



LEAGUE OF  
WOMEN VOTERS®

# SUFFRAGETTE

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## A BRIEF GLANCE AT THE BEGINNINGS OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN NORTH CAROLINA

Suzanne Elsberry Schweikert

Historically in North Carolina women had not fared well in terms of suffrage. The “fair sex” was not mentioned in the North Carolina constitution of 1776 or in any pursuant amendments to it. In 1916, however, female attendees at the Equal Suffrage League in Greenville did receive attention in Chief Justice Walter Clark’s churlish appraisal of the legal ranking of North Carolina’s women regarding suffrage: “The Constitution and the laws of this state grant the right of suffrage to every adult excepting only four classes: 1. Idiots and lunatics---because they are mental defectives. 2. Convicts---because they are moral defectives. 3. Illiterates---unless their ancestors were white. 4. Women—the mothers, wives, and daughters of the...men of North Carolina.”



North Carolina Newspapers did not support suffrage for women and instead published disparaging editorials with the hope of suppressing it. For example, a reader in 1850 could have read in the *Raleigh Register*: “Woman’s sphere is about the domestic altar and within the tranquil precincts of the social circle. When she transgresses that sphere and mingles in the miserable brawling and insane agitations of the day, she descends from her lofty elevation and becomes an object of disgust and contempt.”

Nevertheless, the women’s movement was not to be denied, and, in 1894, a pro-suffrage meeting was held in the Buncombe County Courthouse in Asheville. An organizational meeting followed at which the first North Carolina Women’s Suffrage Association was established.

The struggle for voting rights and the right to hold office continued as bills were introduced and, predictably, failed to pass. One such bill “was referred to the committee on insane asylums.” Women were denied the right to hold office or in one instance, “serve as deputy clerk of court.” Finally, in 1913, Charlotte, along with fourteen other cities, became the site of a meeting of women who organized the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League.

In January, 1919, prior to the vote for ratification, there were three bills taken up in the North Carolina General Assembly having to do with women’s suffrage: their being able to vote in primary, municipal and all elections. Not one of these bills was passed by the General Assembly.

Once the question of ratification of the nineteenth amendment was scheduled to come before the North Carolina General Assembly, there was total support from the newspapers and both the Democratic and Republican Parties. Thirty-five states had ratified. One more state was needed for ratification, and North Carolina and Tennessee were considered key states to meet the two-thirds quota. On August 20, 1920, these two states were in simultaneous sessions. A messenger from the North Carolina General Assembly was sent to the Tennessee legislature to tell them North Carolina was not going to ratify the amendment and stated: “we hope you won’t ratify it either.” The state of Tennessee chose not to side with the Old North State in its suppressive bargain, and North Carolina lost the chance to make history. There was such ill feeling surrounding the issue by politicians and others, North Carolina women could vote fifty years before the state ratified the nineteenth amendment in 1971!

The Suffragette, a publication of the League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, intends to be a vehicle for disseminating in-depth information, inspiring action, and promoting participation in the civic affairs of the State of North Carolina.

*Information in this article was compiled from the book, By Her Own Bootstraps: A Saga of Women in North Carolina By Albert Coates, Professor Emeritus in the Law School of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

## NC's VOTER ID CHALLENGE: WHAT IT MEANS AND HOW IT AFFECTS YOU

by Delores J. Hurt

In August 2013, within hours of Governor Pat McCrory's signature on the state's notorious Voter ID bill, the *League of Women Voters of North Carolina et al.* filed suit in federal court in Greensboro, arguing that changes in the voting law violated both the U.S. Constitution and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Five months later, in January, U.S. District Court Judge Joi Peake said she would rule this summer on the League's request for an injunction to stop some or all of the law's provisions from taking place until after the suit's trial, which is scheduled for July 2015. Her ruling could greatly impact the up-coming 2014 midterm elections.

The League's suit is being handled by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Southern Coalition for Justice, and specifically targets provisions that 1) eliminate a week of early voting, 2) end same-day registration, and 3) prohibit "out-of-precinct" voting. It charges that enacting these provisions would unduly burden the right to vote and discriminate against African-American and other voters, in violation of the U.S.



Constitution's equal protection clause and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. (The state NAACP and the U.S. Justice Department have filed complaints targeting other aspects of the law.) It also states that non-profit, non-partisan groups, such as the League, which actively work to increase voter participation in North Carolina, will be directly harmed, greatly impacting their educational and get-out-the vote programs.

Later amendments to the League's lawsuit attack taking away the discretion of local boards of elections to keep polling locations open for an extra hour on Election Day and eliminating the availability of early registration for 16 and 17-year-olds.

### Talking points of the lawsuit are as follows:

#### Early Voting

During the 2012 election, 2.5 million ballots were cast during the early voting period, representing more than half the total electorate. More than 70 percent of African-American voters utilized early voting during the 2008 and 2012 general elections, compared to 52% of white voters.

Early voting provides flexibility in finding time to vote, and significantly eases the burden of arranging transportation to a voting site. This is critical for low-income voters, who are more likely to have hourly-wage jobs that don't afford them the time to get to the polls on Election Day or during common work hours. For many, then, the choice becomes early voting or not voting at all.

Work, combined with child-care responsibilities, places great demands on voters living in poverty. Poverty in North Carolina is higher among African Americans and other minorities, meaning a reduction in early voting opportunities will disproportionately affect them.

#### Same Day Registration

Legislation allowing voters to register to vote during the early voting period, rather than only if they were registered 25 days prior to the election - so-called "same-day registration" or "one-stop voting" - was first offered state-wide in 2008. Result: the number of North Carolinians using the ballot box rose

significantly. Same-day registration allowed voters to register or update their registration information and vote, in one trip to an early voting site. In both 2008 and 2012, approximately 250,000 people did so. African Americans disproportionately relied on same-day registration in both elections. The new law eliminates this opportunity to register, effectively disenfranchising tens of thousands.

### **Out-of-Precinct Voting**

For over a decade, voters who accidentally cast a ballot in the wrong precinct could still expect to have their votes counted for races such as governor and president. Now, those votes would not even be accepted.

Parties to the League's suit are the North Carolina A. Philip Randolph Institute, North Carolina Common Cause, Unifour Onestop Collaborative, individuals and youths who will face substantial hardship under the law.

The Republican-controlled General Assembly began drastically changing the state's voting laws a month after the Supreme Court struck down Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Previously, 40 North Carolina counties needed approval from the U.S. Justice Department before altering voting procedures.

Meanwhile, in Washington, a new bi-partisan bill with a formula that would penalize states and jurisdictions that have had five violations over the last 15 years will be heard by Congress. The bill, however, permits states to maintain voter ID laws. Although North Carolina now has the most stringent Voter ID law in the nation, it was not cited as a targeted state, thus possibly allowing years to pass before NC voters can receive relief.

**Until the law is changed, using the attached brochure will help you negotiate the new regulations.**

## **WHAT'S TRENDING IN NORTH CAROLINA EDUCATION**

by Gloria Cox

Some hot topics in education are school choice, school vouchers, and NC teacher salaries. All students and parents should have educational choice; however, most admit choosing is VERY confusing. Public schools, private schools, home schools, charter schools, online schools, religious schools, basketball schools....what to do?

While school choice is a great concept, what questions should we ask, and better yet, how do we separate fact from fiction? In some instances, education has become more of a business opportunity and a way to make money without being held to the same level of accountability and standards as traditional public schools.

What questions should we ask as we (1) explore school choice and/or (2) talk to elected officials? Some considerations might be:

- Is the school accredited so my son/daughter will be eligible for college admission?
- Do the teachers and administrators have NC teaching certification?
- Are there background checks for ALL staff employed?
- What college prep or Advanced Placement courses are available?
- What transportation and food are provided for low-income students?
- What curriculum standards does the school follow?
- What are the achievement levels of the students?

- How will student achievement be measured and reported?
- Will the voucher cover the added costs of my choice school?
- What is the diversity of the students and the staff?
- Should ALL schools that receive public tax dollars be accountable for how the money is spent? If not, why?
- North Carolina teachers need to be paid at least the national average for teacher salaries or the exodus of teachers will be devastating for students. What is the plan for the next five (5) years?

Explore and educate yourself so you are able to make good educational decisions for your son/daughter. Also, suggest to friends and relatives who are considering choice options that they ask the same questions. Talk to your son/daughter's school about how you can work to make it the best choice. Our elected officials are accountable for the education of the future leaders of our state, and it is our duty as voters in the state to know and understand the impact of the decisions they make. The education we provide for our children is the future for all us.

*Gloria Cox, Education Chair, LWVCM (1<sup>st</sup>-VP@goleaguego.org)*

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### **CONSIDER JOINING THE LEAGUE'S OBSERVER CORPS. . .**

Pick your preference of attending City Council, County Commissioners, Board of Education or the Planning Commission to find out what that body is doing, planning or endlessly discussing. Your information gathered over a series of sessions can be shared with other League members, contribute to local studies that may be undertaken as well as putting elected officials on notice that the public is paying attention to their actions. Contact Peg Chapin at ptchapin@hotmail.com for more information.

*The Suffragette is a publication of the membership committee, Suzanne Elsberry Schweikert, chair, and edited by Delores J. Hurt and Lucille Howard*

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