

Prior to announcing our speaker for Tuesday Topics on September 7, President Carole Jordan made several important announcements and reminded members and guests that we are a non-partisan organization that advocates for active participation in government and for making voting available to everyone. We do not pretend to be election officials.

On September 28, from 6 to 8 p.m., the LWV, JUMP and the YWCA advocacy committee are hosting a virtual candidate forum for November election municipal candidates.

On October 5 the League will hold their Books, Bags and Beyond fundraiser at Judy Moler's home.

Richie McDaneld announced voter education for Shawnee County high schools is fully staffed and up and running. The first program was held at Seaman High School. Presenters opened the program with the statement they were not election officials. No voter registration forms were handed out.

Mary Galligan said voter services is focusing on local elections and low voter turnout. She said the legislature will enact a redistricting plan in the 2022 sessions. Public hearings were held in various Kansas cities but not in Topeka. Organizations are encouraged to hold redistricting meetings focusing on what they want to see in the redistricting plan.

October 12th is the last day to register to vote either for advanced in-person or mail-in ballot. Election Day is November 7, 2021, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Vickie Arnett announced Observer Corps needs volunteers for City Council, County Commission and some school boards. Observers ensure meetings are open, transparent, and follow guidelines.

Rules for the meeting: Questions should be put into Chat, audio should be muted, and video may be on or off as the participant prefers. Carole introduced our speaker, Melissa Stiehler, Loud Light Advocacy Director, and described her many jobs that have focused on democracy and voting. She has lobbied for the Affordable Care Act, worked for the ACLU, and traveled to Central America to study U.S. policy and how it influences trade agreements and corporate agriculture that impacts our neighbors and human rights.

Melissa Stiehler, Loud Light Advocacy Director

Melissa began her talk by saying voting rights in Kansas are not great. We have voter suppression. We need to make sure voters have access to voting. Focusing on youth votes, Melissa posed the question, "What is preventing young people from voting?" Student data from polls conducted in colleges and universities revealed that 60 percent of registered students in Kansas don't vote. Half said they didn't have access to a polling location. One-third said they couldn't find transportation on election day. To the question, "What can we do?" Loud Light wants polling places on every college/university campus, and the polls should be open to the public. We want evening and weekend voting two weeks before election day. (The LWV has advocated for this. Maybe we can partner.)

Fellowships allow Loud Light to hire students on college campuses. We want students to be ambassadors who can organize and advocate for early voting and polling places on campus. We want drop boxes on campuses. There are drop boxes at some colleges. Grace Wilson posed a question about getting out the vote. Melissa said every organization needs a risk assessment about what they can and cannot do. Some folks wear a "volunteer" button. Loud Light had talked about getting a tee shirt or buttons stating they were not election officials. However, such shirts make assumptions. Do people speak English? Do they know what an election officer is? Can they read and understand?

Loud Light wants not only a student campaign but a community campaign. They have asked for open records from the 105 county clerks to get a voting picture of Kansas communities. County clerks have a difficult job and are not bad actors. Loud Light is not going after local county clerks. However, some county clerks are testifying to the legislature that some unidentified "they" are busing in undocumented people to commit voter fraud. Melissa said that is clearly misinformation. Some county election commissioners are elected. In Johnson, Sedgwick, Shawnee and Wyandotte counties the election commissioner is appointed by the Secretary of State, which provides the party of the Secretary of State an advantage in establishing rules for voting in the most populous counties in Kansas.

We are waiting for the court to respond to the recent law suppressing voting that is too subjective and open to perception rather than intention. The judge did not rule on the temporary injunction so the law went into

effect in July. The entire Tuesday Topics presentation is available through the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library website.