



THE VOICE OF ALABAMA

ALABAMA CITIZENS FOR
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

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Fall events point to action in 2007

**By Lenora Pate
ACCR Co- Chair**

Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, Inc., the all volunteer not-for-profit organization dedicated to advocating for a new Alabama constitution and the right of Alabamians to vote in 2007 for a constitutional convention, has been on the move!

Sixth annual meeting

At our sixth annual meeting in Montgomery on October 5, several interactive panels including legislators, media representatives, and local officials urged ACCR supporters to continue to educate the public on the need for reform, as well as lobby legislators now to Let the People Vote in 2007 on the constitution convention question.

The Local Democracy Panel consisted of Sonny Brasfield, assistant executive director of the Alabama County Commissioners Association, and Rondel Rhone, president of the Alabama Board of County Commissioners. Each shared his personal and professional frustrations with the lack of home rule in the 1901 Ala-

bama constitution and urged ACCR supporters to educate and lobby county commissioners, as well as the public, to join forces to bring about real reform in 2007.

Senator Bradley Byrne (Fairhope), Senator-elect and Representative Linda Coleman (Birmingham), Senator Steve French (Birmingham), Senator Mac Gipson (Prattville) and House Speaker Pro Tem Demetrius Newton (Birmingham) were all present to participate on the Legislators Panel. All voiced support for a new Alabama constitution and advised ACCR members to support legislators who supported a constitutional convention,

This is the year to allow all Alabamians to vote on calling a convention of citizen delegates.

urging ACCR to let the public know who those legislators are. They challenged us all to engage ACCR supporters throughout the fall and into the 2007 Legislative Session to contact legislators continually in our districts and in Montgomery to urge each legislator to vote

yes for the 2007 legislation to Let the People Vote.

As a result of the Legislators Panel and the Media Panel urging ACCR supporters to engage the public through the media, ACCR circulated to the media and public, prior to the November election, the results of the ACCR survey of candidates, highlighting on the ACCR website the candidate responses to the ACCR survey. In addition, ACCR volunteers are following the advice of the Media Panel—consisting of Angie Casey, anchor, WTVY TV in Dothan; Frances Coleman, editorial page editor, Mobile Press Register; Bob Davis, editor, Anniston Star, and Becky Hoydt, assignment desk director, WAKA in Montgomery—by sending letters to editors, writing articles, holding public events, and other media opportunities to keep the constitution issues before the public as we move into the 2007 Legislative Session.

If any of these Legislators or media representatives are from your area, please contact them and thank them for their participation in the annual meeting. More

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This document scares folks who care about our future

By Janie DeNeefe

Alabama is haunted. Something disturbs our state that is scarier than all "Thirteen Alabama Ghosts and Jeffrey" combined. We are haunted by the mean spirit that created the Constitution of 1901.

Alabama's first constitution was written in 1819. Between 1861 and 1875, events surrounding secession, the Civil War and Reconstruction generated a flurry of four more constitutions.

By the end of the 1800s more kinds of men were voting than ever before, including African Americans, northerners who had

After more than a century of social change, we are still stuck with a chaotic constitution full of bad ideas. You would need a genuine decoder ring to make sense of it.

moved south, and their white Southern sympathizers, such as laborers and small farmers. Political power was shifting.

A spirit of retaliation against "Negroes, carpetbaggers and scalawags" dominated the convention that drafted Alabama's sixth constitution in 1901. To dispel the psychic burden that lingers, our only hope is for a diverse array of fair-minded Alabamians to get together and create our seventh constitution.

The Constitution of 1901 is known as the "disenfranchising constitution" because it took the right to vote away from so many citizens. It is a niggling list of rules and regulations. With over 700 amendments, it is the least functional and most cumbersome constitution in all fifty states.

"I believe Alabama has such great capacity, so many positive attributes," Dr. Thomas Corts reflects, "yet, sadly, so often it ends up at the bottom when it could be at the top - and it seems as if the Alabama public might be resigned to that status, or has become numb to it, or sees no way out."

Alabama's political process is full of awkward twists and turns. An ordinary citizen can feel like giving up, like the character in "To Kill a Mockingbird" who refuses to participate in the

life of the town.

Scout's brother Jem says, "I think I'm beginning to understand why Boo Radley's stayed shut up in the house all this time. He wants to stay inside." Navigating local politics is too tricky for Boo's comfort.

Instead of encouraging citizen participation, our constitution perpetuates cynicism about state government. Most of us avoid the constitution when we can. It is embarrassing.

It wrote "white supremacy" into state law, using every available trick to keep African Americans from voting. Even trickier, these tactics removed thousands of white citizens from the voter rolls because they couldn't pay the poll tax or pass the literacy requirements.

The U. S. Constitution and Voting Rights Act make those restrictive voting laws obsolete, yet they remain on the books with other archaic laws. We even have an amendment outlawing the boll weevil.

After more than a century of social change, we are still stuck with a chaotic constitution full of bad ideas. You would need a genuine decoder ring to make sense of it.

Our whole state votes on small questions of local importance. At least 19 amendments regulate local bingo games. Home rule is hard to find in Alabama.



Our state constitution inhibits our development. Corts quips, "It was out-of-date by 1908." We need a constitution with a future.

Sometimes ordinary citizens feel powerless to confront a political situation that is out of control. Overwhelmed like Boo Radley, we retreat into our private worlds. Luckily, when Scout and Jem really need him, Boo Radley comes out and participates.

The grassroots people of Alabama are the Boo Radleys of our state's political process. The Constitution of 1901 may keep us at a distance, but we are the very people who can show up to save the day. We can emerge from the shadows and demand a new constitution.

Come out, Boo Radley! Alabama's children need your help again.

*Janie DeNeefe is a 2006 community columnist for the **Huntsville Times**. This article first appeared in the October 29 issue of the **Times**.*



Special seasonal thanks for leaders past and present

**By Mark Berte
Grassroots
Education Director
ACCR Foundation**

When I was thinking about what to write for the ACCR “holiday” newsletter, a central theme and holiday kept coming to mind: Thanksgiving. I am so thankful to everyone who has been involved in the constitutional reform movement. We have made steady gains since the formation of the ACCR Foundation in 2000, and that is because so many people have poured their energy into something that will have a positive, lasting impact for the future of *all* Alabamians.

I am grateful to Bailey Thomson and the many other people who had the foresight to create a non-profit organization dedicated solely to educating people about the need to reform the inefficient, unjust and fundamentally flawed 1901 Alabama constitution. This issue was hardly a blip on the radar for many Alabamians in 2000, but now there are tens of thousands of people who are aware of the problems with our state constitution. One of the other great accomplishments of the early years of ACCR was the successful passage of Amendment 714, which ensures the right of Alabama’s voters to ap-

prove the document produced by a constitution convention.

So many people—chief among them Sid McAnally—kept the doors of ACCR open after Bailey’s death three years ago. In 2004, the local ACCR chap-



ters played a larger role in shaping the movement: Thanks to the creativity and leadership from the Huntsville chapter, the petition effort was initiated to give citizens a way to make their voice be heard. In 2005, Lenora Pate was asked to lead ACCR, Inc., the organization that focuses on CR legislation. The persistent work of hundreds of volunteers, and in particular Cary Page, resulted in not only obtaining over 75,000 signatures to the petition, but also helping to develop and advocate

for the Citizens Convention Bills bringing Alabama citizens the closest they have ever been to the opportunity to write our seventh constitution.

In early 2006, the Board of Directors of the ACCR Foundation set four goals for the year which were to:

- Ask legislative candidates what their positions on CR were.
- Strengthen the (geographic and racial) diversity of the Board membership.
- Increase fundraising and education.
- Find and implement a database management system to help us better communicate.

I am thankful for the leadership of the Board which has already achieved the above objectives. Furthermore, in August they approved a policy that every Board member would make a financial contribution to the ACCR Foundation and they have already met that goal (100%) as well. This not only helps to keep the organization operating and

pays for my and (very thankfully) Amy Sedlis’ time, but also sends a positive statement to foundations that people are willing to give both their time and their financial resources to support this important work.

I am deeply appreciative for the many non-profit organizations that constitute the Constitution Convention Coalition. There will be more written about this group in future newsletters. However, its members need to be honored now since they are doing such crucial work with so little resources.

I would like to shower so many more people with my gratitude, but know that the list would be too long—even longer than our current constitution—and that there have been many more people that have been quietly working behind the scenes. I look forward to serving along side each of you as we engage others into the movement.



Need a great holiday gift idea?

Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the ACCR Foundation in someone’s honor. This gift will keep giving long after the holidays are over, helping ensure that we make Alabama a better, stronger, more just state for future generations. The recipient of your gift will receive a special card announcing your gift. You can use our fast and secure online donation page:

(<https://www.thedatabank.com/dpg/260/donate.asp?formid=ACCRfdnDON>)

OR send your tax-deductible check to:

Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform Foundation Inc.
P O Box 10746
Birmingham, AL 35202.

Either way, please make sure that you tell us the recipient’s name and address. We need to receive your donation before December 18 to ensure time to process your gift. Questions? Email or call Amy Sedlis, the ACCR Foundation Coordinator (Amy@constitutionALreform.org) OR 205-910-7801



Fall events point to action in 2007

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importantly, take time NOW to write letters to the editors and to all legislators in your area urging the Legislature to Let the People Vote in 2007! This is the year to allow all Alabamians to vote on calling a constitution convention of citizen delegates.

Student action

The most stimulating portion of the annual meeting was hearing from the student leaders of ACCR who are ready to take revolutionary action now to bring forth a new Alabama constitution. Andy Brashier, chair, UAB ACCR Chapter; Caroline Dale, Homewood High School; Eddie LaCour, chair, ACCR/GBM College Council, and Matthew Lewis, chair, University of Alabama ACCR Chapter, enthusiastically described and challenged us all to participate in the college campus effort to read the 1901 constitution all day on October 24.

The students not only energized us at the Annual meeting, but fulfilled their challenge by having public readings and events at over a dozen college campuses in

At left, Birmingham-Southern College students sign up to support reform during a statewide ACCR College Council action day on October 24.

Alabama on one day. October 24 was indeed a tipping point for all of us as we caught the enthusiasm and the frustration of our college students who could not even read the 1901 Alabama constitution through in a 24 hour period! We thank all of the students, faculty, and local media and ACCR supporters for a great day of educating, organizing, and lobbying!

Enlistment

ACCR did not stop with its October Annual meeting or its college event. It mobilized volunteers to urge voters at the polls on November 7 to sign participation forms to become engaged NOW for the 2007 Legislative session. Building on the successes of 2006, ACCR will be working with its sister organization, the ACCR Foundation, and its new Chair, Jim Nash, as well as its new Grassroots Education Director, Mark Berte,

to continue to educate citizens regarding the need for a new Alabama constitution. Regional Chapters of ACCR throughout the state are on the move locally, and more are being formed under the great leadership of our Membership Chair, Pat Siano.

In addition to educating and organizing the ACCR membership through regional chapters and our new virtual database, ACCR will continue its advocacy for a citizens' convention and the passage of Let the People Vote legislation in the 2007 General Session of the Legislature under the tireless efforts of our Legislative Chair, Cary Page. More from Pat, Mark, and Cary in this issue of the Voice on how you can become involved now in educating, organizing, and lobbying for a new constitution.

Strong allies

But ACCR is not alone in

this endeavor. Complementing the ACCR effort, Greater Birmingham Ministries, led by Scott Douglas, is continuing to work side by side with ACCR through its Constitutional Reform Education Campaign, with Hill Carmichael as Project Coordinator, to educate and inform Alabamians. GBM, with Hill Carmichael's leadership, also has led the effort to create the Alabama Students for Constitutional Reform College Council, with chapters formed across the state to activate students for reform. Moreover, GBM conceived and birthed the Constitution Convention Coalition of 30-plus organizations supporting the call for a constitution convention to rewrite the Alabama constitution. Way to go GBM for all that you are doing! More students, organizations, and groups to educate are the continuing mission of GBM, so urge your organizations to become involved.

The ACCR grass roots effort to mobilize our citizens is growing. But we need YOU! The power is vested in the people of the great state of Alabama in Section 2 of the 1901 Alabama constitution, which states that "all political power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded on their authority, and instituted for their benefit; and that, therefore, they have at all times an inalienable and indefeasible right to change their form of government in





such manner as they may deem expedient."

The PEOPLE's job

So, a new Alabama constitution is not the job of the Alabama Legislature. It is the PEOPLE's job. As John Adams said, a new constitution begins in the minds and hearts of people. So search your heart, stir up your mind and passion, and get involved. Send in your membership dues to ACCR, Inc., make a donation to the ACCR Foundation, but, more importantly, get informed, educate, organize your area, and lobby the Legislature now to Let the People Vote in 2007 to hold a constitution convention to let the people of this great state exercise our right under Section 2 of the 1901 constitution to write a new Alabama constitution!

Contacts

For more information on ACCR's historic legislative efforts, education endeavors, organizational regions, polling data, and other information, go to www.constitutionalreform.org or contact any of the following:

- Lenora Pate: (205) 930 5162; lpate@sirrote.com
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- ACCR Foundation – (205) 266-3371; Mark@constitutionalreform.org
- Greater Birmingham Ministries: (205) 326-6821; Hill@GBM.org
- Alabama Students for Constitutional Reform College Council: (205) 326-6821; Hill@GBM.org
- Constitutional Convention Coalition: (205) 326-6821; Hill@GBM.org

Contact legislators NOW, urge support for 2007 convention bill!

By Cary Page
ACCR Legislative Chair

Since the 2006 Alabama Legislative session ended, ACCR has continued to engage citizens across the state to participate in constitutional reform and call for a citizens' convention to rewrite the 1901 constitution. Through the participation campaign, citizens are encouraged to meet with their legislators, join action teams, send emails and make phone calls now and before the session begins March 9. Once the session begins the legislators have many demands for their attention. Therefore, our conversations in the local districts NOW are very important.



On election day volunteers around the state manned polling places, rain or shine. Hundreds of people signed up on the participation forms to make their voices heard, saying "Let the People Vote" on calling a convention.

This first year of the quadrennial as the new legislature begins is the opportune time to build on the success and momentum of the past four sessions and bring the question of a constitutional convention to the people. It is important for citizens to express their desire for legislators to support the bill to be introduced that lays out, much the same as last year, the framework for a citizens' constitutional convention.

What do you say when the opposition to a convention says:

- *But the special interests will take over.* You say: All special interests must be represented in the convention. The important thing is that the bill requires limited contributions and a more transparent election system and limits lobbyists' activities. The citizens will know who represents which special interest. Trust the people! And if we don't like the new proposed constitution we can vote against it.
- *We need a slow process to study each article and the legislature can do this important task "article by article."* You say: The legislature has had 106 years and has replaced one article, while we have had almost 800 amendments, which causes confusion and inefficiency. The people want an opportunity to participate. Trust the people!

Stay in touch with your legislators and encourage others to do the same. See the website for more information. **Also, see the form on page 8 to sign up to get involved!**



ACCR regional chapters set pace for reform

Several ACCR regional chapters are actively working to sign up new people in our participation campaign, while others are educating and organizing to better lead the CR movement in their respective areas.

Huntsville chapter signed up 139 new volunteers on Election Day at several polling places in their area. Bill Goodson, Huntsville chapter secretary reported that voters that he

A volunteer from a polling place in Birmingham's West End remarked how many middle aged men spoke in favor of CR and signed up to help. It was reassuring to hear in rural and industrial areas, where we have few volunteers and little activity, that many know of the effort and want to contact their legislators.

Other efforts throughout the state included Foley, where in just a few hours between rain showers 25 people signed up to help, with many more racing by and telling the volunteers that they would sign up on line. Many people seemed aware of the issue.

In the Gulf Coast region, ACCR leadership for the city of Mobile has reorganized and will host a meeting on December 1 in hopes of getting long-time supporters to sign and take out participation cards. Lenora Pate, chair of ACCR Inc. will be the featured speaker.

A presentation was made to the Shoals Area Young Professionals. Topics included the 1901 Constitution, why it needs to be changed, and how it impacts their lives. They were encouraged to talk with their friends about the issue. An effort has begun to establish a student chapter at the University of North Alabama.

And last, but certainly not least, Montgomery ACCR is organizing a chapter and will hold their third or-

ganizing meeting in December. They plan to host a large meeting in January with a featured speaker.

Across the state, it is inspiring to many volunteers that the campaign is reaching people and they are listening and agreeing.

Thank you to all volunteers and supporters!

Pat Siano, ACCR Membership Chair, and Cary Page, ACCR Legislative Chair, contributed information for this article.

For information on activities in these areas or to help activate your area of the state, please call Pat Siano, 251-979-8583 or e-mail: patsiano_organize@yahoo.com.

For a list of contacts for each region, go to: <http://constitutionalreform.org/localchapters.shtml>

met at the polls were aware of the effort and seemed eager to help with e-mails, letters and phone calls once the 2007 legislative session begins in March.

Birmingham region had 42 volunteers at numerous polling places in Bibb, Shelby, Blount, Walker, Jefferson, Calhoun Counties. They gathered 262 signed participation forms from supporters agreeing to get involved with the campaign for a new Alabama constitution. Many more voters that day voiced their desire to vote for a convention. There were the naysayers and the unaware, but more expressed support for "Let the people Vote" than said they are opposed. Most accepted the trifold of information on why we need a new constitution and how to call a citizens' convention.

Leadership changes

On October 1, Mark Berte started his new job with the ACCR Foundation as Grassroots Education Director. For two and a half years, Mark directed the state-wide Constitutional Reform Education Campaign at Greater Birmingham Ministries. Hill Carmichael is the new Project Coordinator for GBM's CR Education Campaign, where he has worked for the past year as the Communications and Training Organizer. Please join us in congratulating Mark and Hill on their new positions. Here is their contact info:

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Gov. Riley: For honor's sake, please let us decide!

An open letter to Governor Bob Riley, reprinted from the November 17 *Anniston Star*

By James L. Evans

Dear Governor Riley:

Congratulations on your re-election as our governor. Your 58 percent margin is the largest since 1982 when Alabama governor races started being competitive. For my part, I'm glad you won. You have demonstrated understanding about the needs of the poor in our state and have taken significant steps to address their needs.

The role you played in last year's tax reform measure, which changed the entry point at which families begin paying state income tax from \$4,600 to \$12,500, is a case in point. I have read your Plan 2010 and also appreciate your desire to raise the threshold to \$15,000. That would certainly be helpful, but I hope to persuade you to do more.

I understand the math. You are trying to avoid raising taxes on anyone. Your Plan 2010 reportedly provides a tax cut for 90 percent of Alabama's families. I assume this means the remaining 10 percent

stay the same. But this elite group has been in a privileged place for along time. The poorest 20 percent of our working families in Alabama have for years shouldered an unfair share of the tax burden. For decades, while the upper 10 percent were paying less than 4 percent of their earnings in state and local taxes, the

poorest 20 percent were paying nearly 12 percent. This wealthy elite group in our midst has taken its tax advantages and turned them into investment properties and lucrative portfolios. Meanwhile, middle- and low-income families have invested their funds into rent or house payments, groceries, medicine and child care.

My point is this: Why not go all the way and raise the entry point for state taxes to the national poverty line

about \$20,000? This tax cut would benefit Alabama's most needy working families and it could be offset by asking our most privileged citizens to pay a little more.

In the original tax reform plan offered by Representative Knight last year, a genuinely progressive in-

come tax system could provide monies for the Education Trust Fund at the current level while reducing the tax burden on the poor - all of this with only a modest increase for a small percentage of our citizens. In fact, the Knight plan would lower taxes for families of four earning \$100,000 a year or less.

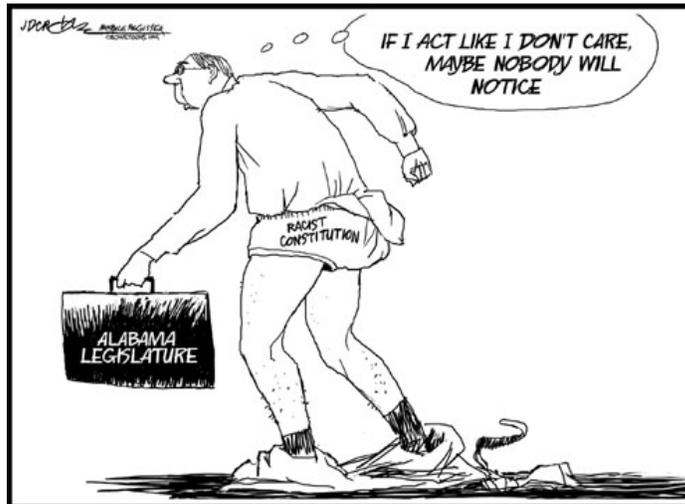
Beyond the tax issue, there is one glaring omission in your Plan 2010. I am referring, of course, to our outdated state constitution.

I know you have thought about it, but why not do something about it? And there is no political risk involved. You don't even have to take sides in the debate. Let us decide. Let your first day in your second term be the first day of a campaign to allow the people of Alabama to decide once and for all, yes or no, whether to hold a constitutional convention to re-write our flawed governing document.

Throughout the Plan 2010 you make reference to "what the people of Alabama want." Well, find out what we want in this regard - find out what our expectations and aspirations are for a new constitution. I urge you to work with the Legislature to get this before the people in the first year of your second term.

Helping to correct these two glaring examples of social and economic injustice - income tax and our constitution - may not get you elected president of the United States. But it will seal for you an honored place in Alabama history.

Go for it.





THE VOICE OF ALABAMA

ALABAMA CITIZENS FOR
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

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.

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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 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 _____

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