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Justice
Department /
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988-85

Election
Results

9 Qualify Here For City Election

By CAS SHEARIN
Times Staff Writer

Two more people have qualified for the Valdosta elections slated for Feb. 14, bringing the candidate count to nine as of this morning.

Running for the seat now held by city councilman Harold Bennett is Betty Bechtel. Steve Wansley qualified for the seat on the city school board now held by Claydon Barron. Barron is not running for re-election.

Mrs. Bechtel, 57, served on the council previously, from 1972-1980. She is a professor of biology at Valdosta State College.

Running against Mrs. Bechtel is Willie Houseal, 32, a native Valdostan. He is employed by the Lowndes County Board of Education and is director of Winnersville Coalition Consultants.

Wansley, 37, is an insurance agent for New York Life. He is a native of Valdosta.

Of the seven seats up for re-election in February, only two incumbents have said they will be returning to the ballots. They are Valdosta Mayor Ernest Nijem and city school board member David Waller. Both are unopposed so far, said City Clerk Richard Hamlen.

David Drumheller has qualified for the city council seat now held by Bill Eanes. Eanes has not said whether he will run again.

Drumheller, 33, is director of sales for Dowling Bag Company and has lived here for 25 years.

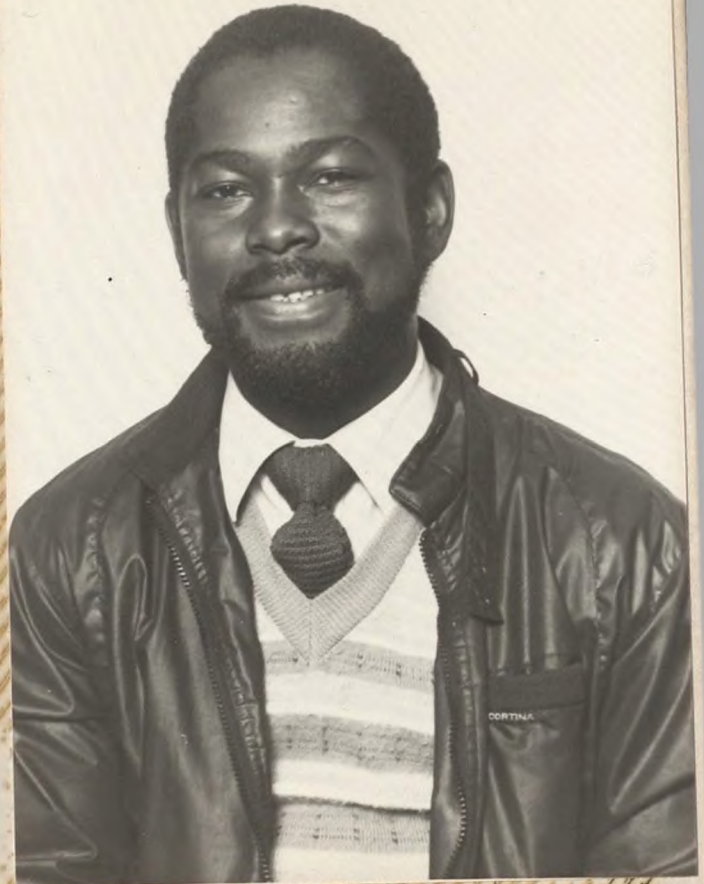
In Post 5, Jack May and Tom Williams have qualified for the race. Gill Autrey, who holds the seat now, is not running for re-election.

May, 61, served on the council from 1974-1980. He ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1980 and 1982. He is a certified public accountant and has lived in Valdosta for 26 years.

Williams, 36, had been running for Post 1, but changed to Post 5 this morning. His opposition in Post 1 would have been Houseal and Mrs. Bechtel. He said he feels all three hold the same views on political issues and it is more beneficial for him to run against someone with opposing viewpoints.

On the ballot for city school board seats are incumbent Waller, for Post 6, Wansley, for Post 5, and Fred Gregg, for Post 4. All three are unopposed so far.

Gregg, 39, of Radiology Associates of Valdosta PC, has lived here for seven years. That post is now held by veteran board member Robert Quattlebaum, who is not seeking re-election.



Two More Qualify 1/14/84

A Valdosta school teacher and a Valdosta attorney qualified for the city elections this morning, bringing the total number of qualifiers to 11.

Alphonzo Rosevelt Hall, a teacher for the Valdosta school system, qualified for Post 3 in the city council race, said Becky Vinson, a city accounting clerk.

Richard W. Shelton, a Valdosta attorney, qualified for Post 4 in the city school board election, she said.

Others who have qualified include Valdosta Mayor Ernest Nijem for mayor, Steve Wansley for Post 5 on the city school board and David Waller for Post 6 on the city school board. All three are unopposed as of yet.

Betty Bechtel and Willie Houseal have qualified for Post 1 in the city council race; Hall joins David Drumheller in the Post 3 race for city council; Jack May and Tom Williams are on the ballot for Post 5 in the city council election; and Shelton and Fred Gregg have qualified for Post 4 in the city school board race.

The election is slated for Feb. 14.

Valdosta City Cou

(Editor's note: This is the second in a series of three articles on the candidates for the Feb. 14 city elections. Today's article deals with candidates for Valdosta City Council.)

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

Of the seven people vying for three Valdosta City Council seats, only one is running as the incumbent—Bill Eanes—while two others have held council seats in the past—Bette Bechtel and Jack May.

Three of the remaining four are taking their first shot at political office. They are Willie Houseal, David Drumheller and Alphonso Hall. The other is Tom Williams, who ran unsuccessfully for the council in 1980.

Ms. Bechtel and Houseal are vying for Post 1, while Drumheller and Hall challenge Incumbent Eanes for the Post 3. May and Williams face each other in the Post 5 race.

The *Times* interviewed each candidate to gauge their views on some of the issues facing Valdosta City Council. The same questions were put to each candidate in the same order.



BETTE BECHTEL
Post 1

Here is a synopsis of what they had to say:

1. What is the function or purpose of a council member?

Bechtel: A council member sets the policy for the city government.

Council members have to be receptive to the people. "Telephone calls at home don't bother me, because that's part of the job...We have the ob-



WILLIE HOUSEAL
Post 1

ligation to answer the needs of the community" and the input of the people is necessary.

Houseal: A council member answers to the entire community. Council members serve as

decision makers for the community, and should be able to make "rational, logical decisions."



WILLIE HOUSEAL
Council Post 1

Willie Herman Houseal—Age 32, born in Valdosta and has lived here for about 23 years.

He has no previous political

3 Feb 84 Vote This Time Around

Election day draws near.

Yet if a poll were to be taken, we'd bet a sizeable minority of Valdostans wouldn't be able to give the date on which the election is to be held.

Even more wouldn't be able to say who's running for which office, even more couldn't tell you a thing about the special referendum on the ballot, and even more would have no idea where the candidates stands on the issues, or what the issues are.

The point is, all too many of us don't care enough to find out. Almost all that information is at your fingertips, waiting to be soaked in.

For the record—the elections are scheduled for Feb. 14. The mayor's post, three Valdosta City Council posts and three Valdosta Board of Education posts are sought by 15 candidates.

The mayoral candidates are incumbent Ernest Nijem, Harold Bennett and Bill Brown. City council candidates are Bette Bechtel and Willie Houseal (Post 1), David Drumheller, Bill Eanes and Alphonso Hall (Post 3) and Jack May and Tom

Williams (Post 5). School board candidates are Fred Gregg and Dick Shelton (Post 4), Al Lynch and Steve Wansley (Post 5), and unopposed incumbent David Waller (Post 6).

The special referendum will ask voters whether the city charter should be amended to require Valdosta City Council to maintain a full-time, professional fire department.

The issues, and where the candidates stand on the issues, cannot be covered quite so easily. But there have been three political forums held so far, two of them open to the general public, in which most of the major issues have been covered. *The Times* covered them all and a series on the candidates and the issues will be coming your way soon.

In other words, there's no good excuse to be uninformed. The public is intelligent enough to elect the best leaders. The problem is not a lack of intelligence, but a lack of interest, and it shows in consistently low voter turnout.

Give it all some thought and vote this time around.

experience, but is coordinator for a Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) chapter in Lowndes County.

Houseal teaches mathematics and reading for the Lowndes County school system at the Georgia Sheriff's Boys Ranch in Hahira.

He is a 10-year veteran of the Air Force, where he achieved the rank of staff sergeant.

He attended Pinevale High School in Valdosta and received a bachelor's degree in sociology from St. Leo College near Tampa, Fla., and a master's degree in human resource management from Pepperdine University in California. He has worked toward a doctorate in public administration at Nova University in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Houseal and his wife, Cleopatra, have three children—Terry, Willie Jr. and Yorshia.

Forum Here Today

From Staff, Wire Reports

At least 12 of the 15 candidates for elected office in Valdosta were expected to participate in today's political forum at the Woman's Building here.

The forum, sponsored by the Wymodausis Club for the benefit of its membership and guests, was to begin following a noon luncheon.

Wymodausis public affairs spokesman Anita Stovall said 11 candidates had committed themselves, and a 12th told *The Times* today he would attend.

The elections are set for Feb. 14. The mayor's post, three Valdosta City Council and three Valdosta Board of Education posts are up for grabs.

The elections could be halted by two legal challenges to the at large method of voting here. However, it doesn't appear likely that they will.

Georgia Legal Services attorney Todd Johnson, who filed one of the suits, said he did not plan to seek an injunction to halt the election.

The U.S. Justice Department filed the other suit and spokesman John Wilson said no decision has been made as to whether to file for an injunction.

However, another source to the case said it did not appear the Justice Department would stop the election, based on conversations with Justice Department personnel.

The candidates are incumbent Ernest Nijem, Harold Bennett and Bill Brown for mayor; Bette Bechtel and Willie Houseal for Post 1 on the council; incumbent Bill Eanes, David Drumheller and Alphonso Rosevelt Hall for council Post 3; and Jack May and Tom Williams for council Post 5.

The school board race features Richard Shelton and Fred Gregg for Post 4; Alfred James Lynch and Steve Wansley for Post 5; and incumbent David Waller, who faces no opposition, for Post 6.

Candidates regret cost of run-off in Valdosta

By Jamie Lucke
Staff Writer

VALDOSTA, Ga. — Two Valdosta City Council candidates who will face each other in a run-off Feb. 28 said they regret that taxpayers will be stuck with paying for a second election.

And a black candidate said his loss will support civil-rights lawsuits against the city's at-large voting system.

Both incumbent Bill Eanes and political newcomer David Drumheller said they are at a loss for strategy as they go into the run-off for Post 3 and regret the expense.

Officials have estimated that it costs about \$10,000 to stage a city election.

Eanes received 33 percent of the vote to Drumheller's 41 percent in the election Tuesday. Alphonso Roosevelt Hall, one of two black candidates, won 27 percent.

Run-offs are required when no candidate receives at least 51 percent of the vote. That majority-rule requirement is an issue in two voting-rights

lawsuits that allege Valdosta's election system discriminates against black candidates.

Willie Houseal, one of two black candidates who lost Tuesday, said yesterday that his defeat will serve as evidence to support the lawsuits. Houseal heads an organization that is a plaintiff in one of the suits. The other suit was filed by the U.S. Justice Department.

"You can clearly see this is a racial type thing," said Houseal, whose share of the vote was 35 percent, compared with 65 percent for his opponent Bette Bechtel, a Valdosta State College professor. "Blacks supported blacks and whites supported whites. There's no way we can play by the establishment's rules and win."

Many observers originally expected the election to be halted by a court order because of the lawsuits. But none of the plaintiffs sought a halt in court.

The election left Lowndes County with no black elected officials, one

(See CANDIDATES, Page B-2)

Candidates regret run-off election's cost

(From Page B-1)

fewer than going into the election.

Both black candidates for the council were defeated. The only black member of the Valdosta Board of Education did not run for re-election, and no blacks filed for school board.

Houseal carried the predominantly black South precinct 917-70, but Mrs. Bechtel overwhelmingly carried the predominantly white North precinct 3,221-525. In the racially mixed Cen-

County

BAXLEY, Ga.
Applying VOL. 79—NO. 121.

tral precinct, they split the vote with 850 for Mrs. Bechtel and 814 for Houseal.

Houseal said that blacks might take legal action to seek a special election under a district voting plan before the next scheduled city election in 1986.

He said that black voters did exert their political clout by ensuring passage of a charter amendment backed by the firefighters union.

"Without the black vote the referendum would not have passed," Houseal said.

The amendment limits changes that can be made in the fire department. The issue was especially important to black voters because the city administration at one point considered closing a fire station that serves the low-income residential area in southern Valdosta and moving the engine and crew to the airport, also on the Southside.

Valdosta, Ga., Mon

scattered thunderstorms today |
ing tonight. Highs

Election Officials Hoping For

By TOM MATHER
Times Staff Writer

A normal turnout for Valdosta elections is about "10,000 fewer than it should be," according to Harrison Tillman, superintendent of elections. But Tillman isn't making any guesses on Tuesday's city elections.

"I have no idea on the expected turnout," he said. "We're hoping for a good one."

Tillman's standards for a good election turnout are pretty strict.

"I consider a good turnout 100 percent," he said. "We usually have around 40 or 50 percent — which is pitiful."

Voters must have registered by Jan. 16 to be eligible to vote in

this election, according to the county registrar's office. A total of 12,732 voters registered by that date.

Voters may cast their ballots from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. at three different poll locations: Mathis Auditorium, at 2311 Williams St.; the Crescent Garden Center, at the corner of Gordon and Patterson streets; and Pinevale Recreation Center, at 930 Old Lake Park Road.

Candidates for the city elections number 15, including three for the mayor's post, seven for the city council and five for the school board. All but one of the seven posts up for election are being contested.

Perhaps the most volatile issue facing voters, however, isn't a candidates race. That issue is whether the city charter should be amended to require the city to maintain a full-time, professional

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Election Officials Hoping For Good Turnout Tuesday

By TOM MATHER
Times Staff Writer

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Perhaps the most volatile issue facing voters, however, isn't a candidates race. That issue is whether the city charter should be amended to require the city to maintain a full-time, professional

fire department.

Candidates for the mayor's race are Bill Brown, City Councilman Harold Bennett and incumbent Ernest Nijem.

Brown, a newcomer to city politics, owns Valdosta Music Teaching Studios here. Bennett is a retired vice president of sales for the Langdale Co. and a building renovator. Nijem is a retired package store owner.

Candidates for city council Post 1 are Bette Bechtel and Willie Houseal. Bechtel is an assistant professor of biology at Valdosta State College and a former council member. Houseal is a teacher with the Lowndes County school system.

City council Post 3 candidates are David Drumheller, incumbent Bill Eanes and Alphonso Rosevelt Hall. Drumheller is

director of sales at Dowling Bag Co. here. Eanes is retired from the Social Security Administration and has been on the council for four years. Hall is a teacher with the Valdosta School system.

City council Post 5 candidates are Jack May and Tom Williams. May is a self-employed certified public accountant, and Williams owns an investigation and security company here.

School board candidates for Post 4 are Fred Gregg, business manager for Radiology Associates of Valdosta, and Dick Shelton, a partner with the law firm of Dover, Sherwood and Shleton.

For Post 5, voters may choose between Al Lynch and Steve Wansley. Lynch is an insurance salesman and manager for A.L. Williams, and Wansley owns an insurance firm affiliated with New York Life.

David Waller is an unopposed candidate for Post 6.

City Council Candidates, Cont.

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

From paving dirt roads to the ward system of voting to sales tax to consolidation, candidates for the Feb. 14 city elections let it be known where they stand at the political forum held here Tuesday night.

The forum, held at Georgia Power Co. and sponsored by the American Association of University Women here, featured all 14 candidates who face opposition in the mayor's race, three city council races and two Valdosta school board races.

More than 150 people turned out to hear the sometimes bland but often hot and lively, even humorous, two-hour forum. Candidates were given three minutes for an introductory speech and one minute to answer questions posed by the audience.

CITY COUNCIL—Post 1

Bechtel: Ms. Bechtel said she was concerned especially with "growth management," or planning for the city's future. She added "reasonable people" needed to be on the council to help draw up a workable ward system of city government, which she believes the courts have already decided will happen here. She also said city-county cooperation "is long past due."

Houseal: "I'm here tonight to tell you I've had enough," were Houseal's opening remarks. He spoke briefly on problems areas such as soil erosion in some sections of town, "eyesore" neighborhoods and the unresponsiveness of city officials to community needs, particularly those of minorities. He supports the ward system of voting.

CITY COUNCIL—Post 3

Drumheller: Calling Valdosta "the greatest city in the world," Drumheller said "we still have problems" and "I want to be part of the solution, not the problem." Problems included a reduction in the number of city firemen while the city has experienced "heavily sustained growth," he said, adding, "we do need trucks to serve" on city council, but warned against

2. What makes you a better candidate for the job than your opponent(s)?

Bechtel: "I have been on the council, so I know a little bit about what it involves...perhaps I'm a proven entity."

Her opponent "may be under a little more pressure" to represent one group more than another, "but I don't think he'd necessarily do that." Ms. Bechtel said she had no pressure to represent any one group.

Houseal: His opponent had the opportunity to help bring about some needed changes while she was on the council before, but the problem areas still exist.

"I've seen things in the community that need to be corrected," and the council needs "a person with a new opinion" to see that that is accomplished.

3. What will be your main goal or top priority if elected?

Bechtel: Planning for the

Houseal: Establishing a ward system of voting is what Houseal called his main goal. Establishing wards and districts is needed to insure minorities have an equal opportunity to gain representation in city government.

4. Valdosta operates under an ad valorem tax millage cap of 10 mills. Can we live within the means of our current tax structure, or should the city seek to raise the limit?

Bechtel: Ms. Bechtel said she'd like to see the city remain within the 10-mill cap. However, she said if it could be shown to her that the city needed to raise the millage,

"I'm willing to sit down and listen...if it's absolutely necessary."

Houseal: Houseal, too, said he didn't want to see the millage raised, but added he felt the cost to provide services is going up. He said the city needed to "re-evaluate" the tax formula and do more study into the financing of services.

5. Is the current division of sales tax proceeds between the Lowndes County Commission (61 percent) and Valdosta City Council (36 percent) fair?

Bechtel: The division is not fair in that it is based on the county assuming financial responsibility for services outlined in a 1979 study, which the county has failed to do. She favors more negotiation between city and county officials over court action.

Houseal: Believes the distribution is unfair because it

should be based on the cost of services rendered and where the money came from in the first place — in other words, where the sales were made. The city deserves a larger slice of the sale tax pie to roll back property taxes.

6. Do Valdostans, who account for about 57 percent of the ad valorem taxes in the county budget, receive a fair share of services from the county in return?

Bechtel: "I don't feel I'm being absolutely robbed, but I wish there was more cooperation between the city and the county." Ms. Bechtel added she didn't feel the county could afford to maintain all of Valdosta's roads by itself.

Houseal: Feels the city receives "an adequate amount of services" from the county, but added that since the city is growing, "it needs to be in-

creased," such as in the area of sewerage and waste disposal.

7. Should Valdosta and Lowndes County consolidate its governmental functions?

Bechtel: "Basically, I'm for consolidation." Ms. Bechtel said she'd like to see a referendum calling for a study of consolidation put before the people. "Some duplication of services could be eliminated, but I'm not saying it's going to be cheaper...It's certainly an area we ought to look into very carefully."

Houseal: The time is not right for consolidation, "but in the future, it's inevitable." Right now the individual governmental bodies "are too

strong as individuals to reach an agreement." Eventually, consolidation could reduce double taxation, Houseal said.

8. Should Valdosta establish a ward system of city government or should the city fight it through the courts?

Houseal: The at large system now in effect "is a wrong that needs to be righted" with the establishment of wards. Houseal said segments of the community are "grossly neglected" under the at large setup, as are the southern and portions of the western sections of the town, and that minorities in particular have been cut out of the decision-making process. "We're not talking about blacks against whites. We're talking about rights against wrongs."

Forum Kicks Off City Political Season

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

Two minutes is precious little time to speak your piece, as candidates for Valdosta's Feb. 14 city elections found out Wednesday.

Five of 12 candidates speaking in a political forum at the Woman's Building Wednesday afternoon were caught in mid-sentence by the bell, the two-minute limit set by the sponsoring Wymodausis Club.

But most managed to get the message across in this year's first elections forum that a vote for them was a vote to improve city government or the city school system. And so the political season begins in earnest.

The mayor's post, three Valdosta City Council seats and three Valdosta Board of Education seats are up for election.

Ernest Nijem faces City Councilman Harold Bennett and Valdosta businessman Bill Brown, a newcomer to Valdosta politics, in his bid for a third term as mayor.

Bennett, the first to speak and the first victim of the two-minute bell, briefly defended his record of four years on the council and said he would continue to follow the city's charter to the letter "when I'm elected mayor."

Bennett told *The Times* that leadership was the mayor's primary function and that he felt Nijem's leadership to be lacking.

Brown, owner of Valdosta Music Teaching Studios, joined in the call to change the at-large method of voting here to a district, or ward, system, in order to ensure adequate representation of all Valdosta residents.

"We have to recognize at large...as an unsatisfactory method of representation," he said.

Two suits have been filed here

time to be a full-time mayor.

"The city has grown so much, it requires a full-time mayor," he said.

"I'm retired, so I can be a full-time mayor...I answer my own telephone down there (at City Hall) and my door is always open."

Others speaking at the forum were:

— **Bette Bechtel**, former city councilwoman and assistant professor of biology at Valdosta State College, who is seeking city council Post 1.

She, too, said wards and districts were coming to Valdosta—"The courts have pretty well decided that this will be done."—and added that reasonable people were needed on the council to ensure a proper district system be put into effect.

She also said planning for Valdosta's growth and the future of the Valdosta Municipal Airport were among the most important issues.

— **Willie Houseal**, a teacher with the Lowndes School system, who is seeking city council Post 1.

Houseal said he was concerned particularly with double taxation, helping the youth of the city and the unresponsiveness of the city toward the needs of residents.

"I have a service I'd like to give...I don't have all the answers but I do have the courage to face the problems."

— **Bill Eanes**, city council Post 3 incumbent, who is seeking re-election.

Eanes said he had kept his promises to represent the people to the best of his ability and "I simply ask that you let me remain on the job, to continue that progress."

Eanes's opponents are David Drumheller and Alphonso Roosevelt Hall. Drumheller, director of sales for Dowling Bag Co., was out of town on a business matter and Hall, a teacher with the

"probably the period of the greatest growth" of Valdosta and called himself a "no frills candidate" who wants "to get the most out of every dollar we have."

He emphasized he wanted the best police and fire protection for the city.

— **Tom Williams**, former city policeman and owner of an investigation and security company, who is seeking City Council Post 5.

Williams described himself as a "working man" and said "it's time the pencil pushers made some room" for the "workers."

He said he wanted to establish an airport authority, maintain a full-time professional city fire department and retain airport security to keep drug smugglers at a distance.

— **Fred Gregg**, business manager of Radiology Associates of Valdosta PC, who is seeking school board Post 4.

He referred to developing leadership skills in the Navy and management skills in business. "I've prayed about this position and I feel this is where the Lord would have me serve," he said.

— **Richard Shelton**, a Valdosta attorney, who is seeking school board Post 4.

Shelton said he had the quality of being able to "listen well," and referred to his status as a Valdosta native, brought up in Valdosta schools.

Gregg and Shelton have children in Valdosta schools.

— **Alfred J. Lynch Jr.**, insurance salesman and manager with A.L. Williams, who is seeking school board Post 5.

Lynch said he wanted to expand school facilities, particularly school buses, and reduce teacher workloads.

— **Steve Wansley**, insurance salesman and owner of Wansley & Associates here, who is seeking school board Post 5.

Wansley said "The Valdosta school system is one of the best in

Justice Dept. Probes Local Government

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

Members of the U.S. Justice Department's civil rights division are in Lowndes County reviewing Valdosta Mayor-Council and Lowndes County Commission meeting minutes.

They are checking to see if various elected governmental bodies in the area are in compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act.

Lowndes County Commission Chairman Fred DeLoach said "I'm satisfied they've had some complaints," possibly concerning committee appointments and "minority elections."

The Justice Department workers have been in neighboring Brooks County this week as well. They have been reviewing the minutes of the Brooks County Commission, according to a Brooks official.

Stanley K. Foshee, one of the Justice Department workers, would not comment on the purpose of the review. He said the "lead attorney," Mark Posner, would make any statement to the press.

Posner referred *The Times* to John Wilson of the public information office of the Justice Department in Washington.

Wilson said he did not know whether the Justice Department had received any complaints, but confirmed that the purpose of

the trip to south Georgia was to see if elected officials are in compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

He said since Congress revised parts of the Voting Rights Act last year, the Justice Department has formed a "discrimination unit" that performs routine reviews throughout the country. Posner is a member of that unit, he said.

"This doesn't indicate there is anything imminent here," said Wilson, meaning that the Justice Department had no plans to file a discrimination lawsuit.

"It's much too preliminary to speak of that."

Valdosta City Manager Mike Cason said he believed the Justice Department was looking at annexation matters which had come before Mayor-Council in past meetings.

The review is apparently an extensive one. One Lowndes County Courthouse worker said Posner and Foshee had already looked through four books of county commission meeting minutes. Each book contains about four years of meetings.

Mayor-Council has been criticized in the past for annexing county property into the city. Some have charged the motive behind the annexations was to dilute black voting strength by bringing more whites into the city.

A threat to complain to the U.S. Justice Department was voiced at one such meeting, where 13 parcels of county property were

annexed into the city.

The city denies the charges. Council members have said they do not seek to annex property, but are merely granting requests of the property owners.

There also have been threats to complain to the U.S. Justice Department about the at large voting system in Lowndes County and Valdosta.

The issue of switching to a ward system of voting for the county commission was put to a vote last year, but it was defeated as 55 percent of the voters decided to keep the elections at large.

At large elections allow every voter in a city or county to vote for every member of an elected city or county board.

Under a ward system of voting, voters cast a ballot only for the elected official in their ward, or district, and perhaps one at large member. If boundaries are drawn correctly, a ward system virtually assures a minority will be elected to represent at least one ward.

A lawsuit filed by Vivian Jones of Valdosta challenging the at large voting system here was dismissed from federal court in February of 1982.

"It could very well be that we heard about that suit and that's what brought it (the Lowndes County area) to our attention," Wilson said.

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"We have to recognize at large...as an unsatisfactory method of representation," he said.

Two suits have been filed here in an attempt to change the at-large setup, and Brown said he wants "to keep the city out of the courts."

Nijem addressed no issue in particular, but referred instead to "open door" policy in four years as mayor and that he had

time to be a full-time mayor.

"The city has grown so much, it requires a full-time mayor," he said.

"I'm retired, so I can be a full-time mayor...I answer my own telephone down there (at City Hall) and my door is always open."

Others speaking at the forum were:

— **Bette Bechtel**, former city councilwoman and assistant professor of biology at Valdosta State College, who is seeking city council Post 1.

She, too, said wards and districts were coming to Valdosta — "The courts have pretty well decided that this will be done." — and added that reasonable people were needed on the council to ensure a proper district system be put into effect.

She also said planning for Valdosta's growth and the future of the Valdosta Municipal Airport were among the most important issues.

— **Willie Houseal**, a teacher with the Lowndes School system, who is seeking city council Post 1.

Houseal said he was concerned particularly with double taxation, helping the youth of the city and the unresponsiveness of the city toward the needs of residents.

"I have a service I'd like to give...I don't have all the answers but I do have the courage to face the problems."

— **Bill Eanes**, city council Post 3 incumbent, who is seeking re-election.

Eanes said he had kept his promises to represent the people to the best of his ability and "I simply ask that you let me remain on the job, to continue that progress."

Eanes's opponents are David Drumheller and Alphonso Rosevelt Hall. Drumheller, director of sales for Dowling Bag Co., was out of town on a business matter and Hall, a teacher with the Valdosta school system, could not attend the forum due to a conflict with his teaching schedule.

— **Jack May**, former city councilman and a certified public accountant, who is seeking city council Post 5.

May said the six years he was on the council, 1974-80, were

"probably the period of the greatest growth" of Valdosta and called himself a "no frills candidate" who wants "to get the most out of every dollar we have."

He emphasized he wanted the best police and fire protection for the city.

— **Tom Williams**, former city policeman and owner of an investigation and security company, who is seeking City Council Post 5.

Williams described himself as a "working man" and said "it's time the pencil pushers made some room" for the "workers."

He said he wanted to establish an airport authority, maintain a full-time professional city fire department and retain airport security to keep drug smugglers at a distance.

— **Fred Gregg**, business manager of Radiology Associates of Valdosta PC, who is seeking school board Post 4.

He referred to developing leadership skills in the Navy and management skills in business. "I've prayed about this position and I feel this is where the Lord would have me serve," he said.

— **Richard Shelton**, a Valdosta attorney, who is seeking school board Post 4.

Shelton said he had the quality of being able to "listen well," and referred to his status as a Valdosta native, brought up in Valdosta schools.

Gregg and Shelton have children in Valdosta schools.

— **Alfred J. Lynch Jr.**, insurance salesman and manager with A.L. Williams, who is seeking school board Post 5.

Lynch said he wanted to expand school facilities, particularly school buses, and reduce teacher workloads.

— **Steve Wansley**, insurance salesman and owner of Wansley & Associates here, who is seeking school board Post 5.

Wansley said "The Valdosta school system is one of the best in the country" and that he wanted the opportunity to help it continue to be.

Both Lynch and Wansley have children in Valdosta schools.

David Waller, incumbent candidate for school board Post 6, was not asked to speak at the forum since he faces no opposition.

1/7/84

Nijem unopposed in Valdosta election

By Jamie Lucke
Staff Writer

VALDOSTA, Ga. — The qualifying deadline for Valdosta's Feb. 14 city election is noon Monday, and so far no one has challenged Mayor Ernest Nijem's bid for a third two-year term.

Neither has there been any move to stop the election although Valdosta's at-large voting system is the target of two lawsuits in federal court.

The U.S. Justice Department filed suit Oct. 27 against the Valdosta City Council, Lowndes County Commission and Valdosta Board of Education.

The suit contends that at-large voting violates the Voting Rights Act of 1973 by effectively excluding blacks from elected office.

Justice Department lawyer Gerald Herbert said yesterday that there has been no decision about whether to seek an injunction against the Feb. 14 election. A number of legal and tactical considerations will go into the decision, he said.

The second suit was filed by black citizens and groups being represented by Georgia Legal Ser-

vices and the American Civil Liberties Union. It targets the City Council solely.

Legal Services lawyer Todd Johnson said yesterday that it is unlikely, but not impossible, that Legal Services will move to enjoin the election.

City Council candidate Willie Houseal is director of the Winnersville Coalition, one of the groups suing the city. The ACLU represents his group. He said yesterday that the chances of the ACLU filing for an injunction are "pretty slim now."

Houseal said that he decided to run despite his opposition to the at-large voting system because, "I didn't think it was a good time to sit back and not participate in this election . . . I'm running to win. I'm also running to make a point, to stress the difficulty of a black being a successful candidate."

Although Valdosta is 39 percent black, only one black has ever been elected to the City Council, and the only black ever elected to the city school board ran unopposed, according to the Justice Department.

Three of six council seats are up for election. Qualifying so far for Post 1 are Houseal, a teacher in the Lowndes County school system and Bette Bechtel, an assistant professor at Valdosta State College and a former City Council member.

Qualifying for Post 3 are David Drumheller, director of sales for Dowling Bag Co. and Alphonse Hall, a teacher in the Valdosta school system.

Qualifying for Post 5 are Jack May, a certified public accountant, former council member and former unsuccessful candidate for mayor, and Tom Williams, owner of Eagle ISA, a security firm.

Three school board posts are up for election. Qualifying for School Board Post 4 are Fred M. Gregg, a medical business manager, and Richard Shelton, an attorney.

Qualifying for school board Post 5 is L. Steve Wansley, insurance salesman.

And for post 6, David Waller, owner of a heating and air-conditioning company.

Fire Dept. Referendum Dominates VSC Forum

By TOM MATHER
Times Staff Writer

The proposed fire department amendment — to be considered by voters in the Feb. 14 election — dominated discussions at Thursday night's political forum at Valdosta State College.

Other key topics discussed at the forum — which was attended by all the city council and mayoral candidates except incumbent Mayor Ernest Nijem — included ward voting plans and consolidation of city and county governments.

The purpose of the forum was to fight voter apathy, according to Wes McDonald, chairman of the Georgia Caucus of Students Voters. The GCSV sponsored the event with the College Republicans and Young Democrats, he said.

Debating the fire department issue were City Councilman Ashley Hill and Leighton Sadler, president of the Valdost Firefighters Association.

Urging a "yes" vote on the amendment, Sadler said its passage would not change operations of Valdosta Fire Department in any way. But a defeat of the amendment, he

said, would allow the city council and mayor to abolish the department and set up contract fire fighting.

"This amendment is being brought to you . . . because we feel the citizens of Valdosta should have input into the decision," Sadler said. "It's time to take it out of the hands of the politicians."

But Valdostans already have such input, Hill said, by way of the city officials that represent them. And passage of the amendment, he said, would hinder management of the city government.

"The yes vote would take away from the power you have vested in the mayor and council," Hill said.

Claims that the city council is trying to establish contract fire fighting are untrue, Hill said.

"No one has said that we're getting rid of your fire department," he said. In fact, he said, the city council recently voted against a measure to consider establishing contract fire fighting.

"That is a complete fallacy," Sadler said. The city council has already spent "thousands

of dollars" looking into the issue, he said.

The fire department issue was also discussed by mayoral candidates Harold Bennett and Bill Brown. Neither candidate said whether they would vote for or against the amendment.

But Bennett, who is currently a city councilman, defended actions by the city council regarding the fire department.

"The council has only wished to look at other alternatives," he said. "Can service be supplied at a lower cost?"

Brown pointed out that the number of city firemen has decreased in recent years, due to attrition.

"I don't understand how we could do this without a reduction in service," Brown said.

Brown and Bennett were also asked for their opinions on ward voting by the debate sponsors. "Would you prefer that the Justice Department or the city council decide on a redistricting plan?" they were asked.

Valdosta should be run by the city council, Brown said, not by the courts. "We need to

do it (redistricting), right here in Valdosta," he said.

Bennett defended city council's actions on redistricting. "There's been more work done on it, than most people realize," he said.

A ward system is inevitable, he said, but a plan must be worked out that is acceptable to all. For that reason, he said the city council is letting the state draw up a ward plan.

"We need to let it be worked out by unbiased people who aren't affected by local politics," Bennett said.

On the issue of consolidation, only two city council candidates were asked for their opinions by the debate sponsors.

Bette Bechtel, running for post 1, said that money could be saved by combining certain city and county services. "We cannot stop at a city-county line," she said.

Bechtel's opponent, Willie Houseal, said that consolidation could be a "good thing for the area," but downplayed its importance.

"This issue comes up every election," he said.

City Election Results Come In

By TOM MATHER
Times Staff Writer

When 12-year-old Billy Lin moved to Valdosta a year ago from Foochow, China, he knew only 10 words in English.

Now he knows about 3,000 words — including the names of candidates in today's city elections.

Lin, whose parents operate China Garden restaurant, was among some 347 students at West Gordon Elementary who participated in a mock election Monday at the school.

"It's a project that our school does every time there's an election," according to Pat Colson, a remedial English and reading teacher who works with Billy Lin.

West Gordon Elementary has held such elections for about six years, Ms. Colson said, to

help teach students about civic duties.

"Voting is a right, but it's also a responsibility," she said, "because you have to register. So it really teaches good citizenship."

The whole voting process is conducted on the students' own initiative, she said. That is, students had to reach school one-half hour early last week to register, and again on Monday to vote. "We would not allow the students to vote unless they had registered," Ms. Colson said.

Judging from voter registration and turnout for West Gordon's election — those students could teach many adults a lesson in civic responsibilities.

Out of 550 students, Ms. Colson said that 78 percent

(429) — had registered to vote. Of those who registered, she said more than 80 percent (347) actually voted.

That voting percentage compares favorably with figures from adults in city elections, where 40 to 50 percent of those registered typically vote, according to Election Superintendent Harrison Tillman.

Incidentally, the results from the school's elections are already in, according to Ms. Colson.

Ernest Nijem won the mayor's race with 53 percent of the vote, compared to 23 percent for Harold Bennett and 14 percent for Bill Brown. In city council Post 1, Willie Houseal won with 55 percent of the vote, compared to Bette Bechtel with 45 percent.

David Drumheller captured

city council Post 3 with 41 percent of the vote, compared to 30 percent for Alphonso Hall and 29 percent for incumbent Bill Eanes. Jack May won city council Post 5 with 81 percent of the vote, compared with 19 percent for challenger Tom Williams.

For the board of education, Fred Gregg won Post 4 with 53 percent of the vote, compared to 47 percent for Dick Shelton. Post 5 was won by Steve Wansley with 72 percent of the vote, compared to 28 percent for Al Lynch.

But the students didn't vote on the fire department amendment, Ms. Colson said, because the issue was too complicated.

"Gosh, it was difficult enough for the adults to understand," she said.

Drumheller, Eanes In Runoff

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

Two landslide victories and a runoff marked the election for three Valdosta City Council posts Tuesday.

Former council members Bette Bechtel and Jack May captured city council posts 1 and 5 with relative ease over challengers Willie Houseal and Tom Williams.

Meanwhile, David Drumheller and incumbent Bill Eanes will square off again Feb. 28 in a runoff election for city council Post 3.

May, 61, a certified public accountant and a council member from 1974 to 1980, garnered more votes than any other candidate for city council in his 4,328-1,731 defeat of Tom Williams, the owner of an investigation company here who once before ran unsuccessfully for city council. May's percentage was 71.4 percent.

Ms. Bechtel, 57, took 64.9 percent of the vote in her 4,209-2,274 victory over Houseal, 32. Ms. Bechtel is an assistant professor of biology at Valdosta State College and was a member of city council from 1972 to 1980. Houseal teaches reading and mathematics for the Lowndes County school system.

Drumheller, 33, and Eanes, 63 collected 40.6 percent and 32.7 percent of the vote, respectively, to put them in a runoff. Drumheller got 2,513 votes and Eanes received 2,022.

Another challenger for that post, Alphonso R. Hall, captured 26.5 percent of the vote with 1,641 votes.

Jack May will in all likelihood become Valdosta's mayor pro tem, since the city council generally selects the person receiving the most votes to be mayor pro tem.

Eanes said he expects a low

turnout for the runoff. "What bothers me is the cost of it... It's a sad, sad thing."

Houseal, meanwhile, said the elections proved the unfairness of the at large electoral process, in that it's virtually impossible for a black to be elected.

Houseal, who is black, told *The Times* today that an effort is already underway to "void the elections."

"Phone calls have been made," he said, though he declined to say to whom the phone calls were made.

Houseal advocates the ward system of voting, which he feels would allow blacks an equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process with whites. The ward versus at large method of voting here is now in the courts.

He pointed to his vote count as evidence that voting patterns are now racially polar-

ized. He received 35 percent of the vote against Bechtel. Valdosta's population is about 39 percent black.

Of his 2,274 votes, 917 came from the south district, comprised mostly of blacks, and 814 from the central district which has a heavy black population.

He received only 18 absentee votes and only 525 votes from the Valdosta north precinct, which has a heavy white population. Ms. Bechtel received 3,221 votes from Valdosta north and only 70 from Valdosta south.

Meanwhile, in the school board races, Richard Shelton took 63.2 percent of the vote to defeat challenger Fred Gregg 3,666-2,129 for Post 4. Steve Wansley took 72 percent of the vote to defeat challenger Al Lynch 3,777-1,459 for Post 5.

Unopposed incumbent David Waller garnered 4,702 votes in Post 6.

16 Feb 84

City Election Results

	VALDOSTA NORTH	VALDOSTA CENTRAL	VALDOSTA SOUTH	ABSENTEE	TOTAL
MAYOR					
HAROLD BENNETT	1,387	483	103	37	2,010
BILL BROWN	500	289	121	6	916
ERNEST NIJEM	1,963	1,028	849	44	3,884
CITY COUNCIL					
BETTE BECHTEL	3,221	850	70	68	4,209
WILLIE HOUSEAL	525	814	917	18	2,274
DAVID DRUMHELLER	1,982	454	33	44	2,513
BILL EANES	1,422	485	87	28	2,022
ALPHONSO HALL	280	599	748	14	1,641
JACK MAY	2,694	1,010	556	68	4,328
TOM WILLIAMS	1,014	513	188	16	1,731
SCHOOL BOARD					
FRED GREGG	1,221	545	346	17	2,129
RICHARD SHELTON	2,360	885	361	60	3,666
AL LYNCH	723	447	276	13	1,459
STEVE WANSLEY	2,610	821	283	63	3,777
FIRE DEPT. REFERENDUM					
YES	1,443	1,283	988	32	3,746
NO	2,375	446	65	55	2,941

Draw Wards Soon

Dec 12, 83

Talks are underway here on changing our voting system to wards for the City Council, Valdosta Board of Education and the Lowndes County Commission.

Valdosta already has some sort of plan in waiting. The school board probably would be able to adjust to the city plan. Lowndes commission remains the question mark.

One thing is certain, city, county and national elections are almost upon us and we need to resolve the matter.

The three governing bodies could go into court, fight for the at-large system, and delay the matter for a time. In so doing, a great deal of tax money would be spent.

The better course, it would seem, is

to work in good faith and in a fair amount of haste to get the ward or district system set up in time for city elections. If not, we might well face the prospect of no elections until we solve the matter.

The ward system is not our choice of righting some obvious wrongs in our elections. But it looks like the only choice we have at this point.

Those officials involved should get down to the bone, draw up wards that ensure blacks will elect a pro rata share of elected officials and lets move on to larger questions.

We can hope that someday we can all vote for the best person, regardless of race or whatever. For now, it looks like we must force the issue and the sooner and easier the better.

Valdostans Have Duty

We have a better than average crop of candidates for the post of mayor and three City Council seats in Valdosta this election. There are some old and new political faces in the various races and this gives voters a choice.

It may be none of the candidates are exactly what you may be looking for in the way of municipal leadership. But, since you didn't offer to run yourself, there are others in the races who represent a fairly broad range of ideas and most of us should be able to find a candidate to our liking.

For their part, the candidates have placed themselves in the spotlight for your inspection. All responded well to invitations to appear in forums, answer questions and all were quite willing to answer questions asked by reporters for this newspaper which resulted in a series of articles ending today.

Thus, one pretty much has to agree the candidates have done their job so

far in stimulating your interest in the election process.

Next Tuesday the burden shifts to the voters of Valdosta. Burden isn't really the word. Actually, the right and privilege to elect our leaders came after a war of revolution and has been improved upon over two centuries.

The burden involved is to show we want and deserve the representative form of democracy we have here and across the nation.

Voting freely and serving on a jury are two major rights which were hard to win and so easy to lose. Democracy is a fragile thing, needing constant nourishment by those who would enjoy the fruit.

All we have to do is go out and vote as we wish Tuesday and we will have held up our end of the burden.

Vote Tuesday, encourage others to vote and show the candidates you appreciate their efforts.



Fundamental Gifts

Willie Houseal of Valdosta distributes books made available through the government-funded Reading is Fundamental program to children at Camp Relitzo. The

books were distributed Friday during the last day of the summer camp held at the Old P.G. Williams School. — Times Staff Photo By Robert Winter III.

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Voting Rights Probe Held Here

2/29/84

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

The U.S. Justice Department is forging ahead with its probe into voting rights violations it alleges to have occurred here.

Justice Department lawyers are in Valdosta this week, talking to people who were elected officials in the 1960s and studying meeting minutes of Valdosta City Council, the Lowndes County Commission and the Valdosta Board of Education.

Those three elected bodies are named as defendants in a federal voting rights suit the Justice Department filed in October of last year. The suit charges the at large method of voting here discriminates against blacks and is in violation of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.

It and another suit filed by the local chapter of the NAACP, Winnersville Coalition of Consultants and others here seek to replace the at large system here with voting districts, or wards. District lines can be drawn to virtually assure the election of minority members to office.

The suits were filed separately but have since been combined, according to Lundie Smith, federal court clerk here.

Among those subpoenaed to talk to the Justice Department lawyers are Earl Mayo, a Valdosta school board member in the 1960s, and Fred Walker, a member of the State Legislature representing Lowndes County in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Valdosta Schools Supt. Ralph Brandon said today school board minutes dating back to 1960 have been supplied through the school attorney to one of the Justice Department lawyers.

Verteran school board member Lamar Newbern said today he had not been subpoenaed but added, "I've been told I will be."

Valdosta City Manager Mike Cason said Justice Department "came in and copied" city council meeting minutes dating back to the 1960s "about two-three weeks ago."

Lowndes County Commission Chairman Fred DeLoach confirmed that the Justice Department has been reviewing county commission minutes as well.

John Wilson, a Justice Department spokesman in Washington, said the Justice Department's activity was "in preparation for the trial."

"What they're doing is what the lawyers call 'discovery'," Wilson said. "That will continue through the summer."

Court Clerk Smith said he has received no notification of a court date for the suit.

The matter could be resolved out of court. Valdosta City Council, for example, has proposed a system involving four wards and two at large posts, with two of the four wards having a majority black population.

"I'm sure it's being considered," Wilson said, but declined to elaborate when asked about the chances of the Justice Department accepting the city's proposal.

"We're always willing to discuss the matter and settle it out of court," he said.

The suit charges, among other things, that voting patterns here are racially polarized and that the numbered at large posts adopted here in 1963 were adopted to "help insure that black citizens would not be elected under the at-large election systems."

Fundamental Gifts



City Voters Thanked

Please be informed of my gratitude to the many voters who came to the polls and voted for me Feb. 14.

By now many think that this election is a thing of the past, and that their efforts to elect a more desirable candidate has failed. Let me be the first to say that this is not so.

I have made a point concerning the unfairness of at-large voting. I am also willing to go that extra mile to see that wards are implemented here in Valdosta.

A vote count of 35 percent clearly signifies the community's voice for a more desirable, different type of governing body.

By now the entire community should be convinced that a change is at hand. A change from the traditional way to a more fair and responsive way by allowing all citizens a chance to serve.

For those who perhaps voted for the first time, and those who will vote next time, you can now begin to notice your value in your vote. A sincere thanks goes out to you, the public, for your support.

Your vote proved more than you could imagine. Feel good about it. And let's go do it again.

Willie Houseal
Valdosta

3/9/84

Valdosta To Host Jackson

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

Democratic presidential hopeful Jesse Jackson will be in Valdosta Saturday for a campaign rally.

Rev. Jackson, one of five recognized leading contenders for the democratic presidential nomination, will speak at the rally in Whitehead Auditorium in the Fine Arts Building of Valdosta State College, according to Jonathan Abel, local chairman of the South Georgia Committee to Elect Jesse Jackson.

The rally will get underway at 9 a.m. and Jackson probably will begin speaking about 10 a.m., Abel said. His is expected to arrive at the Valdosta airport about 9:30 a.m. and will hold a brief press conference at the auditorium prior to speaking.

Whitehead's seating capacity is 814, and Abel said about 200 more folding chairs will be provided.

Jackson, 42, an ordained Baptist Minister, calls his campaign the "Rainbow Coalition" and describes it as "spanning lines of color, sex, age, religion, region and national origin."

He is challenging recognized frontrunners Gary Hart, a U.S.



Jackson To Speak At VSC

Senator from Colorado, and former Vice President Walter Mondale as well as Ohio Sen. John Glenn and former South Dakota Sen. George McGovern for the democratic nomination.

The candidates are stepping up campaign activity in the South as Super Tuesday, March 13, approaches. Georgia, Florida and Alabama are among the states holding presidential preference primaries on Super Tuesday.

If Jackson shows as scheduled, he will be the only one of

the five candidates to visit Valdosta so far in the campaign season.

The rally also will feature entertainment from gospel groups, a high school chorus and a rock group called "Zeal", Abel said.

Jackson is a Greenville, S.C., native and is Associate Pastor of Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago.

He first came into the public eye in the early 1960s with his involvement in the civil rights movement, at times working

with the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Jackson's stance on the issues, according to a pamphlet provided by Abel, includes:

— Enforcement of the federal Voting Rights Act, which he calls "a major campaign issue."

— Elimination of the federal deficit through tax increases "for corporations and wealthy individuals" and by reducing defense spending, health care costs and unemployment, and by reforming farm policy.

— A "mutual and verifiable" nuclear arms freeze. "Nuclear arms would be my highest foreign policy priority...but, I would never endanger or jeopardize this nation's vital interests or national security."

— Support for "the right of free choice relative to abortions" and for "refundable child-care tax credit and increased federal and state funding for child care."

— The phasing out of nuclear power plants "and an end to the construction or licensing of new plants."

Jackson holds a bachelor's degree in sociology and more than 35 honorary degrees.

He and his wife Jacqueline live in Chicago with their five children.

Jackson Addresses Audience Here

Jesse Jackson speaks to a capacity crowd at a rally at Valdosta State College's Whitehead auditorium here Saturday. Jackson, 42, is one of the top five Democratic contenders in the presidential race. In his speech, Jackson devoted much of his

time talking about voting rights, urging people to vote and blasting Reagan. For more on the rally, see the story on page one. Times Staff Photo by Frank C. Williams.

Voters' Rally Set Here

By Times Staff Writer

A voters' rally sponsored by the Winnersville Coalition Consultants of Valdosta will be held Sunday in Scott Park.

The rally is being held to encourage voters to go to the polls and to educate them about the ward system, according to Willie Houseal of the Coalition.

The rally begins at 2 p.m. and is to feature several speakers from throughout the community, Houseal said.

"We are really pushing the live-in a commission proposal because we're sure

this would enhance minority representatives being elected to the commission," Houseal said.

"The ballot is full of activities and positions to be voted on and we're just going to urge everyone to vote (in the Nov. 2 general election)."

Free hot dogs and Pepsi's will be given away at the rally. Houseal said he expects to see a crowd of about 600 people in attendance.

Books Distributed

On Saturday, May 26, nearly 200 books will be distributed to as many children in Scott Park as part of Reading in Fun Week, sponsored by Reading is Fundamental.

The book giveaway will be held just after Valdostan Willie Houseal, area coordinator for RIF, is presented with the Margaret McNamara Certificate of Merit for his role in promoting reading in Valdosta.

Parent-child reading groups will take place that day and refreshments will be served. The ceremonies begin at 11 a.m.



WILLIE HOUSEAL
RIF Coordinator

By FREDRICK HODGE
Times Staff Writer

With contributions by the Community Involvement Team at Levi Strauss and the Georgia Retired Teacher's Association, the Georgia Sheriff's Boys Ranch will receive books through the second Reading Is Fundamental book give away.

The boys at the ranch will receive two books each when the book giveaway starts in about two weeks, said local RIF coordinator Willie Houseal.

The boys at the ranch will have a chance to choose the books they want. This is being done in hopes of inspiring them to read by letting them read something that interests them, he said.

Informational reading seems to turn the kids off, while adventure reading and reading for enjoyment seems to be what they like, he said. The kids also want series publications, he said. "I've had them come to me and ask when the next issue of a series publication they were reading would be in," he said.

Houseal, whose term as the local RIF coordinator expires in August, said he does not think there will be any problem getting another term because of the degree of local interest the program has developed.

If the program is functioning, the national RIF organization will continue the authorization. If enough interest is generated, the local program could also be in line for some governmental funds, he said.

The Community Involvement Team has voted to send money to the program, said Janette Coody, chairperson of the organization.

The organization is a community service organization in all Levi Strauss plants across the nation. The organization is made up of employees who wish to do volunteer work in their community, she said.

They (CIT) have worked with the boys ranch before, having supplied drapes for the ranch during Christmas, she said.

Voters' Rally Set Here

31 Oct 82

By Times Staff Writer

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By FREDRICK HODGE

Times Staff Writer

Contributions by the Community Involvement Team at and the Georgia Retired Teacher's Association, the

blasting Reagan. For more on the rally, see the story on page one. Times Staff Photo by Frank C. Williams.

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Sing Along At Valdosta Mall

2/25/84

Children at the Valdosta Mall Saturday watch a puppet show put on by Lee Street Baptist Church, and at least a few decided to sing along with the puppets. After the show, free books were

given out by the Reading Is Fundamental chapter here. — Times Staff Photo by Frank C. Williams.

Reading For Everyone

Naturally, we believe reading is fundamental to the intellectual growth of everyone.

We want people to read our daily newspaper, not only because we believe our product is worth reading, but because we believe our stories educate people about what's happening in the world, in the city and right next door.

We believe we are informing and educating in a very valuable way. And sometimes, the stories are even entertaining.

Teachers have always stressed the importance of reading — whether it be for enjoyment, education or to gain understanding.

Reading is important. Reading Is Fundamental.

Our hats are off to Willie Houseal, a Valdosta resident, who believes in the importance of encouraging children to read at an early age.

Houseal has plans to start a RIF program

here in August. More than 400 books are expected to be given away to children at Camp Relitso. The books will better prepare preschoolers for the first grade and encourage older children to read for enjoyment.

It would be nice if the program could be ongoing, year round, but funds are not available at this time to do that.

All the funds for Houseal's summer reading program have come from generous individuals and sponsors of Camp Relitso.

These people realize the need for such a program here in Valdosta.

If funds can be obtained from organizations or individuals, the program will be allowed to continue. The benefits from a community RIF program are innumerable.

To Willie Houseal we say a big "Thank you." Thank you for taking an interest in our community and in our children.

Thank you for helping to make Valdosta a better place to live and learn.

• VALDOSTA MALL •

PUT A LITTLE CLASS IN YOUR LIFE



VSC CONTINUING EDUCATION EXHIBITION September 15 & 16

From canoeing to calligraphy, dental care to computer programming, VSC's Continuing Education Courses for fall 1984 offer you a chance to put a little class in your life. At the Center of It All Saturday & Sunday, you can get a free look at the courses being offered. It's a special continuing education exhibit with information and registration.



VALDOSTA MALL

THE CENTER OF IT ALL

• VALDOSTA MALL •

Bicycle Safety Taught

Sept 14, 1984

By CASS SHEARIN
Times Staff Writer

If you are concerned about the safety of your children when they are riding their bicycles on the busy streets of Valdosta, you may want to consider taking them to one of two bicycle safety seminars being offered this month.

Winnersville Coalition Consultants is sponsoring the two seminars at Scott Park on Saturday, Sept. 22, and a week later at West Gordon Elementary School on Sept. 29. Each begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 1 p.m.

Both seminars are free.

"We're doing this because we see an immense need for safety seminars. I've noticed some kids ride very carelessly when in the streets on their bicycles. They don't observe safety rules as they should," said Don Williams, vice-president of the Winnersville Coalition Consultants.

Williams said the Gordon Street and Scott Park locations were chosen because "a lot of school-age kids live in those two areas and a lot ride their bicycles to and from school. With no knowledge of safety precautions, a lot of them ride haphazardly."

Valdosta Police Officer Johnnie Fason will teach the children safety precautions, Williams said, and Winnersville volunteers will assist in the other programs to be offered.

One such program is an obstacle course, designed to test the rider's agility. Volunteers also will show the children how to dress when riding bikes and how to do minor repairs on bicycles having mechanical problems.

Williams said the coalition is also trying to obtain some safety stickers the children can put on their bikes for safer riding at dusk.

Although this is the first such undertaking by the coalition, Williams said he hopes it will be an annual event. "We're just trying to spur interest. We're making up posters and Rick English (principal at West Gordon) is announcing it at his school over the intercom.

"We just hope people show up. Since this is the first time we're doing it, I figure this is something that wouldn't really spur a whole lot of interest, but hopefully it will build interest and support," he said.

There is no preregistration for the seminars, and all participants have to do is show up on one of the two Saturdays, he said.

For The Kids 9/17/84

Later this month, Scott Park is going to be the place for the kids to be.

Bicycle safety seminars are on tap for Sept. 22 and Sept. 29, both beginning at 9 a.m. and ending at 1 p.m.

Sponsored by a local community service group, the Saturday seminars are free and open to the public.

If you have a kid with a bicycle, you couldn't ask for a better deal.

So often we tend to warn only motorists to watch out for the kids. That's still good advice, but it helps to have the kids learn a little bicycle safety common

sense as well.

They're not going to learn it on their own, at least they're not going to learn all they can. In fact, you can count on them to learn to be careless while among daredevil peers.

The seminars will feature a Valdosta police officer teaching safety precautions and programs such as an obstacle course to test rider agility.

Most likely the kids will have fun while they learn. The parents, meanwhile, can learn to breathe a little easier.

And just maybe we can save a few lives in the process.

Lowndes County Will Miss W.T. Knight

7/31/84

Letters To The Editor

This letter is written on behalf of the Winnersville Coalition consultants, associates and friends in tribute to what one would consider a good man and a number one citizen.

I'm speaking of the late Mr. W.T. Knight, commonly known as Taylor

Knight. Many readers knew him for writing letters to *The Valdosta Daily Times* throughout the years. Mr. Knight exhibited the type of concern rarely found in citizens of this community or any

other community.

He stood for democracy in its truest sense of the word. He performed a duty for the citizens of Valdosta and Lowndes County like no other with his style of writing about vital issues,

keeping citizens of this community informed.

I'm sure that many readers would agree that a man of Mr. Knight's caliber will be a hard act to follow. His consistency to express opinions to the public made many aware that there are two sides to

the way this system operates.

Thanks to this man and others not mentioned at this time, Valdosta and Lowndes County will soon operate under a new form of government. One that will represent all citizens of this community. The ward system of voting may not be the total answer to a certain sector of citizens, (but) it is for sure an alternative to an in-

sensitive method of voting (at-large).

Mr. Knight expressed interest in many other areas of local government, speaking out for those who could identify with being treated unfairly.

Our condolences go out to the bereaved family of Mr. Knight, for he will surely be missed by all of us who knew him.

Willie Houseal
Winnersville Coalition

Inherited Apathy Is A Deadly Disease

As a sociologist and through participant observation I became aware of a deadly disease that has been destroying the successful social development of blacks in American society.

I call it inherited apathy.

The concept, inherited apathy, means that from generation to generations blacks have displayed such a lack of interest of concern, on a whole, to unite and turn to each other, instead of away from one

another, as all other races have done and are continuing to do, for so long until it has become a characteristic that each generation of blacks have received from their predecessors ever since being brought to America.

Inherited apathy had its beginning during slavery. Like the deadly disease it is, it laid dormant until the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery.

Blacks were not thoroughly educated to the five major institutions

(family, religion, education, economics and politics) which govern society when they were freed, which has caused this disease to spread like wildfire and reach epidemic proportions.

As a result of my awareness of this deadly disease, Winnersville Coalition consultants was created to help cure this disease of inherited apathy, especially within Lowndes County.

W.C.C. was created and organized to align ourselves with other organizations to help unite the black community; and to consult the black community on ways to help develop esteem and unity.

One area in which W.C.C. has been successful in developing esteem and controlling inherited apathy, has been in politics. Two years ago W.C.C. got involved in the effort to save the Ulmer Avenue firestation within the black community.

Because of the emphasis of balancing the budget W.C.C. recognized that the elected officials all lived outside of the black community which constituted unfair representation and dual taxation.

W.C.C. tried to resolve the situation by meeting with mayor-council and the county commissioners, resulting in promises but no action.

W.C.C., with the help of the NAACP and Ga. Legal Services and some concerned citizens, sued the city of Valdosta to end the at-large method of voting. With the solicitation of the justice department the process was expedited.

The at-large system for voting for county commissioners has been changed to wards and districts.

The Aug. 14 election of a black to the county commission was a board first.

W.C.C. has been instrumental, along with the NAACP, in generating and interest and getting more blacks registered to vote in Lowndes County than ever before. We have held voters rallies and voters registration drives.

As a proud sponsor of the "Reading Is Fundamental program", W.C.C. is attacking this vicious cycle of inherited apathy by having book distributions where we give free books to our youth to help develop an early interest in reading to create a level of self awareness and self esteem in our youth.

We strongly feel and believe that if the American society is to continue to survive, it must assimilate blacks into the mainstream of her society.

Irar DuBard,
President
Winnersville Coalition Consultants

Georgia Laffs



Son, I left the club early so we could have this little talk about the teenage drug problem.

Children Show For Seminar

9/26/54

By Times Staff Writer

It's one down and one to go for bicycle safety lessons being given in Valdosta.

On Saturday, the Winersville Coalition Consultants sponsored a bicycle safety seminar at Scott Park, and another seminar is slated for this Saturday, this time at West Gordon Elementary School.

WCC Vice President Don Williams said response to the Saturday event was good and his organization is hoping even more children will attend the second one this weekend.

Williams said about 200 children showed up for the seminar, which included a safety lesson on riding bicycles, followed up by a test in which the children actually rode their bikes to show what they learned.

Those who performed the test well were awarded with certificates, Williams said.

Like the seminar Saturday, the upcoming West Gordon Elementary seminar begins at 9 a.m. and lasts until 1 p.m.

Williams said the Valdosta Police Department is providing an officer for safety lessons, Pepsi Cola is donating refreshments and the Traveler's Protective Association, in addition to Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, is providing assistance Saturday.

The seminar is free and anyone interested is invited to attend, he said.

Suit Challenges At Large S

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

A civil suit challenging the at large method of voting in Valdosta and Lowndes County was filed in Macon today by the U.S. Justice Department in Washington.

The suit charges the at large electoral process for Valdosta Mayor-Council, the Lowndes County Commission and the Valdosta Board of Education is in violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It seeks to have the at large method

replaced by the ward system of voting.

The at large system, the suit said, discriminates against black voters in Valdosta and Lowndes County, according to John Wilson of the Justice Department in Washington.

It has discouraged blacks from ever running for the Lowndes County Commission, while only one black each has ever been elected to Mayor-Council and the city school board, Wilson said.

"...The 'racially polarized'

voting, the refusal to adopt single member districts, a history of discrimination against blacks...and unresponsiveness of governmental bodies to black community needs" has given blacks less opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect candidates of their choice, Wilson quoted the suit as saying.

The suit is the outcome of an investigation into voting practices in Lowndes County and Valdosta conducted earlier this year by a "discrimination

unit" of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, Wilson said. It is the first suit filed as an outcome of these investigations, which were held statewide, Wilson added.

Named as defendants along with the county commission, the city council and the city school board are Valdosta Mayor Ernest Nijem and the county board of elections, Wilson said.

Not included in the suit are the Lowndes County Board of

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Poll Rides Provided

The Winnersville Coalition Consultants will provide rides to the polls on Tues., Nov. 6. Those who need a ride may call the Mondale/Ferraro headquarters here at 244-3783 to set up an appointment.

Suit Challenges At Large System Of Voting Here

By LEE FREEMAN
Times City Editor

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Not included in the suit are the Lowndes County Board of

Education, Hahira Mayor-Council, Remerton Mayor Council or Lake Park City Council, all of which operate on at large basis.

Wilson said the percentage of blacks within a given electoral area was a major consideration in deciding which bodies to include as defendants.

Justice Department figures show blacks make up only about 19 percent of the county school board electoral area, Wilson said. He said he didn't know why Hahira, Remerton

and Lake Park weren't included, but that the percentage of blacks there could have been a contributing factor.

Valdosta's population, meanwhile, is 39.4 percent black, according to Justice Department calculations, while Lowndes's overall population is about 30.3 percent black, Wilson said. The Justice Department's figures are based on U.S. Census data, he added.

The at large voting system allows every voter to cast a ballot for every post up for

election in a given governmental body. A ward system, in contrast, allows only those voters living in a specific ward, or district, to cast a vote for a representative of that district.

If district lines are drawn correctly, the ward system virtually assures the election of minorities to office.

Valdosta School Board Attorney Reuben Yancey and Lowndes County Attorney Oris Blackburn were notified Wednesday that a suit would be

filed today in Macon.

Wilson said the defendants have 60 days to file an answer to the suit, which is in federal court in Macon. Future court dates have not been set.

This suit is unrelated to another suit Georgia Legal Services here has threatened to file against Valdosta Mayor-Council on behalf of Lowndes County residents. That suit would also challenge the at large system of voting, according to a legal services spokesman.

Reader Thinks Ward System Will Be Good

I would like to commend Lewis Gordon, Willie Houseal, Irar Dubard and each individual who have taken on the task of attempting to bring about a political, social and moral change within the boundaries of Lowndes County. Your tasks, nor goals are easily obtained.

I am not sure the efforts of the forementioned individuals will energize the community of Valdosta/Lowndes County as a whole. That which may please a few, may infuriate many. Nevertheless, a change of some sort is long overdue in Valdosta/Lowndes County. And the progress should be credited to the individuals who took this course of action upon themselves, for the cause of many.

The implementation of the ward system will not end racism, prejudice or racial discrimination. In the same sense, the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery. Neither did Brown vs. The Board of Education (1954) end discrimination. But each event was a step in the right direction that eventually led to greater heights within this nation. As unpopular as it may appear, the ward system is that step in the right direction.

The ward system will make its official debut in Valdosta's city political areas March 4, 1985. At that time, we anticipate a historical event: the admission of three blacks to the city council. Barring any ominous turn of events — or change of mind by the present governing body — Valdostans will witness this monumental occasion of change.

Speaking of change, the question, (as) always, is how to implement this change of "social order," and at whose expense. The latter has a foreseeable answer. The admission of three blacks in March 4, 1985, will inevitably be at the expense of three departing whites in 1986. And this order of social change will cause the incoming parties to inherit the foes of their predecessors, and a few of their own.

We must remember that the ward system came to us amid an abundance of controversy. And a ton of legal litigation. To say the least, the ward system did not have the blessings of the city fathers. The lack of funds — rather than the love of their fellowman — allowed for the compromise of the implementation of the ward system. The cost of continuing litigation

became the deciding factor in instituting the ward system.

It's conceivable to think, if the city fathers had access to greater funds, the ward system litigation would still be in the courts. *Alltogether Better?*

Jimmy Wilcox
Valdosta

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Justices show about school Wilson know

Some Minority Voters Will Fight Ward Plan

BY RICHARD SELLERS
Times Staff Writer

Many minority voters here see the three new black districts approved by the federal government this week as a victory, but some say they will fight the one at-large city council seat approved for Valdosta.

Lewis Gordon, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) said it would still work to do away with the at-large position on the city council.

Wednesday, Chief U.S. District Judge Wilbur Owens signed a consent decree which established six wards in Valdosta.

One city council member will be elected from each single-member ward, or district, and one councilman and the mayor will be elected at large. A special election will be held Feb. 12.

This means there will be nine members on the council until the regular elections scheduled for 1986. Valdosta now has six on its city council.

"The NAACP's stance now is our state officials will do all they can to get rid of the at-large vote," Gordon said. "At this point I've turned it over to the state and they will do what they can.

"We don't like the at-large vote at all," he said. "That's why the suit was filed.

"Next week at the state meeting (to be

held in Valdosta), it will be discussed," Gordon said. "At that time, whatever they do will be announced. I've been assured they will do something."

Willie Houseal, spokesman for the Winnersville Coalition civil rights group, said the outcome was acceptable to it.

"I'm evaluating the settlement from a two-fold perspective: one, as a potential candidate for the February election, and two, as a representative of the Winnersville Coalition," Houseal said.

"From the Coalition perspective, we found it feasible to accept the settlement due to two main reasons: one, because of an election to respond to the dire need for black people to be represented, and two,

the (district) lines are comparable to what we've asked for, which allows us to have 42 percent representation on the city council."

Houseal said Coalition members have no intentions to appeal the settlement.

"However, I will understand why the NAACP would prefer to appeal," he said.

"Judging from what experiences I've had being a former candidate, at large positions automatically go to the majority," Houseal said. "In this case, we know who the majority is.

"Personally, I feel that the settlement is fair because of these reasons. But at the same time I'm not satisfied with the at large seat and never will be.

☆ The FINAL Interview 30, Sept 1984 ☆

Letters To The Editor

Too Many Elections Create Apathy

11/25/84

This letter is written in reference to two articles which appeared in Sunday's edition of the Times dated November 10, 1984.

These articles were written as separate stories; however, both of them require an equal

amount of attention from all of us who faithfully voiced our opinions at the polls and pay taxes.

I was elated to read the headlines, "Black Vote Hits Record Number," although I am not surprised, after all voter apathy was

one of our main reasons for organizing Winnersville Coalition.

Our concern for low voter turnout prompted us to analyze the problem and offer alternatives for solving it.

Voter registration drives, forefront advocacy for wards and districts, and overall community relations proved to be effective in remedying the situation to a degree.

There were many voters who supported the Democratic ticket; it was no surprise as to the outcome of the presidential election. However, we must keep in mind that for the moment we punched the ballot, our voices were heard loud and clear all the way to the White House.

The black community particularly needs to be commended for their strong voter turnout, which brings us to the second concern, which relates to the article "City Could Get \$6.5 Million Facelift."

Although mixed emotions were exhibited concerning a date for the

referendum to be voted on, serious consideration should be given to changing the previously scheduled date of February's Special Election to May (45 days later).

It is my opinion that the previously scheduled date should not have been changed.

I base my logic on experience in combating voter apathy in Valdosta/Lowndes County and research that indicates two primary reasons for voter apathy which are: 1) having undesirable candidates on the ballot; and 2) having too many elections.

This year alone, our citizens have gone to the polls three times and the Special Election makes it four times in twelve months. If the council decides to hold another election in May, this will increase the total to five times in fourteen months. I feel this is bombarding our citizens with too many elections.

Our officials have stated that February's Special Election may not give a true indication of the "true picture." Frankly, this is

absolutely a waste of taxpayers money and valuable time.

Furthermore, this action taken by the council proves to be insensitive on their part, due to the fact that voters will have to return to the polls 45 days after the Special Election.

I am inclined to believe that this decision can very well be categorized as a local government "fillibuster" because we are well aware that the adoption or rejection of the bond issue largely depends on the date decided upon.

It all boils down to will the black voters return to the polls in May, or will the white voters turn out to vote this February.

These type decisions desperately need the black community's input. Perhaps in March when wards are implemented, then and only then will Valdosta/Lowndes County recognize exactly what the "true picture" exemplifies.

Willie Houseal
Valdosta

In a planning meeting earlier this month they named the five most outstanding projects of the past year and made their agenda for 1983, she said.

"We did 50 service projects last year and hope to go into areas other than Valdosta with projects this year which we've already started with the boys ranch in Hahira," she added.

"This group of women volunteers is very unique, they gave 100 percent in any and all projects. They have found the joy of serving others," said Ms. Coody.

The national RIF program has received a grant from the MacArthur Foundation for \$210,000 to develop materials and methods parents can use at home to encourage their children to read.

"The MacArthur Foundation wisely recognizes that the impetus for solving this country's massive and debilitating reading problems must come, first and foremost, from the family," said Ruth Graves, national president of RIF.

Local NAACP Rejects City's District System Proposal

23 Sept 84

By RICHARD SELLERS
Times Staff Writer

City officials had hoped that soon they would be seeing clear skies with their plan to change the present at large method of voting to a ward system.

But the issue still could turn out to be a little cloudy.

Lewis Gordon, president for the Valdosta-Lowndes chapter of the NAACP, said this week the group would not accept a recent proposal by city officials for redistricting Valdosta's voting lines.

The proposal, submitted to the U.S. Justice Department more than a month ago, calls for a seven-member city council, in which three councilmen would be elected from predominately black majority districts and three from predominately white majority districts. One councilman and the mayor would be elected at large.

Officials hoped this proposal would settle their part of an 11-month old lawsuit filed against the city by the U.S. Justice Department and local minority groups, seeking to have a ward system of voting implemented here. Both suits charged the present at large method makes it virtually impossible for blacks to be elected to the council.

"We plan to go to court if they want to add the at large," Gordon said. "We brought a suit because of the at large system and don't believe it would be right to have an at large (councilman) vote."

Gordon said he thinks the best system to have would be the present six-member council, with all councilmen elected from districts and only the mayor elected at large.

"We don't see where the at large vote is helping any at all," Lewis said.

Lewis also said they will still push for council members to be elected with a plurality vote and not a majority vote as it is now.

"We still feel the same way, that plurality elections will be better than a run-off," Gordon said.

"A majority vote will automatically put a black out (of an elections race)," he said.

"Our attorney contacted us and told us what they proposed. We had a meeting last month and decided not to accept what they

were offering," Gordon said.

However, Willie Houseal, director of for another civil rights group, the Winnersville Coalition, said even the present proposal would be an improvement to black citizens.

"We all want to diminish the at large system, but I understand we live in a deep-south area and tradition is not wiped out overall," Houseal said. "We all want the at large system diminished, but at the same time we now have something we can work with."

"As far as Winnersville Coalition is concerned, we'll work with results of this case. But then Judge Owens (U.S. District Court Judge Wilbur Owens) may not accept it. It's pretty much up to the courts," Houseal said.

"Our resources would not allow us to defend this situation any futher other than what is forthcoming," Houseal added. "The NACCP has the resources. Personally, I hope they do what they feel is best. It's all right to have differences of opinion, but we're not split....We're working towards the same goal."

"For those people who are making the decision, they're making it for the best," he said.

"For people who want to give an opinion, they know how to do it. They can go express their opinions at the polls."

According to Section 5 of the Voing Rights Act, the final decision of the U.S. Attorney General to object or not to object to a proposed voting change can not be reviewed directly by the courts.

However, in the event of an objection, city officials have the option of starting all over again by seeking a ruling from the federal court in Washington, D.C., that the voting practice is not discriminatory.

If the proposal is approved by Justice Department officials, the plan will be submitted to Judge Owens in the form of a consent decree.

A special city election would then be held in February to implement the plan before the 1986 election.

Justice Dept. officials have already rejected one plan that would have elected four council members from districts and two at large.

said reports.

Mary Gipson, a neighbor at 615 West

Valdosta, Ga.



Bicycle Safety Taught Here

The second of two bicycle safety seminars sponsored by Winnersville Coalition Consultants was held here this weekend at West Gordon Elementary School. The seminars provided safety lessons and more in an effort to improve bike-riding for children

in this area. At left, members of Valdosta State College fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, Officer Johnny Fason of the Valdosta Police Department and P.O. Temples of the Traveler's Protective Association put

Fason and Temples guide Valdosta through the safe procedures for bicycling safety by Laura Harris.

The Valdosta Daily Times, Sun., May 27, 1984-6-A-



Clarification

A caption with a picture in Sunday's Times said Reading is Fundamental books were paid for by Ulmer Avenue Fire Station. The books were paid for by CHALC, Child Health Association of Lowndes County.

Valdosta civil rights groups split on voting plan

By Jamie Lucke
Staff writer

9/10/84
17

VALDOSTA, Ga. — Spokesmen for two civil rights groups that are suing the city of Valdosta disagree on the city's latest proposal for overhauling Valdosta's at-large voting system.

The plan, which is still a proposal, would expand the city council by one member who would be elected at-large.

The other six council members would run from newly created districts. A special city election would be held in February in order to implement the plan before the next election, in 1986.

Lewis Gordon, president of the Valdosta-Lowndes County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said he objects to the proposal because the at-large seat would dilute black voting strength.

"We feel we'd be defeating our purpose if we accept an at-large seat," Gordon said. "Another year [of waiting for a settlement] wouldn't hurt us if we get what we want."

But Willie Houseal — spokesman for the other civil rights group, Winnersville Coalition Consultants — said the need for black voices on the

all-white council is so urgent that his group would be willing to accept the plan for the time being, despite the at-large seat.

"It's time for us to take advantage of whatever we can get," said Houseal, who was one of two unsuccessful black candidates for the council earlier this year.

This latest plan for settling the 11-month-old voting rights suit is still a proposal because the city is awaiting the U.S. Justice Department's response. However, sources close to the case say the government appears ready to accept the plan.

The settlement then would require federal pre-clearance under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act before it could be submitted to U.S. District Judge Wilbur Owens in the form of a consent decree.

The plan could be ready for the judge's signature within a few weeks, sources have said.

But the Justice Department is not the only plaintiff in the case.

About two weeks after the government filed suit last October, a group of Valdosta residents and two civil rights groups filed a suit similar to

the federal suit, claiming that Valdosta's at-large elections discriminate against blacks.

Lawyers for Georgia Legal Services represented the individuals. The American Civil Liberties Union represented the local NAACP and Winnersville Coalition.

Gordon said the local NAACP may ask the ACLU to hold out for a settlement that provides a district system with no at-large seats.

The Justice Department rejected an earlier city proposal that would have elected four council members from districts and two at-large.

Under the city's latest proposal for settling the suit, three districts would have majority black populations. The other three would be majority white.

The mayor would continue to be elected at-large, as would the member representing the at-large post.

Runoffs still would be required when no candidate received a majority of the vote.

Blacks accounted for 39 percent of Valdosta's population in the 1980 census. Only one black has ever been elected to the Valdosta City Council.

The Justice Department filed similar suits against the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners and the Valdosta Board of Education.

The county commission reached a settlement earlier this year and Alvin Payton became the first black to be elected to the Lowndes County Commission in the August Democratic primary. He is unopposed in November and will take office early next year.

The county established three commission districts with the chairman elected by countywide vote.

The school board apparently is farther from a settlement than the city council.

The school board has nine members. School board and city council elections are held at the same time. A major concern in the negotiations has been establishing compatible districts for school board and council elections.

The Justice Department rejected one school board proposal that would have elected six members from districts and three at-large.

The board is considering alternatives that would incorporate two districts into "super districts."