

Atlanta Urban League,  
239 Auburn Ave., N. E.,  
Atlanta, Ga.



# FACTS

*Published by*

**League of Women Voters of Atlanta**

---

VOL. XXVI

NOVEMBER, 1953

No. 10

---

# THE LEAGUE SPEAKS FOR THE CITIZEN

---

Published Monthly except August and December  
by the League of Women Voters of Atlanta.

---

Mrs. Murdock Equen.....President  
Mrs. Rushton Coulborn.....Editor  
Mrs. Dan M. Byrd, Jr.....Ass't this issue

---

Publishing Headquarters — 415 Henry Grady  
Bldg., Atlanta and 316 Church Street, Decatur.

---

Entered as second class matter, Jan. 28, 1928, at  
the post office at Decatur, Ga., under the Act of  
March 3, 1879.

---

League Membership \$3.00 which includes sub-  
scription to FACTS.

## THE LEAGUE SPEAKS FOR THE CITIZEN

Recently the Atlanta CONSTITUTION, commenting editorially on the proposed Fulton County budget for 1954, had this to say: "It is doubtful that Atlantans are aware of and sufficiently grateful for the Atlanta League of Women Voters. Here is one organization that represents the taxpayer. The League does for the private citizen what he does not have or does not find time to do for himself." In this way, the CONSTITUTION pointed up clearly to the public what League members have long known, that it is possible for active, interested citizens to participate effectively in their government.

### HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CITIZEN

The first step towards being an effective citizen is to vote at every opportunity. Therefore a major portion of the League's time and energy is spent in working to stimulate registration and voting and to provide methods to make balloting convenient and intelligible.

The effective citizen has a further obligation. In addition to speaking at the polls, he may also speak by observing his government in action, by expressing opinions to appropriate authorities, by appearing at public hearings, and by working for desired legislation.

All of these techniques are important to an individual in a democracy. Because the best way to learn is by doing, the League seeks to provide this learning experience for its members. A case in point is our long-time interest in the tax rate and budgetary procedures of both local governments.

### THE LEAGUE AS "A CITIZEN"

For more than two decades the Atlanta League has regularly sent committee members to observe the public meetings of the Fulton County Commission and the Atlanta City Council. From this continuous observation, the League became interested in the exercise of various aspects of the taxing powers of these two governmental bodies and began to study them. As a part of this study, many conferences have been held with government officials, limited projects have been undertaken and reported on, and some of our findings published in FACTS. Whenever the opportunity offered, the League has raised questions concerning proposed budgets at public hearings. This has been easier at the County level than at the City, since the City budget law, although excellent in many ways, does not provide for a genuine public hearing.

As a result of the exercise of all these techniques of citizenship over a period of years, taxes, with emphasis on budgetary procedure, was placed first as a study item and then as a primary action item on the League program. In carry-

ing out this directive from the membership, the League Board undertook a specific project. With the cooperation of other interested groups, an improved Fulton County budget law was drafted. These efforts culminated in the passage by the 1953 General Assembly of the Fulton County Budget Law as introduced by the Fulton County delegation. (See FACTS, July, 1952, Sept., 1952; Sept., 1953).

### THE LEAGUE SPEAKS ON THE COUNTY BUDGET

The first opportunity under the new law to examine the proposed County budget and to raise questions came in December of this year. In a statement adopted by the Board of the League, the Budget Commission was commended on the detailed budgetary statement and in particular on the reduction of each department's item for miscellaneous expenditures and on the allocation to each department of the cost of services supplied by other departments in the county. The rest of the statement was in the form of questions which an informed citizen would ask.

The first questions raised were general in nature: Is it advisable to appropriate so much money to a department, beyond its actual needs, that it can make substantial monthly savings and accumulate them for capital outlay, as, for example, the accumulation of funds in the Welfare Department making it possible to construct buildings from current income? On the other hand, is it possible that the appropriation is not beyond the actual needs, but that money is being saved at the expense of services? Is it sound to use money appropriated for services for capital outlay? Would it not be better to plan capital expenditure on a county-wide basis and over a period of years? Actually Section 4 of the budget law suggests five years. Should the taxpayer have an opportunity to pass on major capital expenditures?

Next, questions were asked about specific items in the budget estimate, questions which should be answered before final adoption of the budget.

(1) Although the county now has 1274 authorized positions (not including temporary ones) as against 1604 before the Plan of Improvement, the county budget is only \$267,000 less than the December, 1951, figure. Unless all these employees were making less than \$1000 a year, it would seem that the loss of 330 employees has not yet been reflected in the county's budget. The budget is again on the increase, since it is \$326,198.40 more than in 1953. It would seem that every function of the county should be scrutinized for economy of operation.

(2) In going over the budget, we find that there is approximately \$7500 in the various departmental budgets for "Travel." We understand that Travel Funds are usually spent attending conventions and association meetings. We would like to ask what rules govern the expenditures of such funds. Who is selected to attend conventions? How many go from one department? Do those attending conventions file

reports for future use and are county procedures improved as a result of such travel? In other words, what benefits do taxpayers receive from the expenditure of the Travel Funds? And how much does it really cost the taxpayer if travel time is also salary-paid time?

(3) We would also like to question item 33 under General Unclassified: Public Works expense for private institutions, \$15,000. Has the policy of this Commission concerning work on private property been changed? If it has been and the county is returning to public works on private property, then we believe that this expenditure of \$15,000 should be further itemized and explained to the public.

(4) Of course the League believes that one way the county budget might be reduced is through further streamlining and modernization of the county government—the elimination of some offices, such as that of the Coroner, and reduction in size of others, such as that of the Sheriff. We would also like to mention that in 1938 the Reed survey recommended that the Alms House be closed and not reopened in its present form, but that provision be made for those needing hospital care and that others be allowed to take advantage of Federal Assistance. In 1938 there were approximately 200 residents and the budget was around \$35,000. In 1954 there are 200 residents and the budget is \$100,794. Furthermore, in 1952 additional Federal Assistance became available, but it cannot be allotted to those living in Alms Houses. We have asked many times, and now we ask again: Is it possible that a better and less costly arrangement could be made?

#### THE LEAGUE AND THE CITY BUDGET

The League also watches the expenditure of city monies. Since, however, the only public hearing is that held by the Finance Committee for the presentation of disallowed requests by city department heads and for hearing requests for money from non-government organizations, the League cannot speak publicly for the taxpayer. Thus, although City officials are most cooperative in producing any records or figures which the League asks to see, no copies of the proposed budget are available for study before its adoption and the League never speaks without studying first.

This, then, is the League's role as a citizen. We are not tax experts and we cannot answer the questions we raise. We have elected public servants to spend the tax monies and we only ask that each item in a budget be carefully weighed so that tax funds will provide adequate services without undue burden on the taxpayer and that the public monies be spent for the benefit of all.