

The Kansas Voter

February 2008



League of Women Voters of Kansas

Working together...for Kansas

Time for Action

■ Start of Session

Means Action Time

Plan to keep aware of what's going on in Topeka and to keep in touch with your legislators about what you think they should be doing. Also plan to attend the Day at the Capitol—a good opportunity to learn more about legislative action and to meet with your own representatives.

State League Priorities

Local League Boards recommended to the State Board that the items listed below be the top priorities for LWVK to address in the 2008 Kansas Legislature:

- W Mental Health Care
- W Voting Machine Integrity
- W Education.

Priorities of other State Boards indicate that Leagues are addressing a variety of issues.

Connecticut: Election Laws and Transportation (reduction of vehicular traffic, expanded schedules, and incentives and capacity for intra-state mass transit users);

Virginia: Civil Rights, Election Laws, Environment, Health Care, Redistricting, and Transportation;

Florida: Election Reform, Water Conservation, Balanced Long-term Fiscal Policy, and Restoration of the Civic Mission of Our Schools;

North Carolina: Campaign and Election Law Reform, Tax Modernization;

Pennsylvania: Redistricting, Election Reform, Health Care, and Transportation Funding. 3

Legislative Hotline

The Legislative Hotline (800-432-3924) which provides citizens toll-free access to Kansas legislative activities and documents is ready for the 2008 Kansas Legislature. Staff of the Legislative Reference Department will assist callers in contacting legislators, relaying brief messages to them, or provide information about pending legislation. 3

League's Goal

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide. Democracy is a promise, not a guarantee. It is a promise that each of us, as citizens, makes to one another. The League is determined to encourage civil participation in order to strengthen the democratic process. (from the Washington, D.C., LWV Newsletter)

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League Day at the Capitol Thursday, March 13, 2008

League members from around the state will gather to discuss legislation and talk with their Representatives and Senators.

- 8:30 Gather in Willard Hall, First Presbyterian Church, for coffee and pastries. Please note that parking is prohibited in the church parking lot.
- 9:00 Paul Johnson, LWVK Legislative Consultant, will provide update on bills in the Kansas legislature
- 10:00 Spend time in Capitol attending committee meetings and talking with legislators
- 12:00 Lunch in the church. Guest speaker, Carol Williams, Kansas Ethics Commission Topic: Campaign Finance Reform
- 1:30 Return to the Capitol as desired

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 with the names and addresses of all who plan to attend to: LWVK, 618 S. Kansas Ave., Suite B1, Topeka, KS 66603.

Spotlight on Local Leagues



• Johnson County

Last fall the Johnson County League and the Johnson County Library invited the public to explore how local government works by attending a five-session series, *Local Government Made Easy*, at the Central Resource Library. Every two weeks from September 10 to November 5, participants learned from experienced teachers and former government officials about the structure and function of local government.

Local Government Made Easy

Session 1: *County Government Made Easy* addressed county expenditures for facilities, staff, and support for the safety-net services that improve the quality of life for individuals with special needs.

Session 2: *City Government Made Easy* focused on municipal administration and responsibilities.

Session 3: *School Boards Made Easy* addressed the Who, What, When, and Where of making school district policy.

Session 4: *Judicial System Made Easy* provided an explanation of how the Johnson County District Court handles both civil and criminal cases and how judges are chosen.

In the final session, *Meet the Press*, representatives from local newspapers were questioned by League moderator, Dolores Furtado, about how they cover and report on government meetings and activities.

Attendance for the sessions ranged from 35 to 72 with over 20 students participating. At the end of each presentation, participants were encouraged to ask questions of both teachers and government officials. Evaluations were positive and there were suggestions for future classes co-sponsored by League and Johnson County Library.

• Lawrence/Douglas County

Activities during 2007 included:

Candidate Forums

The Lawrence/Douglas County League opted to participate in a local Voter Education Coalition. The mission of the VEC is to consolidate the various forums of 11 participating organizations and entities in order to promote civil dialogue and broad participation of citizens through public forums. The VEC sponsored three successful candidate forums preceding the April election of city commissioners and school board members.

Land Use Committee

This committee serves as a steward of the League's land use policies. Monthly meetings have resulted in the League's submitting comments on various issues to local planning agencies. Priority issues in 2007 were: input on the development of the new Smart Code, suggestions on changes to existing plans to tighten up language and clarify requirements, concern over the second Wal-Mart's size and impact on traffic, suggestions to improve the proposed Oread Hotel on campus, and concern about the location and benefits of a new industrial park by the airport.

Douglas County legislators Barbara Ballard, Paul Davis, marci francisco, Tom Holland, Howard Pine, and Tom Sloan and at least 35 League members attended the annual Afternoon with the Legislators. (Photo courtesy of Arla Jones.)



Afternoon with the Legislators

The final event of the year was an Afternoon with the Legislators held on December 1. On that snowy afternoon, more than 35 League members gathered to enjoy refreshments and talk about policy issues with six members of the Kansas legislature. The exchange between participants was lively and informative. Legislators agreed that health care reform, energy initiatives, education, and future budget concerns would be the biggest issues in the upcoming legislative session. The discussion also touched on alternative energy sources and tuition payments for the children of illegal immigrants. It was obvious that the Lawrence legislators are a group that works comfortably together.

Spotlight on Local Leagues continued

• Manhattan/Riley County

In the midst of recovering from a severe ice storm, and at the height of the Christmas season, League members and Manhattan citizens turned out in December and early January to express their concern to city commissioners and planning board members regarding the direction of Manhattan downtown redevelopment. Acting on our position on city growth and our mission and principles, the Manhattan League informed the public of an online petition drive that collected more than 700 signatures from people opposing an amendment to a PUD that would permit constructing a massive big box grocery store within a couple of blocks of our historic downtown. When citizens who did not have computers or were unable to access the online petition contacted us, the Manhattan League facilitated a paper petition that collected an additional 526 signatures.

Throughout the process, the Manhattan League contended in public statements that enlarging the building beyond the scope of the PUD created a building that was not compatible with downtown, was not in character with the downtown, was a suburban solution being shoe-horned into an urban setting, and was putting other downtown area grocery stores at risk (there are already four within 1.5 miles of the proposed site).

The League and other citizen groups were successful in saving the historic Strasser house from demolition or relocation, and we prevented the elimination of most of the housing that had been planned for the north development. We clearly demonstrated to our city commission that Manhattan citizens are overwhelmingly opposed to amending the PUD and we encouraged and enabled citizens to speak out.

Unfortunately, the city commission voted 3-2 on January 8 to amend the PUD. The Manhattan League will continue to monitor downtown redevelopment and speak out when it is warranted.

In other news, one year following our initial presentation to a joint city and county meeting, and after subsequent public statements, the Manhattan League has been successful with our efforts to ensure that a non-elected citizen will be appointed to a citizen spot on the Consolidated Law Board.

(Written by Karen Mayse, President)
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State Water Committee

The LWVK Water Committee is sponsoring a meeting for members of Local League water committees in Salina February 9 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Salina Public Library. Members of the committee will be available to review the material sent out to Local League Presidents and answer any questions.



Reservations may be made by contacting your LL President or Kay Calvert at fs1725@osprey.net. We hope the weather cooperates and we have a great turnout. 3

SCHIP Update

Before Congress recessed for the holidays, they passed legislation that, among other things, extends the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) funding through March 31, 2009. League had joined many other organizations which were advocating for an expansion of the existing program.

Gary Brunk, Kansas Action for Children, writes:

"While it is frustrating that in spite of the hard work of advocates in Kansas and around the nation we were not able to expand SCHIP this year, the long-term prospects are very good. A strong majority in Congress, reflecting the support among voters at large, favors an expansion. Our job in 2008 will be to remind our Congressional delegation that covering more children needs to be a continuing priority.

"To some extent the focus on children's health insurance now shifts back to Kansas. Kansas Action for Children will be looking for opportunities for extending children's coverage in the context of the broader health reform discussion. We look forward to a conversation with many of you about how we can continue to work together so more children have health insurance."

For more information, go to www.kac.org. 3

Where Does my League's PMP Go?

Local League Presidents and Treasurers can count on it. Sometime in early January the mail will bring a reminder from LWWVUS to send the Local League's PMP (per member payment) to the national office in Washington by January 31. This year the payment is \$26.80. The next PMP will be determined at the 2008 Convention in Portland. Since this payment takes a big chunk out of a Local League's membership dues, many members may wonder how the money is spent. A complete explanation is available on the LWWVUS web site, www.lwv.org. Below is an abbreviated version.

ADVOCACY

LWWVUS lobbies Congress and the executive branch on League positions. We keep you informed on issue areas designated by the national Board as legislative priorities. Current key activities include work to improve the functioning of American democracy through our Democracy Agenda: election reform, reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act, campaign

finance reform, lobby reform and ethics, redistricting reform, and safeguarding civil liberties. In 2007 the League also advocated for clean air, full voting rights for the citizens of the District of Columbia and preservation of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We distribute action alerts and support both our Washington-based lobby Corps and our nationwide, electronic Grassroots Lobby Corps.

EDUCATION:

The League is recognized nationally for its ability to make complex issues accessible to the non-expert citizen and for its expertise as a trainer of community leaders and activists. The Education Fund has been hard at work on a broad range of projects in the areas of voter education and outreach; election reforms; liberty, security, and judiciary; global democracy; and civic engagement. Over the past two years, our efforts in these areas have helped state and local Leagues work on these issues in their communities.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Communication efforts of the

LWWVUS communication department include press releases, letters to the editor, press conferences and speeches on our priority issues and our education and civic engagement activities.

LEAGUE COMMUNICATIONS

The LWWVUS/EF staff communicates in several ways. President Mary Wilson sends weekly President's Updates. The new web site now features an enhanced Members section and also enables League members to directly lobby their elected officials at the national level. LWWVUS also provides various publications, including membership brochures and cards.

SERVICE TO LEAGUES

Each year League staff responds to over 30,000 e-mails and phone calls from members and leaders in need of assistance or guidance.

CONVENTION AND COUNCIL

Virtually all 25 LWWVUS staff members are involved throughout the year in the preparations for national Convention or Council meetings. 3

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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. LWWVUS is affiliated with the League of Women Voters of the United States and with local Leagues in Kansas communities.

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