



# Serving Democracy:

## The Value of Nonpartisan Civil Service



**State Convention**  
**Hartley/Vey Studio Theatre at Manship Theatre**  
**Baton Rouge, Louisiana**  
**March 22-23, 2025**

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## CONVENTION SPEAKERS



### JAY DARDENNE

Jay Dardenne was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and educated in some of Louisiana's finest public institutions of education, including Baton Rouge High School, Louisiana State University, and LSU Law School in 1979, and he is listed in Baton Rouge High School Hall of Fame, the Louisiana State University Hall of Distinction and the Mansfield School Hall of Fame. Throughout his ensuing political career and decades of public service Dardenne felt called to serve the state of Louisiana.

Dardenne began his career as a public servant at the age of 34, when he was elected to the East Baton Rouge Parish Metropolitan Council. On the Metro Council, Dardenne authored a flood protection ordinance in 1989 that is credited with preventing new houses constructed after its enactment from flood damage due to storms or hurricanes. After three years on the Metro Council, Dardenne was elected in 1991 to the Louisiana State Senate where he represented District 16 in south Baton Rouge for 15 years, notably preceding U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy in that seat.

After the death of Fox McKeithan, he won a special election for Secretary of State in 2006, serving the remainder of the term, and he was elected to a full term in 2007. As Secretary of State, Dardenne protected elections after Katrina, worked with other states to prevent voter fraud, and created [GeauxVote.com](http://GeauxVote.com) and [GeauxBiz.com](http://GeauxBiz.com), making registering to vote and registering a business in Louisiana quick and convenient.

After serving four years as Secretary of State, Dardenne was twice elected Lieutenant Governor—first in a special election in 2010 and then to a full term in 2011. As Lieutenant Governor, Dardenne headed the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, created the “Louisiana: Pick Your Passion” campaign, and led the state's tourism efforts to four consecutive record-breaking years--the first increases since the Hurricane Katrina and Rita disasters in 2005.

In 2016, Dardenne, a Republican, notably crossed party lines to endorse the Democratic candidate for governor, John Bel Edwards, and he was appointed to serve as Commissioner of the Division of Administration in the Edwards administration. There, Dardenne served as the state's chief administrative officer, which with his previous state offices, gives Dardenne deep insight into issues pertaining to Louisiana's nonpartisan civil service in a way that makes him perhaps the most appropriate keynote speaker possible for our Convention this year.

Over the course of his career in public life, Dardenne has served as the chairman or president of ten non-profit entities in the Baton Rouge area, and he has hosted the Jerry Lewis Telethon for the Muscular Dystrophy Association for more than 30 years. He has delivered more than 500 speeches in almost every parish of the state on Louisiana history, politics, music, and movies. Dardenne has been the author or co-author of notable reports on controversies over selection of the state flag and celebrations of the centennial of the Louisiana Supreme Court. His



presentation “Why Louisiana Ain’t Mississippi . . . or anywhere else!”, made into a Louisiana Public Broadcasting program, has entertained and educated audiences across the state.



## SHAWN WILSON

Dr. Shawn Wilson, a New Orleans native, earned a B.A. in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Louisiana where he served as Student Government Association president and student member of the University of Louisiana System Board. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree, as well as a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the Nelson Mandela School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs at Southern University.

Wilson is the former executive director of the Louisiana Serve Commission, established 1993 in the Office of the Lieutenant Governor to rekindle the spirit of service and citizenship among the citizens of Louisiana, serving as a focal point for national service efforts in the state and acting as a clearinghouse for national service programs operating in Louisiana. Over its history, the commission has awarded grants to organizations and schools that foster civic responsibility and provide educational opportunities for those who make a substantial commitment to service.

Dr. Wilson went on to serve as former deputy legislative director in the Blanco Administration with transportation policy responsibilities. In 2016, Dr. Wilson was appointed Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) by Governor John Bel Edwards, after more than 10 years of executive service at DOTD. As the head of DOTD, he oversaw more than \$5.2 billion in construction services around the state.

Dr. Wilson is currently employed in the private sector by WSP, a civil engineering firm and environment and professional services consultancy, as the national agency coordination leader for transportation and infrastructure. In that role, Wilson is expanding networks and growth opportunities and supporting communication between state and federal government across the United States.



## ROBERT MANN

Bob Mann is a journalist, political historian, scholar, and author with deep background in public service and public life. Prior to retiring in 2024, Mann held the Manship Chair in Journalism at the Manship School of Mass Communication. Before joining the Manship School in 2006, he served as communications director to Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. He joined the governor’s staff in 2004 after serving 17 years as state director and press secretary to U.S. Senator John Breaux following previous service to U.S. Senator Russell Long. Mann was also press secretary for the 1990 re-election campaign of U.S. Senator J. Bennett Johnston. In 2015, he was inducted into the Louisiana Political Hall of Fame.

In the early 1980s, he covered Louisiana politics as a reporter for the *Shreveport Journal* and the *Monroe News-Star*. He has published op-eds and book reviews in numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Smithsonian*, *Politico*, *Vox* and *Salon*. From 2013 to 2018, he wrote a weekly column for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*.

Mann is the author of numerous books, including: *Wartime Dissent in America: A History and Anthology* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) *Daisy Petals and Mushroom Clouds: LBJ, Barry Goldwater, and the Ad That Changed American Politics* (LSU Press, 2011), which was named one of the best political books of 2011 by *The Washington Post*; *Becoming Ronald Reagan: The Rise of a Conservative Icon* (Potomac Books, 2019), *Backrooms and Bayous: My Life in Louisiana Politics* (Pelican Publishing, 2021), and, most recently, *Kingfish U: Huey Long and LSU* (LSU Press, 2023), and *You Are My Sunshine: Jimmie Davis & the Biography of a Song* (LSU Press, 2025). Most recently, Mann has been publishing essays on his Substack platform, "Something Like the Truth."



## AMANDA JONES

Amanda Jones is an American librarian and anti-censorship advocate, who has challenged book banning movements in Louisiana and throughout the U.S. She has served as an educator and school librarian in Louisiana for over twenty years. Jones has long been a vocal opponent of book censorship, arguing that book challenges have disproportionately targeted books with LGBTQ or BIPOC themes, characters, or authors, and she has actively campaigned against censorship legislation in Louisiana.

In 2021, Jones was recognized by *School Library Journal* as School Librarian of the Year and made the journal's "Movers and Shakers" list. In 2022, Jones earned national news coverage for filing a defamation and harassment lawsuit against a political group that had challenged her right to speak at a local library board meeting in Livingston Parish. In 2022, Jones played a key role in founding Louisiana Citizens Against Censorship, where she serves as the executive director, as well as the Livingston Parish Library Alliance. In 2023, Jones was awarded the American Association of School Librarians' Intellectual Freedom Award, the American Library Association's Paul Howard Award for Courage, and the Louisiana Library Association's Alex Allain Intellectual Freedom Award.

Jones recently published her first book, *That Librarian: The Fight Against Book Banning in America* (Bloomsbury, 2024), which has earned bestseller status and taken her on a speaking tour across the nation. We are especially proud that Amanda is a member of the League of Women Voters of Louisiana and delighted to welcome her home to address our Convention.



## CHRIS DIER

Chris Dier is a high school history teacher and adjunct professor based in New Orleans, holds two master's degrees, and is presently pursuing a Ph.D. in curriculum development. He is the 2020 Louisiana Teacher of the Year, a 2020 finalist for the National Teacher of the Year, and the 2021 Gilder Lehrman Louisiana Teacher of the Year. Dier is the recipient of the 2021 NEA H. Councill Trenholm Memorial Civil Rights Award and the 2023 NEA California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence. Dier has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Politico*, and he has appeared on The Today Show, NPR, CBS, The Canadian Broadcast Corporation, and CNN.

Dier has been awarded various fellowships to study history education in South Africa, Germany, and Armenia and advocated for the teaching of authentic history at the United Nations Headquarters. Dier is also the author of *The 1868 St. Bernard Parish Massacre: Blood in the Cane Fields* (The History Press, 2011).



## MELISSA FLOURNOY

Dr. Melissa Flournoy is a scholar, political activist, and social entrepreneur who served in the Louisiana House of Representatives, representing her home district in Caddo Parish. She earned her undergraduate degree at Hollins University, a master of public administration degree at Columbia University, and a doctorate in political science and government at LSU. Flournoy was the Executive Director of the RAND Gulf States Policy Institute and the Louisiana State Director of Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast and is the founder of numerous

organizations dedicated to political progress in Louisiana, including the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO) and the Louisiana Budget Project (now known as Invest in Louisiana), and, most recently, 10,000 Women Louisiana. Currently, Dr. Flournoy is an adjunct professor in Political Science at LSU. She has served on numerous boards and commissions and is a lifelong advocate for women and children. Melissa is a member of the League of Women Voters of Louisiana.



## ALFREDA TILLMAN BESTER

Alfreda Tillman Bester is a Baton Rouge attorney at her law firm, Tillman Bester & Associates, LLC, who earned her bachelor's degree from Southern Mississippi University, her master of business administration degree from McNeese University, and her law degree from Southern University Law Center. Bester is the former General Counsel to the NAACP and served as Secretary of Labor in the administration of Governor Buddy Roemer. Bester is an advocate of civil rights, voting rights, and health equity. She is known to many for her radio show "Perspective" on WTQT 106.1

FM in Baton Rouge, where she assembles guests from around the state each week to discuss community empowerment in Louisiana.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### LWVLA Board of Directors, 2023-2025

M. Christian Green (LWVLFT), President  
 Bonnie Schmidt (LWVSTM), Vice President  
 Alicia Chaisson (LWVLFT), Secretary  
 Sylvia Johnson (LWVSTM), Director/Voter Service Chair  
 Wendy King (LWVNO), Director  
 Gisele Proby-Bryant (LWVCB), Director  
 Alma Chazez (LWVT), Director

### Chairs of LWVLA Standing Committees, 2023-2025)

Criminal Justice Committee: Bonnie Schmidt (LWVSTM)  
 Education Committee: M. Christian Green (LWVLFT), Toni Ventroy (LWVLFT)  
 Environmental Committee: Wendy King (LWVNO)  
 Healthcare Committee: Patrice Sentino (LWVNO)  
 Library Freedom Committee: Bonnie Schmidt (LWVSTM)  
 Voting Rights Committee: M. Christian Green (LWVLFT)  
 Voter Services Committee: Sylvia Johnson (LWVSTM)  
 Women's Issues Committee: Rosalind Blanco Cook (LWVNO)

### Members of Louisiana Commissions, 2023-2025

Kathleen Schott Espinoza (LWVLFT), Louisiana Commission on Civic Education  
 Patrice Sentino (LWVNO), Louisiana Health Care Commission  
 Ellen Torgrimson (LWVNO), Water Resources Commission

<b>Local Chapter Leaders</b> Gisele Proby-Bryant (LWVCB) Charleen Markle (LWVI) Kathleen Schott Espinoza (LWVLFT) Rosalind Blanco Cook (LWVNO) Gail Ledet (LWVSTM) Alma Chazez (LWVI)	<b>Convention Budget Committee</b> Carol DeVille (LWVCB), Chair Eileen deHaro Wendy King (LWVNO) Charleen Markle (LWVI) Gisele Proby-Bryant (LWVCB)
<b>Voter Service Chairs, 2023 and 2024</b> Gisele Proby-Bryant (LWVCB) Cecelia "Beanie" Bonin (LWVI) Christie Maloyed (LWVLFT) Sylvia Finger and Debra Salvador (LWVNO) Sylvia Johnson (LWVST) Alma Chazez and Beth Gray (LWVT)	<b>Nominating Committee</b> DeVoe Allen, Chair Kathleen Schott Espinoza, Chair Alfred Doucette, Jr. Sylvia Johnson

## In Memoriam

Richard Cusimano (LWVLFT)  
 Althea M. Lawes (LWVNO)  
 Lea Young (LWVNO)