



**League of Women Voters
of the Jackson Area
THE VOTER**

P.O. Box 68214, Jackson, MS 39286-8214

http://www.lwv-ms.org/Jackson_League

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League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement



FRANCES N. (FRAN) LEBER

JUNE 20, 1934 – APRIL 18, 2018

BELOVED FRIEND AND MENTOR

Message from the President



Carol Andersen

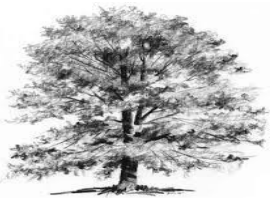
There are so many other topics I would have preferred to address in my first Voter message as LWVJA president. Losing Fran Leber four days after accepting leadership of our local chapter was devastating, personally and for the League. I held Fran dear, as a friend who contributed thoughtfully to a monthly discussion my husband and I host in our home, and also as a mentor on League matters and women's leadership in general. Rather than mourn, I want to share an insightful (and amusing) conversation I had with Fran while I was working on a master of liberal arts degree at Tulane University two years ago.

I was researching the growing efficacy of women lobbyists in state and national politics for a political science course I was taking. My research leaned toward the conclusion that women have played an important, although sometimes subtle, role in shaping and influencing policy and legislation from the very beginning of our Republic (Abigail Adams!). I had stumbled on the memoir of Benjamin Perley Poore, a prominent American newspaper editor and correspondent in Boston and Washington, D.C., in the mid-nineteenth century, which included a section entitled "Lady Lobbyists." Poore wrote of lobbyists as a "quiet but efficient part of Congressional machinery," but I especially wanted to ask Fran about Poore's observation that "the most adroit lobbyists belong to the gentler sex," often wives or daughters of congressmen who were "retained with instructions to exert their influence" on designated opponents. He described their influence in very colorful prose:

"Every evening they receive, and in the winter their blazing wood fires are often surrounded by a distinguished circle. Some favored guests to a game of euchre, and as midnight approaches there is always an adjournment to the dining-room, where a choice supper is served. A cold game pie, broiled oysters, charmingly mixed salad, and one or two light dishes generally constitute the repast, with iced champagne or Burgundy at blood heat. Who can blame a Congressman for leaving the bad cooking of his hotel or boarding-house, with the absence of all home comforts, to walk into the parlor web which the cunning spider-lobbyist weaves for him?"

I was offended! But when I asked Fran her thoughts on Poore's observations, she laughed and said, "That still works." She went on to describe how as the League's longtime lobbyist she went to the Mississippi Capitol armed with facts and arguments about various bills of interest or concern to the League, and also sometimes hugs and cookies. Her goal was to reach the human being, not the "legislator." "The League does a great deal of research to give correct facts and data to legislators, but we also work to make the issues personal for them," she told me. "We try to address issues from a personal perspective—how legislation affects people as individuals—and that often involves an emotional appeal, which I think women can sometimes do better than men."

What she was trying to tell me was that kind gestures, good manners—and sometimes a home-baked treat—can be as effective as strong facts and data. Fran was a "lady lobbyist" in the best sense of the words. Her legacy is a model for me as I deepen my own commitment to the work of the League of Women Voters.



I met Fran at a League of Women Voters meeting. She was warm and friendly from the start, and she continued to be as the years went on. She was also knowledgeable and generous with her knowledge. Fran had faith in the future and believed in educating for a better future.

Whenever you think of registering and educating voters, think of Fran Leber; whenever you think of the need for better ethics in government, think of Fran Leber; whenever you think of the commitment to quality public education, think of Fran Leber; whenever you think of the call to commitment to community service, think of Fran Leber; whenever you think you cannot go to another meeting, think of Fran Leber; whenever you think of love of family, think of Fran Leber; whenever you think of a good person, think of Fran Leber.

There should be national recognition of Fran's service to the League of Women Voters. There should be statewide recognition of her commitment to public education.

Fran is missed by all who knew her, heard of her, and benefited from her extensive work for the communities in which she lived and loved.

This is a painful passing of a great human being.

I miss you, Fran.

-Dierdre Payne

When Great Trees Fall

When great trees fall,
rocks on distant hills shudder,
lions hunker down
in tall grasses,
and even elephants
lumber after safety.

When great trees fall
in forests,
small things recoil into silence,
their senses
eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die
the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.
We breathe, briefly.
Our eyes, briefly
see with
a hurtful clarity.
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines,
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,
promised walks
never taken.

Great souls die and
our reality, bound to
them, takes leave of us.
Our souls,
dependent upon their
nurture,
now shrink, wizened.
Our minds, formed
And informed by their
radiance,
fall away.
We are not so much maddened
as reduced to the unutterable ignorance of
dark, cold
caves.

And when great souls die,
after a period peace blooms,
slowly and always
irregularly. Spaces fill
with a kind of
soothing electric vibration.
Our senses, restored, never
to be the same, whisper to us.
They existed. They existed.
We can be. Be and be
better. For they existed.

-Maya Angelou



“Fran Leber was a strong advocate for public education, better health care and election reform. We need more people like her.”

- Gov. William Winter

“I was saddened to hear about the passing of Mrs. Fran Leber. I admired Fran because she always stood up and fought for justice for all. I always enjoyed greeting her during her many visits to the State Capitol.”



-Sen. Hillman Frazier

“I worked closely with Fran Leber for many years. She was a great Mississippian, a smiling tenacious advocate for positive change. We worked together on many issues, from campaign finance reform to voter registration. Being recognized with the Fran Leber Award from the MS League of Women Voters is a high point of my time in the State Senate. Women like Fran Leber change the world and we will miss her very much.”

-Sen. David Blount

"It was an honor for me to work with Fran Leber, a tireless advocate for ethics and positive change in Mississippi, her adopted state. She did so much more than "talk the talk"; she walked the walk and climbed the steps through the halls of the Mississippi Legislature. Her successes contributed to Mississippians having greater access to the ballot box and government being more accountable through efforts in lobbying law reform. More recently, her advocacy for fully funding our public education system was an example to so many. She knew that the torch she carried with such dedication for education must continue to be held high if our state is to progress toward its potential."

– Sec. Dick Molpus



Fran Leber was a beloved activist here in Jackson. She worked very hard to make sure that we have as many people as possible registered to vote and participating in the electoral process. She was a very strong ally of the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance. She died at 83 years old and we will really miss her as she has been one of the most consistent people over decades that participated in the overall movement.

Fran was a leader of women's rights and also one of the mainstays of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jackson. We will miss her.

-Bill Chandler, Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance



Some of my memories of Fran- attending my first LWV-J meeting at Fran's urging...listening to Fran's thoughtful comments during forums at the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Jackson...going to Vicksburg with Fran to attend the unveiling of a historic marker honoring Judith Sargent Murray, an early American feminist writer & champion of women's rights...getting advice on pruning shrubs.

-Dary Shenefelt

Oh how time flies!!! In thinking back it has been over 40 years since I first met Fran Leber. I had a preschool-age child and was interested in public school kindergartens. Somehow our paths crossed and Fran got me involved in the kindergarten movement (see there is success in perseverance!) then I joined LWV because issues of importance to me and my family kept arising. Fran was always a knowledgeable and enthusiastic friend. We lived not too far from each other, so carpooling to meetings was often the case. I wish every Mississippian would realize what a significant impact on our lives this one woman made. Thanks Fran.

-Judy Lacy

Almost 40 years ago I joined LWV after meeting Fran Leber. I met her on a school project. Fran joined the volunteers to lead and support the start up of a new school in a vacant old school building, Davis School, on Congress Street (my mother and Eudora Welty had attended the grade school). The families at this new school wanted more hands-on learning as opposed to workbooks. The Superintendent gave us Davis School and paid the teachers we chose to teach our students. Today Davis School has a long waiting list to enroll at the school. Barbara and Barry Powell's and Alferdteen Harrison's children went there too.

-Marcia Weaver

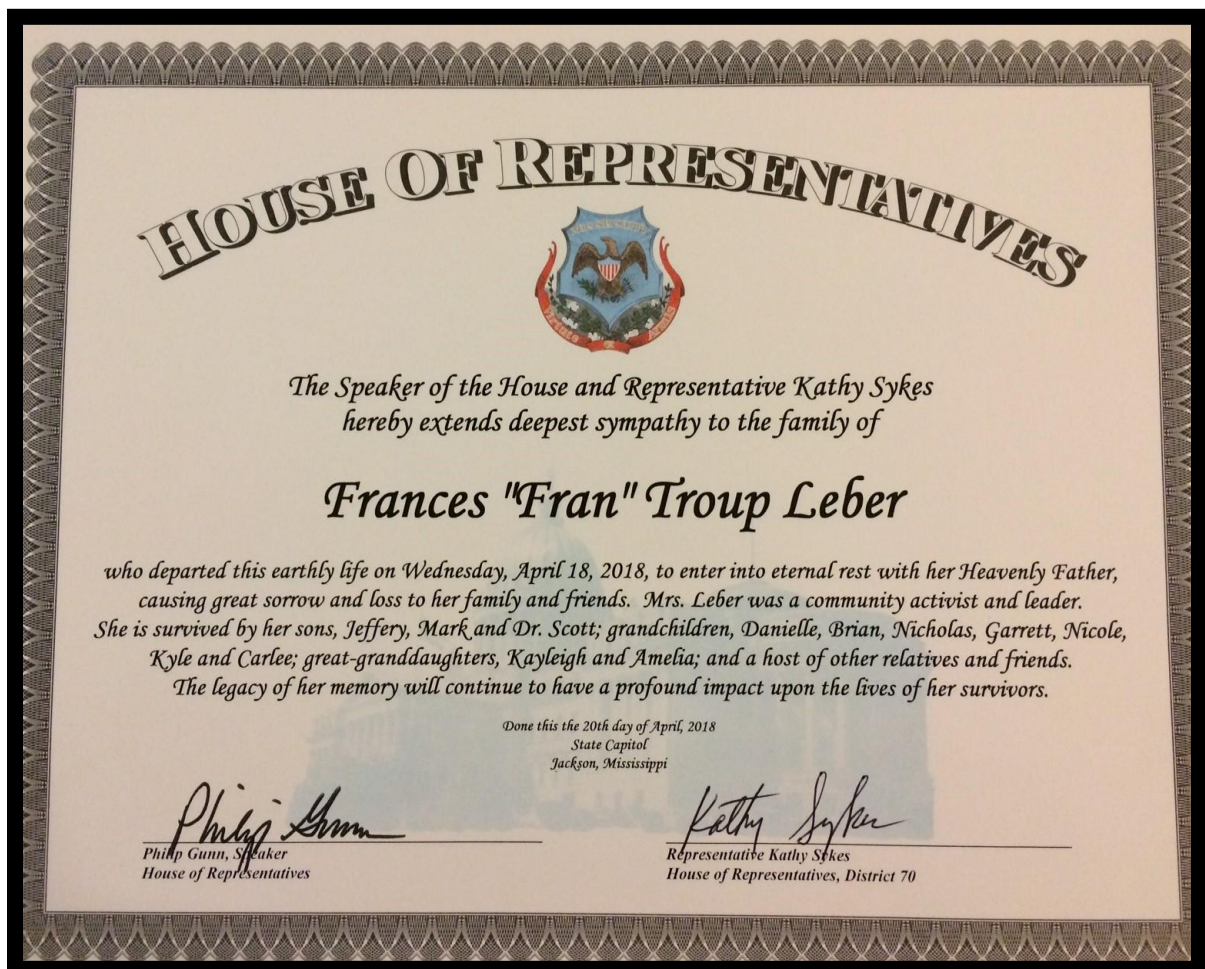


Fran Leber took me under her wing when I began to work with the Legislature. She guided me on a tour of the building and introduced me to staff that could and would help me. I accompanied her in a private meeting with a senator, who gave me his personal cell phone number. I am positive he trusted me only because Fran did. As she walked down the halls with that captivating smile, it was apparent all the legislators knew her. There were nods, almost bows, and returning smiles. And then there were those who did not want Fran to see them. She had surely worked with them before. Fran was such an inspiration, a mentor, and an educator to all who would listen.

-Carolyn Townes

Fran Leber stood up for Women Rights when many were silent. She worked tirelessly to get us Women organized and participating in all aspects of our democracy. For all that you and other members of LWV have done, I am truly grateful! As a first term legislator who rose from the ranks of activism, I thank you for inspiring me and countless others.

-Rep. Kathy Sykes, MS House District 70





Fran was always a welcoming and helpful person. When I moved to Mississippi with two children, one nearly five years old, I went to register him for kindergarten. I then learned there was no public kindergarten in Mississippi and I should have registered him for a church kindergarten when he was born. I did try three or four and found that was the answer so enrolled him in Head Start which was a great experience for him and for me. Then I learned that Fran and the League of Women Voters were working on legislation to provide public kindergarten in Mississippi. The big concern was that it would be "required" and therefore, would integrate the schools. Fran worked patiently for years with many of us to move step by step to create a system that required the schools to offer kindergarten but didn't require families to send their children. By the time my son graduated from college, Mississippi had public kindergarten.

When I began attending League meetings in Jackson I found that their studies covered not only many national and state issues that I didn't know much about but that they welcomed new ideas for passing state legislation. Maternal and child health advocates worked with the League to get Medicaid in Mississippi to cover married mothers for maternity as well as unmarried mothers. The respect that League had at the Legislature made a lot of difference and our bill passed and was funded after several years. Later, enjoying being the legislative chair for State LWV, I mentioned that when I retired I might like to be the League lobbyist. "Sorry," she said, "That's my job" and it was. She came faithfully to the MS Human Services Coalition meetings on Monday noon throughout the Legislative Session each year. Her experience and wisdom made a big difference.

-Judy Barber

I have many, many great memories of Fran from LWV, the UU Church, and various other places and activities. Among my favorite memories are those of going out to dinner after the monthly Precinct 4 COPS meetings and talking about anything and everything. During those dinners Fran and I solved the problems of the city, the state, the country, and beyond. I am very grateful that Fran was my friend, and I will miss her terribly.

-Natalie Maynor

See the wonderful photo-montage created by Natalie Maynor on the following page - images of Fran Leber through the years of her LWV involvement!

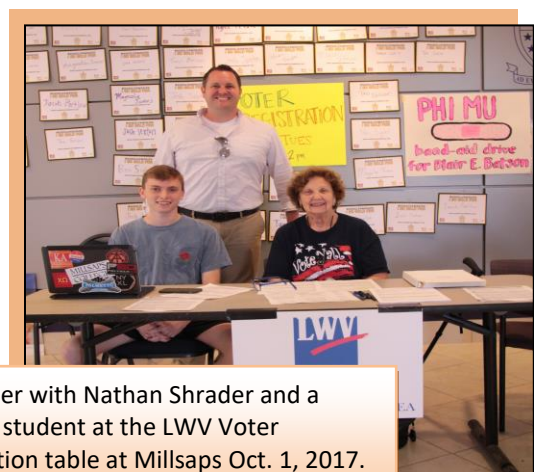


Tomorrow the life and legacy of a great lady will be remembered and honored. She was not a native of Jackson or Mississippi, but she gave much of her life, energy, and effort to make it a better place. She was a persistent champion for women, education, and social, racial, and economic justice. She was known for her advocacy for good government and democratic participation through the League of Women Voters. She was known for living out her Unitarian Universalist values of respecting the inherent worth and dignity of individuals and the interdependent web of life, freely and responsibly seeking truth and meaning, and working to build beloved community through equity, justice, peace, and liberty. She was known as a dedicated and loving wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother who proudly shared tales of their accomplishments and warm recollections of their joys, loves, and life together. Even in the midst of challenge and adversity, she had a ready smile, a joyful laugh, and unfailing spirit that changed the space around her. You could not help but be cheered by her presence and encouraged to continue the good work. She was also a downright bulldog to press for doing what she knew to be right, reminding others that they knew and should do it too! (I'm sure there are many legislators who remember that knowing look she would give them over the edge of her glasses, with the face of mother you did not want to disappoint, for which the only real answer was, "yes, ma'am.") She was warm and caring with a real passion and compassion for the people she knew and even those she didn't, wanting everyone to have a fair opportunity to experience the best that life has to offer. For me, she was an inspiration, a mentor, and, I am honored to say, a friend. She made a special effort to identify and guide younger women, encouraging them to become involved in transforming the world for good. I feel a debt of gratitude for her leadership and support over the years. I hope my life, in some small way, honors the legacy she bequeathed to me. Thank you Fran Leber for being who you were, for all you did! May the seeds of goodness you planted grow into the garden of peace and justice of which you dreamed!

-Stacey Callendar



The Voter, Oct. 2017



Fran Leber with Nathan Shrader and a Millsaps student at the LWV Voter Registration table at Millsaps Oct. 1, 2017.

MEMORIES OF FRAN LEBER

Fran joined the League of Women Voters soon after moving to Jackson and later served in many leadership positions, including president of the local and state units. The League of Women Voters was a good fit for Fran, because she cared about the importance of voting and providing voter services to the public, protecting the environment, accessibility of medical care, support for public education and keeping government accountable.

When Fran retired from full time employment, she volunteered as a legislative lobbyist for the LWVMS. She spent countless hours attending legislative committee meetings and talking to key legislators. Through Voter legislative updates, local programs on legislative issues and LWVMS Legislative Visits Day, she helped other members be more effective advocates.

Fran believed that a good government should represent all its citizens. One memory that exemplifies this was her standing on the sidewalk outside grocery stores (along with other LWV members) asking people to sign a petition to change the form of government in Jackson. The city council had always been elected at-large which resulted in an all white council dominated by northeast Jackson. The success of the petition drive allowed each ward of the city to elect their own council member.

Fran has been my friend and mentor for nearly 50 years. She will be dearly missed.

-Barbara Powell



In the 1970's, when Fran needed an office for the League of Women Voters, she came to see me. We welcomed her into our collective of social action advocates which included Childrens Defense Fund, ACLU, Gray Panthers, and Gay Alliance. She was committed to improving public education, equal opportunity, and voting rights in Mississippi and involved us in her activities. Her push for kindergarten led her to be an important worker for what became Governor Winter's Education Reform legislation. She and Marcia Weaver often went to the State Capitol and talked with important legislative leaders and would come back to the office to discuss strategies for moving forward. Her successes came from long-term commitment. Mail-In Voter Registration took 10 years.

Later when she was the Director of Mynelle Gardens, she arranged for me to perform a gay wedding in the gardens. It was a lovely occasion. Throughout the years she was a faithful attendee of the Mississippi Human Service Coalition's weekly legislative discussion group which met during the Legislative Session.

-Rims Barber

She and I attended a training conference a number of years ago at Emory University in Georgia sponsored by the LWVUS. It was an excellent chance for me to learn more about the League and Fran turned out to be a great traveling companion. Great traveling companions are indeed hard to come by! It was a wonderful training that was attended by a number of other League members from across the South. Fran never met a stranger and treated everyone like old friends. I'll never forget how gracious and outgoing she was. She was a genuine people person and LWV was truly close to her heart. I am thankful to have crossed paths with Fran. She was one of those people you're glad you met.

-Deloris Lee



Being elected Co-President of the State League of Women Voters can leave one feeling overwhelmed. When Carolyn Townes and I were elected Co-Presidents, we were lost about what exactly we were supposed to do. Fran graciously offered to meet with us and give us a few pointers. We were delighted and eagerly went to her home for our session. We were greeted by a smiling Fran and her dog. She led us to the den where there were large volumes of League material. She spent hours going over the material with us and patiently explained any time we had questions. We left thinking we could do this job and it was Fran's effort and her loan of the volumes of material that gave us that feeling. She knew League inside and out and was a great mentor. The materials she loaned us have proven to be invaluable to us during our terms.

-Mary Ann Everett, Co-President, LWVMS

I was going through the sign in sheets from our April 14th Annual Meeting and when I saw Fran's name it occurred to me her family might like to have that page. After consulting with other board members I put it in an envelope with the note below and left it with the guest book at the funeral home.

-Elaine Talbott

To the Family of Fran Leber,

On April 14th, 2018 the day started with sirens and tornado warnings. That was also the day of the League of Women Voters Jackson Area Annual Meeting. It is a time to celebrate accomplishments and make plans for the coming year. The weather kept about a third of the expected crowd away that day. However, Fran was not one to let something as trivial as the threats of a possible tornado keep her from being with her tribe. She arrived with flowers for the center of the tables and her characteristic sunny disposition in spite of the clouds and rain.

The enclosed sign-in sheet is a memento of her last League meeting. We thought her family might like to have it. The League is forever in her debt for her tenacity, mentoring and leadership. We share in your loss and grieve with you.

*In deepest sympathy,
The League of Women Voters Jackson Area*