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Non-profit groups grow Convention Coalition

By Hill Carmichael

In the summer of 2005, a group of people representing over forty non-profit organizations throughout the state gathered to discuss the constitutional reform movement. These citizens discussed the many ways in which the 1901 Alabama Constitution continues to hinder the work of non-profits in our state. Recognizing that living in a democracy is the conscious choice to live together in community, these Alabamians decided to take action by forming the Constitution Convention Coalition.

Non-profits have the responsibility of serving their missions and the 1901 Constitution makes

that important task more difficult. The Coalition is made up of non-profit and civic organizations that share the common interest of drafting a new constitution through a citizen delegated convention. Ranging from healthcare to foster care, homelessness and housing, economic and community development, arts, culture and the environment, every person and every group in Alabama has a stake in Alabama's project to bring democracy closer to the people.

Non-profits occupy strategic space in a democracy and more specifically, have a vital stake in a citizens' constitutional convention. The Constitution Convention Coalition will continue to re-

cruit new partner organizations so that we can work to empower Alabamians to shape their own future.

We encourage you and your organization to join the Constitution Convention Coalition as we work for a new, more just Alabama Constitution. The time commitment of getting involved averages to about one hour per month and you will be sharing in an historic effort that will have a major impact on our state for years to come. **If you have questions about the Constitution Convention Coalition**, please contact Hill Carmichael, Hill@gbm.org.

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Constitution Convention Coalition member organizations to date

Alabama Arise	Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham	Montgomery Transportation Coalition
American Association of University Women (AAUW)	Democracy Project	National Federation of the Blind (Montgomery Chapter)
Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform (ACCR)	Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL)	Quest for Social Justice
Alabama Environmental Council (AEC)	Gateway	Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative
Alabama Parent Teacher Association (ALPTA)	Greater Birmingham Ministries	Tuscaloosa's One Place - A Family Resource Center
Alabama Rivers Alliance (ARA)	Jubilee Community Center	The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham
Catalyst 4 Birmingham	Leading Edge Institute	YouthServe
Community Affairs Committee (CAC) of Operation New Birmingham	The League of Women Voters of Alabama	YWCA of Central Alabama



Capitol rally set stage for 2006 struggle, committee gains, more action in 2007

A January 25 “Let the People Vote” rally on the capitol steps in Montgomery set the stage for ACCR efforts in the 2006 legislature to give voters the chance to call a constitution convention. Gains in House and Senate committee votes were not enough for passage, but they showed potential for later success.

The many, many letters to legislators from supporters during the 2006 session were important to increase the visibility of

the convention effort. All supporters are encouraged to continue conversations with their legislators and to make the call for a convention the central issue when the new legislature convenes in 2007. New bills are expected to be introduced.

Shown here at the January 25 rally are, counterclockwise from right: House Speaker Pro Tem and bill sponsor **Demetrius Newton**; House Speaker Seth Hammett, who welcomed the crowd and their partici-



pation in government; **Matthew Lewis**, University of Alabama ACCR Student Chapter; Senate sponsor **Ted Little**; Rep. **Randy Hinshaw**, Little, Newton,

Hammett, and Sen. **Wendell Mitchell**; and **Johnnie Carr**, civil rights activist and friend of Rosa Parks.



Lawyers: New constitution means less legal work

Lawyers' groups are willing to support a constitutional convention to write a new Alabama constitution even though a new constitution will likely mean less work for them.

"The present 1901 constitution has lawyers fully employed," said Bobby Segall, President of the Alabama State Bar and the Alabama Board of Bar Commissioners, whose Commission Board members voted to support bills in the Alabama Legislature that would have allowed a citizens' convention to write a new Alabama constitution. "Hopefully, a new constitution will reduce litigation by clearing up ambiguities presently existing in Alabama's Constitution, and by avoiding the necessity of constantly offering amendments to the constitution."

The Alabama Bar Com-

mission is one of four law groups that has recently endorsed a constitutional convention for Alabama. Resolutions supporting a constitutional convention have also been approved by the Shelby County Bar Association, the Baldwin County Bar Association and the Birmingham Bar Association.

The Alabama Board of Bar Commissioners, which is the governing arm of the Alabama State Bar, has 72 lawyers from all over Alabama serving as Commissioners. The Commission, which is representative of Alabama's entire legal community, is non-partisan and comprised of members from all political parties.

"During the eleven years I have been involved with the Commission, it has, on only exceedingly rare occasions, approved or disapproved of any legislation unanimously," Segall said. "But this year, it voted unanimously to support legislation permitting Alabama citizens to vote on holding a constitutional convention. The Commission's unanimous endorsement was based on a desire to improve the administration and dispensing of justice in our State."

Bar Associations are among many entities that have signed resolutions supporting a constitutional convention. Among those are Alabama PTA, Alabama Arise, the YWCA of Central Alabama, the League of Women Voters of Alabama, NCCJ, the National Conference for Community and Justice (formerly called the National Conference of Christians and Jews) the Alabama Association of University Women of Alabama, Greater Birmingham Ministries, the Women's Fund and the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, just to name a few.

Marion Wynne, of the Baldwin County Bar Association, puts it this way: "The efforts at constitutional reform will allow the people of Alabama to vote and decide whether or not the people should work toward enacting a new state constitution, one for the 21st Century. A new constitution could support local democracy. Now, under the current Constitution, decisions that should be made by our local officials such as city councils and county commissions, have to be made in Montgomery. Small but powerful special interests and their lobby-

The Alabama Bar Commission is one of four law groups standing up for reform, 'based on a desire to improve the administration and dispensing of justice.'

ists can control decisions for their benefit. This is not in the best interests of Alabama. A new constitution could grant local rule so Alabama could be like the other 49 states."

Marda Sydnor, of the Birmingham Bar Association says, "The Executive Committee of the Birmingham Bar Association supports the effort to draft a new constitution and have the people of Alabama vote for the new constitution."

Anyone interested in learning more about constitutional reform may go to the ACCR website www.constitutionalreform.org or call 205-540-7501.

Other support . . .

Other organizations that have passed resolutions in support of reform include Sirote & Permutt, P.C., the Baldwin County Board of Education and the Kiwanis Club of Birmingham. ACCR urges all individuals, companies and organizations to take favorable stands.



Published by Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform. We welcome submissions of articles, announcements, opinions, photographs, and suggestions related to Alabama constitutional reform. All submissions are subject to approval by ACCR editorial board: Lenora Pate, Robert Schaefer. Brunson White

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ACCR is a public interest group dedicated to helping Alabamians draft a new state constitution.

ACCR Foundation, Inc., grew out of a rally in Tuscaloosa, Ala., on April 7, 2000, as part of a grass-roots movement for civic renewal and constitutional revision.

ACCR represents members across Alabama who believe in the power of citizens to create a better future for themselves and their state.

We are devoted to the idea that people deserve the best government they can design. Our mission is civic, rather than partisan. We seek to engage Alabamians in serious discussion about the future of our state.

We want a state constitution that unites, rather than divides our people. We want to create a civic atmosphere in which politics can function for the benefit of all citizens, rather than for a few powerful interests.

Our movement begins with the citizen, who holds the highest office in our democracy.

ACCR is about people's willingness to take control of their civic destiny and achieve the promise that our nation's founders held up for the world to admire and follow.

Find out where the candidates stand!

In April of this year, every candidate running for legislative office received a questionnaire from the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform Foundation. The intent of the questionnaire was to help Alabamians better understand the candidates' views on constitutional reform.

As we face the June 6 primary and November 7 general election, we hope you will use this resource (*and share it with many others!*) to find out what the candidates for your Senate and House District are



saying about constitutional reform. If you notice that your legislator or the candidate running to represent you has not responded to the

questionnaire, please call and encourage them to do so. Now is the time to contact your legislators/candidates to remind them just how important this issue is to their constituents.

And while many of the questionnaires have not been sent back, we are confident that we will receive them, as all the candidates will want to share their views on the most important issue facing Alabamians today - Constitutional Reform!

If you want to know where the candidates stand on this fundamental issue, please visit <http://www.constitutionalreform.org/questionnaireform.html>.