

The Kansas Voter

October 2006



League of Women Voters of Kansas

Working together...for Kansas

Local Leagues in the Spotlight

■ Voter Service,
Membership, & More



Emporia League of Women Voters Holds Elections at Emporia High School

Ann Havenhill, Membership Chair

For the past three years the Emporia League has run the elections for Homecoming King and Queen and for the Winter Sports Royalty at Emporia High School. We have poll workers there from 9 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. and the election is set up just like in "real life." The Lyon County Clerk provides electronic voting machines so that the students can experience using the machines.

The students check in with a poll worker giving their name and some piece of identifying information or their student ID so they can be checked off the student list. For example, this year for homecoming they needed to give their locker number. The Emporia HS staff provides the list and the information we need. (Hint: The school places a poster with candidates' pictures above the voting machines to help students identify their choice.) That is our chance to emphasize that they need to know about candidates or issues before they come to vote.

The League also does voter education and registers voters. Students who plan to go away to school or into the military the following year find it helpful to know how to get a ballot mailed to them.

It is our hope that participation in these elections by the students will eliminate the intimidation that some voters feel with the election process. Many students voting for the first time express their concern that they couldn't do this. When they finish their comments include "Awesome" or "That is Great." This fall we had several Hispanic students voting, which hasn't happened before, and a Special Education class came with their teacher to vote. Each time we do this we increase the numbers and this fall we almost doubled the numbers participating. **3**

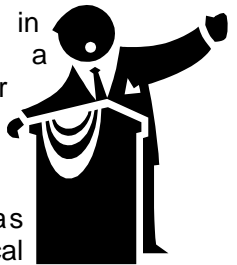
Johnson County League of Women Voters Fall 2006 Highlights

Ann Sanders, President

Membership successes, increased visibility and dynamic, relevant programming characterize the Johnson County League's 2006-07 programming year. Highlights, to date, include:

- Hosting a New and Prospective Member Wine and Cheese Party attended by 35 interested persons which resulted in 10 new memberships;
- Co-sponsoring 24 televised candidate forums;
- Co-sponsoring the Morrison-Kline debate in which approximately

- 500 citizens attended;
- Co-sponsoring Moore-Ahner debate;
- Participating in hosting a luncheon for L W V U S President, Mary Wilson;
- Serving as judges in local school districts' Citizenship Essay contests;
- Sponsoring a fundraising book review on the History of Southeast Johnson County;
- Presenting information at the Kansas Environmental Issues forum;
- Conducting a New Member Orientation and Jo Co League Board Orientation;
- Enrolling 15 new members to date;
- Presenting Programs and "Let's Talk Issues" forums on: Mental Health, Health Care, and China's Emergence on the World Stage;
- Hosting the metro-wide 2020 Luncheon commemorating the founding of the League of Women Voters with the theme, "Celebrating the Right to Vote."



The Johnson County League continues to celebrate renewed visibility and vitality. **3**

■ It's All about Elections—Lessons Learned from the Primary Election

Sedgwick County Primary Election Observations

Ernestine Krehbiel, Co-President, Wichita Metro League

In Sedgwick County, the Election Commissioner is appointed by the Secretary of State for a four-year term, and his budget is approved by the five-member County Commission. The League has always supported such independence from political pressure. However, when the Sedgwick County Election Commissioner (EC), without any apparent prior input or discussion, revealed only eight weeks before the primary that he had cut the number of polling places by 70% (from 208 to 63), we were stunned. Our League phone rang off the hook from groups asking us to take the lead to DO SOMETHING. The Wichita-Metro League was suddenly thrust into the forefront of organizing a coalition of 24 civic and religious groups to try to reverse that decision.

The Secretary of State seemed to have also been taken surprised by the EC's decision to make such a drastic cut, but claims his actions were legal. The EC says he looked at other places—like Larimer County, Colorado, (Fort Collins-Estes Park area)—where they have voting centers and voters can vote at any poll because of an electronic data base of registered voters; however, Kansas law does not allow regional voting centers. The EC also decided to purchase enough ADA-compliant voting machines to have all machines for all voting places be ADA-compliant, though HAVA mandates only one machine at each polling place be compliant. Clearly, the cost difference for these two approaches is significant. Sedgwick County does have over 800 voting machines which are still available and useable.

There are now 63 poll sites in Wichita, with an average of over 4200 voters per poll, and in 17 there are over 4500 voters per poll. Our coalition members are concerned this

could suppress voter turnout of selected voting populations. The League has no opinion on this—we just think that to make such a drastic cut without any public input, voter education, or preparation raises serious issues.

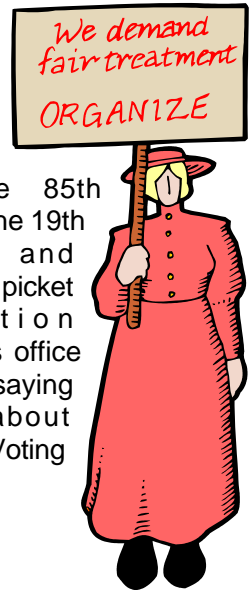
We had observers at 20% of the polls on August 1 and documented widespread voter and poll-worker confusion. Poll workers did not consistently tell people about their options when they came to the wrong poll site. But the frantic poll workers had had to learn all the tricks of new machines (ES&S with side window paper record), provisional ballots, change of boundary lines, etc. One state representative district spans the inner-city area and is over 10 miles north to south and several miles wide. It now has only two polling sites, one of which is in a largely Hispanic area. On August 1, this site was in a small room with no air-conditioning on a day when the temperature was over 100 degrees.

Our observers documented widespread problems with voter privacy, with ten or more machines lined up next to each other with no curtains or shields. (One voter, shocked at this, told a poll worker she could see how everyone was voting and was told, "Don't look.") The EC tells us that this will be remedied by November.

When we first asked for a random audit of the vote, we found out that **by Kansas Law, the paper record in these new machines cannot be used for an official audit.** The only count or recount is what is in the machines—which of course will print out the same results whether you do it once or a dozen times.

But the possibility of voter suppression is the battle at this time. And it looks like our fight to restore the lost polling places is not one we will win. At least not NOW. As a last hoorah before the end of time for

v o t e r registration, we are thinking about pulling out the suffrage costumes we wore for the 85th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and wearing those to picket the Election Commissioner's office with posters saying something about Suppression of Voting Once Again! **3**



Manhattan/Riley County Primary Election Observations

Karen Mayse, 1st Vice President

Ten Manhattan/Riley County league members observed at election polls during the primary to gather data about new electronic voting machines. Observers were asked to notice security arrangements and report on the voting experience. Security, privacy and confusing machine prompts about incomplete ballots were identified as areas of concern.

Observers were only permitted to observe when polls were open, so they could only verify machine security during those hours. Poll workers told observers that machines were set up before they arrived. Many polls are located in churches where several church members have keys to the building. Additionally, without a voter-verified paper audit trail, it was impossible for a voter or an observer to verify whether machines were correctly recording votes.

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Three of six early morning observers reported that machines weren't operating when polls opened, and voters were offered paper ballots. Poll workers were unable to resolve machine malfunction with documentation provided and could not get through the busy County Clerk's office phone lines to receive immediate assistance. Still, by the end of the first hour nearly all machines were working.

All observers reported complaints about the lack of privacy. Machines were positioned very close together and facing outward toward the entrances. Screens were viewable from many angles. Some observers reported that poll workers and fellow voters were helping people complete machine ballots, and helpers could view how the voter had voted. Since there were no voting booths, voters completed paper ballots at tables out in the open. Poll workers at one location finally produced one two-foot, plastic tri-fold screen to improve privacy for paper ballots. In another location, tallies for paper ballots were being kept on a note pad.

Due to very low turnout, voters only had to wait a few seconds to vote. Most voters understood how to use the machines and found them simple to use. Still, three of ten observers reported voters were confused when trying to submit ballots. Most people didn't write in candidates, and if they did not, the machine indicated they hadn't completely filled out their ballot. Four of ten observers reported that poll workers seemed confused part of the time. In one location a poll worker accidentally brought up a democratic ballot for a republican voter and didn't know how to resolve the problem other than to ask the next democrat voter to use that machine. **3**

Thinking Outside the Ballot Box

Excerpted from the LWVUS Website
Seeing to reduce Election Day lines and offer added convenience for voters, many states and counties are allowing people to cast their ballots at a limited number of polling places during a defined "early voting" period (usually about two weeks before the election). In many counties, early voting now attracts 50 percent or more of voters, who clearly appreciate the opportunity to go to the polls on a day that is convenient for them.

While elections officials generally welcome early voting, it does create new administrative challenges, including the need to find suitable locations that can accommodate voting equipment, poll workers, and voters, as well as candidates trolling for support.

Johnson County, Kansas
Kansas legislator

Advance voting takes any chance you won't be able to vote out of the equation.

s approved "advance voting" after the 1992 election, which is remembered for long lines experienced by voters, many of whom still were trying to cast their ballots at 11 p.m. "It was a big fiasco," recalled Connie Schmidt, former Election Commissioner in Johnson County, which includes the Kansas City metropolitan area. In the 1996 election, voters in Kansas could only vote early at the county elections office. Despite that restriction, advance voting proved enormously popular among Kansans during its inaugural run, leading Schmidt and other county officials to lobby the state for the ability to open more early voting sites.

Thanks to changes in state law, Johnson County opened two additional sites in 2000 and 2004. Forty percent of the county's voters—100,000 in all—took advantage of the opportunity to vote early at one of the three sites in 2004.

"We found that if the advance voting location was convenient to work or home, more people would choose to vote in person than by mail," Schmidt said, noting that the county chose advance voting sites near large employers. Adding to the convenience for voters, the county keeps the voting sites open until 7 p.m. on weekdays, as well as from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays. The advance voting period in Kansas starts 20 days before Election Day; the state also allows advance voting by mail. Voters may go to any advance voting location in the county; as in Clark County, Nevada, and Travis County, Texas, all sites are



connected to the voter registration database using an electronic poll book system.

"Advance voting takes any chance you won't be able to vote out of the equation," said current Johnson County Election Commissioner Brian Newby. "People are now in control of when they vote, and there should not be any reason why you can't vote." Newby said Johnson County plans to increase the number of advance voting sites to four in 2006 and eight by 2008. Cost-effectiveness has been a key consideration for the county as it seeks to expand advance voting, he added. "We're taking a hard look at how many voters we can process per hour to make this a good investment for the county," Newby said. **3**

Kansas Tax Policy and Impact on Families

Excerpted from Kansas Action for Children "Fiscal Focus," Vol. 1, 2006

Families must have the opportunity to meet their children's economic and developmental needs through the provision of food, clothing, transportation, healthcare, education, and safe, affordable housing. Ensuring this opportunity requires that essential supports for families are a priority in the state budget process, that state finances are managed in a fiscally sound manner, and that the tax system fairly distributes the tax burden among income levels.

The composition of the Kansas tax structure tends to be regressive in that it places a disproportionate burden on

low- and middle-income taxpayers. In recent years there has been a proliferation of special tax provisions such as sales and income tax exemptions and income tax credits. This coupled with the tax rate and other deductions has at times even caused revenue and budget shortfalls resulting in tax increases, including sales and cigarette tax rate hikes, as well as endangering the ability of the state to fund vital programs for children and their families.

Tax Reform

A recent study commissioned by the Kansas Department of Revenue indicates that key components of the Kansas tax structure are highly

regressive, particularly the property tax. While the need to maintain current revenues prohibits isolated property tax reductions, the time has come to revisit and update the Kansas tax structure.

Ensuring Sufficient Revenues to Maintain an Acceptable Level of Services

With the many growing demands for state spending including K-12 education, healthcare, and public safety, it is important that revenues keep pace. Otherwise the ability of the state to fund vital services for children and their families will be placed in jeopardy. **3**

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