

THE ALABAMA VOTER

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CO-PRESIDENT'S CORNER: HAVING AN IMPACT

Kathryn Byrd, LWVAL Co-President

I have been thinking lately about what the priorities of the League of Women Voters of Alabama should be. One goal I have considered is the meaning of **having an impact**. I have had the privilege of attending the past few national conventions and off-year council meetings of the League of Women Voters of the United States. At those meetings, LWVUS officers and staff have urged us to select League activities that not only serve our citizens, but to select activities that also bring **visibility** of the LWV and its mission and that **get “the most bang for the buck.”** What is the relative worth of our various activities in terms of impact-visibility-bang?

This year the Alabama League has been successful in “having an impact” in several ways. The one closest to my heart has been the pair of gubernatorial debates we have been participating in. (See article on Debate #1 later in this *VOTER*.) Several Leagues have used the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment (and the League’s consequent 90th birthday) to celebrate the impact of the League during its illustrious history. The LWVAL Judicial voters guide allows Alabama voters to compare the answers of high-level judicial candidates with opposition on the issues. We continue to share some of the positive attention garnered by the wonderful DVD *Open Secret*, produced by Melanie Jeffcoat and the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, ACCR, but which the LWVAL helped to fund. The launching of the Membership Recruitment Initiative (MRI) in Alabama promises to bring both immediate and long range benefits to the Leagues in our state. And a meeting with some very capable and concerned women in the Anniston area who are interested in starting an MAL unit in the area brings the promise of more League visibility and service.

Of course, we are visible when we put on our advocacy hats—as witnessed during the Legislative sessions with our excellent Advocacy Committee, chaired by Anne Permaloff. These include also letters to the editor, personal contacts with our governmental officials and our representation on committees. (Thanks, for example, should go to Joyce Lanning, who represents us on so many boards and in so many statements relating to natural resources). And we have joined the electronic age through our outstanding website (thanks, Jean Johnson) and our weekly *Facebook* updates (thanks, Scarlett Gaddy).

As important as “maximizing on visibility” and getting “the most bang for the buck” are laudable goals, they certainly do not portray all that the League is about. I am thinking particularly about

Dear League Member,

ACCR Inc, the advocacy arm of ACCR, invites you to organize a Listening Session between now and the November elections in your neighborhood, church or organization so that ACCR Board members can meet with you to discuss Legislative options and strategies for the 2011 Legislative Session in Montgomery. The ACCR Inc. Board has been evaluating several legislative options and strategies in light of our past efforts, and needs your input, ideas and feedback in a Listening Sessions throughout the State.

Some of the constitution reform legislative options and strategies we would like to discuss and solicit your thoughts about include:

1. A Citizens' Constitution Commission created by the Legislature or the Governor, to write a new constitution or amendments. In the past, Commissions have been created by Executive Order if the Governor creates a Commission, or a Legislative Resolution/Act if the Legislature creates a Commission. The Commission's draft Constitution and/or amendments would be purely advisory and still must be enacted Article by Article by the Legislature as Constitutional amendments or through citizens in a Constitutional Convention, and then subject to an ultimate vote of the people.
2. The ACCR supported legislative Resolution to let the people vote on calling a Constitution Convention from the past two years, with revised dates for the 2011 Legislative Session. The Resolution requires a majority vote of the Legislature for approval to allow the people to vote on holding a constitutional convention, and then provides for delegate elections and a convention procedure for writing and ultimately ratifying by a vote of the people anything produced by a Convention.
3. ACCR support of a Legislative Article by Article approach with support of specific amendments in the 2011 Legislative Session to address such important areas as Home Rule.
4. Other strategic options being discussed by some include a grassroots or individual initiative to just vote "no" on constitutional amendments until people are given the right to vote on a Constitution Convention or other creative ways to create a grassroots focus.

We want to hear from you today and to get your thoughts and feedback on making the 2011 Legislative Session the most productive that ACCR and its sponsors and co-sponsors have ever had!

Would you set up a Listening Session in your neighborhood through your local civic organizations, clubs, school groups, churches, neighborhood clubs and social groups?

Contact Nancy Ekberg at e-mail naneckberg@aol.com and let her know. ♦

DEFENDING JUSTICE IN ALABAMA *Appellate Courts Voter Guide*

Mary Lynn Bates

In a democracy with a judicial system based on law, justice requires fair, impartial, informed and wise decision making by the judges who apply that law. In Alabama, we elect our judges and we are notorious for the amount of money spent by special interests on judicial campaigns. There is an impression of justice for sale in Alabama.

The League of Women Voters of Alabama supports a different method of judicial selection where judges are initially appointed from a list of qualified candidates prepared by a nonpartisan commission and retain their jobs after an initial term through a retention election. Polls have indicated, however, that Alabamians prefer to elect their judges from the beginning.

The political advertising in judicial campaigns rarely informs the voter about the basic qualifications of the candidates or the candidates' views about the responsibilities of a judge. Indeed such advertising may focus on issues that should be irrelevant to electing a competent, impartial judge. In races where there is little advertising, the voter may know nothing about the candidates on which to base a vote and too often party or name recognition is the only criteria used to cast a vote.

The online Appellate Courts Voter Guide for the 2010 General Election, prepared by the League of Women Voters of Alabama Education Fund and available on the League's website at www.lwval.org from around Oct. 5 until the election, gives Alabamians an easy way to become better voters. The Guide covers the races for all the appellate court seats to be filled

Defending Justice in Alabama, continued on page 5

GUBERNATORIAL DEBATE, ACT ONE

Kathryn Byrd, LWVAL Debate Coordinator

At the writing of this article, the first of two important gubernatorial debates has been aired on Alabama Public Television and Radio and C-SPAN, and also carried in print media across the state. For those who haven't heard yet, this debate was sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Alabama, joined by the Student Government Associations (SGAs) of the University of Alabama, the Chambers of Commerce of West Alabama and of Auburn, and the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP) and held on September 16, 2010, from 7 to 8 P.M. A second debate is scheduled for October 19th at Auburn University. The first debate went well, with all manner of bells and whistles on the stage of the UA Moody Music concert hall. It certainly allowed the two gubernatorial candidates, Dr. Robert Bentley (R) and Commissioner Ron Sparks (D), to make clear their differences on the issues discussed.

A little background: The SGA at UA approached the LWVAL during the summer of 2009 about joining them in a joint venture of sponsoring a pair of statewide televised gubernatorial debates in the Fall of 2010. The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama was also on board, and, because the LWVAL had already discussed doing a debate with ADAP, that agency joined the lineup. Then the SGA of Auburn was approached and accepted the invitation, as did the Auburn Chamber of Commerce. This group was an amazing mix, and the results speak for themselves.

The League served a number of important functions during the debate. We definitely provided our name/reputation and our expertise in putting on political debates. We also interacted with a variety of students and professionals at numerous meetings—everyone

from the Vice President for Student Affairs, the director of UA's School of Music, the campus police chief, head of catering, head of other food services, numerous representatives related to the physical arrangements, media relations, the Center for Public Television and Radio, and many, many student leaders. Either Kathy Byrd or Hattie Kaufman from the LWVAL Board attended these various meetings.

One interesting feature of these debates is that questions were solicited from the public via al.com (which has ties with local newspapers and well as websites), via Alabama Public Television and via Alabama Public Radio. Individuals were invited to submit their questions online or to a post office box. Over 180 questions were submitted for the first debate, and more are coming in for the second debate. The questions were compiled (literally put in piles according to topic) and from those, the questions were prepared for the first debate by Kathy Byrd, Hattie Kaufman, and Jimmy Young of the UA SGA. The debate format provided each candidate to respond in turn for two minutes to a given question, then each candidate was allowed one minute for rebuttal. The questions were written to encourage debate. We think that the candidates did just that, in part because moderator Debbie Elliott of National Public Radio did an excellent job of having the candidates answer the questions that were asked.

Act Two – the second debate –

is scheduled for October 19th in the Ballroom of the Auburn Student Center. The format will be the same, with a different moderator. Submit your questions if you haven't already to DecisionAlabama.ua.edu. or go to Debates, P. O. Box 1326, Tuscaloosa, AL 35403. ♦

Co-President's Corner: *Continued*

the very in-depth work we do when studying an issue and possibly coming to consensus or concurrence on it. The LWVAL has two studies at present: the second year of the update on Health Care Reform in Alabama, and the first year of the Charter School study. The previous *VOTER discussed* the excellent presentations on both subjects provided at the May LWVAL council meeting. The local Leagues will be busy this year studying LWVAL-developed material on these subjects. The "bang for the buck" will hopefully be apparent when these studies are completed, especially if we do come to consensus/concurrence and can then advocate for our positions.

When I look back over this list (with apologies to those whom I have omitted), I can see that the diversity of our activities that bring impact works to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the League of Women Voters—small as we are in numbers. It is a joy to celebrate big achievements, but the impact of the League comes in the various layers and textures of our activities. Can we improve? No doubt, but we can be proud of what we are achieving this very busy election year. ♦



The “League Way” of Conducting Political Debates

One of the most valuable things a league can do at the local, state, and national level is to conduct a fair and impartial forum for candidates to present their ideas to the public. However, the League has standards that must be met if our name is to be attached to the event. Some years ago, failure to agree to League standards resulted in the League’s withdrawing sponsorship from presidential debates.

Here, Hattie Kaufman shares her knowledge and experience on how to conduct a debate or forum.

L league has long been known for conducting political debates. Some, in fact, think of it as our signature activity. Respect for these debates has come from the League’s strict adherence to our non-partisan role, which has enabled us to present the candidates fairly and in an even-handed manner. When conducting these debates, there are certain guidelines that we must be careful to follow.

FIRST, AT EACH LEVEL, LEAGUE MUST SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE. Thus, if the debate is a LWVAL event, the state president or co-president must authorize it. For local League debates, the chapter president or spokesperson must be the one who signs off on it.

ALL LETTERS TO CANDIDATES AND ALL PUBLICITY MUST RECITE THE LEAGUE’S NON-PARTISAN POLICY.

Typically, invitations to candidates are mailed with return receipt requested. If any candidate cannot be reached by mail, attempts to reach him or her by phone or electronically must be made and documented. For any given race involved in the debate, an invitation must be issued to every candidate who has qualified to appear on the ballot, including any third-party candidates, unless detailed criteria to the contrary are established. It is not necessary to include write-in candidates, as long as this standard is clearly articulated. Only the candidate himself or herself is invited to speak. No proxy speakers are permitted.

The invitation letter should spell out the debate procedure (i.e., how many minutes for introduction, how many minutes for each question, whether

there will be time for rebuttal and surrebuttal, how many minutes for closing statements, how the questions will be chosen). It should inform the candidate that no electioneering will be permitted on the premises; that supporters will not be allowed to bring signs, or wear buttons or t-shirts promoting the candidate (or opposing other candidates); and that no promotional or fund-raising materials can be distributed.

IF ONLY ONE CANDIDATE IN A CONTESTED RACE ACCEPTS THE INVITATION, THAT RACE CANNOT BE INCLUDED IN THE DEBATE. (If 2 of 3 candidates accept, the debate can go forward.) If the race is uncontested, the sole candidate may be invited to offer a statement, but he or she should not be included in the debate questions.

A COMMITTEE OF LEAGUE MEMBERS SHOULD MEET BEFORE THE DEBATE TO FORMULATE APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS OF GENERAL CONCERN TO THE ELECTORATE. No questions are provided to the candidates in advance. At the debate itself, index cards and pencils should be made available to the members of the audience, on which they can jot down questions that they would like to have asked of the candidates. The audience should be instructed to hold up their filled-out cards so that a League member can come for them. Audience questions are submitted to a “question-review committee” of League members, who then pass on to the moderator those questions that are of general interest and appropriate to be asked. No ad hominem attacks or questions about individual situations should be passed on to the moderator. As time permits, after the League-developed questions have been asked, the moderator

should work in the audience questions, grouping together those that deal with the same or related issues. Under NO circumstances should audience members be permitted to speak to address their questions to the candidates.

THE ORDER OF QUESTIONING SHOULD VARY FOR EACH QUESTION TO THE CANDIDATES. If there are more than two candidates, it works to change up the order by directing the first question to candidate one, two, three—and then asking the second question to candidate two, three, one—and so on.

TWO LEAGUE MEMBERS SHOULD BE SEATED AT THE VERY FRONT OF THE AUDIENCE WHERE THEY ARE VERY VISIBLE TO THE CANDIDATES. One should be in charge of the stopwatch, so that the other can hold up colored flags or folders to indicate when there are 30 seconds left, when there are 15 seconds left, and when it is time to stop. In her discretion, the moderator may allow the candidate speaking to conclude the sentence, but the time limits must be strictly enforced by the moderator.

THE MODERATOR HAS A KEY ROLE IN THE DEBATE PROCEDURE, ASKING QUESTIONS IN A NEUTRAL TONE AND KEEPING THE DEBATE ON TRACK AND ON TIME.

As a final note, **LEAGUE MUST BE CAREFUL WHEN IT IS ASKED TO CO-SPONSOR A DEBATE.** It may not co-sponsor with any organization that is not non-partisan, and it must insist that the debate be conducted according to League procedures. We cherish our well-deserved reputation for conducting the kinds of debates that are designed to inform the electorate fairly and fully, and we must jealously guard that reputation. ♦

Membership Recruitment Initiative — *Organizational Growth & Leadership Development*

Mary McGinnis, President, League of Women Voters of Mobile

Alabama's local Leagues are picking up steam in their implementation of the new Membership Recruitment Initiative (MRI). On August 14, LWVUS conducted MRI Training in Montgomery. With every local League in Alabama represented by at least one designated MRI Liaison, attendees learned about the fundamentals of the recruitment effort (including successful tools to increase and retain membership), and Leagues created a year-long plan for growth. Training opportunities are continuing with coaches visiting local Leagues and helping build more understanding of the MRI process and goals.

The MRI initiative is a combination of basic marketing techniques, communication strategies, and suggested activities. The MRI initiative complements the local League's "program" by providing training and guidance about how to overlay best practices for outreach and visibility onto existing or planned activities and events. Coaches for each League make a monthly phone call to the Liaisons to help develop ideas and celebrate successes.

Basically, the MRI focuses on three things we need to be watchful about. The first is visibility – do we promote our activities in the media? The second is outreach to similar organizations and sponsoring cooperative programs. And, the third and most important is "the ASK". The League has a great reputation and is respected by many; however, we seldom interject into our conversations with friends and acquaintances the simple – "Would you like to join the League?" I was surprised that so often the answer is – "Yes, I have been meaning to for a long time." Most membership recruiting happens at the local level. Consider your local community. Mobile is rejuvenating its Observer Corps and has already brought in several new members because of this expanded opportunity. Montgomery is reaching out to the Alabama State University Alumni for potential new members. East Alabama's Board members made a commitment to invite at least one new person to each League event. So, do "the ASK". Get the media behind you. Reach out to other organizations. And we can all watch our membership grow!

The value of the League is in its members. To be a strong productive organization, we need more members like you. If you are interested in learning more about the MRI initiative, please contact your local Liaison listed below.

Defending Justice in Alabama, *continued from page 2*

in this election and includes information on all the candidates. There will be three seats on the Supreme Court and one seat each on the Court of Criminal Appeals and the Court of Civil Appeals on the ballot. The Voter Guide includes candidate provided biographical information, including educational and professional qualifications, and answers submitted by the candidates to seven fundamental questions regarding the role of a judge. The Voter Guide also contains information about the appellate courts and, for the convenience of the user, links to candidate-sponsored websites.

Please use the Guide to become better informed before going to the polls and make others aware of this resource. You can make a significant impact on the quality of appellate judicial elections in Alabama and defend justice in our state by using your affiliations and contacts with other organizations to spread the word about the availability of this nonpartisan information through your newsletters, e-mail lists and social media. ♦

Alabama State MRI Coaches:

Debra Butler – Greater Birmingham & Greater Tuscaloosa

Kathy Byrd – Baldwin County & Mobile

Scarlett Gaddy – Baldwin County & Mobile

Mary McGinnis – East Alabama & Montgomery

Local League MRI Liaisons:

Baldwin County – *Paulette Fedor, Cheryl Rocker*

East Alabama – *Marilyn Garrett*

Greater Birmingham – *Connie Arnwine, Nancy Ekberg*

Greater Tuscaloosa – *Annette Dudgeon, Peggy Hammer, Jill Stokley*

Mobile – *Jane Gordon, Beth Hardaway*

Montgomery – *Roberta Collins, Louvenia Graham, Ursula Nolte*

National MRI Coach is

Julie Arneith from Wisconsin



STATUS OF STATE STUDIES

Health Care study materials are still being revised. It now seems unlikely that we will be able to have a consensus on health care this year. A main focus so far has been on whether or not there is a need for enabling legislation to allow non-physician practitioners to practice in Alabama, but the state board believes more work is needed in the general area of Alabama's basic health care needs.

The emphasis in the EDUCATION STUDY will be on whether or not Alabama should provide for charter schools as part of the public school system. As those who attended Council last May know, Alabama does not now allow for charter schools, and other states have had varied experiences with them. The LWV must study and reach consensus on the issue before we can either support or oppose enabling legislation. Study materials will be available by January. ♦

ALABAMA LEAGUERS ON THE NATIONAL SCENE

Scarlett Gaddy has been appointed to the core committee for the LWVUS study of the role of the federal government in education, and Charlotte Ward will serve as a consultant on the formulation of a national science curriculum for the public schools.

Scarlett had been a leader in social studies education in Tuscaloosa and beyond and has introduced effective innovations using technology to broaden the political awareness and learning possibilities for high school students. The LWVUS is proud to share her expertise with the whole country.

Charlotte has been involved with science teaching at all levels in Alabama for half a century, and looks forward to sharing her experience to improve science education nationally.

At the LWVUS convention in June, Leaguers from most of the thirteen southeastern states met to consider their mutual environmental concerns. Growing out of that meeting is an informal coalition of Leagues that will keep track of governmental action in those areas and provide information and support for action by state Leagues in the areas affected. The group's initial action will be a letter to be sent to elected and appointed agency officials whose actions we will monitor. At this writing the letter is about ready to be sent in the names of the thirteen Leagues, over the signatures of their presidents. Joyce Lanning and Charlotte Ward are working with this coalition. ♦

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THE LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS
OF ALABAMA

