

The Kansas Voter



August 2009

League of Women Voters of Kansas

Working together...for Kansas

Kansas Leagues Chosen for Prestigious LWVUS Grant

■ **Fair Judiciary: New
Safeguarding U.S.**

Democracy Project

Kansas Leagues have been chosen for a prestigious LWVUS grant and project. The Open Society Institute is providing support for "Safeguarding U.S. Democracy: The Quest for a Diverse Judiciary," beginning September 1, 2009. This new two-year project will work to raise awareness of the importance for fair and impartial courts to reflect the diversity of the population they represent. The work will be carried out in the area for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, which covers six states: Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah. This project is different from previous ones in that the first year's work will be carried out only in Kansas. Kansas Leagues have agreed to work on this project under

LWVUS direction. The project will be launched in Topeka on October 17, but the preparation meeting will be **August 29**.

All Kansas local League Board members are urged to be at the **August 29** meeting in Topeka to find out all about the grant and the expectations/requirements to participate (local forums, for example) for both state and local Leagues. Other interested members are enthusiastically invited to come also. The meeting will be from 12:00 noon (lunch provided) to about 3:00. The after-lunch presentation about the grant will be provided by LWVUS Deputy Executive Director Zaida Arguedas (who is the Director of the LWV Global Democracy Program). With her will be LWVUS judicial expert David Ward.

While there will be no charge to League members for the excellent lunch, reservations are required by Monday, August 25. Contact Diane Kuhn (913-631-9499).

Then the real kick-off for the two-year grant will be **League Day in Topeka on October 17**. It is for all League members and interested public (and other organizations such as the Kansas Bar Association). The nationally known expert on fairness

and diversity in the judiciary, Rebecca Love Kourlis, Executive Director of the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, will speak in the morning, and Kansas experts on fair and impartial judiciary will speak after lunch. The day is planned to go from 10:00 a.m. to about 3:00 p.m.

This two-year grant is under the leadership of Ernestine Krehbiel, LWVK President, Diane Kuhn, LWVK Vice President (immediate past president), and LWVUS Board Director Janis McMillen. 3

From the President

Greetings to all Kansas League members. I am honored to be your new LWVK president. I am following some excellent LWVK presidents and board members so I feel a little intimidated.

The League has two crucial ways that we help democracy work. One is to educate ourselves and others in a non-partisan way about issues of importance. Another is, as I've written about below, that we advocate for positions we have arrived at through our League processes for studies.

Fitting into the educate-ourselves-and-the-public role of the League, we will be launching an exciting two-year project about maintaining democracy, especially understanding the importance of a fair, independent, diverse, and impartial judiciary. LWVUS Ed. Fund has chosen Kansas as the only state League to receive a

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Important Dates

August 29: 12:00 noon–3:00 p.m.

McFarland Restaurant

4133 SW Gage Center Drive, Topeka

Important Meeting for All Local League Boards
and interested members

with LWVUS Deputy Executive Director
to launch our two-year grant and project.

Lunch provided.

October 17
State League Day

2009 National League Council

First Bi-Annual Council by Internet

Noteworthy this summer was the NUS League's use of cutting-edge technology to interact with state Leagues across the country via the Internet (and telephone). LWVUS hosted our first major virtual meeting, Council 2009, which included an interview with U.S. Senator Kay Hagan (NC) and a briefing on the latest from Capitol Hill. The message from the national League president, Mary Wilson, was a video and was clear and quite useful and relevant.

The Kansas League had viewing sites set up by Leagues in Johnson County, Topeka-Shawnee County, and Wichita-Metro. The online/telephone virtual council was very interesting, and listening to interaction of League members all over the nation was very informative. Some of the Kansas members had said ahead of time that they did not

expect this virtual "talking heads" and "talking voices" to be very interesting. However, everyone changed their minds as the virtual council happened. Votes were taken via the Internet connection on procedure and an issue or two. Comments by delegates were given by telephone but heard on the Internet. This was so successful that I expect it will be used more by the League—even when the economic times do not force it as was the case in 2009. It is a great way to do training—saving travel costs.

From 44 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands, 82 voting delegates gave the interactive business meeting high marks! A total of 140-120 people watched or participated over the Internet. And it appears that the League is again at the forefront of change! 3

No Consensus on National Popular Vote Compact

Despite strong support—about 50%—the remaining Leagues either did not favor it or were unable to reach consensus. Therefore, the committees recommend a statement of our position based on the consensus reports from local Leagues:

"The LWVUS affirms its support for the direct election of the president and abolition of the Electoral College, but the LWVUS has no position on the National Popular Vote compact as currently proposed."

You can find the whole recommendation to the LWVUS Board at www.LWV.org under "For Members" tab and then "Projects and Programs." 3

Wichita Leaguer Travels to Russia

Pat Dooley of the Wichita League was part of a national delegation of League members who spent 12 days in Russia in May.



Dooley said she had a wonderful time. "It was a thrill to travel to a country I grew up afraid of and be treated like one of the family. I wish everyone could have such an opportunity."

The group of nine delegates

arrived in Moscow on May 12. They spent four days there, then traveled to the city of Kaluga, where they were hosted for four nights at the homes of Russian families. The tour ended with three days in St. Petersburg.

Highlights of the trip included meetings with local officials in Moscow and Kaluga, a seminar hosted by a group of Russian feminist activists and scholars, and a roundtable session with the St. Petersburg League of Women Voters. In the past two years, the Wichita League has hosted two groups of Russian delegates who came to the U.S. under the auspices of the Open World Program. Dooley said she saw four of those delegates while she was in Russia. "All four told me how much they enjoyed their stay in Wichita," she said.

Zaida Arguedas, director of the National League's Global Democracy Project, and Manuela Campbell, the program's global democracy specialist, organized the trip. 3

LWVK Convention 2009

Convention '09 was a full day in which the budget was adopted, changes were made in the Endowment Fund bylaws to increase flexibility, and new officers were elected.

The recommended program—a focus of study and action on our current positions, educating and training members to advocate on our positions in the Kansas legislature, and compiling materials for future testimony and advocacy opportunities—was adopted.

Five action resolutions were passed regarding income tax increase and evaluation of other taxes; commending Senator marci francisco; campaign finance—requiring information about funding sources and expenditures from organizations promoting issue ads; supporting single-payer health insurance; and exempting food from sales taxes.

See the LWVK web site for the minutes of the Convention. 3

Quick Facts on Health Care Costs

U Total health spending in the U.S. reached \$2.1 trillion in 2007—or \$7,026 per capita.

U By 2016, total health spending is projected to rise to \$4.2 trillion.

U Between 2005–2006, total health spending increased 6.7 percent, more than double the rate of the 2.9 percent increase in overall economic growth.

U Total health spending remained relatively constant at about 16 percent of gross domestic product from 2003–2006, but is projected to increase to 19.5 percent by 2017.

U Spending for home health care increased at a faster pace from 2005–2006 (9.9 percent) than any other category of health spending; however, its impact is limited because it accounts overall for only 2.5 percent of total health spending.

U Yearly prescription drug spending growth accelerated in 2006 to 8.5 percent from a low of 5.8 percent in 2005, in part because of full implementation of Medicare Part D.

U Between 2006 and 2007, premiums for health coverage offered by employers increased 6.1 percent, the fourth straight year of declines in the rate of premium growth, from a peak of 13.9 percent in 2003. Even so, this was more than twice the rate of growth in the Consumer Price Index.

U Of every dollar spent on health services in the U.S. in 2006, 46 cents came directly from government sources.

U Costs for program administration and the net cost of private health insurance were about 7 percent of total health spending in the U.S. in 2006 and grew 8.8 percent, a marked increase over the 3.6 percent rise in 2005.

From “A Reporter’s Toolkit: Health Care Costs” (an Alliance for Health Reform Toolkit produced with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation); reproduced here courtesy

of the Alliance for Health Care. The entire toolkit can be found at http://www.allhealth.org/Publications/Cost_of_health_care/health_care_costs_toolkit.asp#keyfacts.

Janis McMillen (LWVUS Board member and LWVKS) is chair of the LWVUS Health Care Education Task Force.

Produced by the LWVUS Health Care Education Task Force, 2009 3

From the President, *continued*

grant for this education project, and it has opportunities for pass-through grants to participating Kansas local Leagues. Too many members of the public do not really understand the importance of our impartial court system; this will help us educate the public as well as update ourselves.

Come to the Launch Lunch on August 29, to launch the Fair Judiciary Project; your lunch will be provided at our meeting with Deputy Executive Director Zaida Arguedas of the LWVUS. It will be from noon to 3:00 p.m. at McFarland Restaurant in Topeka. (See front page.)

Local League presidents: turn in reservations for Aug. 29 lunches for your members by Monday August 25 to Diane Kuhn at dianekuhn@kc.rr.com (phone: 913-631-9499)

Health Care Reform – Highest LWV Priority

The other side of the League is to advocate for our carefully studied positions to be made into law. Right now all of us are watching the struggles to get a health care reform bill passed. There are some excellent clarification articles on the LWVUS web site, lwv.org—some written by our own Janis McMillen who, as member of the national League board, has headed up the health care study/advocacy project for LWVUS. We hope for a bill that comes even close to our national League position adopted many years ago that includes

favoring universal health care and a single payer system, similar to Medicare. This is the closest that Congress has ever come to trying to fix the problems with both the limited coverage and the sky-rocketing cost of health care but it does not look like a government option (even as an alternative) will be included in a final package.

Nonetheless, we should write to our Senators and Representatives and tell them why we think that reform must come—to show that there is a great constituency here in Kansas that recognizes that many Kansans lack coverage and many others are without portability of their insurance in case of job loss/change, and this needs to be fixed.

According to a new report from Families USA, one in three families in Kansas—748,000 people—were without health coverage last year and that was *before* the huge economic downturn. Also demonstrating our state health care crisis is the prevalence of medical debt in Kansas and the difficulty many health consumers have paying their medical bills (30% of all Kansans under 65).

Our national board and President Mary Wilson are urging all League members to contact our members of the US House and Senate *even* if you are sure you know how they will vote. Tell them personal stories of people you know who have been caught in the health care squeeze. You can bet that all of those opposed to health care changes *are* contacting them.

Look in the phone book for local offices or go to this web site to find out how to call or e-mail them. http://www.alllaw.com/state_resources/kansas/congress/default.asp. 3

Ernestine Krehbiel

Democracy is not a spectator sport.



Leagues Urged to Apply for LWWUS Program

Grants for Citizen Exchanges with Colombia and Brazil (NEW)

The League of Women Voters Education Fund is currently seeking Leagues interested in hosting fellows from Colombia and Brazil for month-long educational/collaborative stays during 2010-2011. A modest pass-through grant for these exciting Global Democracy programs is available to hosting Leagues. Also, the exchange program includes a two-week, all-expenses-paid trip to Colombia or Brazil for a participating League member to engage in educational programs in those countries. For more information on this great opportunity, please contact Sergio España at sespana@lww.org and the LWWUS web site for information.

Wichita-Metro League participated in such a Global Democracy hosting program in 2006-2007 with Kenya, and 2007-2008 with Russia.

Pictured here is Ernestine Krehbiel, current LWVK president, during that citizen exchange in 2006. She represented the LWWUS



providing "Good Governance" workshops to women in coastal Kenya. The article on page 2 describes the Wichita group's contacts with Russia.

Balancing Liberty and Homeland Security

If you'd like to give input on security/liberty issues check out the web site for a National Dialogue. It's www.homelandsecuritydialogue.org.

The web site explains that there will be three sessions for interactive dialogue on Homeland Security missions, goals, and priorities. These dialogues begin in August.

You can sign up for news and announcements about the National Dialogue, and be notified when each Dialogue is live.

Join the conversation at www.homelandsecuritydialogue.org. 3

LWVK Board will meet at 9:00 a.m. on Aug. 29, at McFarland's Restaurant before the Launch Lunch. All League members are welcome to attend.

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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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