

# The Kansas Voter

March 2006



**League of Women Voters of Kansas**

*Working together...for Kansas*

## State Finance

### ■ Balancing Taxes and Spending Needs

by Lee Rowe

The reason taxes are levied is to pay for services that citizens need or desire. The interrelationships between local (city and county), state, and federal funding are complicated. When taxes are reduced in one area or at one level of government, they will need to be increased in another area to make up the lost funding. It is important for us to keep an eye on all levels of government when we consider funding needs in state government.

Final decisions on funding the Kansas budget always come towards the end of the legislative session. The good news is that revenue projections for the state have come in above expectations for this year. It is generally agreed now that funding for schools is inadequate and the need is for about \$400 million in additional funding. Funding levels varying from \$400 million to \$660 million have been proposed. All of the proposals would increase funding over a several year period rather than immediately, as was recommended in the recent Legislative post-audit study.

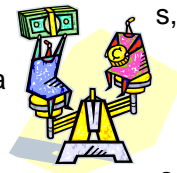
As always, decisions that are made at the federal level affect state funding problems. We all remember Congress's promise of 40 percent funding for special education—funding that has never reached even the 20 percent level. Now the

“unfunded mandate” expenses of No Child Left Behind have added even more to states’ burdens. The “trickle down” effect is evident in the budget bill working its way through Congress at this point, and Medicaid funds flowing through to the states will undoubtedly be reduced. This will mean that the Kansas legislature will have to fund an ever larger percentage of Medicaid expenses. The federal government will not increase taxes, so state and local governments must now fund essential services.

As people reduce their mileage driven and/or use more efficient vehicles, gasoline use will decrease. From an energy consumption perspective, that’s good. However, both the state and federal governments rely on fuel taxes for a large portion of highway expenditures, so legislators will need to use other sources of income for maintaining our road systems. Raising fuel taxes above surrounding state rates is not considered good for business—either for fuel users or fuel providers.

The governor and the legislature are working on proposals to reduce or eliminate the property taxes on new business property. The idea is to encourage business investment, but it will also shift the tax burden and reduce income to both the local and state governments. Gaming proposals made by the governor are now gaining serious attention, as legislators are unwilling to raise taxes, yet need a new source of revenue for

schools and other increasing expenditures. Gaming is morally objectionable to many legislators, and is seen by some as an unpredictable revenue source from year-to-year, so supporters face an uphill battle.



#### League Position

The LWVK position on state finance reads that “LWVK supports a broad-based state tax system that has diverse sources of revenue and that is equitable, provides adequate revenue, and is effectively and economically administered.” Keep in mind that in recent years the Kansas legislature has reduced income tax rates, increased sales tax rates, and reduced the state-wide school property tax from 32 mills to 20 mills. We need to remember that sales tax is a regressive tax and income tax is a progressive tax. Unfortunately, the political reality is that sales tax is easiest to increase and income tax is hardest to raise.

We are now at the half-way point of the legislative session. Your legislators need to hear from you before the House Appropriations and Senate Ways and Means committees finalize their budget proposals. Contact them by letter, phone call, e-mail, or at a public forum; it will make a difference. **3**

# State Council '06

**Planting the Seeds of Democracy** is the theme of State Council 2006. The Lawrence-Douglas County League will be our hosts at the meeting to be held in the library of Lawrence High School. The host League committee and the State Board have put together a program that we believe will be educational, energizing, and enjoyable.

With the upcoming elections, it is a great opportunity for Leagues to be visible and active in voter registration, voter education, and candidate forums. Engaging our citizens in a dialog about the issues and stimulating them to get out and vote becomes our way of "planting the seeds of democracy." The topics and speakers we have selected should assist these efforts. In the morning, we will hear a political reporter's view on the political landscape in Kansas as the election approaches. After lunch, we will learn more about immigration issues facing Kansas. This topic is very timely, as our League has supported legislation that gives immigrant children the right to attend Kansas colleges on in-state tuition; otherwise a college education would be out of reach for many children of immigrants. In the afternoon, we will have a break-out session on the implementation of the Help America Vote Act in Kansas. Another break-out session, one about which I am very excited, will be a brainstorming effort to develop a Civics 101 course that Leagues can offer in their communities. Leagues in other states have successfully implemented such efforts.

And of course, we will attend to the business of the League—approving a budget and electing new officers and board members. Each League is entitled to three voting delegates; all League members are welcome and encouraged to attend Council.

I hope to see many of you in Lawrence! *\_Janis McMillen, President*

## 2006 Council Agenda

Saturday, April 29, 2006

- 8:30 Registration, Continental Breakfast
- 9:00 Call to Order, Opening Business Session
- 10:00 Break
- 10:15 "The Political Landscape in Kansas for the Upcoming Elections," Steve Kraske, Kansas City Star (invited)
- 11:15 Second Business Session
- 12:15 Luncheon and keynote speaker, Melinda Lewis, Public Policy and Advocacy Chair for El Centro, "Immigration Issues Facing Kansas"
- 1:45 Concurrent Workshops
- Update on HAVA Implementation in Kansas, Brad Bryant, Elections and Legislative Matters, Secretary of State's Office (invited)
  - Developing a Civics 101 Course, led by one member each from the Johnson County, Lawrence-Douglas County and Wichita Leagues
- 2:45 Break
- 3:00 Final Business Session
- 4:00 Adjourn

## Proposed Budget for 2006-2007

General Fund Revenue	
Local League Support	
Emporia	\$945
Great Bend	\$639
Johnson County	\$2,502
Lawrence	\$2,268
Manhattan	\$1,656
Salina	\$1,044
Topeka	\$1,782
Wichita	\$918
MAL Dues	\$500
Interest	\$56
Contributions	
Member	\$1,000
Non-Member	\$400
Other Projects	\$100
Publications	\$120
Meetings	

State Council	\$500
Day at the Capitol	\$700
Other	\$25
Endowment Interest	\$2,000
Carry Forward	\$2,500
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$19,655</b>
General Fund Expenditures	
Operating	
Capital Expenditures	\$400
Fees and Contracts	\$1,600
Office Services	\$2,200
Rent	\$4,000
Postage	\$500
Supplies	\$300
Telephone	\$500
Web Page	\$200
Other	\$50
Board	
Adm. Committee	\$150
Board Meeting	\$40
Board Operating Project	\$100
Sales Tax	\$20
President	\$500
Secretary	\$30
Treasurer	\$75
LWVK Meetings	
Day at the Capitol	\$800
State Council	\$200
Other	\$30
LWVUS Meetings	
Convention	\$2,500
Training	
Membership	\$30
Organization	\$30
MAL Dues	\$300
Publications	
Voter	\$1,500
Other	\$40
Education	
Program	\$100
Study	\$100
Voter Service	\$1,000
Action	
Coalition Memberships	\$100
Lobby Corps	\$2,200
National Action	\$30
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$19,655</b>

# Spotlight on Local Leagues



## Lawrence-Douglas County

This year, the Lawrence-Douglas County League has instituted a monthly Brown Bag Lunch, which we hold at the Lawrence Public Library. Our first guest speaker, scheduled during the special legislative session last summer, was League member and State Senator marci francisco, who answered many questions regarding school financing. Subsequent speakers have included Douglas County Clerk Jamie Shew, who told us about new projects in the Clerk's office, and LWV L-DC President Carrie Lindsey, who offered a "Get to Know your President" event. On Thursday, January 26th, Eric Haar, Outreach Coordinator for Congressman Jim Ryun's office, was our Brown Bag Lunch guest speaker. We continued to hold our annual *Afternoon with the Legislators* in December. This is a great chance for League members to discuss the upcoming legislative session with our entire delegation. Wine, savories, and sweets are provided.

Paula Schumacher, our fund raising chair, continues to research new avenues for fundraising. We have found low-risk, low cost-of-entry, and good return on investment with two sports-related fund raising ideas.

Another highlight for Lawrence was the Naturalization Ceremony at the Dole Center in September. After the ceremony, League members partner with members of the Johnson County League and Wyandotte County Members-at-Large to register new citizens to vote. We look forward to continuing this inspiring, patriotic event.

If you would like any information on the events mentioned above, please feel free to contact Carrie Lindsey at 785-766-8561 or [carriblindsey@yahoo.com](mailto:carriblindsey@yahoo.com). **3**

## Topeka/Shawnee

### County

In response to "Directions to the Board" from last year's Annual Meeting, a "Board Briefs" column was added to our monthly *Voter*. We moved to a communication system more dependent on electronic messaging than phone calls. We have redesigned our "New Member Information" form. Board meetings were reduced to one hour in length by moving to a "consent agenda" format. With that change, we were able to move Board meetings to the lunch hour which the employed members really appreciated.

We enjoy the enviable position of having wonderful resources for speakers at our monthly membership meetings called "Tuesday Topics". This seems to have really helped our membership boom. We have had 20 new memberships this year so our total membership increased in spite of the fact that we lost 9 members to moving, illness and death, etc. Our attendance at our monthly meetings has grown from an average of 25-30 to 40-45.

We have some special events that may be of interest to other Leagues. In the fall we hold a "Governmental Issues Dinner," where various elected officials are our guests. We take this opportunity to "educate" them on a particular subject or just support them in their endeavors through guest speakers. Early in the fall, we hold a mock election at one of our elementary schools located in a low income neighborhood. We declare the entire school a "city" and the children elect a mayor. We register the children, we hold a primary election and a general election. The kindergartners are totally confused by the whole process but the older kids who have done it before really get into it. It is probably the most fun project that we do! **3**

## Wichita Metro

*Still coasting on our 19th Amendment 85th Anniversary Laurels*

2005 was a very big year for the Wichita Metro League. The participation in the Wichita River Festival with both a parade entry and a suffrage pageant launched us in a big way celebrating the 85th anniversary of the 19th amendment all under the leadership of former League president, Mary Knecht. We had 1200 people on Aug. 26 to hear Senator Nancy Kassebaum and about 800 to hear TV personality Eleanor Clift (author of *Founding Sisters And the 19th Amendment*). We have provided over 50 programs for local groups.

As a result of the 85th activities our roster has swollen by 19 new members (better than 50% increase). Special attention is being paid to involve them in our activities, committees, action alerts, and working on getting mentors for each of them. These new members almost all work outside the home in the day time so a new evening unit has been initiated to accommodate them. On the coattails of our public awareness from the 85th we have two big projects coming up that are attracting public notice and we are grateful for the help of our new members.

The Wichita Metro LWV was selected to be one of two Leagues in the nation to host four women from Kenya who are coming to learn about issues involving democratic and representative government—open government. All four women come from the coastal regions of Kenya, have experience in organizing for community activism, and plan to run for office under the new constitution of Kenya. League members have volunteered to host each in their homes. Our activities for the week (April 7–15) include visiting local

*continued on page 4*

## State Council, cont.

### Nominees

The slate of nominees is as follows:  
2nd Vice President: Cathy Hoy,  
Emporia

Treasurer: Leonore Rowe, Johnson  
County

Directors, 2-year terms

Janice Norlin, Salina  
Nona Ponder, Wichita

Respectfully submitted by the  
Nominating Committee:

Marge Mintun, Chair, Salina  
Caleb Morse, Lawrence-Douglas  
County

County

Mary Lou Warren, Great Bend  
Ellen Estes, Wichita  
Gwen Elliott, Topeka **3**

## Spotlight on Local Leagues, cont.

government, the courts, Cowtown and another museum or two, visiting with those who have held elected office (or run a campaign), visiting the state legislature, and possibly meeting with the Governor. In July of this year, Ernestine Krehbiel, project coordinator, will go to the cities in Kenya where these ladies come from, along with her counterpart from Tucson, City Councilwoman Carol West and with Zaida Arguedas from the national office of LWVUS. This is a two-year program so there will be four more Kenyan visitors to Wichita next year. **3**

## Membership—Feast or Famine

by Sharon Ailslieger, Membership  
Chair

**W**ebster's Dictionary defines the word "member" as a person belonging to an incorporated or organized body or society. Everyone is a "member" of something. The problem is that membership in many organizations has decreased, rather than increased. Sociologists tell us that 1) women make up at least 50% of the workforce, 2) there are more single-parent households than ever before, 3) children are involved in more activities than in previous generations, which take parents' time, and 4) apathy is growing. These facts add up to citizens who have to pick and choose their activities. Their schedules are full of events which directly touch them and make a difference in their everyday lives. The question is: "Where does this leave the League of Women Voters?"

The League of Women Voters is a multi-issue, non-partisan organization. This fact alone can be a positive or a negative. The League will study and consider before jumping into the fray. Again, this time-consuming style can be a positive or a negative. It seems it is easy to identify problems, but not so easy to find solutions. Sometimes we end up reinventing the wheel. However, sometimes improving the wheel can make the wagon move better. Anyone who has been a member of the League for any period of time can relate to the previous statements. New members want to change the unit time, add to or drop the number of units, change the way the unit is presented, shorten or speed up study time, etc. The secret is knowing when and where to make changes.

The following are factors to consider when doing a "membership drive:"

1. Assess your community. Consider the ethnic makeup, the socioeconomic level, current activities and citizen involvement, and issues of importance to the community.

2. Market your organization. Form a marketing strategy which includes who and how. Ask questions: "Why would community members want to join the League?" "Who, within the community, would want to join the League?"

3. Devise a plan. Set strategic goals (long-term outcomes), tactical goals (what do you want to happen?), and objectives (what will be accomplished to reach goals).

4. Implement and evaluate. Be willing to be flexible and evaluate along the way. If something is not working than evaluate the outcomes (results). Remember the plan must be achievable.

Stress the BENEFITS of the League of Women Voters, not the features. Include a time line and remember you want to influence citizens of the community to join the LWV. It is encouraged to look at what other Leagues have done—either successfully or unsuccessfully!!

The Membership Committee should consist of young/new members and more experienced members. This may be an opportunity to involve inactive or new members in League decision making. Perhaps they will take more ownership of their membership.

REMEMBER: NOTHING VENTURED,  
NOTHING GAINED!!

GO FOR IT!! THE LWV DOES MAKE  
A DIFFERENCE!! **3**

# Health Care, Yours, Mine and Theirs

by Lougene Marsh, Director

Flint Hills Community Health Center

Fellow League members, I thank you for the opportunity to share a few words about health care. I chose the title *Health Care, Yours, Mine and Theirs*, because I believe it is an apt description of the fragmentation that plagues our health care system today and yet challenges us to think about whether health care should be a “yours, mine, theirs” public policy or whether it should be an “our” public policy.

My comments are based on the work of the Citizens Health Care Working Group, and much of the data and other information used in this presentation is drawn from the report of this group, *Health Care for all Americans*. I do this because the work of this group is important and may do more to shape the future of health care policy than anything that has occurred since the wave of HMOs swept the country from the mid 1980s to 2000.

The Citizens Health Care Working Group was formed by Congress based on the 2003 Medicare Modernization Act, a portion of which said, “In order to improve the health care system, the American public must engage in an informed national public debate to make choices about the services they want covered, what health care coverage they want, and how they are willing to pay for coverage.” A group of 14 citizens was given the charge to develop a plan of action that will result in new laws and strategies seeking to create Health Care That Works for All Americans.

A series of 31 community meetings are occurring across the country, including a virtual web cast meeting scheduled for March 22 at 6:00 pm. I was privileged to attend the first of these meetings in Kansas City, Missouri, on January 19 and was very impressed with the content of the

report and the manner in which the forum was conducted and information was collected from the participants.

There are other ways in which all of us can have input on this very important topic, including going to the Citizens Health Care web site ([www.CitizensHealthCare.gov](http://www.CitizensHealthCare.gov)) to complete an on-line poll or hosting meetings in our own communities. The working group has developed a community tool kit to assist any interested community in structuring its meeting.

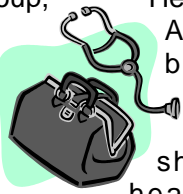
There were three areas of concern identified in the report: Cost, Quality and Access. The sharply rising cost of health care is one of the most troublesome areas and one that cuts across yours, mine, and theirs. An article in a recent issue of *Health Affairs* projects that the growth of health care spending will continue to outpace the Gross Domestic Product, reaching 20% in 2015 compared to the current level of 16%. This will equate to an average per capita expenditure of \$12,320 compared to \$6400 in 2004 and equaling \$4T. The three largest components of health care costs are Professional health services, like doctors and dentists (\$542B), Hospital services (\$516B) and Prescription drugs (\$179B). Factors driving the costs include: age, chronic conditions (78% of health expenditures are related to chronic diseases), lifestyle (62% of the growth in health care spending since 1991 is attributable to obesity). Other factors contributing to rising costs: Technology, the way we pay—a fragmented payment system resulting in great administrative cost and duplication, and waste, fraud, and abuse.

Current financing of health care comes from three main sources. One is private funding, mostly through employers (health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenditures); in 2005, virtually all large employers provided health

insurance but only half of small employers (<10 employees). There is a \$145B price tag to the federal tax system because of tax exemptions allowed to employers and to employees. Next is Medicare and Medicaid, which accounts for approximately 1/3 of our health care spending with \$41M Americans on Medicare and \$35M on Medicaid (some dually eligible) and \$6M on SCHIP. SCHIP is probably our single most recent public policy success in reducing the number of uninsured children in this country and increasing access to health care for this population segment. Finally, there is uncompensated care, at \$35B, which is absorbed by providers but ultimately results in higher costs for those with insurance

Let’s turn next to quality. Although 85% of us report our health as excellent, very good, or good, only 50% of us are very or extremely satisfied with our health care and only 55% of recommended care is received by adults. There is somewhat of an imbalance between under-use and over-use. For example, we underutilize some preventative health services like vaccines, colonoscopies, preventive care for diabetes (for example, retinal eye exams, regular oral health check-ups, foot exams). Yet we over utilize some services such as antibiotics.

So, how does our quality measure up against cost? Although the U.S. spends \$1,800 more per capita than any other developed country, our health outcomes are seldom better and currently the U.S. ranks 29th in the world for “healthy” life expectancy, which defines how much of our life span is spent in good



## Health Care, cont.

health. Disparities in health care related to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status continue to plague our system and are reflected in quality issues. There is consistent evidence of a difference in quality of care and in health outcomes with 2/3 of African-Americans, one-half of Hispanics, and 60% of low SES experiencing these disparities. Educational level and insurance coverage intertwine with ethnicity and poverty to exacerbate the disparities.

Disparities are also reflected in the third major area of concern reported by the Citizens Health Care Working Group—Access. Again, it's a multi-faceted area. Availability of services and Health Care professionals are inadequate and there is poor geographical distribution; Lack of a regular place of care: a medical home which 15% of Americans say they lack, contributing to cost issues when 30% of ER visits are for non-urgent care; Ease of use of the system: Length of time to get appointment, Length of wait at time of visit, Failure to receive

test result information, All compounded by language issues, lack of work schedule flexibility, especially among low-wage workers. And again all of this is multiplied several times over across racial, ethnic, and economic lines: African-Americans, 40% worse access, Hispanics, 90% worse access, low SES, 80% worse access.



Access issues are also directly connected to a lack of health insurance: 45.8M Americans without insurance and in Kansas our rate of uninsurance from 2002-2004 was 10.8%. The likelihood of having insurance is influenced by several factors: Type of employment (both type of job and size of employer), 2 of 3 uninsured are in a family with one or more full-time workers; Ethnicity—Hispanics are three times more likely to be uninsured; No insurance equals less care and more problems; Lack of coverage for some types of preventive care; High co-insurance and deductibles may

create access problems even for those with insurance; and Medical debt—a recent study in Kansas showed an impact on Kansans with medical debt mirroring national data. The existence of medical debt creates an additional barrier to care, whether self-imposed by the debtor or imposed by the unwillingness of the medical provider holding the debt to meet current health care needs of the debtor.

So, have you heard anything that you haven't heard before? I would suspect not. The health care system might be described as an ecosystem and the complexity of this system absolutely guarantees that there are no simple solutions.

Clearly, a multi-faceted problem will require multi-faceted approaches. Some of these approaches are being tried in states and communities across the country, some are very narrowly targeted and many are young enough in their development, that success is not yet determined. In the next issue of the *Kansas Voter*, we will discuss the topic further and learn what approaches are being considered. **3**

The *Kansas Voter* is published by the League of Women Voters of Kansas, a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation of citizens in government. The League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. LWVK is affiliated with the League of Women Voters of the United States and with local Leagues in Kansas communities.

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