

# THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALABAMA

DECEMBER 2019



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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

As I contemplate the upcoming election season, I am reminded of a quotation I read recently by Albert Einstein: "Politics is more difficult than physics." In the same vein, Calvin in a cartoon says to Hobbes, "It's a lot more fun to blame things than to fix them"—because, of course, fixing them would require the political system to work properly. These very human comments on our political life summarize the challenges faced by the League of Women Voters as we enter our hundredth year.

We face several challenges. We face the challenge that, in some Americans' shallow view, politics is just theater and is only there for fun. We face the challenge of public apathy—those feeling that individual votes or opinions are not important. We also face the challenge that compromise and collaboration are never easy. And yet, good government requires that our elected representatives exercise not only compromise and collaboration, but also common sense.

Nonpartisanship in our relationships with politicians and political parties is fundamental to the League's respected status. And, the League's powerful principled voice on current issues keeps us relevant. As it has done for almost 100 years, the League will maintain our policy of non-partisanship toward politicians and political parties even as we take a strong partisan stand on public issues. The League will continue to use these strengths to meet challenges to our democratic political system.

To answer the challenges, the LWVAL is undertaking these projects:

- Registering voters old and young as well as assisting voters in regaining their voting rights
- Sponsoring several candidate events, including televised forums for U.S. Senatorial candidates

I urge you to join us as we face the challenges to democracy and participate in one of these efforts. Let's work together to make Alabama a better place!

# Kickoff of 19th Amendment Celebration in Montgomery

Kathy Jones



The Alabama Women's Suffrage Centennial Committee (AWSCC) was formed in 2019 to commemorate the achievements of the past and promote the importance of voting in the present. The committee is comprised of educators, historians, civic leaders, and interested citizens from across the state. The League of Women Voters Alabama President Barbara Caddell and the Alabama State Bar President Christy Crow are the committee's co-chairs. Check out the AWSCC website at <https://www.alabamawomen100.org/>

On December 14, 2019, to commemorate the ending of the Alabama Bicentennial year, there will be a parade in Montgomery that starts at 10am and a Festival afterwards from 1pm-4pm. The AWSCC has invited all League members to join them in marching in the parade in costume as a kickoff for the 19th Amendment Centennial Year!

Their guidance on costumes is: We will be reenacting a 19-teens-era suffrage march. If you would like to sew your own costume, there is a pattern you can purchase. There are also several nice suffragist costumes available on Amazon if you'd like to check them out.

The AWSCC will also print a few signs for marchers to hold and will send some examples in case folks would like to make one of their own. They will also plan to get a banner that says "Alabama Women's Suffrage Centennial Committee" for those in the front to carry.

**Location: all participants will need to meet at Cramton Bowl (220 Hall St., Montgomery, AL 36104) already in costume by no later than about 9:45am on 12/14/19.**

During the festival (1 to 4 p.m.) we will divide everyone into shifts (so that you can go and enjoy the festival yourself). There, we will have buttons and other things to hand out as well as sign-up sheets for any festival goers who is interested in becoming a member of the League.

**If you are interested in joining the League in the parade and/or festival, please send an email to Kathy Jones at [Kathy.u.jones@gmail.com](mailto:Kathy.u.jones@gmail.com) or to Barbara Caddell at [caddellh@comcast.net](mailto:caddellh@comcast.net)!**

# Voter Rights Restoration Initiative for 2020

Kathy Jones

Based on the 1901 Constitution, Alabama citizens who are convicted of felonies that are deemed acts of moral turpitude are not allowed to vote. For one hundred and sixteen (116) years the sixty seven (67) County Registrars operated without guidance and with impunity to disenfranchise those who, in their opinion, had committed a “disqualifying felony.”

It wasn't until 2017, with the threat of a lawsuit (Thompson v. Alabama), that the Alabama legislature passed a “Definition of Moral Turpitude Act” providing explicit guidance to the County Registrars on what constitutes a disqualifying felony. Through this legislation, disenfranchised citizens also gained a path to restore their voting rights.

Based on rights restoration efforts conducted since the passage of the 2017 law, it is believed that the majority of the estimated 250,000 Alabama citizens who were disenfranchised should never have lost the right to vote in the first place. Many who think they have lost their right to vote have never even tried to register. Additionally, many people think that if someone is in jail they automatically cannot vote—but that is not true.

Unfortunately many people in this state still do not realize that the moral turpitude laws have changed. The Secretary of State's Office has not reached out to those previously denied voting rights. The immense effort of locating and assisting disenfranchised citizens has fallen upon civic groups, churches, and voting rights organizations like the League of Women Voters.

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## Voter Rights Restoration Initiative for 2020, continued

For the 2020 election year, the Campaign Legal Center and the League of Women Voters of Alabama are partnering to develop a more effective and efficient approach for helping Alabama's disenfranchised citizens regain their voting rights. This initiative includes providing Alacourt.com database access free of charge to our state's League members who complete Voter Rights Restoration (VRR) training and sign a "LWVAL Alacourt usage agreement" that defines requirements for utilizing Alacourt, forms to be used, and record keeping.

Blair Bowie of the Campaign Legal Center will provide computer/phone-based VRR training, including how to utilize Alacourt on either November 19th in the evening or November 20th at lunch. After completion of the training, members will receive a user agreement to complete and return so that a personalized Alacourt password can be issued.

Our goal is that each Local League will benefit from having VRR experts who can support voter registration efforts. Also, each League is encouraged create partnerships with other nonpartisan community groups to reach more people who need assistance.

**Please contact Kathy Jones at [Kathy.U.Jones@gmail.com](mailto:Kathy.U.Jones@gmail.com) if you are interested in becoming a VRR warrior!**



# 2019 Membership Development Grant

Kristen De La Fuente

The Membership Development Grant provides small amounts of funding to Local Leagues (LL) and Member-At-Large (MAL) Units in order to increase membership in the LWVAL by increasing the visibility and outreach of LLs and MALs.

The grant money is intended to help LLs and MAL units grow their memberships. As membership increases, more grant money would presumably be available in each subsequent year.

Funding available (2019): \$838

Funding awarded (2019): \$838

Three proposals were received, and all proposals received some funding.

The 2019 recipients are as follows:

- The LWV of Tennessee Valley was awarded \$250 to create new membership development publications.
- The LWV of Baldwin County was awarded \$460 to enhance their member meetings with guest speakers (stipends), audio equipment, and a new LWV banner.
- The Greater Shoals MAL Unit was awarded \$128 to create literature and advertising to support the Shoals Renewable Energy Symposium held on Thursday, September 5, 2019.



Upon completion of proposed activities, receipts for all purchases plus an accountability report will be required. The reports should include achievements: proposed deliverables or goals, including specific information relevant to each grant such as a listing of all speakers and associated stipends, the number of audience members for each event, as well as any change in membership count.

The amount for the 2020 grant cycle will be determined on February 1, 2020 and will be based on the PMP numbers for the LWVAL membership as of January 31, 2020. Two dollars will be budgeted for each member of the LWVAL in the database on that date.

Thank you to those who submitted proposals and to the members of the 2019 Membership Development Grant Committee: Stacey Blersch (East Alabama) and Kathy Byrd (Tuscaloosa).

# VOTE 411

Mary Anne Wilson

VOTE411.org is a “one-stop-shop,” providing tools to help voters navigate the voting process. It has provided voters with nonpartisan information concerning elections since 2006. On VOTE411.org, you will find detailed candidate information, including candidates’ direct responses to issue-related questions, information about constitutional amendments on the ballot, voter registration tools, polling place locations, and other helpful Election Day information.

2020 is shaping up to be a very active election year. The presidential preference primary and statewide primary elections will be held March 3, any runoffs on March 31, and the General Election, Nov. 3. (Various municipal elections also will be held in 2020 on August 25.)

Alabama will be electing a U.S. Senator, seven members of the U.S. House, Justices to the Alabama Supreme Court, Judges on the Courts of Criminal and Civil Appeals, Public

Service Commission President, some districted State Board of Education seats, and numerous county offices. LWVAL will cover the statewide races. Districted races and local elections will be within the purview of the local Leagues in each district. LWVUS will cover the national races. All of this voter information will be accessible in one place—Vote411.org.

Vote411.org is an excellent way for the League to fulfill an important part of its mission: to encourage informed and active participation in government.

**If you are interested in volunteering to help LWVAL with Vote 411, please contact Mary Anne Wilson at [hallwils@aol.com](mailto:hallwils@aol.com). To volunteer with your local leagues, contact the local Voter Services Chair.**



# Fair Maps Campaign

Robin Buckelew



The People Powered Fair Maps Campaign is envisioned as a 3-year effort to introduce equitable redistricting for legislative districts over all the United States. All 50 state and D.C. leagues will be "speaking with one voice." Alabama belongs to the Federal Legislative Fix focus group (one of four such groups) with the goal of restoring the Voting Rights Act of 1965 through the passage of the Voting Rights Advancement Act by 2021. Whether anyone can influence the Alabama Congressional delegation to vote for this act, activity in Alabama will still have a reinforcing effect on public opinion throughout the U.S.

The campaign is also intended to build the power of the League. It is the first campaign to have a defined evaluation plan, which is why data will be collected in monthly reports. Leadership is also moving to prevent other organizations from taking credit for league work, by being more proactive with press releases. The Fair Maps campaign logo is being trademarked, and it will be available for us to use in our printed material.

In the near term we would like to meet with representatives of the Alabama local Leagues to scope out their preferred roles in support of the state campaign. We have sent the materials supplied by LWVUS to Leagues across the state. I am willing to travel to the various cities to meet personally with League personnel, and I hope to hear soon what schedules might be available.

Activities under the LWVAL contract with LWVUS include hosting events and tabling at other groups' events to educate the public on redistricting. LWVTN has found a terrific

video clip that explains gerrymandering and includes a speech by a consultant engaged in gerrymandering. Other activities include recruiting volunteers, writing letters to the editor, sending out action alerts, and participating in the Feb 14 2020 National Day of Action. We need to identify allies and form partnerships to bring added strength to the campaign. In Huntsville, we have held a meeting and created a list of potential contacts.

One of the key techniques described by LWVUS to engage the public is storytelling. The example cited was Jimmy Kimmel talking about his infant son, in support of the Affordable Care Act. We need personal stories of individuals who have been adversely affected by the unfairly drawn voter districts in Alabama.

Is there an area that has been neglected because it is split into several districts, and no one takes ownership of it? Is there a place that lacks fire protection or clean water because not enough people in the legislature care? When politicians choose their voters, and their seats are safe, there is little incentive for them to serve their constituencies, save their own conscience. There are different stories in each League's geographical area, and the local Leagues could really support our state's efforts by contributing some of these stories. Our plans include collecting these stories.

LWVUS notes that this is a new kind of effort for the League, and we should expect to alter our planning as we proceed. We will be open to all suggestions from the local Leagues.

## Part II: "People-Powered Fair Maps" Train-the-Trainer Meeting

The Fair Maps Campaign is underway: Virginia Case, the CEO of the LWVUS, testified before Congress on the Voting Rights Act. The Train-the-Trainer Meeting held October 9–11 included training sessions on two tools to be used in the campaign.

*Power Mapping* is a technique used to plot influence against group position for various groups of interest to the campaign. The vertical axis would reflect the amount of influence a particular group (like the NAACP) has on our goal. The horizontal axis would reflect how close or far away that group is from our position. Once all the groups of interest are plotted, then the unit doing the strategizing (say, LWVVA) would decide where to deploy their resources. If a group is highly influential and aligned with our position, resources do not need to be spent on it. If a group is adamantly opposed with no hope for movement, LWV could either ignore it or try to figure out a way to diminish its influence. Or, the group might appear to be influential and subject to a favorable shift. When LWVUS sends out the Powerpoint charts for this meeting, I will forward them to *The Voter*, and hopefully this tool will be more clear.

The second tool presented was story telling. The example given was Jimmy Kimmel's influence on the Affordable Care Act. He told a personal story about his sick infant on national television. He said that nobody's baby should have to die if care is available to save the child. The presenter made the point that if a baby is born with a life-threatening illness, the illness is a pre-existing condition. The example given for redistricting was the destruction of Korea Town during the LA riots. Korea Town was pieced into 4 legislative districts, so no one cared whether it was rebuilt. The story was personalized by telling it from the point of view of one restaurant owner who had worked hard and planned to pass his restaurant on to the next generation of his family, but now that prospect seemed impossible.

The idea is for us to come up with true stories that show personal effects of redistricting on real people. I think one possibility here in Alabama is Medicaid expansion, which would stop the closing of more rural hospitals in our state.

If our legislature were more representative of Alabamians, we would have a chance to expand Medicaid. One does not have to be on Medicaid to benefit from having a local hospital—for example, when a mother is giving birth. It should not be difficult to find a League member in the state who did not have a hospital available when needed.

I took the training on building coalitions and one on maximizing power across state and local Leagues. The training used power mapping to develop a list of potential partners, and covered things like making sure each partner's task is defined and understood. The presenter focused on 3 Cs: communication, coordination, and collaboration.

The meeting also included a session on the evaluation plan, which will have fairly simple reporting. Each focus group will also have a monthly session that will employ Zoom, a video conferencing software. Finally, there was a session by a lawyer explaining the ins and outs of lobbying—i.e., what is legal and how much can be spent on it.

~ Robin Buckelew



# Why Is the League Non-Partisan?

Scarlett Gaddy



In today's climate, we are increasingly tribal, viewing events through the lens of political parties. The League of Women Voters is often confused with partisan groups even though League policy is clear in its nonpartisanship. Each member should be familiar with our nonpartisan policy. We neither support nor endorse political candidates or political parties. The League, however, is political in that we hold positions on key issues.

In anticipation of the Centennial of the League of Women Voters, which was founded by Carrie Chapman Catt in 1920, we are providing *her* answer to this question. She addressed a group of Republican women who were unhappy that the support provided by the suffrage movement wasn't reciprocated by the League of Women Voters. Mrs. Catt's speech is preserved in the Library of Congress. While this speech concerned the Republican Party, it's important to note it could have also been addressed to Democratic Party concerns. The following text is an excerpt of that historic speech:

*A few days ago, a group of Republican women meeting in Albany devoted a considerable period to a discussion of the League of Women Voters. If the press reports are correct, they showed an enormous amount of misinformation and so shocking a spirit of intolerances as to be wholly un-American. If there is any one thing to which our Republic is more sacredly pledged than to another, it is to free thought, free speech, freedom of organization, and freedom of political action. These are and ever have been the four cornerstones of our American liberty. Yet these women were quoted as saying that members of the League of Women Voters are not wanted in the Republican Party. That was apparently said by more than one delegate. Even the Governor is reported as warning the women to beware of groups.*

*In view of the fact that many thousands of members of the League of Women Voters are Republican by tradition, this challenge takes on particular significance. Can it be that the Republican Party of the state of New York means to demand of women that they choose between the Party and the League of Women Voters? That women cannot belong to both? Does it issue this demand as an ultimatum?*

# Why Is the League Non-Partisan?

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*Since when has the Republican Party renounced the principle of free organization and free political action? What is it that Republicans find objectionable about the League of Women Voters? Its national constitution defines its objects: "The object of the National League of Women Voters shall be to foster education in citizenship and to support improved legislation. The National League of Women Voters urges every woman to become an enrolled voter but as an organization it shall be allied with and support no party." Do Republicans find "education in citizenship" or "improved legislation" dangerous aims? As matters stand it is not the League of Women Voters which needs to rise to defend its platform, but Republican women within the League of Women Voters do merit an explanation.*

*It is true enough that this is a government of parties and that every voter should therefore join one, but while that is the truth, it is not the whole truth. Parties administer government, but progress is compelled by groups. I can recall no really important change in our institutions which has been brought about by party initiative and I can think of no policy more certainly destructive of normal progress than the destruction of these organizations which are promoting measures of reform. As a matter of historical fact, every great net of any political party has been brought about by group action.*

*The very party these political ladies serve was for years a group before it was a party. It pommelled Whigs and Tories with its unanswerable appeals, and as parties do, they*



*shirked and dodged the issue, until the nation arose in revolt and blew both old parties into oblivion and made a young fighting party of what had been a fighting group.*

*Prohibition has never been noticed in the national platform of either political party, yet by group agitation it is a law. The examples are plentiful. The facts are that no party adopts an idea until that idea is supported by sufficient sentiment to indicate that the party will lose votes unless it takes it up; or because the idea promises additional votes. In so doing parties merely obey the law of self-preservation. Whoever fails to recognize that behind the parties are the people; and that among them independent groups are at all times educating, agitating, arguing, contending, urging, appealing, for their various causes, has missed the determining factor in government by the people. These ideas swell and grow and press for recognition and parties give heed when they can evade action no longer.*

# Why Is the League Non-Partisan

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Ours is a government by minorities but the compact, consecrated earnest minorities compel the majorities to think and to act. The League of Women Voters aspires to be a part of the big majorities which administer our government, and at the same time, it wishes to be a minority which "agitates and educates" and shapes ideas today which the majority will adopt tomorrow. Its members in the main will wish to be partisans if by so doing their individual freedom to think and to act accordingly to the mandates of their own consciences, is not curtailed; collectively the organization will remain non-partisan. Women to whom party loyalty is a superstition and a fetish will not be able to hold to both aims; they will be partisan only. Women who fail to see good in parties because they know much they cannot admire, will be Leaguers only, but the majority will possess the vision and the fundamental knowledge of how changes are wrought in such a nation as ours, and will follow the land of majority and minority without confusion of thought or act. The League has a work to do and it invites cooperation and friendly relations with all parties. If it receives them, its work will be seen done.

Mrs. Catt believed in the power of groups to create and foster change in government and society. She saw the League's role as a non-partisan group to be a more effective means of accomplishing our goals. She believed groups had more flexibility to work with multiple parties to facilitate change. Partisan behavior would jeopardize that effectiveness. It is not the League's intent to stifle the freedom of thought of its members, and most members may openly support the party or candidate they choose in elections. In so doing, individuals must make it clear that this support is the individual's only and not the League's. The only exceptions are for League officers who are by the nature of the office identified as League leaders such that their community cannot separate the Leaguers' individual beliefs from that of the League. In this upcoming election season, if questions related to our nonpartisan position arise, do not hesitate to reach out to the State League for guidance. Careful consideration of our nonpartisan policy protects the reputation of the League and insures we can be more effective protectors of democracy.



# Speaking with One Voice

Jean Johnson

The League of Women Voters speaks with one voice. What exactly does that mean, and why is it important? Basically, it means that only the president of the League chapter or her/his specifically designated spokesperson can represent that League chapter when speaking to public officials, the media, or any other entity. This principle is necessary so that the position of a League is clear and discernible from the opinion of its members or another League chapter.

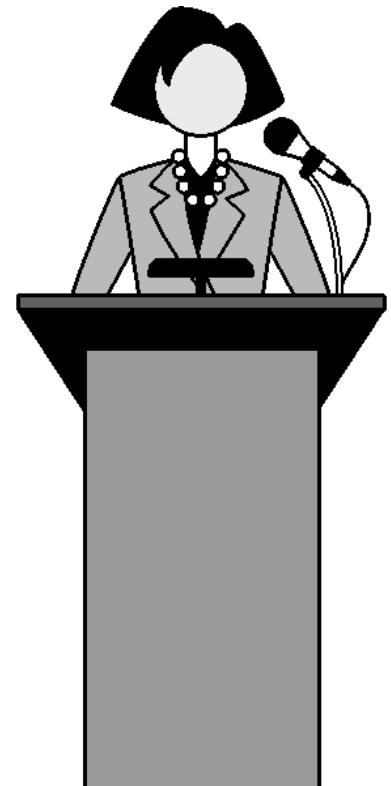
For example, LWVAL occasionally issues a call-to-action to League members. The members are asked to contact a government official and express support for or opposition to a bill. League members should ask support or opposition in their own name, not in the name of the League. This precaution assures that the League's position is not misunderstood. Also, when many individuals call in their own names, that "grassroots" voice is strong. The impact is powerful. You are encouraged to speak out to your elected representatives in your own voice and be fully engaged in the democratic process, regardless of whether you agree with the League's position on an issue.

Local league leadership should always inform the state or national League when it plans to lobby concerning a state or national League issue position. Good communication assures coordination and understanding of the lobbying goals, and it greatly improves the chance for success. This letter

<https://www.lwval.org/members/docs/onevoice>

was sent to local league presidents in 2011 from then-LWVAL President Kathy Byrd. In it, she explains the policy in further detail.

If you have questions regarding a call-to-action or League lobbying, please contact your local League leadership or contact the LWVAL at [admin@lwval.org](mailto:admin@lwval.org).



# **LWVAL Policy on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

Barbara Caddell



Diversity, equity, and inclusion are of utmost importance to the League of Women Voters. LWVAL asks that all local Leagues observe the following DEI policy and actively encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion in league policymaking and actions. We hope you will make this policy your own. Thank you!

*The League of Women Voters of Alabama is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.*

*There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, political perspective or affiliation, marital status, parental status or family composition, socioeconomic status, language, accent, ability status, mental health, educational level or background, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, and/or any other characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity.*

## **New Greater Shoals League**

Kathy Byrd

LWVAL has sent the LWVUS approval for a new League: the Greater Shoals chapter. Greater Shoals has conducted a number of recent activities, including the Renewable Energy Symposium on September 5, 2019, co-sponsored by Greater Shoals MAL/League, the University of North Alabama, and Energy Alabama. This day-long event was spearheaded by League Education Chairperson Nancy Muse and was attended by approximately 75 members of the community. The program included many experts on renewable energy and was well-received by the community. In addition, we held a member recruitment event on October 3, 2019, headed by our Membership chairperson Carolyn Waterman. We recruited two new members at this successful event.

# LVVAL Centennial Committee

Kathy Jones

The LVVAL Centennial Committee was established May 2018 when the State LVV Convention directed the LVVAL Board to prioritize commemorating and celebrating the Centennial of the League of Women Voters and the 19th Amendment in 2020. The Centennial Committee is co-chaired by Kathy Jones and Yvonne Brakefield-Knowles and comprises representatives from each of the Local Leagues.

The committee has two major areas of focus:

- 1) Researching Alabama women to identify candidates for recognition and inclusion in the National Votes for Women Trail; and
- 2) Hosting a LVVAL Equalitea after the 2020 Council in Montgomery.

The Committee's Research Team will identify and research candidates before they are submitted to the State's Women's Trail representative.

If you have suggestions for Alabama women who should be included, please pass your research/information to your League's committee representative or to Yvonne at ybrakefield@mac.com.

After the LVVAL Council and panels on April 25, 2020 in Montgomery, the Centennial Committee will host a community event at the Alabama State Archives. This LVVAL "Equalitea" reception will be attended by League members, the public, members of the State's Centennial committee, and many others. It will be a highly visible tribute to women who fought for their right to vote and to the Centennial of the League in Alabama. It will also promote the LVV to people who may know little about who we are.

To make the Equalitea more meaningful and memorable, Local Leagues and MAL Units are invited to participate in the entertainment/programming for the reception. Local Leagues are asked to submit their plans for Equalitea performances, art, or other exhibits by no later than February 15, 2020 to Kathy at Kathy.U.Jones@gmail.com. Also, let us know if you are interested in helping plan or participating in the Equalitea!

*The Voter has a new editor. Meet Diana Eidson, member of the East Alabama League. Diana teaches English at Auburn University.*

