



THE VOICE OF ALABAMA

ALABAMA CITIZENS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Vol. I: 2
September 4,
2006

Help create Action Teams for fall campaign!

The ACCR Board voted unanimously, August 20, to implement a fall election strategy to build and strengthen ACCR's grassroots by mobilizing citizens to ask their legislators to support rewriting our 1901 constitution through a convention.

A major component of the new plan is the organizing of Legislative Action Teams in legislative districts around the state.

Pat Siano, the plan's author, said, "To get the word out, supporters and ACCR regional leaders will ask mem-

bers and citizens to host coffees and small group meetings to further educate voters on specifically how the current

See form on page 6 to join the campaign

constitution holds the state back and why we need a convention.

"Participation Forms are available on the website and in this newsletter so that rank and file voters can sign up to help in whatever way is comfortable for them. All are asked to make copies of the form and to encourage citi-

zens to become more involved."

"We also plan to have a speaker's bureau to reach various community groups throughout the state," said Lenora Pate, ACCR Chair. "We need to educate, organize, and activate our community base. A Legislative Action Team in each legislative district will help us do that."

This fall is an excellent time to bring our issue to candidates at home where they are campaigning. Some regions plan to target one or more polling places on Election Day.

"If our legislators had passed our bills in the 2006 legislative session, we could have been voting November 7 'yes' or 'no' on whether to convene a convention to rewrite this ugly chapter of Alabama history," said Siano.

Please participate by hosting a small meeting or coffee, or by forming a Legislative Action Team to contact your district legislators. Fill out the **form on page 6** and return to ACCR through e-mail or regular mail. To discuss this further or volunteer by phone, call Pat Siano, 251-979-8583, or ACCR, 205-540-7501. Region chairs and materials can be found on the website.

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Sign up now for the fall campaign for success in 2007! 6

Mark your calendar!

ACCR ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, October 5, 2006

1:00 - 3:30 P.M.

State Capitol Auditorium

600 Dexter Avenue, Montgomery

- Legislators panel
- Media panel
- County representatives panel
- Youth and college council panel
- Constitution experts
- Planning for 2007 legislative session

Will you join us?

Contact us at 205-540-7501 or accr4@bellsouth.net

COME AND LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!



Curriculum project needs funding advice

By Jan Cowin Bedford

Despite progress, a K-12 curriculum writing project to build grass roots understanding of the Alabama constitution has bumped into funding needs.

Teachers on the Alabama Constitution Curriculum writing team from Monroeville, Shelby County, Jefferson County, and the Alabama School of Fine Arts made an exciting presentation to more than 45 teachers from cross the state at the Fifteenth Annual "Educating for Citizenship" Conference in Birmingham on February 17. This was

their first time to go public with the work they have been part of since 2004. The enthusiastic response from the audience was encouraging to this effort to educate young Alabama citizens on our state constitution.

During the 2004-05 school year, 12 teachers from 12 participating school districts met monthly to learn about the state constitution and to write grade-appropriate lesson plans. Soon recognizing that the learning curve would be longer than had been earlier anticipated, they wisely decided to concentrate first on

grasping the content before assuming the role of curriculum developers. Needing a substantial funding source to accommodate this slower pace, we wrote a National Endowment for the Humanities grant proposal and submitted it last fall to fund a three-year detailed and systematic approach. In March NEH announced that the proposal was denied funding.

Can this proposal be retooled and resubmitted by October 2? Is there a more appropriate funding source which should be considered? If you are willing to give ex-

pert advice to help answer these questions, please contact me at jacowin@samford.edu.

"Regardless of one's position on reform, it is simply not possible to have a robust, meaningful discussion of the Alabama Constitution of 1901 without better knowledge of the constitution itself," stated Governor Bob Riley in a letter included in the grant proposal submitted to NEH in November.

Jan Cowin Bedford is executive director of the Samford Center for Law and Civic Education

Quick and Easy Alabama Constitution Resource List

ACCR Website: www.constitutionalreform.org

For copies of the 1901 Alabama Constitution: <http://www.lrs.state.al.us/> Click on "Publications"

To read the 1901 Constitution on-line:

http://www.legislature.state.al.us/CodeofAlabama/Constitution/1901/Constitution1901_toc.htm

For volunteer training: <http://www.gbm.org/> Click on "Constitutional Reform"

Books:

- **A Century of Controversy** by Bailey Thomson, The University of Alabama Press 2002
- **State Constitutions for the Twenty-first Century** by G. Alan Tarr and Robert F. Williams, State of New York University Press 2006
- **The Least of These** by Susan Pace Hamill, Sweet Water Press 2003
- **Alabama in the Twentieth Century** by Wayne Flynt, The University of Alabama Press 2003
- **Inside Alabama** by Harvey Jackson, The University of Alabama Press 2004

And then educate your legislators!

How do I get the name of my legislator?

Go to: www.legislature.state.al.us, write your zip code, then email:

Legislator's first name, a period, legislator's last name, @alhouse.org or alsenate.org

Example: george.perdue@alhouse.org



Law student sharpens skills for reform mission

By Lucy Jones

There is truth to the old saying “you don’t know what you’ve got ‘till it’s gone.” Washington is a great place for an aspiring public policy advocate—it’s a hotbed of bright, ambitious, talented, and focused individuals who are all passionate about their causes and willing to vigorously defend them on a national stage.

Being a student at Georgetown University Law Center is an equally unbelievable experience—learning about the way public policy is developed, legislated, and enforced through the law has introduced me to new ideas, challenged my beliefs, and helped me to reinvent my approach to social and political change.

But in two more years, after it’s all said and done, I can’t wait to come home and fight for constitutional reform—but this time, I will be armed with new tools and new skills that I have learned and developed in law school.

Even though I am in Washington and often feel so far away from the action—the petition drives,

the rallies, the legislative hearings, the meetings—I am constantly reminded of our fight to reform Alabama’s antiquated constitution primarily because of all the questions I get about the bumper sticker that I still proudly display on my car: “Fight to Rewrite Alabama’s Constitu-

tion.” when the federal government created a local government for the District composed only of three appointed commissioners. Although the situation has since improved and Washingtonians now elect a mayor and a city council, the local government here still does not have full

know that this is one of the most important grassroots campaigns in Alabama’s history. I can’t wait to go back and speak to neighborhood associations, pass out literature at local events, and personally talk to Alabamians about this critical issue.

In the meantime, I value so much the opportunity to remain on the Board of Directors for the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, and I salute and admire all of those who continue to advocate for a better Alabama.

And even though I am more than 800 miles away for the next two years, I want everyone to know that I am still invested in the cause, I am still a believer in reform, and I am eager to return to Alabama. Until then, I send my thoughts, my prayers, my encouragement, and my support to all of you who continue to believe in and fight for constitutional reform.

Lucy Jones is a member of ACCR’s 501(c)(4) Board of Directors and is beginning her second year at Georgetown University Law Center.



tion.”

People here constantly ask: “Why does it need rewriting?” or “What’s wrong with your constitution?”

I’ve sent countless numbers of individuals to ACCR’s website and have encouraged people to get involved in the cause. The issue strikes many Washingtonians very deeply, as they have been involved in a fight for full home rule since the late 19th century

home rule, as their budget is subject to Congressional oversight and the District still does not have a voting representative in the House or Senate.

Although I have gotten into vigorous and fascinating debates about the issues of home rule and decentralization of power with many of my friends and neighbors here in the District, I am ready to come home and go back to actively pursuing constitutional reform on the ground with those who



Some say Alabama's constitution needs to be rewritten

By Lance Griffin

Ever read the Constitution of the State of Alabama?

Don't bother.

Even those who fervently support a re-write of the 105-year-old document say their eyes glaze over after just a few words.

But they say they know enough to conclude the

state is long overdue for a major rehaul of the constitution, and advocacy groups are touring the state in hopes of marshaling enough support to make it happen.

"The Constitution of Alabama is an antiquated, racist, gender-biased document designed for the wealthy," said Dr. Linda York, a history professor at Wallace College who gathered with reform supporters to speak on the issue Thursday at the Alfred Saliba Family Services Center.

Those who support constitution reform point to length and content as major reasons for rewriting the document.

Including the main document and more than 800 amendments, the Alabama Constitution is roughly 330,000 words long, making it the longest governing organ in the United States and possibly the world.

Written in 1901, reformers say the constitution contains laws intended to disenfranchise black voters. While the laws such as the poll tax and others that require ownership of property to vote no longer apply, reform supporters believe the language needs to be scrubbed clean from the

document.

Reformers say the constitution restricts home rule and centralizes power in Montgomery. They say most of the 803 amendments to the document deal with county-specific issues the constitution does not allow to be taken care of on the local level.

A recent poll conducted by the University of Alabama-Birmingham indicates the majority of state voters who identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats support some type of constitutional reform. But two questions keep many of them skittish about a major overhaul.

What will a new constitution say?

Who is going to write it?

Alabama voters expressed their suspicion over changes when they voted down a proposed amendment in 2004 that would have erased the constitution's racist wording after opponents raised concerns that the language of the amendment opened the door for new taxes.

Constitution reform supporters say that suspicion will be a tall hurdle to overcome.

"The 800-pound gorilla is always going to be 'They

are going to raise your taxes,'" said Cary Page of Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform.

Who will write it? Elected delegates to a constitutional convention next year, if supporters convince Alabama lawmakers to pass proposed legislation. First, voters would be given the chance to determine if they want a constitutional convention. If they do, voters would then elect two delegates from each of Alabama's 105 state house districts to come to Montgomery for the purpose of rewriting the document.

Supporters admit the odds are long. Many opponents to an overhaul say it is easier for the constitution to be fixed by amendment, as it is now. Others support retooling the constitution article-by-article instead of all at one time. And, legislators who have control now may not be likely to give power over to other elected delegates for the purpose of rewriting the document.

"This is David versus Goliath," Page said.

This article is reprinted with permission from the July 29, 2006, Dothan Eagle.



Youth hopes, acts for better future

By **Eddie LaCour**

What is it about being young that seems to nurture hope and faith? How is it that young folks can actually believe that tomorrow will be better than today? Is it misplaced hope or faith to believe that things can change for the better? Whatever the answers are to these questions, one has to acknowledge that youth inspires people to believe that a better world is actually possible.

There is another question, though. What happens when young people not only believe, but also act as though a better world is possible? This has happened all over the world at pivotal times throughout history and today it's happening in Alabama.

Greater Birmingham Ministries' Constitutional Reform Education Campaign and the College Council for Constitutional Reform are working alongside Alabama Students for Constitutional Reform (ASCR) to organize college students throughout the state in support of a citizens' constitutional convention to rewrite the 1901 Alabama Constitution. For more

than a century, our state's governing document has stymied any form of real progress by promoting an inefficient, unaccountable and unresponsive form of government. It has limited civic engagement and eroded civic trust.

Many legislators are still ignoring the will of their constituents and having a tougher time justifying their actions. Recent polls show strong voter support for a constitutional convention to rewrite Alabama's constitution. In an effort to secure a brighter future for all the citizens of this state, college students are working together to maintain the momentum of the Constitutional Reform Movement.

In 2005, students at the University of Alabama held an event in which they read from Alabama's 1901 Constitution for 24 hours, non-stop. Sadly, that was only enough time to get through less than half of the document. Students at Birmingham-Southern College held a similar event in which students and professors read from the constitution for 12 straight hours.

This year, GBM, the College Council, and ASCR are building upon last year's successful

events. Currently, more than 40 students at 11 public universities, 10 private colleges, and four two-year public colleges are coordinating efforts to host similar events across the state. The events will take place just two weeks before the November 7 elections. Students from every participating college will invite the legislative candidates from their district, most of whom are up for re-election. We expect them to show up if they care about students and the state's future. If they have the citizens' best interest at heart, they will also support giving all Alabamians the right to vote on holding a citizens' constitutional convention.

With the events coming so close to elections and with a unified democratic voice being raised, the October rallies may just succeed in making the citizens of this state not only believe, but act as though a better Alabama is possible. This is what happens when the young people of Alabama take action and believe in a brighter future for everyone.

Eddie LaCour was a summer intern at Greater Birmingham Ministries

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CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

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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 the ACCR editorial board.

To submit:
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For FREE e-mail subscription, go to:
www.constitutionalreform.org

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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.

“LET THE PEOPLE VOTE!”

In 2006, we presented our legislators petitions signed by tens of thousands of citizens to “Let the People Vote” for a constitutional convention to replace the 6th Alabama Constitution. Many legislators listened, but most were either non-committal or spoke against our bills. **We need YOU! In 2007 our legislators need to hear directly from YOU!**

*YES! I want to join the ACCR lobbying program to pass the **Let the People Vote!** House and Senate bills in 2007 by (check one or more):*

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone call | <input type="checkbox"/> Face-to-face meetings locally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail | <input type="checkbox"/> Face-to face meetings in Montgomery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write letters | <input type="checkbox"/> Join local Legislative Action Team |

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ County _____

UNITE TO RE-WRITE THE ALABAMA CONSTITUTION!

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