



Save the Date:

- **Membership Meeting**
Monday, 9/23 @ 6:30PM
First Baptist Church
Dr. Gerald Johnson
- **School Tax Vote**
Tuesday, 9/24
- **National Voter Registration Day**
Tuesday, 9/24 from 2-6PM in Opelika
- **PSC Meeting**
Thursday, 9/26
141 N. Ross St. - Auburn
City Council Chambers
- **Board Meeting**
Monday, 9/30 @ 5:30PM
660 East Lane, Auburn
- **Hot Topics Lunches**
Thursdays, 10/3 and 10/17 @ 11AM, location TBD

See Calendar on Page 6 for more information

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League of Women Voters of East Alabama

<http://lww-eastalabama.org/>

From the President: A Challenge for You

My Goal: 70 Members by 2015

September is Membership Month for the LWVEA! Your membership expired on March 31st, which is the end of our fiscal year. If you did not renew at our Annual Meeting in April or over the summer, your dues are due! We are in the process of updating our membership booklet and would love to include you as one of our members. Dues are \$55 per person or \$82.50 per household of two. Checks can be sent to Laura Hill, 1317 Clearmont Cir., Opelika, AL 36801. Your dues go to support local, state and national goals as well as costs to send delegates to state and national conventions and councils.

Our membership number has dropped considerably in the last few years from 67 to 47. Many believe they have renewed when in fact they have not. I have set a goal: we will reach 70 members while I am President of the LWVEA. My term ends in 2015 and I believe that we can do it!

I have big plans for the LWVEA and we have already started to see some strong interest in League activities. Our August meeting was well attended (~30 people were there) and our Hot Topics Lunches have also been a hit. We have averaged almost 10 members at each of our three lunches so far. Our Voter Services team is also in high gear as voter registrations were held at three locations over the last five weeks. Another event is scheduled in Opelika on September 24th for National Voter Registration Day.

If you have not done so already, please send in your membership dues to help meet the goal of 70 members. We also will gladly accept donations as well. Thank you for your continued support and I look forward to seeing you at one of our League events!

Respectfully submitted,

*Kristen De La Fuente
President, LWVEA*

We have a lot of work to do...

First Meeting of 2013/14 was a success!

On Monday, August 26, thirty members of the LWVEA attended the inaugural meeting of the 2013-2014 season to hear an overview of the

upcoming programming for the next year. Kristen De La Fuente and Laura Hill presented the facts on the Auburn school tax referendum, the new Photo Voter ID Law, the Alabama Accountability Act and the Common Core Standards. Dr. Karen DeLano,

Superintendent of Auburn City Schools, was also on hand to answer a few questions regarding the tax referendum.

The most contentious issue we discussed was the Photo Voter ID law.

(Continued on Page 3)

Why Bother to Vote? by Charlotte Ward

Now we have, at least in theory, universal suffrage. But in most elections, a majority of citizens don't bother to use that hard-won right. Why not? All too often, the answer is, "Why bother?"

Voting is a right, and also a privilege. It is the essential dues we pay for freedom...

When the Constitution of the United States was adopted, as far as voting was concerned, "we, the people" were white males who (in most states) owned property. The Fifteenth Amendment conceded that those male voters could be black.

Last month we celebrated the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote. The ratification of that amendment depended on one vote, that of a young legislator in Tennessee. Yes, the amendment would have passed eventually, in some other state legislature, had that young man not changed his vote that day, but it shows that one vote can make a difference.

Now we have, at least in theory, universal suffrage. But in most elections, a majority of citizens don't bother to use that hard-won right. Why not? All too often, the answer is, "Why bother?"

Why vote, indeed? Can your vote, or mine, really matter? Actually, American history is filled with elections that could have gone another way if one vote per district had gone differently. Every vote does count, potentially, and who

can tell when that will be the case?

Democracy is a messy form of government. But as Winston Churchill once commented all the others are worse. When Ben Franklin was asked what form of government the writers of the Constitution were designing, his answer was, "A republic, if you can keep it."

And that is the question: how do we keep it?

Today, there are a number of threats to the continuance of our representative democracy. One is the amount of money involved. It now requires a fortune to run for office. It doesn't sound as true as it once did to tell any American child he (or she) could grow up to be president. On the other hand, the 2008 Obama campaign showed what a great many small contributions can do.

With the gutting of the 1965 Voting Rights Act by a recent Supreme Court decision, the door has been opened for states to pass measures that restrict access to the ballot. Requiring government-issued picture IDs, shortening

the hours and days for registration and voting, and making voting places less accessible make voting harder for those with inflexible working hours, and those without easy access to transportation (i.e., the poor and the elderly). Organizations like the League of Women Voters work tirelessly against such legislation.

The answer to these threats lies with each of us. We begin by voting. Then to make sure our vote counts, we get involved with issues, we sign petitions, we call legislators, we write letters, we attend meetings, maybe we even run for office ourselves. Well, we don't all have to do all those things every time, but one thing we must do every time is VOTE.

Voting is a right, and also a privilege. It is the essential dues we pay for freedom, and its neglect will make Ben Franklin's pessimistic inference come true.

This article will appear in the November edition of "Inside the Village on the Plains" periodical.

We have a lot of work to do... *(continued from Page 1)*

In particular, the issues with notarization of two of the proposed forms. One form is the actual application for the free voter ID. The other is for the affidavit signed by two election officials who identify a voter who does not have picture ID. As many LWVEA members are poll workers, this aspect was particularly troubling. These requirements of notarization are cumbersome and unnecessary.

During the presentations, numerous questions were posed and very interesting discussions ensued. Many members expressed their excitement of the meeting and enjoyed the overview of topics that, while known to almost all, had not been fully examined until then. We have a lot of work to do! We need to stay active and engaged on these topics. To start, please see the article on Pages 4 and 5 with an update to the topics discussed at the August meeting.

GETTING A PICTURE ID IN LEE COUNTY, ALABAMA: AN ADVENTURE STORY

As a non-driver, I have traveled the world using my passport and my Auburn University faculty card as identification. Then came the winter of 2004, when my daughter suggested we celebrate my 75th birthday with a weekend in Bermuda. At the time, my passport was at the Brazilian Embassy, getting a visa for an upcoming cruise that included a visit to Iguassu Falls.

A passport is not required for admission to Bermuda, but a government ID is needed to get through American airports.

Clearly it was time for me to get an Alabama non-driver's card.

My friend Sylvia took me over to the driver's license office to

apply. It turned out I had to have my Social Security card. I'd had one for 60 years, but at this point, I had no idea where it was. That meant a trip to the Social Security office to get a replacement. (Thank goodness for Sylvia!)

That took about a week. Then armed with my shiny new card, we went back to the license office, early in the morning. I got in line. There were a number of young people there for their driver's test and very few people to give it. I waited my turn, although it seemed to me my case might have been processed while the kids were out driving. My turn finally came shortly before 4:00 PM.

The young woman who took

me back for the interview, apparently a new employee, looked at my SS card. It said "Charlotte Berkley Reed," since that was my name when I was 15.

"I'll need to see your marriage license," she said.

Well, I hadn't seen that in 50 years. But an older woman came to my rescue, saying, "That really won't be necessary."

So I got the paperwork done, finally, with minutes to spare to jog up the hill to the court house to get my picture taken and the final document prepared. (I jogged a little faster at 75 than I do now.)

So now I'm official. See how easy that was?

Contributed by Charlotte Ward

LWVAL Healthcare Consensus - October 21, 2013

The League of Women Voters of Alabama (LWVAL) have been gathering information, formulating questions and studying the issue of healthcare. Now is the time to participate in the healthcare consensus put forth by the state League. Documents to help you navigate through the information as well as the consensus questions can be downloaded from the state [website](#). It is critical that our LWVEA members read and understand the contents of all of these documents in order to contribute input at the consensus meeting.

The healthcare consensus meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 21, at the Auburn First Baptist Church starting at 7PM. Social time will start at 6:30PM. Please plan to attend this important meeting.

All of the relevant information is available on the LWVAL website www.lwval.org.

Follow up: The State of Education in Alabama & Photo Voter ID Law

The following is an update to the overview provided at our August meeting where we discussed recent legislation and events affecting Alabama.

Auburn School Tax Referendum

The referendum is set for September 24, 2013. The debate has become very heated with both proponents and opponents strongly voicing their opinions and asking pertinent questions. It actually is good to see so many citizens interested in the measure. The LWVEA is constantly trying to engage voters and get them involved! From that perspective, the debate has been exciting to watch. Both sides have presented impassioned pleas and hard facts in addition to some fuzzy math. Regardless of your decision, the most important thing is to actually vote. It will be very interesting to see how this turns out and how many citizens actually show up at the polls.

Photo Voter ID Law

Comments were due to the Secretary of State's (SoS) office on September 4, 2013, in response to the proposed implementation of the Photo Voter ID Law. In addition to the comprehensive response by the LWVAL, several of our LWVEA members also sent in comments. Thank you for voicing your opinion! It is not clear yet when the final implementation process will be made available but we will be following it. Many comments related to the requirement of notarization of the application form for free voter IDs as well as the verification form by two election officials. Notarization of these two forms is cumbersome and seemingly impossible to accomplish. Another item of interest is whether a valid ID must be current. We are hopeful the SoS will take into account our comments and modify the process accordingly.

Common Core State Standards

In November 2010, the Alabama Board of Education approved the adoption of the **Common Core State Standards** with selected Alabama [standards](#). The standards were developed through a state-led initiative to create a set of benchmarks for college readiness. While the federal government did not create the standards, federal money is tied to the implementation of the standards.

Currently, much is being made of the standards, mostly from those who oppose them. Many mistake the standards for curriculum, which they are not. They do, however, provide benchmarks that children of certain ages should be able to meet regardless of where one resides. They also provide for examples of reading materials of sufficient complexity to be mastered by certain ages. Both proponents and opponents of the standards are concerned that flexibility and innovation will be cast aside in favor of a one-size-fits-all curriculum. Clearly, the Common Core Standards deserve a closer look to make sure rhetoric and inaccuracies are weeded out.

(Continued on Page 5)

Follow Up *(continued from page 4)*

Alabama Accountability Act

The new school year has begun and the Alabama Accountability Act of 2013 is in effect. The controversial legislation enables students in failing schools to transfer to private schools and apply for a \$3500 tax credit to offset the cost of tuition and other acceptable costs. The federal program "No Child Left Behind" already enabled students in failing schools to transfer to non-failing public schools. As of early September, 789 students transferred from failing schools: the vast majority transferred to another public school while 52 of the 789 students transferred to a private school.

At our LWVEA meeting in August, several questions were raised about the scholarship program created to assist those who need financial help to attend private schools. The Alabama Department of Revenue (ADOR; <http://revenue.alabama.gov/>) is the entity that is managing the scholarships and the Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs). Tax credits are in place for entities that donate to the SGOs. As of September 13th, there were six qualified 501(c)3 SGOs accepting donations. One example of these agencies is the AAA Scholarship Foundation, Inc. that has been in existence since 2010. It is a Georgia-based, not-for-profit organization that also has an operating address in Prattville, AL. No more than 5% of the donations and interest may be used for operating costs for the SGOs. The state of Alabama has \$25M available for the donation tax credits.

All students in failing schools are eligible for a scholarship from an SGO but there is an income cap of approximately \$64,400 to qualify. The details of how the scholarship process works is not entirely clear right now. However, according to HB658 (amendments to HB84), all SGOs shall "ensure that educational scholarships are provided only to students who would otherwise attend a failing school so that the student can attend a nonpublic school or a non-failing public school. Provided, however, that any scholarship funds unaccounted for on September 15th of each year may be made available to low-income eligible students to defray the costs of attending a qualifying school, whether or not the student is assigned to a failing school." It remains to be seen how this will be managed.

Lawsuits have been filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the Alabama Education Association (AEA) for various reasons. The SPLC claims that the law discriminates against students, particularly those in Alabama's Black Belt region, who attend failing schools but do not have options to attend non-failing schools. They claim that either non-failing schools do not exist where they live or, if a non-failing school is nearby, those schools are not accepting transfers or else students lack transportation to attend. This lawsuit is still pending.

The lawsuit brought forth by the AEA claimed that the Legislature violated the open meetings law and its own rules when it passed the AAA. On September 21, the lawsuit filed by the AEA was blocked by the Alabama Supreme Court. According to the O-A News, the court released a statement, "The Alabama Constitution does not require the Legislature to conduct its meetings in public." They also added, "It is not the function of the judiciary to require the Legislature to follow its own rules."

Calendar of Events

We want to see you! Add these events to your calendars and get involved!

September 23 (Monday) - General Meeting Dr. Gerald Johnson, retired professor from the Auburn University Political Science Department and head of AEA's polling program, will be our speaker. Dr. Johnson will talk about the effects of recent legislation on Alabama's poor. Auburn First Baptist Church, 128 E. Glenn Ave. Social time starting at 6:30PM with presentation beginning at 7:00PM. Light refreshments will be served.

September 24 (Tuesday) - National Voter Registration Day The LWVEA will register voters in Opelika at the Dollar General (next to Piggly Wiggly) and at Wright's Market at 603 Pleasant Drive from 2-6PM. Contact [Marilyn Garrett](#) to join us.

September 24 (Tuesday) - Auburn School Tax Referendum Don't forget to vote!

September 26 (Thursday) - Public Service Commission to hold session and public forum in Auburn This meeting will be in two parts, both in the Council Chambers of the City of Auburn located at 141 North Ross Street, Auburn, AL. In the PSC day meeting beginning at 1:30 p.m., Alagasco presents pipeline safety and corporate risk. At the evening meeting beginning at 6:00 p.m., there will be a public forum for Alagasco customer feedback.

September 30 (Monday) - LWVEA Board meeting Start time is 5:30PM, location 660 East Lane, Auburn. All members are welcome.

October 3 and 17 (Thursdays) - Hot Topics Lunches at 11AM at Toomer's Coffee on South College (behind Loco's).

October 21 (Monday) - General Meeting Join us for our Healthcare Consensus Meeting. Please take a look at the materials (<http://www.lwval.org/takeaction/health-care-2013-consensus/>) and join us for this important event. Auburn First Baptist Church, 128 E. Glenn Ave. Social time starting at 6:30PM with meeting beginning at 7:00PM. Light refreshments will be served.

October 28 (Monday) - LWVEA Board meeting Start time is 5:30PM, location 660 East Lane, Auburn. All members are welcome.

Moratorium on Title Pawn and Payday Loan Businesses

As reported by Marilyn Garrett in the LWVEA's August issue of *The Voter*, Alabama is a "paradise for predatory lenders" such as title pawn and payday loan businesses. Montgomery is the latest Alabama city to impose a moratorium on these types of businesses. They will halt licensing of new title loan or payday loan businesses for 90 days. Current businesses will be unaffected. According to a [Montgomery Advertiser article](#), 11 other cities have imposed moratoriums such as Huntsville, Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, Eufaula and Trussville.

Many citizens cannot use traditional means of banking and must rely on title pawn and payday loans. As such, they are subject to the high fees and interest rates associated with these loans. The LWVEA needs to keep pushing the legislature to do something about these loan practices.



Registering voters is a core component to the League of Women Voters. It is more important than ever to make sure that everyone who is eligible to vote has the opportunity to do so. We have had several successful Voter Registration events in August and September.

Photo, left: [Voter Registration Drive at Tailgate @ the Library, August 30, 2013](#)

A Big THANK YOU to the following people who helped out at the Voter Registration Drives this year:

Laura Hill
Marilyn Garrett
Jayson Hill
Betty T. Smith
Judy Lechner

Observer Corps - Get Involved!

- [Auburn City Council](#) - 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month at 7PM at 141 N. Ross St.
- [Opelika City Council](#) - 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month at 7PM at 204 S. 7th St.
- [Auburn Planning Commission](#) - 2nd Thursday of each month at 5PM at 141 N. Ross St.
- [Opelika Planning Commission](#) - 4th Tuesday of each month at 3PM at the Public Works Facility, 700 Fox Trail
- [Lee County Commission](#) - 2nd and last Mondays of the month at 6PM (pre-meeting at 4PM) at the Lee County Courthouse

We also need observers for local school and water boards.

If you are interested in becoming an Observer, contact [Kristen De La Fuente](#) for more information.



LWVEA
660 East Lane
Auburn, AL 36830

E-MAIL:
president@lwv-eastalabama.org

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:
<http://lwv-eastalabama.org/>

Facebook:
[League of Women Voters of East Alabama](#)

Twitter:
[@lwveasta!](#)

LWV of East Alabama Board of Directors, 2013-2014	
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<i>Ann Moss</i>	<i>Director - The Voter Editor</i>
<i>Charlotte Ward</i>	<i>Website Management (off-board)</i>

Dues are Due by September 30th

Your dues go towards the functioning of the League of Women Voters at local, state and national levels. Locally, we use our portion of dues to send members to state and national conventions and councils as well as funding for voter services literature and registration drives.

Individual members \$55.00 Household of two \$82.50

Please send checks made payable to LWVEA to our Treasurer:
Laura Hill, 1317 Clearmont Cir., Opelika, AL 36801

About the League of Women Voters of East Alabama..

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots, nonpartisan, political organization that "has fought since 1920 to improve our systems of

government and impact public policies through citizen education and advocacy." Membership is open to men and women 18 or older.

Individual, family and student memberships are available. Join us today and help make a difference in the East Alabama area!

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF EAST ALABAMA
660 East Lane
Auburn, AL 36830

