

The Kansas Voter

February 2007



League of Women Voters of Kansas

Working together...for Kansas

A Final Word on the 2006 Elections

■ Ellen Estes'

Election Blog

A few years ago, I registered high school seniors to vote. When I asked a student if he wanted to declare a party preference at that time, he responded that his government teacher told him to be a democrat. Because I had also been a government teacher at one time, I was hoping that there was more to the story. So, I asked him exactly what his teacher said. The student replied that his teacher had said that "I should be a part of the democratic process."

I believe in being a part of the lower case "d" democracy too, and therefore, I have worked elections for the past 4 years. Wichita introduced new voting machines this year, as well as consolidated voting locations. These changes were not without their problems, as I and many voters unfortunately discovered. In August 2006, I was in the first class to be trained on the new machines for advance voting. It is one thing to know your stuff but another to teach the same; I quickly realized that there was a lot of learning taking place on both sides. As a supervising judge, I knew I had to be knowledgeable in all the different aspects, like how to operate the hearing-impaired voter hook-up. Under the new plan, poll workers were to know how to do only one of the many jobs, with only 2 of 11 workers on election day to be cross-trained. Because I was working the advance

voting period, I also needed training on using the computers to access the entire Sedgwick County registered voter database. Basically, the more you learned, the more you realized you were not totally competent, and the longer you stayed to learn more. I ended up at the training for over two and a half hours.

The training was set up as "learning centers." Workers were given a set duty; i.e. operating the computer (advance voting only), troubleshooting on the touch screen machines, organizing the provisional/paper ballots, check-in clerk and greeter (election day only), cross-training on several duties and supervising judge. I was in the first group to learn how to operate the touch screen machines. So when Election Commissioner Bill Gale was taking us through the process of activating each machine, I was the person who pressed the screen just because I was in the front (naturally). But very few got hands-on experience.

My last "center" was the computer area. I talked with an election office employee and identified myself as a League member. He told me the office had about a six-month false start with the new machines (no explanation, but I thought that perhaps they had started with another choice of voting machines). Due to lost time, the election office could either get the machines in place for this primary or do the P.R. (I took this to mean getting interested groups' input). The office decided to concentrate on the machines.

I worked the advance voting for three days. The election office had discovered that the entire list of registered voters in Sedgwick County could not fit on each machine. So they divided the list into fourths. We had six machines—two dedicated to each of the two voter lists for precincts closest to us, plus one list for the west side of Wichita and one for the outlying areas. It turned out there was a problem with the software for the west side and everyone in those precincts had to vote by paper ballot. The election office fixed the problem on the second morning.

● **First Call to Convention**

The League: Legacy and Leadership

On Saturday, April 28, 2007, the Wichita Metro League will host State Convention. It will be held at the Holiday Inn Select, 549 S. Rock Road (intersection of Kellogg and Rock Road) in Wichita. Mark your calendars and make plans now to attend!

● **Day at the Capitol** Thursday, March 8, 2007
See registration form on page 3

Election Blog, continued

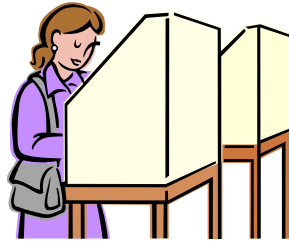
The advance voting location I supervised had just 160 voters over those three days. After advance voting, it was time to see if the kinks in the system had been worked out enough to handle the big primary election day.

Two Sedgwick County employees were sent to work with us. They had participated in the same training that all poll workers had been through. Sonja, who works for community mental health, was great, and a big help. The technical IT person, John, was assigned full-time to my location and arrived to set up the computers before 9:00 a.m. When I arrived at 11:00, after picking up my supplies at the election office, he was just finishing setting up. So he worked from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. that first day. If I did not have John and Sonya helping us during advance voting, and John on election day, the process would have been so challenging that it is unlikely that the democracy I seek to take part in could have taken place; they were invaluable in making the process run as close to as smooth as possible. When I closed down the polls, I found that the county employees had better, more simplified and more current instructions than non-employees. Their updates had been sent to them via their county e-mails.

My advance voting location was set up in the sanctuary of a large church. Each night I took home the cartridges that made the machines work, and the tokens (keys) that allowed access to the computers. We locked the paper ballots and provisional ballots in a secure area each night and I took the key to that area too. The issue of using churches for voting has come up since the election. First, let me say that there is no one more concerned about the separation of church and state. But, there are many problems with having polling places at secular locations. I have heard that some Wichitans are not comfortable going into a place of

a different religion. This makes me wonder if Wichita is just the same as the rest of the world in its intolerance of those who worship differently. I had hoped for a better outlook from my hometown. I've been to the Mosque in Wichita and everyone is asked to remove their shoes. Also synagogues have been targets of extremists and they may not want to open up to the public.

The first time I worked during an election, the voting took place at a fire station. There were so many people with cars pulling in and out, that the firefighters had to post someone



outside to make sure people did not block the fire truck driveway. Schools are similarly problematic. Most schools have notices asking visitors to check in at the office. Additionally, during drop off and pick up time, you are dodging kids, parents, and all the buses. Also, high school parking lots are not for the faint of heart. In sum, there are just not adequate public buildings to bear the entire burden of voting locations.

The media had forecast problems with machines, long lines and confusion regarding voting locations. Awareness from the media hype (including LWV Wichita's voter coalition) may have backfired, because voters were more "aware," but they were scared away. When voters were leaving, they were saying it was not as bad as they expected. We suggested they tell their friends and neighbors how easy it was.

Poll Workers

I called some of the workers who were going to be working my location on Election Day to see if any of them had worked on advance voting; only one had. One of my workers said that her husband was too ill to work. She later told me that he had Parkinson's

disease and had had two strokes. Another of the workers had spent Saturday night in the hospital. She sounded like she had pneumonia. Some people thought I should have told her to go home. I did ask her if she wanted to sit or lie down. I know that I washed my hands all the time, as she was a machine operator and we used the cartridges interchangeably.

At the end of election day, it took us an hour and a half to pack up and leave. In previous years, we would have been out in half an hour. After closing down, it took me an hour to turn in all the necessary equipment to the election office. One elderly supervising judge was so tired that he had to have the security people at the election office bring in his supplies. I got home at 10:00 p.m. It was a 17-hour day.

After a person has worked a full election day, their critique of the voting process would be useful, perhaps by bringing supervising judges in to the election office for a focus type discussion. For example, I would recommend that some of the larger polling sites have more than one control cartridge. It takes too long to close down with only one cartridge when each machine has to have it in place to download the data. Secondly, the election laws should be amended to allow half-day poll-workers; the energy and caliber of the workers would improve. And lastly, the election office should provide chairs for the election judges while they wait to check in at the end of the day. After being on our feet for at least 15 hours, it would be a sign of gratitude to the people who make the election run smoothly.

Spotlight on Local Leagues



Lawrence-Douglas County

Rusty Thomas, President

Our League has been very busy with several programs: *Civics for Everyone* and the State Mental Health study. We held meetings and public events as well as study sessions for our members. In January, we had our final Mental Health Study meeting, then sent our findings to the State Committee. We also completed Program Planning in January.

In December, we held our annual Afternoon With Our Legislators. Marlys Harder, a long-time League member, always invited us into her home for this get-together. Marlys passed away a week before the event, so it was held at the historic Watkins Community Museum downtown. We did make another change; the event was renamed the "Marlys Harder Afternoon With Our Legislators." Marlys' family appreciated our gesture and said that this particular function was a long-time favorite of hers.

In March, we plan to have a dinner to honor a local individual with the Helen Fluker Open and Accessible Government Award. This

has been an annual event since Helen's death in 1998. The Fluker family donates the award each year and are regular attendees. Bob, Helen's husband, is a League member.

April will be the month for our annual meeting and election of officers. It will also signal the end of my term as president and a twelve year stint on the board—a period of time in which my education has grown, as have my many friendships. **3**

Manhattan/Riley County

Karen McCulloh, President

It has been a very busy fall for our League. Along with monthly Lunch with League meetings dealing with mental health and other local issues, we had a very well attended candidate forum in October. This was also broadcast live on a local radio station. As speakers on the topic of mental health, we heard from our local Director of Police, Mike Watson and later, from the Director of our Community Mental Health Organization, Robbin Cole. We are currently holding small group

meetings to discuss our responses to the plans and issues being discussed in the state mental health consensus statement. We are also planning our spring city and school board candidates forum and our annual Edith Stunkel award activities. **3**

Great Bend

Becky Dudrey, President

Our League is just finishing a two year study of the drug problem in Barton County, as it is perceived by the public and as it actually is. It has been a very enlightening study. We have heard from groups that provide rehabilitation, the law offices of the city and county, recovering addicts, the schools, resource offices, and many more facilities. We have discovered that the problem is much more widespread and larger than we had imagined. It has been a very worthwhile study. We are just getting ready to do a consensus and concurrence.

Day at the Capitol Thursday, March 8, 2007

League members and AAUW members from around the state will gather to discuss legislation and talk with our Representatives and Senators. Mark your calendar now and plan to join us.

- 8:30 a.m. Gather in Willard Hall, First Presbyterian Church, for coffee, pastries, and a discussion of key legislation
- 9:15–11:30 Spend time in the Capitol attending committee meetings and talking with legislators
- 12:00 noon Return to Willard Hall for lunch and a special presentation on Health Care Issues in Kansas; Jim McLean, Vice President of the Kansas Health Institute and a former Topeka *Capitol-Journal* reporter and staff person for Governor Sebelius, will give us a broad overview of various health initiatives
- 1:30 p.m. Return to the Capitol, as desired

Name: _____

Address: _____

The cost is \$20 and will include coffee, juice, and pastries in the morning and the noon lunch. Please make checks payable to the League of Women Voters of Kansas and mail to: League of Women Voters of Kansas, 618 S. Kansas Avenue, Suite B1, Topeka KS 66603.

New Legislative Contributor for LWVK

The state Board agreed to hire Paul Johnson, a long time advocate for issues that affect persons in poverty, to augment our coverage of legislation during the 2007 session. Paul is a KU graduate with a BA in social work and political science. For many years he was director of the Public Assistance Coalition, during which time he worked alongside many of our former League lobbyists. In 1995, he began assisting the Kansas Catholic Conference and expanded his issue coverage to include agriculture, energy, and affordable housing. Paul is a "market gardener" during the summer, as part of the Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance, and serves on the Board of the Kansas Rural Center.

We are very fortunate to have him share his experience and knowledge on many issues of interest to our members. He has been, and will continue to be, a regular contributor to our Legislative E-Reports. **3**

Great Bend League continued

We held a very successful forum for the candidates in July before the primary. It was well attended and the candidates were pleased with it, as were we. Rose Kelly, our Voter Service person, ran a very good forum for us. We had few contested races, but the people running for the offices that were contested represented themselves very well.

We're trying to decide on a new topic of study for the next year, and we have had some very interesting submissions. We hope this study will be as informative as the last one. **3**

Election Blog continued

P.S. During the general election I had problems with an observer at our polling place. Two voters who had been in line when the polls closed at 7:00 p.m. left and came back 45 minutes later, saying they thought it would take that long for us to get through the long line. However, we had processed the last voter 15 minutes before they came back. The observer argued with me to allow the guys to vote. My workers asked her to leave me alone so that I could finish doing my job. She told the two guys they should be allowed to vote. When I had released some paper ballots to be used after 7:00 p.m., she came over to me and said it was great that I had found some more paper ballots. We had used almost 900 paper ballots and had to be re-supplied many times during the day. This observer talked almost non-stop to whoever would listen, including my workers and me. Most of it was after 7:00 p.m.—when we were trying to accurately complete our jobs. **3**

League of Women Voters of Kansas

618 South Kansas Avenue, Suite B1

Topeka, KS 66603

(785) 234-5152

lwvks@aol.com

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.

President Janis McMillen
Editor Linda R. Johnson
www.lwvk.org