

# THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALABAMA

NOVEMBER 2020



## From the President's Desk

As we enter the holiday season, I encourage you to join me in counting our blessings. Here's my gratitude list. I'm grateful that:

- Alabama League volunteers did amazing Voter Service work during a challenging election season. [See this letter of thanks](#) to understand the many ways in which they registered, educated, and encouraged Alabama voters.
- Thanks to the efforts of Kathleen Leonard and her team in the Tennessee Valley, we received a CARES Act grant to further our voting rights work; this much-needed infusion of funds was split between our state-wide voting rights restoration work and the local leagues' Voter Services work.
- We have strong League leadership both locally and state-wide.
- We have had the *pro-bono* help of many state and nationally-recognized professionals who have given their expert services, advice and support. Among them are Jim Blacksher, Blair Bowie, Kitty Brown, Augusta Dowd, Mitch McGuire, Bobby Segall, Ed Still, and Joyce Vance.
- Planning for the LWVAL Convention 2021 is underway and in good hands. The Board has decided to hold a virtual convention in early May, and you will be receiving a "save the date" notice after the holidays. Kathleen Leonard and her committee are planning the logistics of a virtual convention. Leonette Slay and her committee are revising our bylaws. Kathy Byrd and her committee are looking for league leaders to carry us into the next biennium. Committees for Budget and Program are "in the works".
- We remain committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in our activities and are fortunate to have a committee composed of Carol Mosely (chair), Sarah Feldmier, Bonita Gill, Judy Golberg, and Beth McDaniel. They are busy providing us a blueprint for change.
- Our state-wide Action Team composed of Robin Buckelew and Kathy Jones (co-chairs), Stephanie Barnett, Sue Carney, Catherine Davies, Dana Ellis, Ardis Fine, Rebecca Jackson, Beth McDaniel, Brian Lorge, Arlissa Minniefield, and Stephen Stetson are spearheading a number of advocacy activities focusing on voting rights, redistricting, and governmental transparency.
- An effective COVID vaccine is on the horizon sooner than we'd thought it might be – *although* we need to continue to be careful, we can see that help is coming.

To be sure, there are some serious issues to worry about as we see the ills facing our country and the world. As I stop to contemplate the growing group of talented and committed League members, however, I am hopeful that our future will be brighter. May you and all you hold dear have a safe and "Thank-Full" holiday season!

*Barbara Caddell*

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# Voting Rights Restoration

## THE ALABAMA JOURNEY



Alabama has a long and sordid history of voter suppression. One manifestation has been the disenfranchisement of citizens who have prior felony convictions. In 2017 the legislature passed HB 282, Definition of Moral Turpitude Act, which clarified which convictions affected the ability to vote. Despite the progress made with this legislation, there was little education about the impact of this law on our fellow citizens. As a result, there are many Alabamians who mistakenly believe that they have lost their right to vote.

In March 2020, the League of Women Voters of Alabama, in partnership with the Campaign Legal Center, initiated a safe, confidential and free, text-based Voter Rights Restoration (VRR) service to all Alabamians who believe they may have lost their voting rights. Working directly with citizens through text, League members provide information on specific next-steps, tailored to an individual's situation, to help guide them in reclaiming their voting rights. The League has successfully assisted hundreds of disenfranchised Alabamians in navigating Alabama's complex Voter Rights Restoration process to determine if they can register to vote immediately or need to take additional steps.

Several volunteers throughout the state have been involved in this work. As one of those volunteers, I have found my VRR work to be extremely satisfying. To be able to tell someone that they can register to vote (after years of believing otherwise) is so very gratifying. Several people have texted photos to me of their voter registration cards. In addition, when people who have to go through the process of reclaiming their rights by applying for a Certificate for the Eligibility to Register to Vote (CERV), most have reached out to me when they have received their CERV. Their joy and their excitement is contagious.

Harriette Huggins of the LWV of East Alabama described a situation when an individual's registration was revoked despite the fact that they did not have a disqualifying felony on her record. Harriette interacted with the county registrar who did reverse the original decision. The citizen sent Harriette a copy of her registration card and when she voted absentee in person sent a picture of her "I voted" sticker! In addition, she referred two other people to Harriette. Both of those individuals are now registered as well.

While direct assistance helps individuals regain their voting rights, there are several serious deficiencies with Alabama's current felony re-enfranchisement laws which must be fixed. And the League has found inconsistent VRR implementation by County officials across the state which points to additional issues. The League of Women Voters of Alabama is working with other non-profit organizations and government officials in Alabama to advocate for legislative solutions and additional training/guidance for elections officials.

If you know an Alabama citizen needing Voter Rights Restoration assistance, please let them know that we will help. You can let them know that all they need to do is send a text to (256)203-6827 or call (888)306-8683 with their first name, phone number, and include the word "VRR". If you would like to support the vital work of voting rights restoration, please use [this link](#) to make your donation.

-- Robin Buckelew and Kathy Jones,  
Voting Rights Restoration

## Voter Services News



LWVAL covered the eight state-wide races for the November general election on Vote 411. There were only two contested races – US Senate and Public Service Commission President. The judicial races were all uncontested. Six of the ten candidates participated in Vote 411 for November. In addition, we provided information on all six state-wide constitutional amendments on the ballot. This year we have had more participation in Vote 411 by local leagues and are excited to see this valuable service expand its coverage.

LWVAL also sought to sponsor a debate between the two candidates for US Senator, Doug Jones and Tommy Tuberville. Thanks to LWV member Pete Johnson, we were connected with CBS 42 in Birmingham. CBS 42, a part of Nexstar Broadcasting, had the capability through the Nexstar stations in most major Alabama markets, plus online streaming and their radio network, to provide state-wide coverage of the event. Doug Jones agreed to participate in a debate but we were not able to get a commitment from Tommy Tuberville, and so the debate could not go forward.

In October, Jean Johnson and I met via Zoom with two international observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights who were in the US by invitation of the State Department to observe the November 3 US General Election. With 57 states from Europe, Central Asia and North America, the OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization. The OSCE works for stability, peace and democracy for more than a billion people, through political dialogue about shared values and through practical work that aims to make a lasting difference. The two observers, Ingo Buettner from Germany and Gayane Hovhannisyan from Armenia, were in Alabama for about two weeks meeting with various election stakeholders. Before heading to Florida, which was their next stop, Ingo and Gayane also had the opportunity to observe a voter registration/education event sponsored by LWVGB.

-- Mary Anne Wilson,  
Director, Voter Services



## Report of Nominating Committee



The process of developing a slate of officers and board of directors for the 2021-2023 biennium is under way. The process began by contacting current State Board members to determine their preferences regarding staying on board for an additional term. Responses have been received.

A letter has gone out today to solicit nominations for State Board officers, the Board of Directors, and next Nominating Committee went out on October 25, 2020. The form and its instructions were emailed to the president or co-presidents of each local league, with instructions that nominations may be made by the local league board or by individual members. Self-nominations are accepted. The deadline for returning the nominations is December 15th.

Each committee member will be assigned one or two local leagues/MAL unit to encourage submissions and forward questions to the Nominating Committee.

Once the nominations are completed and tallied according to office or position, the chair will send the results to committee members for discussion via Zoom and to determine if additional searches will be needed for specific spots.

The current Nominating Committee members are:

Kathryn Byrd, Chair—LVW of Greater Tuscaloosa  
Connie Arnwine—LWV of Greater Birmingham  
Andrea Pennington---LWV of Mobile  
Kristen De La Fuente—LWV of Eastern Alabama and State Treasurer  
Juanita Heersink—South East Alabama LWV—MAL Unit

For questions, contact Kathy Byrd at [kcbyrd@aol.com](mailto:kcbyrd@aol.com) or 205-394-5852

-- Kathryn Byrd,  
Nominations Chair

## LWVUS 2020 National Convention



Portland (Oregon). Atlanta. Dallas. Chicago. Locations of the LWV national conventions I've attended since joining the organization. Washington D.C. was to be next. The League's 2020 convention was also going to a celebration of its 100th anniversary. I was looking forward to experiencing the joy of the centennial combined with the stimulation of the convention. The coronavirus pandemic changed all plans. Instead, I attended my fifth biennial gathering—the League's 54th—from a couch in Opelika, viewed via Zoom on a large TV screen, connected to the Alabama delegation with a cell phone. And although the energy generated by almost a thousand good government advocates gathered in one place was missing, the first ever virtual LWV national convention was much better than I anticipated.

As always, the event was superbly organized. The technical glitches were minimal, especially considering the time zones span and variations in online connections. Motions were handled effectively. Pro and con arguments went smoothly. Even electronically, the power of well-executed parliamentary procedure came through. (One should attend a national convention at least once, if for no other reason than to experience the value of *Robert's Rules of Order* on such a grand scale.) The process of voting online required some practice, but we adjusted to it fairly quickly. On occasions, I felt lost on what was happening, but that feeling has occurred at regular conventions before. By the end, a new budget was approved, the 2020-22 National Program was adopted, and new directors were elected. The national league is in good financial shape and no PMP increase was proposed, which significantly contributed to the schedule adherence. The business portion of the convention was efficient, on schedule, and far less draining than those of the in-person variety. If national conventions were solely about conducting League business, the virtual version was much more streamlined and less expensive to attend than the traditional ones. Summaries of the plenary actions are available online: <https://www.lwv.org/league-management/council-convention/2020-convention-daily-briefing>.

But national League conventions are about more than conducting necessary business. They are also about people, ideas, and solutions. Those elements, the reasons why I've attended so LWV conventions, were missing from the virtual version. There were online caucuses and information sessions (many are available on the national web site), but they lacked the vitality and networking opportunities of attending them in person. I missed the spark of inspiration that comes with hearing an off-the-cuff comment about a presentation. I missed the visibility Alabama gains as members of its delegation introduces themselves to people from across the country. Most of all, I missed the after-hours gathering in the Mobile delegation's room, where young people from multiple states lounge and discuss our nation's future. The first virtual LWV national convention was efficient and cost effective, but for me it was not intellectually satisfying in this format. It may be the isolation talking, but I've learned that when it comes to League activities, I prefer social fatigue and sore feet over loungewear and adjourning ahead of schedule.

-- *Laura Hill*,  
Delegate

## Public Service Announcement Project

On April 7, 2020, we received the following email:

*Hello!*

*I am the Voter Services chair for LWV Kittitas County in Washington state. We vote by mail so our elections are not as affected by COVID-19 as they are in other states. Our Board voted to adopt a county or precinct in a state where voting absentee was not well understood or required a lot of lead time. We want to partner with the local LWV and help you turnout out voters safely this November. 1) could you use our help? 2) we could mail out postcard instructions to voters on a list you give us or, we could send texts, make phone calls...to areas of the state where there is no LWV or the LWV is stretched. Could you use our help?*

This letter from Charli Sorenson began a partnership between two very distant leagues. After a teleconference between Charli, LWVAL President Barbara Caddell and former LWVAL President and current spokesperson of the LWV of Greater Tuscaloosa, it was decided that we would love to take Kittatis County up on their offer.

Charli was interested in the LWVAL to the extent that she attended our Annual Meeting via Zoom last May and was introduced to the conference attendees.

The LWVAL and local leagues were very busy over the summer because the run-off election from the March primary had been postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were particularly busy because the governor had declared that absentee voting would be open to any Alabama voter because of the pandemic. This opened absentee voting, which has previously very restrictive, to the masses. However, the process of voting an absentee ballot is confusing and cumbersome for many voters. We saw an important role for the League in helping voters work through voter registration and voting absentee.

So, we explained to our friends in Washington State that we would like to use their assistance prior to the November 3rd election. We decided we would target some of the Black Belt Counties, which are traditionally rural, with many residents living well below the poverty level. This region persists in having experiencing voter suppression.

We decided to not pursue a postcard campaign because obtaining voter lists from the Secretary of State's office was cost-prohibitive. Print media is becoming increasingly spotty in Alabama, especially in rural areas.

Enter iHeart Radio, a very large group of radio stations broadcast to a wide variety of audiences, including those whom the League never reaches. The LWV of Mobile had contracted with iHeart Radio before and had been pleased. Discussions were held regarding the use of public service announcements on the radio. At the same time, Kathy was meeting with representatives and officials from ACLU, SCLC, Black Votes Matters, and church associations. It became apparent that a lot of money and effort was going to the Black Belt, which is good news for that region. But it made us question whether there was another section of Alabama that could use PSAs via iHeart Radio to get out voter information. The Northeastern corner of the state, where the Appalachian Mountains emerge and where there are many small rural communities, came to mind. So with the help of Jesse Blankenship of iHeart



Radio, a two-step approach was devised to serve NE Alabama voters. PSAs were produced to air on two local stations. The first, which ran the week before the deadline for voter registration. The second was scheduled to run until October 29th, the deadline to apply for an absentee ballot.

We arrived at a fee of \$500 for iHeart to record and play the two sets of PSAs daily as noted above. We are happy because we were serving a new area and because the LWV of Kittatis County promptly send the check to cover our expenses. We are so grateful that they had an open heart. We wish we could have done something involving having our Washington League friends address postcards or something like that. With the situation arising with the gush of absentee voting on our state, the delayed primary run-off in August, and the pandemic, that didn't work out. But they can be assured they allowed the League of Women Voters of Alabama to reach an audience we could not have without first giving us the impetus to extend our outreach in a new direction and to be able to bring it to fruition because of their financial support.

-- *Kathryn Byrd*,  
Project Chair

## Advocacy Team



The statewide Advocacy Team for the LWVAL has been forming up. Nearly every local league has identified a member volunteering to serve on the statewide team. At a meeting on October 25, the State Board approved advocacy topics to be pursued for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. These are

1. Voting Rights, as the League proposed to Alabama Arise, and which Alabama Arise adopted, with three sub-bullets:
  - a. Universal Automatic Voter Registration,
  - b. Voter Rights Restoration "fixes" to legislation and to processes
  - c. Absentee and Early Voting improvements
2. Fairmaps and the Voting Rights Advancement Act (LWVUS campaign for federal legislation)
3. Alabama government operations transparency, foundational to everything else the LWVAL wants to accomplish.

The team is now in the planning stage for near term advocacy actions to advance each topic. For the time being, most activities will be either at a distance or virtual. The Advocacy Team would welcome members who are interested in pursuing any of the above topics, either at the local league level or statewide. If any league member would like to participate in any of the advocacy activities, please contact your local league president, Robin Buckelew at [wpbrbb@att.net](mailto:wpbrbb@att.net), or Kathy Jones at [kathy.u.jones@gmail.com](mailto:kathy.u.jones@gmail.com).

-- *Robin Buckelew and Kathy Jones*,  
Advocacy Team



## Local League Reports



There are now eight Local Leagues and one Member-at-Large Unit in Alabama! Click below to find out what's happening around the state.

- [LWV Baldwin County](#)
- [LWV East Alabama](#)
- [LWV Greater Birmingham](#)
- [LWV Mobile](#)
- [LWV Montgomery](#)
- [LWV Southeast Alabama MAL Unit](#)
- [LWV Tennessee Valley](#)
- [LWV Shoals](#)
- [LWV Greater Tuscaloosa](#)

## Local League Leaders



The presidents/spokesperson from each unit in LWVAL have, at this writing, convened four times on zoom. We skipped the month of October, due to hectic local schedules leading up to the November election, but we have a fifth meeting scheduled for November 15.

Discussions have centered around facilitating absentee ballot voting, facilitating voter registration, ways in which Women's Equality Day was commemorated, membership renewal procedures in each unit, and the pros/cons of online payment of dues (conversation will be continued). There has been a free and respectful exchange of ideas. We are gaining a better understanding of how uniquely each of our units functions; the conversations about how governance works, membership cycles, the amount we charge for dues, and various payment methods, etc. have been enlightening, as we discover that we have developed different patterns, sometimes without realizing there are other ways. In particular, the smaller and/or newer units have appreciated hearing how larger more established groups function, and people who are relatively new to League are learning from more experienced members.

Additionally, a different member of the LWVAL Board of Directors has been invited to sit in on each meeting to smooth communication of local needs and discussion of state initiatives and resources.

The energy from our individual units is contagious. After a hectic election season, our upcoming meetings will focus on where we go from here, how we can assist each other, and planning for the LWVAL convention in the spring of 2021.

-- Carol Prickett,  
Director, League Communications



## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

The DEI Team began work on a review of our state DEI Plan in July at the request of President Barbara Caddell. The state plan began in 2018 with a format and some requirements from the national LWV. The original state DEI Team had used that format to customize our Alabama plan. The current team reviewed and made some suggestions for changes and additions that were presented to the Board at their October 25 meeting. The Board accepted the suggested updates to the Vision and Policy statements, the suggestions for additional statements used in requesting nominations for the Board, and the development of a DEI Facebook page as one method of disseminating resource materials.

The team will return to work on a number of other items. We will be studying ways for members to access resource materials to promote individual learning. We will research effective use of demographic data and survey data. We will further define the purpose and goals of the DEI team and how we can effectively work with the Advocacy team as we all decide where our efforts should be focused.

The team has been assisted by Dr. Zillah Fluker who was our speaker at the Council meeting in April. Because her presentation was received so positively, we are continuing to work with her and the eventual plan is that Dr. Fluker will develop a training for each of the nine Leagues. You will be hearing more about the Plan as well as the trainings for each League early in 2021. In the meantime, please contact your DEI team if you have questions, or comments.

Carol Mosely, Montgomery, team leader, [carolmosely@gmail.com](mailto:carolmosely@gmail.com)  
Bonita Gill, Huntsville  
Sara Feldmeier, Tennessee Valley  
Beth McDaniel, East Alabama

## Remember the League on Giving Tuesday, December 1!



Please give to your local League of Women Voters on [#GivingTuesday](#), December 1 to support our efforts to empower voters and defend democracy. Why not give to the League now? Find a [League of Women Voters in Alabama](#), and please give generously!

# Understanding the Convict Lease System: The Longer Life of Alabama Black Enslavement

By Sarah Carmack

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## Anti-Emancipation in the South

Alabama had the nation's longest-running system of Convict Leasing, made legal from 1846 until 1928. In the decades before the Civil War, the state leased white prisoners to private individuals for profit to the state. Prior to Emancipation, Black men and women were not brought into a formal criminal justice system or prison system. They were either unjustly punished by enslavers or killed for alleged crimes by local mobs. The effects of state prison practices would rise and spread throughout the Southern Black community after Emancipation.

Convict Leasing is one of the least understood and most dangerous systems of Black oppression in the post-Civil War South and was disguised and accepted as a perpetual and necessary source of revenue for local and state governments. In Alabama, profitability sent most forced-work prisoners underground to coal mines with a high chance they would not return alive. During many periods of this long-practiced horror, one in ten men did not survive forced prison work. Understanding this history makes us even more watchful of current prison policy and work practices in a state that incarcerates the third largest prison population in the U.S. with no sign of decrease.



## Loopholes, Black Codes, and a New Imprisonment

A broken, oppressive economic system created a broken civil war and backfired on the former Confederate South – industry and agriculture were in a post-Civil War shambles. All levels of white citizens were in a panic. A war had been fought and lost, but the revolution focused on race had just begun. Reports by Contemporary observers, like social reformer Carl Schur, stated a rising tide of white anger in Mississippi directed to the Black community, the traditional victims of violence and exploitation in the South. The white Southern “Bourbons,” finding a way to rise again after Civil War losses, harnessed the general white anger and helped legalize a system that would suppress Freedmen and all of Black society. There would be no social revolution if men of property could help it. A Constitutional loophole and local Black Codes would be enough to hold society to a neoslavery system for decades.

Accepting that Black people could no longer be owned as chattel, white society took advantage of the next available legality: the Thirteenth Amendment loophole. The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) legalized slavery as punishment for criminal convictions. If the Southern legal system could play this opportunity broadly enough, Black citizens could be coerced through local law enforcement to stay “in their place” and “under contract” to their former owners or risk violating hundreds of artificial new laws. Conviction under those new laws opened the opportunity for the state and private individuals or industry to collaborate in convict leasing. [Continue reading this article.](#)

## Remembering Anne Walsh



The Mobile League is mourning the loss of long-time member Anne Walsh, who died peacefully at home on October 16 surrounded by her family. Anne was the embodiment of the League. As Voter Services Chair, she was always ready to plan a candidate forum, write questions for a voter guide, or figure out where to hold a voter registration drive. She was interested in learning something new and pushed us to undertake new studies. Sensitive to the need to protect our natural environment, she testified at public hearings on environmental projects and encouraged us to file a lawsuit to prohibit over-building on our beaches. When the League opposed a permit to allow a hazardous waste incinerator ship to operate out of the port of Mobile, she opened her home to Texas activists who came to testify at the hearing. She was an awesome cook and gracious hostess; our league Holiday Party will not be the same without her cheerful laugh and tasty hors d'oeuvres.

The League was not Anne's only interest. She loved her Church, L'Arche, Ikebana, the Herb Society, her book club and her numerous friends. As a nurse working in her doctor husband's medical practice, she was the kind and compassionate voice calling patients to check on them. She reached out to help people she encountered, making car or rent payments, helping in other concrete ways, all without fanfare. More than anything, Anne loved her family. Her girls remember her lessons in civics and social responsibility; usually this meant working on a League project.

Anne is survived by her husband of 50 years, David, her daughters, Aimee Walsh Holberg (Michael), Devon Walsh Hecker (Timothy), and Mollie Walsh (Sheila Gallow), and by her grandchildren, Sam and Janie Hecker and Julianne Holberg.

Her passing has left a hole in the League and in the Mobile community.

-- *Barbara Caddell*,  
President

## Introducing Mary Ann Merchant



Mary Ann Merchant has been a member of the LWV of Mobile since 2007 and has served capably as board secretary, grant writer, and Voter editor; she also prepares the annual meeting booklet. Currently she is Assistant City Clerk for the City of Mobile, having begun in city offices as a stenographer straight out of high school and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration along the way. She has been married for 41 years to CJ Merchant; they have 3 children and 2 grandchildren. Her hobbies include reading, gardening, and attending fitness classes at the YMCA. We are fortunate to have her as our new Voter editor. Our former editor, Diana Eidson, has taken a job in Georgia and moved there. We wish Diana all the best in her new position and welcome Mary Ann!

-- *Barbara Caddell*,  
President