

## TUESDAY TOPICS FEBRUARY 7, 2023

President Carole Jordan opened the meeting. She welcomed members and guests, wished everyone a Happy Valentine's Day, and announced that the LWV in 2023 is a century old. She noted that two Zoom meetings are scheduled in February: the first on February 20 on the topic of Redistricting and the second on February 27 on the Local Government Project. More notifications will be sent.

Ginger Park announced that the library is working with a consultant group on a strategic plan and a public meeting is scheduled for February 23, from 10:30 to 11:30 in The Edge at the library. She noted that no library personnel will attend.

President Jordan introduced the speaker, Andrew Howell, Shawnee County Election Commissioner, who has been in that office since 2012, when he was appointed by Kris Kobach. Previously, Mr. Howell served in the Kansas House of Representatives for several terms.

Commissioner Howell thanked the LWV for their help, noting the high voter turnout here in Shawnee County. He mentioned four handouts that were distributed to attendees. One handout was a calendar of upcoming elections for city offices and school district board members that would be on the primary ballot if at least four people file to run for a position. He pointed out that June 1 is the filing deadline. If a primary is held, the last day to register to vote is July 11 until 6 pm (if registering in person) or until 11:59 pm (if registering online). In even years voters can go to the Election Office or one of the nearly 40 registration outposts from 8 am to 7 pm to vote two weeks before election day. In odd years, the hours are from 8 am to 6 pm. Howell said they try to make it convenient for voters. At the same time, he said the Election Office trains workers at the outposts to pay attention to details to make certain they have verified all a voter's information.

Howell said the Election Office is working with a vendor on an Election Management System, noting that managing 800 election workers requires a great deal of time and effort. For the General Election in November, October 17 would be the last day to register to vote in the November General Election. Voters who register in person must bring a government issued ID.

Howell emphasized that voters can choose to cast their ballot in several ways: (1) in person at their polling place, (2) in person at the Election Office, or (3) by mail-in ballot. Voters can request a mail-in ballot two months early; Howell reminded the audience that it's important to return mail-in ballots as quickly as possible to ensure they arrive on time and that postage is paid, thanks to funding from the Shawnee County Commissioners.

Howell said that voters are not purged from the voter registration list based on zip code. If a voter has not voted for several years, their name would be purged; Howell said this was usually due to the voter's death or having moved. He said that typically about three thousand voters are purged annually.

Howell emphasized that there was a secure process for tracking ballots and ballot boxes. Every time a ballot or ballot box is moved, the receiver is required to sign a form verifying the Election Office has received it. There are several steps involved in voter verification: signature matches to ensure a voter has only voted once, batches of votes to ensure numbers on the back match, and pre-tabulation that by law doesn't allow the Election officials to look at the actual count. The vote count is a massive accounting process. After last year's election, 65,000 votes had to be recounted. Only 19 votes were off, no doubt due to a voter not following directions (e.g., not circling an answer or blackening the circle).

Many questions were asked by audience members, including one about getting some voting machines that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Others asked about weekend voting or other voting options such as having additional Election Offices in other locations. Some suggested that there should be consistency across all (105) Kansas counties, and Howell said that would be nice, but counties have their own way of doing things. Other questions dealt with how voters can find out if their mail-in ballot was received; although the Secretary of State's office has a system, it can take a while to get the answer. Commissioner Howell said he shouldn't suggest it, but a call to the

Election Office would be the quickest way to get an answer, noting that he doesn't allow the use of voicemail at the Election Office, due to concerns that some calls might get lost.

Although the entire election process is both complex and challenging, Howell said he takes his position very seriously and works hard to make certain voters have confidence in the system and that all laws pertaining to elections are scrupulously followed.