

VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF TOPEKA & SHAWNEE COUNTY

November

- 1 Tuesday Topics, 1275 SW Boswell (elevator entrance on the East)
11:30AM-1PM.
"Governmental Issues with Shawnee County Delegation."
Menu: Italian Buffet BY RESERVATION ONLY—more details on page 3
- 2-15 Finance Drive
- 8 LWV-TSC Board Meeting, at Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 SW 10th Av., 11:30AM-1PM.
Check the schedule displayed in the lobby for assigned room.
Food can be brought to the meeting from Millenium Cafe.
- 17 VOICE Meeting: "**National Study on Privatization**", organization meeting
- 18 Naturalization Ceremony, Frank Carlson Federal Bldg., 10:30 AM

December

- 6 Tuesday Topics, at Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 SW 10th Av., 11:30AM-1PM.
Speaker is Kris Kobach, Kansas Secretary of State
"SAFE Act"
Menu: Turkey club croissant with fruit cup, carrot cake and iced tea. Price \$8.25.
- 13 LWV-TSC Board Meeting, at Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 SW 10th Av., 11:30AM-1PM.
Check the schedule displayed in the lobby for assigned room.
Food can be brought to the meeting from Millenium Cafe.
All members are welcome.
- 16 VOTER Deadline

*Tuesday Topics are held in room JCM 101B, across from the Millennium Cafe at the Topeka-Shawnee County Public Library, unless otherwise indicated.
Meals are available to the first twenty-five arriving, @ \$8.25/ea.
Checks payable to the Millennium Cafe.
If you need a ride to any League event, contact [Betsy Rohleder](mailto:Betsy.Rohleder).*

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Prez Sez



Marge Ahrens, President
League of Women Voters
Topeka/Shawnee County

*A great deal of fun, thoughtful planning and hard work go into such as we. In the past month we celebrated our membership with a delightful party at the Eclectic in North Topeka while by day volunteers lined up registering voters and candidates at Loman Hill Elementary for their yearly training in citizenship. The reality of our annual fund drive came into focus, in time to remember how we make a difference in a democracy trying to figure out its financial priorities. Opportunities to register voters fall into our laps, but require much executive talent and bazillions of enthusiastic volunteers. And we have BOTH. At this writing KNEA and Ameri-corps are shouting out to join up with us in a voter registration drive effort at high school football games, parent-teacher conferences and other locations to be determined. Twenty one Leaguers signed up at our last Tuesday Topics to join in the **voter registration drive before "Safe" laws** threaten the safety of our right to vote. We sent formal LWVTSC observers to the Cooperative Council, not knowing the next incident of city/county disputes was on its way. The first consensus meeting on The Role of the Federal Government showed what new members and mentors can do to inform and coalesce thinking on an issue. Sixteen of our members may*

have set a record for us, attending an outstanding League Day on State Taxes and National Education Funding.

Our energy is positive, though we are not always pleased with the events around us. This week I prepared a statement regarding the possible demise of city statues which make domestic violence a crime. As I see it, we come to this place in our community because of a number of reasons: competing city and county interests and budgets, lack of long range planning on the part of the county in an environment where both federal tax cuts and state exemptions have left both cities and counties ON THEIR OWN, and in some cases the silly political desire to be the best among elected officials to cut the most. The threat to the underserved is huge, and very obviously so in the case of domestic violence. Last year Judge Nuss speaking to the LWVKS at League Day told us of the dangers for the most vulnerable when the justice system has not enough money to hold court. The system could be out of money to even keep criminals in jail.

We have had extraordinary value from Tuesday Topic speakers on education these past two months. Our knowledge of issues and support of public servants stands out at a time of deep criticism and even hopelessness.

Lucky to be in the League. Marge

An Invitation to all Members and their Guests

GOVERNMENT ISSUES LUNCHEON

November 1, 2011 at 11:30am
Westminster Presbyterian Church
1275 SW Boswell Ave.

The League of Women Voters of Topeka Shawnee County invites the membership and guests to a social gathering and lunch (*optional*) with the Shawnee County Legislative Delegation to discuss issues of the 2012 legislative session.

Menu: Italian meal to include penne pasta, meatballs, chicken strips, marina and alfredo sauces, fresh sautéed vegetables, garden salad, bread sticks, brownies, coffee and iced tea.

Cost \$8.50.

FOOD MUST BE RESERVED *NO LATER THAN* October 28th, 2011 to Maryanna Quilty at mquilty@cox.net or 234 6925

VOTER SERVICE REPORT

By Anita Epps

Voter service activities are in high gear! During September, we registered voters at Chase Middle School, Lowman Hill Elementary and at a naturalization ceremony. At the naturalization proceedings, there were sixty new citizens from thirty-one countries: thirty people registered to vote. In October, we will have registered people to vote at Meadows and Williams Magnet Schools and Eisenhower and Robinson Middle Schools. We also will be registering voters at Let's Help at the lunch site and when students enroll in their education programs. At the public school sites, we are registering less than ten at each site.

Within the past two weeks, we have begun collaborating with NEA-Topeka and Washburn University Learning in the Community program. The contact people are Stephanie Harsin and Rick Ellis. The NEA members are setting up voter registration sites at USD 501 football games and parent-teacher conferences. The League secured a list of twenty-one volunteers at October Tuesday Topics: those names were forwarded to Stephanie Harsin, and she has begun contacting our members to help at sites they establish. Rick Ellis from Washburn is soon to begin soliciting registration volunteers and will give us those name. We will work together to locate sites.

There is a new political party in Kansas called Americans Elect (www.americansselect.org). They obtained sufficient names on petitions to have the party added to the voter registration forms. A few new forms have been printed that list Americans Elect party, and when we register voters we should ask if they are interested in registering with that party. If not, use the old form that lists Democratic, Republican, Libertarian, Reform and Not affiliated with a party.

At December Tuesday Topics, Secretary Kris Kobach is scheduled to be the speaker, and he will focus on the new election law which has been passed and will be implemented in January 2012. Photo identification will be required when voting in 2012, and proof of citizenship will be required when registering to vote for the first time beginning in 2013. (There will be an effort made by the SOS to move that date up with legislative approval when the legislators return this January.)

SAFE Act information to be covered in this VOTER covers advance and "absentee" voting.

Advance and "Absentee" Voting:

Your may cast your vote in advance at the Election Office (or County Clerk's Office) during regular office hours beginning 20 days prior to each election, or advance vote by mail (cast a so called absentee ballot) When casting an advance ballot in person, you will be required to show photo ID. (A list of approved IDs was outlined in the July VOTER). To request that an advance ballot be mailed to your home, you must complete and submit to the County Election Office an advance voting application. Applications may also be downloaded from the election office website. Advance ballots will be mailed out beginning 20 days prior to each election; however, you may request one as late as 5 pm on the Friday prior to the election day. *Note:* as of January, 2012, changes to Kansas law require inclusion of one of the following kinds of ID when advance voting by mail: full Kansas driver's license number, full Kansas non-driver ID card or a copy of one of the forms of ID required for voting at the polls. In addition, under the new law, if you want your ballot to be transmitted by another individual, you must request it in writing and sign a form affirming that you have not been subjected to undue influence, and finally, the County Election Office must verify your signature before accepting your ballot.





Attention Members:

The Topeka Shawnee County League Finance Drive is starting. The League needs your support. You know how active we are in this community.

In order to carry out these activities we need funds. Our local League receives only \$5.00 of the regular yearly dues paid by each member. Whatever additional contribution you can provide will help the League meet the need for an informed electorate and voter registration in our community.

You have or will be receiving a letter regarding the need for funds. Please contribute what you can.

Thank you so much for your participation in the Topeka Shawnee County League.

Nancy Wagner
Finance, Chair

To insure we are able to continue providing services in this area we need funds.

Welcome to New League Members

Look at our membership grow! We have lots of great new members because you have been telling your friends of our mission and you are asking them to become a part of this work. Please continue to invite people to join the League. We can accomplish so much more with interested and committed members! Thank you.

Teresa Stambaugh Membership Chair

New Member 2011

Resa Boydston (April)

Mary and Ken Kerle (April)

Mary Galligan (May)

Sandra Powell (May)

Margaret Gatewood (May)

James McHenry (May)

Linda Williams (June)

Ginny Dowell (August)

Shelley Bulkley (August)

Marty Frisbie (August)

Grace Patterson (September)

Cora Spencer (September)

Alice Wurtz (October)



Education Commissioner Sees Common Standards Coming

By Grace L. Wilson



Dr. Diane DeBacker, Kansas Commissioner of Education

Dr. Diane DeBacker, Kansas Commissioner of **Education, addressing the League's September Tuesday Topics meeting**, said that ideally every student graduating in Kansas should have a High School diploma and one industry-recognized certified designation. That was a goal she mentioned during her presentation about common core standards and changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act when it comes up for renewal.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) took effect in 2005-2006 during the George W. Bush administration, which affects how education is structured in classrooms. Every [federal] administration puts their twist on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). With NCLB, all states had to put in core standards in to meet Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP], and 50 states ended up with 50 different sets of standards. Now several years into NCLB, DeBacker said, this seems even crazier than it did in the beginning.

Obviously, federal involvement in education is politically connected. With a new administration and Arne Duncan as Secretary of Education, DeBacker said, there has been some new thinking. The National Governors Association and the Chief State School Officers (of which DeBacker is a member) decided to support a process to compare the core standards of the states in

Math and English/Language Arts and also compare them with international education standards.

Only Texas and Alaska declined to be a part of the group. So representatives of the other 48 **states "threw [their standards] all out on the table" and determined what they thought was good**, then internationally benchmarked them with the desire to help the United States be a leader in the world.

It was up to each state whether to adopt the core standards agreed upon by the states. In Kansas, educational standards are approved by the state board of education where they need six out of ten votes to pass them. The Kansas board of **education said "Yes" to the common core standards**. Forty states have adopted these standards.

Some states have to take this to the legislature [groans from the audience]. Happily our board of education makes those decisions in Kansas, DeBacker said. That leaves local control in place. **"We are proud of that," she said. The common core standards are to be implemented by August of 2013 and the assessment process in place in 2014.**

"Switching to new standards will be very difficult," Debacker said. "It's a big change and very stressful." She said that there was nothing new in the concepts covered in math and language arts. Where things are placed grade-wise may be changed. Typically the standards were to be met at a lower grade level not up. It will take time for the principal and for the local superintendent and school board, for instance, to purchase different materials. It will take time, cause anxiety, and cost some money as things are rearranged, but it is not going to cost hundreds and thousands of dollars.

The next effort to establish common core standards may be attempted in science. A privately-

funded organization, Achieve, Inc. hopes to begin a process to establish the next generation of science standards. Kansas has applied to be involved early in this process and DeBacker expected Kansas to be one of the states selected for this.

No Child Left Behind is set to expire in 2013-2014 and DeBacker said she expects it to expire on its own and not be renewed as it presently exists. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act will likely take a different form after the presidential election in 2013, when there should be a clearer agenda. DeBacker said she believed that the specific AYP targets that were required to be met will be gone from the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and a "growth model" put in place.**

She said how sad it was when a school improved from 30% to 60%, but because they did not reach 80%, they got zero credit for that growth, in spite of enormous efforts with tutoring and before and after school programs.

With new standards, new assessment tools will **be needed. "This is a good thing," DeBacker said. "One test on one day does not determine what a kid knows. It doesn't tell whether it's a good or bad school." She said the assessments should be on more than one day and more performance-based; not just multiple choice, but perhaps a project.**

The core standards will not be a national curriculum. The books, pacing and so forth will have to be determined individually by the 286 school districts in Kansas. Right now, there are 286 teacher evaluation systems. DeBacker said she thinks that when ESEA is reauthorized, the states may have common evaluation standards,

some part of which will be determined by student achievement.

Until the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is renewed, we cannot know what the outcome may be. Some have suggested that the common core standards be voluntary, but to be sure that the process transparent. So far all these efforts have been grass roots, not top down.

In response to audience questions, DeBacker suggested the writings of Linda Darling Hammond and Diane Ravish. Apparently, DeBacker said, Hammond is well-respected by educators and the Obama administration, and Ravish was formerly a supporter of NCLB, but now is not in favor of what is happening.

One questioner wanted to know what was being done to foster the employability of students not going to college. DeBacker said she thought that all students need the same level of math, communications and reading for jobs out of high school that college-bound students need. What students often do not have, DeBacker said, are job skills like: Initiative, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Communication Skills, or Being on Time. **"When were they last assessed for that!"**

DeBacker said Smuckers, one of the best run companies in the United States, has said, **"We do not hire for *aptitude*. We hire for *attitude*."** They say they can teach what else they need to know to do the job.

Instead of blaming just the parents for poor student outcomes, DeBacker said, we need to heed **Hillary Clinton's concept that "It Takes a Village."**

Interim Superintendent Speaks about Federal Funding for USD #501



By Grace L. Wilson

Interim #501 superintendent, Julie Ford, spoke at the October Tuesday Topics. She said she has been enjoying every minute of being superintendent for #501. She has tried to walk through every school once a month. At one school the

Julie Ford, Interim #501 superintendent

students asked her what her goals were as interim superintendent. Someone asked her if she was stressed or worried.

Ford said "No, we are in the second year of a strategic plan. A lot of superintendents walk into a district without a plan." The goals of the plan fall into five categories: Family and community engagement, student performance, teaching and learning, human resources and infrastructure.

"This district is so organized and focused," Ford said. The main reason for educating students is to prepare them for citizenship and to be productive in the future, she said. One of her goals is to be out there telling people about the good things that are happening. She praised an outstanding staff and active parents.

Programs causing some excitement include the Topeka High School Chinese language program with 75 students; they plan to offer Chinese II second semester. French Middle School has been awarded a technology grant. Highland Park High School has a new robotics program.

Ford talked about what she thought was good about federal funding, what was challenging, and how school districts have come to depend on it. With all federal funding, there must be assurances that the district will use the money in a certain way. It takes a lot of time and paperwork to comply and the rules change a little each year. While districts need to be accountable for federal dollars, she would like less paper and more streamlining to get it done faster.

A grant that was "backfilling" for special education is no longer going to be there. Other Title I money is now gone. Federal money does not all come from the U.S. Department of Education, but from four different departments.

The child nutrition funds come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture **"and do they have rules!" Ford said. In order to receive the funding, the district has to do a census showing the number of students at the poverty level, so they can be reimbursed for the breakfast and lunch program for 14,000 students a day.**

If the district does not use all the money, it must be returned, so they need to keep track of all free and reduced meals used. They have to start over the next year with a new application process **which takes up to 30 days for approval.** "You know you're going to be monitored; there are a lot of strings attached," Ford said, "and if your paperwork is incorrect, you lose the opportunity to reclaim that lunch." **This requires a lot of staff and technical time, plus the federal calendar year is different.**

The Indian education program receives federal funds and has two employees tutoring and connecting students with community resources. The district must re-enroll parents every year and always be checking records.

Headstart funding comes from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Ford said she likes Headstart under the auspices of the school district. She had been in districts where Headstart was separate. Having Headstart with #501, means there can be pre-school expectations before the students enter kindergarten and the opportunity to make the transition smoother.

The U.S. Department of Education overseas state flow-through grants, including Title programs for school improvement and to provide equity for low-income students. The district has to choose which schools are Title schools, starting from those with the most poverty to the least. District #501 could almost count all schools for Title funds, but they choose to concentrate on elementary schools and the most needy middle schools.

With Title funds the district can hire teachers to reduce class size, hire reading teachers, and do parent in-service. **"It is a great asset," Ford said, "and we are getting accustomed to having it."**

Once the district takes the funds, if schools then have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two years in a row, they have to write an improvement plan for review. The bar has been going up toward 2014, and more and more schools in the nation are on **"improvement," yet most districts still have the same amount of dollars.** Ford said that urban districts and the largest districts have the most schools or sub-groups on improvement and a lot of challenges, compared to the small, non-diverse districts.

Highland Park High School applied for a very complicated grant and will be receiving \$2 million per year for three years. In addition to the new robotics program, they have a newly upgraded security system and uniforms in the lower grades. Ford said Highland Park was one of her favorite places to visit.

Then there is Title IIA, with rules but no money. This includes restrictions on who can be hired, in other words, highly qualified teachers. **Because Kansas has "always played by the rules," Ford said, becoming compliant was not as difficult.** For instance, you cannot teach special education K-12, if you are only certified K-6. Or a high school coach certified only in social studies cannot teach

physical education. A biology certified teacher cannot teach physics or chemistry.

Ford said we should want not just highly qualified, but highly effective teachers who are measured according to student growth [beginning of the year to the end], not just achievement level. A group is starting to work on a teacher evaluation system – a model a school district *could* use that is being piloted. In Kansas every district has a different teacher evaluation system. Having worked in a state where every district had the same evaluation system, Ford said she could see some advantages to having familiarity district to district

There is a small pot of federal funds for English Language Learners. There is some money for migrant students. This program takes a lot of staffing, outreach, and goes to age 21. The state ends up sending back money which can only be for programs serving migrant students – not for both migrant students and English Language Learners.

For Special Education in #501, there are 350 certified teachers and 350 paraprofessionals. Oklahoma provides funds for all students to go to pre-school at age four. Ford said the district has special education students with some very severe needs. The state was trying to cut back funds for special education and the federal government said that if that happened, they would take away the federal dollars forever. Ford said she would favor more money for the Carl Perkins Vocational Technical Education Act, but the federal dollars there are pretty much gone.

Ford said the No Child Left Behind had done some good things for education, but had pretty much run its course. States can now apply for a waiver, but must come up with their own accountability system. After all, 83 percent achievement is not failing, Ford said, and sometimes it is just sub-groups that are below AYP. One option the Kansas State Board of Education is **considering is holding steady with last year's numbers, instead of planning to reach 100 percent in 2014.**

Ford said we should be talking about a new accreditation system that looks at more than a test, a system that might give a district points for health meals, physical education, a high quality safety plan, and career and technical plans.

LWVUS Privatization Study

Would You Like to Join the Study Committee?

The purpose of the National LWV Privatization Study is to identify those parameters and policy issues to be considered in connection with proposals to transfer federal, state or local government services, assets and/or functions to the private sector. It will review the stated goals and the community impact of such transfers, and identify strategies to ensure transparency, accountability, and preservation of the common good.

The study committee will provide a history and background of privatization, a glossary of terms, legal issues to be considered when privatizing at different levels of government, current state regulations on privatizing and case studies on successful and unsuccessful privatizing efforts. Finally, the committee will provide suggested policies and parameters to be considered when privatizing.

The timeline is: October, 2011, information to be provided to local Leagues.

November 2011 to May 2012 – Leagues are encouraged to participate in the study on Privatization of Government Services, Assets and Functions, and the impact on local communities by scheduling meetings to educate members and communities about the issue and come to consensus. Study materials are now posted on the LWVUS website, lwv.org. Other recommended reading includes:

1. The Meaning of Privatization, Paul Starr, Yale Law and Policy Review 6 (1988) 6-41
2. Privatization: A Seattle League Study
3. Government Privatization: History, Examples, and Issues

Call Marge Ahrens at 232-1947 if you are interested in the issue or just want a great experience being part of a LWV study committee!



League Urges Lobbying Disclosure for Members of Deficit Reduction Committee

The League and coalition partners sent a letter to members of the [Committee on Deficit Reduction](#) (Super Committee) urging them to take steps immediately to voluntarily disclose the efforts of outside interests to lobby them on matters related to the business of the committee.

Redistricting: Justice Department Aligns with League on TX Redistricting

Following last week's submission of an LWVUS/LWVTX comment letter urging the Department of Justice to object to Texas's congressional redistricting plan, the Department indicated Monday that it believes the plan fails to comply with requirements set forth by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. The League in Texas and other key states will continue to stand up for the rights of minority voters as the redistricting process wraps up across the country.

League Concerned about the Delay of Pollution Regulation

The League and coalition groups sent a letter to the White House expressing deep concern that the Environmental Protection Agency will not meet its commitment to propose long overdue Clean Air Act standards limiting dangerous carbon pollution from new and existing power plants.

Elections: Federal Judge Upholds Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act

In a significant ruling, a federal judge upheld section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires states with a history of voter suppression to seek approval before implementing changes to their voting laws. The past year has demonstrated the need for such continued oversight – multiple legislatures implemented voter photo ID and proof of citizenship requirements as a prerequisite to voting as well as shortening early voting periods and attacking Election Day registration.

Privatization Study

LWVUS study to identify those parameters & policy issues to be considered in connection with proposals to transfer federal, state or local government services, assets or functions to the private sector. And to identify strategies to ensure transparency, accountability, & the common good. What is happening in your local community or state with regard to transferring some government services to the private sector?



Topeka City Council

October 11, 2011

Statement of the League of Women Voters of Topeka-Shawnee County

The League of Women Voters supports the active role of government and social institutions in preventing violent behavior and the allocation of public monies in government programs to prevent violence. We support the position of NOW and other advocacy groups who have long fought for the protection of women, men and children from the effects of domestic violence. The idea of eliminating the Topeka law making domestic violence a crime in Topeka is unthinkable.

City and County elected officials have a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable. That value supersedes the value of cost cutting. But Federal and State monies previously shared with local governments have been drying up or given away in income tax cuts and sales tax exemptions for years. Local governments have only local sales tax and property tax to **look to pay our residents' bills. Both forms of taxation are regressive.** There is no city/county planning body, or unified government which would require the community as a whole to weigh priorities and plan to protect basic civil rights such as the availability of court services. Separately city and county governments do their best to meet separate taxing and budget constraints which largely affect the same people. They compete for shrunken monies.

The issue of prosecuting domestic violence cases shows us that intergovernmental competition for limited funds could cost lives. The League of Women Voters of Topeka-Shawnee County requests that the Topeka City Council work instead in collaboration with the Shawnee County Commissioners regarding unified planning, administration and government to give structure to the provision and protection of basic rights and services. We need an appointed County Administrator and budget planning process which eliminates time lost in turf protection. It is all our turf. It is one community that knows how to protect the vulnerable. We need to organize to do it.

Marge Ahrens,

President



Reflections on the Proceedings of the Topeka City Council (submitted by Joe Sargent)

This article deals with the period from early August, 2011 to early October, 2011.

A correction from the last reflection is necessary. By state law **the city's 2012 budget must be finalized and certified by the county clerk, not by the city clerk, by August 25th, 2011**

Once again Topeka is in the national news. The council on October 11th was scheduled to vote on repealing a portion of the city code banning domestic violence. How we got to this point is an interesting saga. It started with a request by the Shawnee County Commission on January 6th for county elected officers and departmental heads to review their 2011 budgets and see where they could reduce their expenses by ten percent. District attorney Taylor then sent a letter to the commission starting that a ten percent cut in revenue would prevent him from carrying out his statutory duties. On August 18th the commission looked at reducing its 2012 budget by ten percent and the district attorney responded that a cut would force him to stop prosecuting misdemeanors in Topeka involving domestic violence. These cases would then be handled by the City Municipal Court. The commission voted on August 25th to make the contemplated ten percent cuts in its 2012 budget.

On September 8th the district attorney officially announced that his department would no longer prosecute misdemeanors occurring in Topeka, dealing with domestic battery, and the city interim manager Stanley quickly responded that the city court system was not prepared to do this. Stanley on September 20th presented the council several courses of action, one of which was the repeal of the city ordinance banning battery. This action would force the district attorney to prosecute these cases because such cases under state law fall under his jurisdiction

Other options that the interim city manager considered included seeking an opinion from the Kansas attorney general about whether the district attorney can unilaterally decide not to take these cases, negotiating an agreement by which the city would pay some of the costs for the district attorney to handle these cases or pursuing a period of transition during which the city would gear up to handle these cases at an estimated cost between \$600,000 to \$1 million. The district attorney offered to review for prosecution all misdemeanors of domestic battery committed in the city as required by Kansas statutes in lieu a one time payment for \$350,000. The council on October 11th faced a dilemma. After much debate and public testimony, including the president of the local League of Women Voters (Marge Ahrens), the council voted seven to three to repeal the ordinance. The next day the district attorney decided to resume prosecution of misdemeanors of domestic battery in Topeka.

Final approval of the city budget by the council occurred on

August 16th by an eight to two vote. The 2012 budget will contain no increase in the mill levy. However, Stanley pointed out **that there are problems ahead. The city's employee health insurance will develop a negative balance in 2012 and will face a possible deficit of \$1.7 million at the end of 2012. Other problems are the city's aging fleet of cars, particularly police vehicles, and the increasing cost of repairing water mains due to the increased number of breaks.**

The funding of the Topeka Performing Arts Center (TPAC) in the city 2012 budget continued to remain at its 2011 level (\$187,500). TPAC had requested \$250,000 for 2012 Audit reports from 2007-2009 indicated that loss of city funding could have adverse affects on its operations. There has been speculation of its possible closure.

The board of the Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority raised the bus fares as of October 1st because of the loss of \$750,000 in federal funding or 30% of their budget. For example as to how it will affect riders, now an adult rider will pay \$2 instead of \$1.25 for a single ride.

Former county commissioner Vic Miller was sworn in as the Topeka Municipal Court administrative judge on September 12th. He was appointed to this position by the interim city manager.

Recently workers from the Topeka Parks and Recreation Department have raised concerns about reductions in pay and even possible loss of jobs with the merger between the county and city Parks and Recreation Departments. Now, a merger between the **Topeka police and the county's sheriff department is under consideration.**

Since the proceedings of the Joint Economic Development Organization (JEDO) are now televised, there is more transparency in the conduct of its business. To continue this trend of openness, a proposal to open the bidding of the services that Go Topeka (a private entity connected with the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce) now provides was made by council person Gray, a member of JEDO.



Notes by Georgia Sandlin



Shawnee County Commission Meetings

August 18, 2011 –

This observer was a few minutes late to the meeting but did make it in time to hear Joseph Ledbetter's requests regarding the annexation of the Kanza property to the City of Topeka. This annexation was under 'Unfinished Business' and passed 3-0 after amended to include streets adjacent to the property.

Several items of business that may of interest to League members were conducted before the elephant in the room the UB (Ugly Budget).

First, the Health Agency is, once again, requesting to fill the vacant physician position due to resignation. Second, a 25 year contract that rents space at the Law Enforcement Center to the county for \$1 was approved. What a deal! This space includes the Sheriff's Department, dispatch and the coroner's office. Third, commissioners looked closely at the monthly report from Stacey Woolington, Audit/Finance, to see if departments have enough money in their accounts to finish the fiscal year. Fourth, commissioners passed 3-0 the resolution for a one year suspension on step increases for county payroll. Fifth, John Knight reported on progress made in consolidation of the parks and recreation departments.

UB (Ugly Budget) business proceeded with commissioners emphasizing more than once that proposals are not final yet. Most department budget were cut 10%. The coroner's office was cut by 50%. Commissioner Miller stated that the coroner's office may need **"reorganization"**. **The Shawnee County Coroner does work** for some surrounding counties that do not have a coroner. All departments have not been covered in this UB process.

August 22, 2011 –

There was standing room only at the commission meeting this morning. Two residents of Reading, KS came to thank the people of Shawnee County for helping after Reading was hit by a tornado in May. After this ceremony regular business was conducted with **few questions or comments until the "Discussion of the 2012 budget"**. **Commissioner Miller called a recess to adjourn to an Executive session** so the crowd waited.

Since the pattern has been cuts to each department of 10% or more some department heads and elected officials reported to the commission why they could not function with the proposed reduction.

Judge Nancy Parrish reported that many of the court's expenses were controlled by statute, such as pay for jurors and appointed defense attorneys.

The coroner Eric Mitchell reported that the county would lose an opportunity to make money if the coroner's office was not able to do work for other counties.

Sheriff Barta reported that 89% of his budget is personnel and that gas prices are rising.

Philicia McKee, Keep America Beautiful, reported the money that KAB saved for the county and suggested they be funded by recycle revenues.

County Treasurer, Larry Wilson, reported that it would be very difficult to operate with a 20% cut.

And so on...

The goal is to get to a \$4.4 million carry over at the end of the year.

Before adjournment Commissioner Miller announced a special meeting for more work on the budget the following Wednesday at 9:00 am.

August 25, 2011 –

Commissioner Miller read a letter of apology from Sheriff Richard **Barta at the beginning of today's meeting. The sheriff had expressed his frustration with the cut in his budget implying the Commission was not sensitive to the safety of the citizens of the county. The commissioners accepted the apology, praised the sheriff, expressed their regrets that budgets items had to be cut.**

Steve Bolton, Solid Waste, has been charged with the clean-up of the old Shawnee County landfill. KDHE mandated this **clean-up. The Sheriff's Department used the area for a firing range.** Today Mr. Bolton requested approval for the first part of the **cleanup plan. The Sheriff's department is contributing \$50,000** to help with the cleanup. The commissioners asked for reassurance that the funds the Sheriff was contributing came from the forfeiture fund. The commissioners and sheriff have a history of **disagreeing on how sheriff's funds are spent.**

Each Thursday Shawnee County Commission meeting John Knight is instructed to report on the progress made in the consolidation of city/county parks and recreation departments. Today Mr. Knight reported that they have divided the issues to be addressed before and after Jan. 1 2012. Commissioner Miller asked for a list of the issues.

In spite of the request of some citizens (one spoke at the commission meeting) Commissioners Ensley and Miller approved the **appointment of "Taco Al" (Al Ward) to the unexpired term as Mission Township Trustee.** Commissioner Buhler moved for a 2 week time frame to consider other people.

At the end of the meeting Commissioners Miller and Ensley approved the budget and raised the county property tax levy by about 2.14 mills. Commissioner Buhler dissented because she thought there were still other options to consider before raising taxes.

August 29, 2011

Commissioners approved a contract with TARC with conditions for the Winter Wonderland Celebration of Lights. They also approved the appointment of John Knight, the current Director of the Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Department, to be the Director of the (combined) Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Departments. That was the happy business.

Then the commissioners heard the reports of damage to county properties from the hail storm of May 21. According to the county's insurance provider, there was more than \$325,000 damage to Shawnee County structures.

September 1, 2011

All the commissioners have reported that they have been "inundated" with requests from people interested in serving on The Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. All appointments have not been made at this time.

On the agenda was a request to issue "Request for Proposals" for District Coroner services to begin January 10, 2012. County Coroner Donald Pojman appeared before the commission to ask (plead) that they do not open the field to other entities. Mr. Pojman reported that he had submitted a budget that was within the confines of the money the commission had designated. He reported that they were likely to lose employees who loved their jobs but would be forced to seek other employment to be ensured of an income. Two other employees and the Topeka police chaplain echoed Mr. Pojman's arguments. The commissioners voted to defer the decision to issue RFP's for one week.

Commissioner Miller announced his intentions for another consolidation: that of the Topeka Police Department and the County Sheriff's Department. He stated he was not seeking any action or discussion at this time. The LWVTSC does have a position on the consolidation of law enforcement in Shawnee County.

September 8, 2011

We had a couple of bombs dropped on us at this meeting. At the beginning of the meeting Commissioner Miller asked the other commissioners to add to the agenda a letter to the District Attorney that listed duties required by law that County Treasurer has neglected to perform. The letter asks that District Attorney investigate the complaints and initiate ouster proceedings if necessary.

That action produced a somber atmosphere.

The commissioners then announced that no action would be taken regarding the coroner's office so business as usual was the result.

After some business that included accepting and soliciting bids and the refinancing of bonds, the commissioners approved the letter to District Attorney Taylor.

At the end of the meeting, the second bomb dropped. Commissioner Miller asked the clerk, Cindy Beck, to read his resignation from the commission, effective September 12. That action produced a stunned atmosphere.

September 12, 2011

The business of the Shawnee County Commission was conducted with two commissioners due to the resignation of Vic Miller last week. Business was routine. The two commissioners approved the requests to fill vacancies at the Health Agency. They agreed to solicit bids for resurfacing the gymnasium floor at the Juvenile Detention Center and they agreed to award bids for carts for trash pickup

The first reading of a resolution that allows a law enforcement

officer to issue a ticket to the owner of an animal that displays vicious behavior was presented. Currently the law requires officers to issue a warning in the first incident. There were no comments regarding this resolution today.

September 15, 2011

The resolution allowing law enforcement to issue a ticket to owners of animals displaying dangerous behavior was approved first.

Two items on the agenda caught the attention of the counselor's office resulting with action from the county counselor. The first was a bid for excavating work. Herman's Excavating had the low bid but after seeing the other bids wanted to withdraw the bid and submit another for \$10,000 more. Rich Eckert recommended that the county award the bid to the next lowest bidder to prevent companies from using the tactic of withdrawing the original bid and resubmitting a bid when they see the other bids. The commissioners agreed and awarded the bid to Emerson

The second item will result in negotiations between a committee representing the county and Waste Management. What started as a bidding process ended with one company standing to establish a facility for recyclable materials. Mr. Eckert suggested that negotiating a contract with Waste Management made more sense. The commissioners agreed.

September 19, 2011

The county is operating with two commissioners since the resignation of Vic Miller. There was very little business to conduct this morning.

The Parks and Recreation Department presented some routine items for approval. They gained approval for a contract for engineering and surveying services for the Dick and Dotty Hanger Family Preserve. They gained approved for the purchase of tulips. And they gained approval of a contract for the Kansas Special Olympics Polar Plunge.

The Health Agency gained approval of a contract for physician services and an application for Public Health Mini-Grants.

Gary Ross was appointed to the Civil Service Board.

A brief meeting.

September 22, 2011

The meeting opened with another example of City/County cooperation. The commissioners approved an agreement with the City of Topeka to connect the Health Agency to the city's fiber optic line. The county had previously planned on a contract with Torgeson Electric for over \$5,000.

Commissioner Ensley reported that he would be very happy to **inform a citizen that "Yes," the county would award her claim for damages.** Apparently, he had already received numerous calls on the subject.

Shawnee Treasurer Larry Wilson brought the news to the commissioner that has been anticipated for months. Space for an **annex for the treasurer's office has been located at 5938 SW 17th.** The owner of the space, Beverly Bernardi Post, was present to take questions. The commissioners acknowledged the news but did not express enthusiasm on the location.

Continued from page 11

Cuts in the budget continue to effect changes in organization. Rich Davis resigned his position as Director of Human Resources and Facilities Management Department. The next item on the agenda was the resolution to consolidate departments. Commissioner Ensley did not want to consider this consolidation with only two commissioners so it was deferred.

September 26, 2011

County Treasurer Larry Wilson, once again, brought a list of delinquent personal property tax accounts with a request they be referred to a collection agency. This time the two commissioners approved the request with the assurance of Mr. Wilson that his staff would continue to check to see if property taxes were paid before tags were issued.

Barry Beagle, Planning, has been working on the nationwide change of flood maps and related regulations. The process started in 2007. The county adoption of the resolution creating the districts on the new maps allows county residents to qualify for federal assistance. The commissioners approved this resolution today. Mr. Beagle spent many hours preparing for these changes, including holding meetings throughout the county to inform citizens of the changes. The commissioners recognized his hard work with a ,**“Well done”**.

September 29, 2011

Mary Thomas was sworn in as Shawnee County Commissioner this morning. A very brief meeting followed.

The commissioners agreed to provide \$76,000 to the City of Topeka to buy out a lease-purchase agreement with Billy Casper Golf. This action provides options for the county, without monetary penalties, regarding the relationship with Billy Casper. Rich Eckert, county counselor, indicated the county has not yet decided on the future management of Cypress Ridge Golf Course.

October 3, 2011

The resolution regarding the consolidation of Shawnee County departments returned to the agenda this morning under **“Unfinished Business”**. **After an executive session lasting 20 minutes** the commissioners quickly approved the plan to place the human resources department under the county counselor's office and the facilities management with the park and recreation department.

When Allison Alejos, health agency, brought a contract with a lawn service before the commission instead of approving the contract they asked that she investigate the possibility of having the county parks and recreation department do the required maintenance.

The Wannamaker Road project between SW 53rd and SW 61st Streets will be completed this week, according to Tom Vlach, public works; a relief to all in the neighborhood. A flashing red light will be transferred from that area on Wannamaker to the intersection at SW 29th and SW Auburn. Even though it is a flat and highly visible area accidents occur more often than they should.

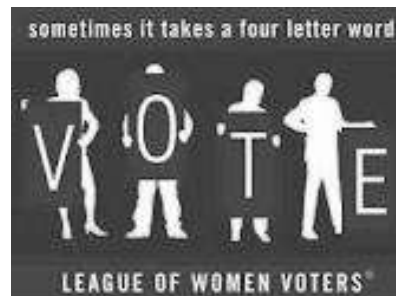
October 6, 2011

This morning's meeting proceeded at a steady pace with approvals for routine requests with very few questions or drama. The commissioners approved six contracts for the health agency. Purchases were approved for the Expocentre, and the elections office. Out-of-state travel was approved for the solid waste department. John Knight reported that the consolidation of the parks and recreation departments is going smoothly, listing the steps that were taken during the past week.

The drama began when Kari Ann Rinker, of NOW, spoke before the commission. She stepped up to the microphone with her black pin-striped suit and jet black hair and commanded **everyone's attention with her emotional plea for an end of the suspension of the prosecution of domestic violence cases in Shawnee County.** She reported that she had spoken to individual council members and a representative of the DA's office. She reported each is placing the blame on another entity. **The commissioner's did the same. Commissioner Buhler stated they had no say as to where the DA places his priorities.** Commissioner Ensley was obviously moved when Ms Rinker held up a picture of a friend and colleague who was killed by her abusive **boyfriend. Ensley pointed out that the DA's budget is not reduced until 2012 and perhaps they could find solution if he would continue to take cases until then.** Ms Rinker called for a meeting between city council, county commission and DA representatives to solve the problem. I predict that elected officials will continue to hear about this problem, as they should. Abusers will not be taking a break as the powers-that-be sort things out.

Intergovernmental Co-operation Commission, September 20

The group consists of school, local government, and community leaders. Much of the discussion centered around the recently passed City/ County consolidation. Those present had facilitated the change, and they shared documents from many previous attempts to consolidate. An Emergency Planning leader said that the entrenched culture, as well as pay scales, might make it more difficult to consolidate police and fire departments. Other discussion was about the changes in health insurance, the costs, and how to plan for it.



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Board Briefs

By Lea Billinger, secretary



September 13, 2011 LWV Board meeting at the library, 11 board members were present.

The Membership Event held at the Eclectic in the NOTO Arts District was a big success. Thanks and praise for Teresa Stambaugh, who organized it.

The possibility of getting a Power Point projector was discussed. It would be useful for meetings away from the library.

Five of our members attended the LWVUS Leadership Training in Manhattan in August. Reports were very positive. Through **this process, we have available for our League a "coach" from the Wichita LWV.**

Kansas University has planned a forum on redistricting at TSCPL for January 31. They have invited LWVTSC to co-sponsor this event, at no cost to us. K.U. has invited panelists, and professors from K.U. will also participate. We plan to publicize.

Liz Post, member of LWVKS Board, is working on planning for the State League Day September 24.

Sybil Wiegman, treasurer, reported that there are some delinquent dues. We want to avoid paying the per-member cost to State and National for people who do not wish to rejoin. Teresa Stambaugh will contact the members.

Next board meeting will be October 11 at noon, TSCPL.

October 11, 2011 LWV Board meeting at the library, 11 board members were present.

Marge Ahrens will attend tonight's City Council meeting and speak about the domestic violence ordinance, and the prosecution of those cases.

Plans for the Legislative Issues Tuesday Topics November 1 are being finalized. Two legislators have already accepted. There was discussion of inviting school officials, or possibly other groups and organizations. Last year, we had press coverage and we hope to have that again.

Liz Post is developing a tri-fold summary of the information

learned through the City/ County Finance Study. This will be available to all.

Much is being done to register voters before the new Voter ID law makes it more difficult. Anita is working with KNEA to hold registrations at school events, including sports events.

Some time ago Grace Wilson donated many things with the history of our League to the Historical Society. These things can be accessed or checked out. There is a gap between the last VOTER that she donated and the present. If you have older VOTERS, please talk to Grace.

There was discussion of publicity for the forum on redistricting that we will co-sponsor with K.U. January 31.

The LWVTSC fund-drive letter will soon be mailed; watch for yours.

Next board meeting will be November 8 at noon, TSCPL.



The League of Women Voters provides the mechanism for the election of a mayor and deputy mayor at the Lowman Hill Elementary School. We provide for voter registration, a mayoral guide as to procedures for the mayoral election for the teachers and staff, the training of mayoral candidates, conduct the primary and general election.

The general election was held on September 20th. Jocelyn Mercer was elected mayor and Jose Paredes was elected deputy mayor. Mayor Bill Bunten did the swearing into office of the two candidates. Voter turnout was over 95%. Two television stations provided coverage for the event.

My thanks to the following League members who provided support for this important public education event.

Jan Waide, Maryanna Quilty, June Windscheffel, JoAnn Myers, Alta Morris, Gwen Elliot, Georgia Sandlin, Diana Siegal, Carol Yoho, Linda Williams, Anita Epps, Nancy Sargent, Ken Kerle and Dottie Harder.

The total volunteer time for this project was 70 hours.

Bob Harder

LWVTSC Board

Marge Ahrens, President,
Maryanna Quilty, President Elect,
Lea Billinger, Secretary,
Sybil Wiegman, Treasurer,
Grace Wilson, Tuesday Topics,
Teresa Stambaugh, Membership,
Nancy Wagner, Finance Drive,
Liz Post, Action,
June Windscheffel, Observer Corps,
Anita Epps, Voter Service,
Georgia Sandlin, Publications,
Gwen Elliot, Special Arrangements,
Peggy Hinck, VOTER editor,

We're on the WEB !
<http://www.lwvtsc.org>



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS TOPEKA SHAWNEE COUNTY
Peggy Hinck, VOTER Editor
3722 NE Kincaid Rd
Topeka KS 66617-3625



I want to add my voice to yours by joining the League of Women Voters. I enclose

_____ \$53 for a 1 year Individual Membership

_____ \$75 for a 1 year Household Membership

_____ \$85 for a 1 year Sustaining Membership

_____ \$25 for a 1 year Student (age 18) Membership

I am unable to join the League at this time, but enclosed is a tax-deductible contribution in the amount of \$_____

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Please make check payable to: **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS TOPEKA SHAWNEE COUNTY**

Mail to: Teresa Stambaugh, Membership, 4608 SE Oak Bend Dr., Berryton, Ks, 66409