama
and
The League of Women Voters of Greater
Tuscaloosa
invite you to join us on the campus of the
University of Alabama for...*

**LWVAL Convention
April 26 - 28, 2013
"FLAGGIN' THE TRAIN TO
TUSCALOOSA"
ALL ABOARD!**



Find out more at: <http://www.lwval.org/convention2013/>

Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Women's Suffrage

By: Renee Davidson 03/01/2013



On March 3, 1913, 5,000 suffragists from across the country gathered in Washington, DC, to demand the right to vote. The elaborate parade, which marched from the U.S. Capitol to the Treasury Building, included nurses, college students, academics, and clergywomen united in the struggle for women's suffrage.

Throughout the three-hour parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, marchers faced strong opposition from anti-suffragists among the crowds. Insults and lit cigarette butts were hurled at them, and marchers were tripped, groped and beaten. The violence was so intense that army troops were called in to restore order, and 100 marchers were hospitalized.

Yet even amid the abuse and opposition, many suffragists completed the parade route, and their voices were heard. Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), underscored the women's perseverance: "I have never seen greater dignity under trying conditions; greater coolness under insult and oppression than was displayed by the marchers for suffrage today."

In the end, the opposition faced by the marchers only helped their cause. Their mistreatment, including their lack of protection by police, led to a public outcry that strengthened of the women's suffrage movement for weeks to come. Ultimately, the Washington march succeeded in reinvigorating the suffrage movement, which had stalled at a national level. It would be a number of years until the 19th amendment gave women the right to vote, but the 1913 suffrage parade helped pave the way for renewed attention to fight for women's suffrage.

Now online...

[LWVAL 2013 Legislative Report](#)

2013 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature convened Tuesday, February 5, 2013.

LWVAL Legislative Report updated March 9, 2013.

Go to:

<http://www.lwval.org/takeaction/legreport2013/index.html>



You are invited to build a living shoreline at Pelican Point (10299 County Road 1, Fairhope AL, 36535) near the mouth of Weeks Bay from 8:00am to 4:00pm on **Saturday, April 6**. This is a project of 100-1000: Restore Coastal Alabama and we need your help that day and spreading the word now. Volunteers will deploy 20,500 blocks—which weigh between 30-35 pounds each—to create four reefs at Pelican Point. This area has experienced significant habitat loss and erosion that in turn has negatively impacted the very resources that draw residents and support local economies.

Once constructed, the reefs will protect the adjacent shoreline and enhance habitat for fish, shellfish and birds, providing opportunities for fishing, bird watching and sightseeing from land, kayak or boat. Funding for this project is made possible through grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Please sign up and encourage others to do the same *as soon as you can* by clicking the following link: <http://100-1000.org>