

THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALABAMA

APRIL 2021



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

As I close out my second and final term as your president, I want to take a few moments to reflect on what we have accomplished together.

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In keeping with our Program ("making democracy work") area of focus, we have

- Organized a wide variety of educational and informational forums (thanks to Zoom).
- Conducted "drive-up" voter registration and informational events in a safe and socially distant manner.
- Used Vote411 to reach record numbers of people all over the state.
- Filed a state court voting rights lawsuit and a "friend of the court" brief in a federal voting rights lawsuit.
- Received two grants from LWVUS to work on federal voting rights issues and the drawing of fair maps – resulting in a series of videos to educate the public.
- Obtained a CARES Act grant to support statewide voter service activities in a safe and socially distant manner.
- Instituted a state-wide advocacy program to follow legislation and alert members when an item of concern is debated, raise awareness specifically of voting rights issues, and provide direct assistance to citizens seeking to have their voting rights restored.

We have worked hard to strengthen our organization. We have

- Started two local leagues.
- Increased total membership of the league – 558 members state-wide.
- Committed to improving our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- Improved communication with and collaboration among local leagues.
- Collaborated with groups including Cover Alabama and Alabama Arise working on similar issues.
- Expanded the communication committee to increase our visibility on social media, adding a blog and a legislative newsletter.

Additionally, we commemorated the imperfect history of woman suffrage in a variety of ways, such as in museum exhibits, public art displays, bicentennial events, and memorializing Alabama women both in the National Votes for Women Trail and the Pomeroy National Women's Suffrage Marker program.

We have done all these things while faced with incredible challenges: a pandemic which took numerous lives and shut down normal activities, numerous severe weather events, a nation-wide racial reckoning brought on by police violence, and a polarizing election season. Through all of this, we kept focused on our mission of "empowering voters and defending democracy."

I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with dynamic League leaders from all over during these past four years. Their hard work has made all of this possible. I look forward to supporting the incoming LWVAL leadership team as they continue the work to further our mission.

Barbara Caddell

By Robin Buckelew

In statewide elections, Alabama citizens cast about 60% of their votes for Republicans and about 40% for Democrats. However, the Democratic representation in Congress is 1 of 7, or about 14%. The state Senate has eight Democrats out of 35 members, or 23%, and the state House has 28 Democrats out of 105 members, or 27%. All these numbers are far short of the 40% of Democratic votes cast. Why is this so? The answer lies in the process of legislative redistricting. In Alabama, as in many other states, redistricting is under the control of the state legislature and the governor.

When one party controls the executive and both houses of the legislature, redistricting is often gerrymandered for partisan advantage. Gerrymandering techniques include “packing” or concentrating specific groups of voters into as few districts as possible to reduce the group’s representation; and “cracking,” spreading the group into a large number of districts in which the dominant party is a majority, again to reduce or eliminate influence. The Supreme Court ruled in 2019 that “partisan gerrymandering claims present political questions beyond the reach of the federal courts.”

So what governs the redistricting process in Alabama? With regard to federal elections, the US Constitution, federal law, and court decisions provide some rules. The Constitution states “[t]he times, places, and manner of holding elections for senators and representatives” is prescribed by the state legislature, but Congress may at any time make or alter such regulations. Congressional representatives are apportioned to the states on the basis of population, using population data developed in the US Census every 10 years. The Supreme Court ruled in 1964 that the population of House districts must be equal “as nearly as practicable.” This requirement is strict: a state policy that causes a one percent spread from largest to smallest district will likely be unconstitutional.

For state legislatures, the Supreme Court has ruled that the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution requires substantially equal state legislative representation for all citizens. In addition, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits racial gerrymandering, or the process of diluting African American votes through redistricting.

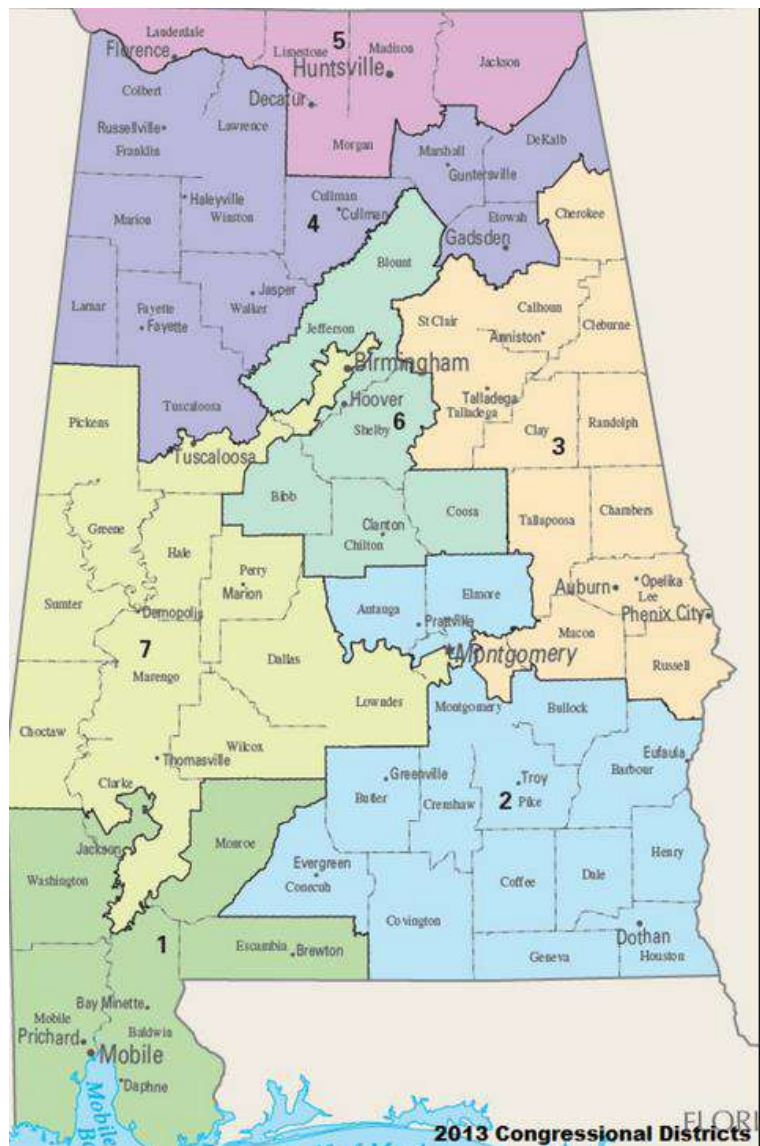
Regarding state rules, the Alabama Constitution requires that state legislative districts be contiguous. It also states that state Senate districts “follow county lines except where necessary to comply with other legal requirements.” State legislative district lines must be approved during the first legislative session following the US Census. The state Legislature has a standing committee on redistricting, called the “Permanent Legislative Committee on Reapportionment.” The committee consists of six members, three members from the Senate and three from the House, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the House, respectively. For the period when the redistricting work is to occur, the committee expands to 22 members (one member of the House from each congressional district, four members of the House at-large appointed by the Speaker of the House and one member of the Senate from each congressional district, four members of the Senate at-large, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor.) Twenty-one have been appointed, fifteen Republicans and six Democrats; at press time, there was one vacancy for the spot previously held by Cam Ward, who currently heads the Bureau of Pardons and Paroles.

The committee creates a plan for redistricting, which is voted on by the legislature and signed or vetoed by the governor. Guidelines adopted by the committee in 2000 asked “that [congressional] districts be contiguous, reasonably compact, follow county lines where possible, and maintain communities of interest to the extent feasible.” The committee also agreed to “attempt to avoid contests between incumbents.” The committee had similar guidelines applying to state legislative redistricting.

Looking at Alabama congressional districts, drawn after the last (2010) census, we can get an idea of how closely those guidelines were followed. The equal population requirement is strictly enforced (Supreme Court ruling). Districts are contiguous, although sometimes with a very narrow neck connecting one area with another. What about compactness? The two districts at the top of the state stretch from the eastern border to the western border. District 6 has a top portion shaped like a hammerhead. District 7 looks like an amoeba

extending into Birmingham, Montgomery, and points south. District 2 looks like a mountain with a large boulder balancing in its top. As far as following county lines is concerned, Birmingham, in the middle of Jefferson County, has a large piece in the middle of the city carved out and placed in the 7th district. Likewise, Montgomery is in the same situation. For communities of interest, we have to wonder what Birmingham voters, who share a county commission, city government, and school districts with the rest of the city, have in common with voters in Clarke County.

We might conclude that the final guideline mentioned here, avoiding contests between incumbents, is the most important to the legislature. In fact, districts in Alabama, drawn by sitting legislators, almost guarantee reelection of those same legislators. The bottom line is that in Alabama, legislators pick their voters, not the other way around.



ADVOCACY IN ALABAMA

By Kathy Jones

The League of Women Voters of Alabama (LWVAL) State and Local Leagues Boards agreed in 2020 to establish the LWVAL Advocacy Team that will advocate for positive changes in three areas: voting rights, government transparency, and redistricting in Alabama. Under the voting rights topic we are primarily focusing on absentee voting, early voting, voter rights restoration, and automatic voter registration. Our Fair Maps project is tackling issues around redistricting. With respect to transparency, if citizens are to cast an informed vote on election day, they must be informed about the actions of government officials. Lack of transparency and accountability is yet another way of obstructing true democracy. The League advocates for a more equitable, transparent, and accountable government for its citizens.

Looking at standard definitions of advocacy helps to explain the Advocacy Team's purpose and mission: "Advocacy means giving a person support to have their voice heard. It is a service aimed at helping people understand their rights and express their views." Advocacy can also be described as "an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions." The LWVAL Advocacy Team will work throughout the year to create, plan, and review near-term and longer-term strategies for our LWVAL Advocacy priorities.

The key to successful advocacy is a robust communication strategy for our issues and topics. This past winter the LWVAL Advocacy Blog, "Voices of the League" was established which will provide timely updates on proposed legislation in Montgomery. This blog will be a central part of our overall strategy to address advocacy topics and necessary context on the issues and legislation. Check it out at <https://blog.lwval.org/> In addition,

our Communications team publishes an Advocacy newsletter and eye-catching, impactful social media with clear messages posted and shared on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Not everything that the Advocacy team is doing relates to legislative advocacy. In the area of Voter Rights Restoration (VRR), we have worked with the Auburn Elections College professors to upgrade the training they give to Registrars. We also met with the new director of the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles. We have offered to provide additional instructional materials to help Parole Officers and disenfranchised citizens become better informed about the VRR laws and overall process.

Additionally, the Advocacy Team will sponsor educational events along with other projects to promote civic engagement. For example, for the Redistricting topic, the Advocacy Team has the Maptitude mapmaking software that will be made available to local leagues who wish to use it to develop alternative, equitable redistricting maps for municipalities, and school boards.

The relationships and alliances we are building, the lessons we are learning, and the persistence the League is bringing to advocacy in Alabama are making us stronger as we move forward. Alabama's history of institutionalized discrimination, racism, disenfranchisement, gerrymandering, and voter suppression still haunts the state. Although improving voting rights in Alabama will require constant vigilance, greater government transparency, and increasing voter turnout, we are up to the challenge and would love for you to join us!

By Mary Anne Wilson

After an intense 2020 election cycle, we have a much lighter year in 2021. There are no federal elections or Alabama statewide elections in 2021. Thus far we have had a few local elections, including a municipal election in Tuscaloosa and some special district elections for the Alabama House and Senate. Birmingham, Dothan and Mobile will hold municipal elections in August. For the local leagues participating, Vote 411 will be available for the municipal elections this summer. VOTE411.org is the League's "one-stop-shop", providing tools to help voters navigate the voting process. On VOTE411.org you will find detailed candidate information, including candidates' direct responses to issue-related questions, voter registration tools, polling place locations and other helpful Election Day information.

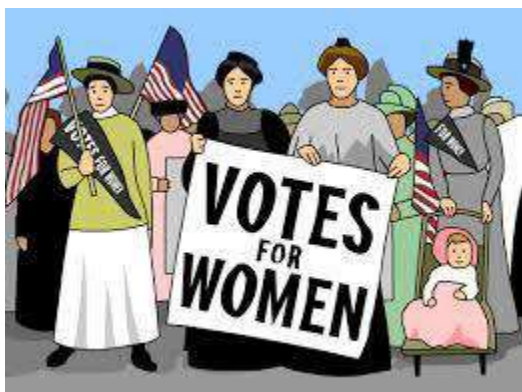
On another front, the recent voter list maintenance process continues. This is one of the processes for keeping updated and accurate voter lists that occurs on a four-year cycle. Non-forwardable post cards were sent from the Office of the Secretary of State the end of January to all registered Alabama voters at their last known address. (If the information on the card was correct, the voter did not need to do anything.) In April, a second round of postcards will be sent out, this time to only those whose original postcards were returned undeliverable. This mailing will notify the voter of the need to update their registration information on the postage paid confirmation card. If that second card is returned or the voter does not respond to that card within 90 days, the voter's status will be marked "inactive" and

moved to the suspense list. The voter is still on the rolls; however, if the voter does not update the registration information or vote within the next two federal election cycles, the voter will be removed from the rolls (in January 2025) after publication in a newspaper of general circulation for two consecutive weeks. If removed from the rolls, a voter will need to re-register. You can always check your voter registration information online at www.sos.alabama.gov, or if you have any questions, contact the Secretary of State's office or your local Board of Registrars.



SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL NOTES

By Barbara Caddell



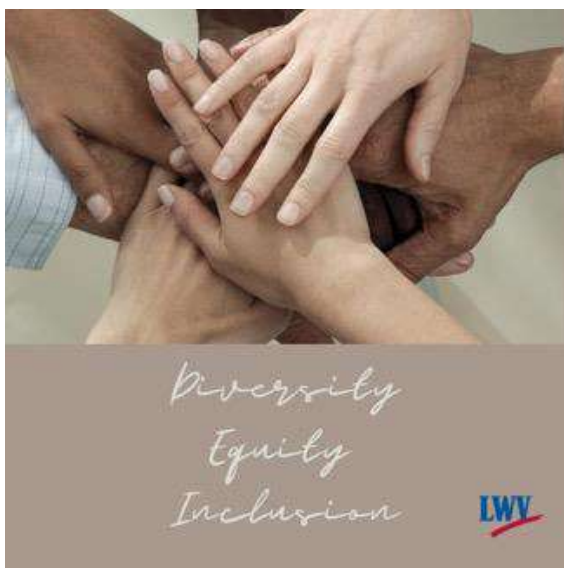
As part of our celebration of the centennial of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Alabamians have worked hard to research and commemorate sites important to woman suffrage in our state. An important part of this effort to honor women is the William G. Pomeroy Foundation's National Woman's Suffrage Marker Program commemorating structures where suffrage events occurred. Alabama is slated to receive 6 of these markers in various parts of the state. Thanks to the efforts of women's history researchers, markers will be placed in:

- Huntsville - YMCA where the Huntsville Equal Suffrage Association formed in 1912
- Decatur – Echols Opera House where Susan B. Anthony spoke in 1895
- Birmingham – Rickwood Field, where a "Suffrage Day" was held at a Birmingham Barons game in 1915
- Selma – building where the Selma Equal Suffrage Association formed in 1912
- Tuskegee – library building where Adella Hunt Logan, African American suffragist, worked
- Mobile – home of Eugenie Marx, first President of the Mobile Equal Suffrage Association

Currently these markers are in production and we look forward to announcing their delivery, installation, and dedication late in the summer.

LWVAL COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

By Carol Mosely



The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Team is thrilled that trainings are underway! Dr. Zillah Fluker has begun her work with the team starting with the Tennessee Valley League. The DEI Team will be working with Dr. Fluker to devise a rollout strategy for the rest of us.

We are also working to add logistical details to our state DEI Plan. For example, we are increasing our skills in collaborating with other groups and connecting with members of DEI Committees in other states to compare notes and get ideas.

We welcome questions and suggestions.

Carol Mosely, Montgomery
Bonita Gill, Huntsville
Beth McDaniel, East Alabama
Sara Feldmeier, Tennessee Valley
Judy Golberg, Shur Fellow

Earth Day 2021: Focus on Alabama
Earth Day Panel Discussion
April 24, 2021, 1pm
Via Zoom

The LWVAL cordially invites you to a 51st Earth Day celebration on April 24, 2021, at 1 pm via Zoom. It will feature a panel of environmental advocates, including Valerie Adams of the Alabama Indigenous Coalition, Maggie Johnston of Wild Alabama, and Casie Jones of the Sierra Club. They will describe Alabama's biodiversity and describe what Alabamians can do to preserve it. Moderator Cindy Lowry of the Alabama Rivers Alliance will explain the connection between voting and environmental protection. Registration is required – sign up at <https://bit.ly/3rPSAjH>

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALABAMA

APRIL 24TH AT 1:00PM

51st Earth Day '21: Focus on Alabama

MAGGIE JOHNSTON
WILD ALABAMA

VALERIE ADAMS
ALABAMA INDIGENOUS COALITION

CASIE JONES
SIERRA CLUB ALABAMA CHAPTER

MODERATOR
CINDY LOWRY
Alabama Rivers Alliance

Please join us for a stellar panel of environmental advocates to discuss Alabama's amazing biodiversity and the threats to the state's environment.

Find out how voting can make a difference for clean air, water, and land in Alabama.

Registration information:
<http://bit.ly/3rPSAjH>

@LWVAL

LWVAL STATE CONVENTION



The League of Women Voters of Alabama will hold its 2021 biennial convention on - SAVE THE DATE! - May 22, 2021, 10 am – 3 pm. Because of COVID concerns, it will be held via Zoom and will focus on doing the business of the League. We will review our achievements; adopt bylaws, budgets, and program items; and elect new officers and directors. Local leagues and MAL units are assigned delegates according to the size of their membership.

Registration is required and league members will be sent registration information via email.

How will members know the specifics of the business to be conducted? We are providing information in several ways:

- **ALSO, SAVE THIS DATE! On May 5 at 6 pm, there will be a policy briefing for League members via Zoom in order to present proposed bylaws changes, budgets, and program areas for emphasis.** This will be an opportunity to obtain important information and ask questions. League members will receive an email soon with registration links for this learning session and for convention.
- By April 22, members will receive via email a packet of information containing the final versions of the budget, bylaws, and program items as well as a copy of the proposed slate of nominees for office.

At a typical Convention, we have speakers and panels to educate and inspire us. Unfortunately, COVID has changed that. We are planning to have an educational/inspirational program late in the summer. Stephanie Butler from our organization in Dothan is leading the planning effort for this event – stay tuned for more information!

We are pleased to announce that LWVAL will have special guest Leah Edwards with us at the convention on May 22. Leah currently serves as Treasurer of the League of Women Voters of the United States and is the LWVUS Board liaison to LWVAL. She began volunteering with the League of Women Voters of San Francisco in 2014 and joined the Board of Directors later that year. She managed LWVSF's Voter Services programs before serving as President from 2017 to 2020. As President, Leah focused on growing LWVSF's impact through partnerships and implementing technology to streamline operations. She also represented the League of Women Voters as a delegate at the United Nations 63rd Commission on the Status of Women. Leah believes that citizen's participation in government is critical to the success of our nation, and she is excited to continue furthering the League's mission in creating a more perfect democracy.



Professionally, Leah works in the investment management industry. She is a CFA Charterholder and received her B.S. in Environmental and Water Resource Economics and B.A. in Political Science from the University of Arizona. In addition to her work with the League of Women Voters, Leah also serves on the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Bond Oversight Committee.

LOCAL LEAGUE REPORTS

Click below to find out what is happening around the state!

[LWV Baldwin County](#)

[LWV of East Alabama](#)

[LWV of Greater Birmingham](#)

[LWV of Greater Tuscaloosa](#)

[LWV of Mobile](#)

[LWV of Montgomery](#)

[LWV of Southeast Alabama MAL Unit](#)

[LWV of the Tennessee Valley](#)

IN MEMORIAM



Jeannie Graetz, long-time member of the League of Women Voters Montgomery, died in December at the age of 90. She and her husband, the Reverend Robert Graetz, were among the handful of whites who supported the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956. Their family home was bombed twice for their involvement in the Civil Rights movement in 1956 and 1957. Still, she remained active in the fight for Civil Rights throughout her life and at the time of her death she was still active with the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University in Montgomery. Ms. Graetz had a life-long passion for learning and earned her bachelor's degree at the age of 85. Her husband predeceased her by three months. She is survived by six children, 26 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.