

April 22 LWVK Convention

A Day of speakers, information, sharing!

By Janice Walker, LWVK Intra-League Co-Coordinator

The 75th Biennial Convention of the League of Women Voters of Kansas was held in Wichita on April 22. Delegates attended from all nine Leagues: Emporia, Great Bend/BC, Johnson County, Lawrence/DC, Leavenworth, Manhattan/RC, Salina, Topeka/SC, and Wichita-Metro. After a welcome by Wichita City Council member, Maggie Ballard, and the first business session, the 70-plus attendees heard from our keynote speaker.

Sara Jane Crespo from radio station KMUW, introduced the *One Small Step* initiative that she has helped produce since 2020. Created by StoryCorps, *One Small Step* is an effort to remind us of the humanity in all of us, even those with whom we disagree. The initiative brings strangers with different political views together to record a 50-minute conversation — not to debate politics, but to learn who they are as people. Audio recordings of each interview are archived at the Library of Congress. Interested parties first fill out a questionnaire at <http://onesmallstep.storycorps.org/Wichita>.

After being interviewed the person is matched with a conversation partner for an in-person meeting or an online session if they are out of the Wichita area. To engage both people with curiosity and respect, there are ground rules of conduct, and these questions are asked: 1) Why did you want to do the interview today? 2) Who are you? 3) Who were your biggest influencers? 4) Describe your political values. 5) What political issue would you like to see progress on?

The results are often surprising. Participants may find that they share traumas, or similarities within their families, and may even continue their conversations after the recording is completed. Unfortunately, there is a multi-billion-dollar effort in our country to make money on hate. *One Small Step* does not strive to change people's minds about politics, but to change everyone's mind about people. You may can listen to the Wichita recordings on the Story Corps website at [Stories https://storycorps.org/stories/?location=kansas](https://storycorps.org/stories/?location=kansas)

Four Breakout Sessions were next :1) Club Express/Britten Kuckelman and Amber Stenger. 2) Navigating Burnout/ Liz Hamor. 3) Communications and Social Media Tips/Cindy Kelly and Kayla Vix. 4) Membership: Brainstorming on How to Recruit and Engage Members/Haley Matherly.

The session on Membership gave a number of ideas. First, people must know how to join the League. Then, it is important to match their skills and interests with our board positions or our focus on certain issues, e.g., reproductive health care or redistricting. The member's efforts can be either episodic or long-term. Our new *Club Express* platform can pull out information regarding new members' interests. We were also encouraged to collaborate with leadership groups at local high schools and to have

job descriptions for directors and volunteers. She suggested posting our unmet needs for members on volunteer management platforms such as www.volunteerkansas.org, [Volunteer Management Software \(betterimpact.com\)](#), and [JustServe](#). It is important for our Leagues to become more diverse as innovative ideas can come from different populations.

The final speakers were a panel of people in the media helping us to **Spot and Combat Mis-and Disinformation**. Kayla Vix, LWVUS Field Communication Senior Manager, was the moderator. The four journalists fielded a series of questions: 1) What is the news media's role? 2) How the misinformation has changed. 3) How can community groups such as the LWV partner with the media to find true information? 4) What gives you hope in the current climate?

Claudia Amaro from the *Planeta Venus* notices that young Latinos do not have access to information and do not know where to start. When they use social media, influencers shape the way people consume news, and some of that news is not true. There are few Latino news sources, and she is careful about what she shares on social media. She wants to create content that people want to read and believes a reporter will attract the right people if their values are right. She welcomes press releases as *Planeta Venus* is a small publication that translates information received into Spanish. There is a fact-checking service for Latinos that she uses. It is her hope to bring more Latinos into the digital arena and is sending copies of her publication to Dodge City.

P.J. Griekspoor with *The Community Voice* believes we are living in scary times for journalists. There are too many connections to large corporations, thus, giving a voice to the voiceless is disappearing. When the Fairness Doctrine was suspended in the mid-80s, there was no need to cover both sides of an issue anymore, so misinformation expanded, as did privately owned radio and cable TV channels. She noted that it seems the more bizarre an idea is, the more some people embrace it. Recording what a speaker says can hold them more accountable. Misinformation confuses people as to what communism, fascism, and socialism are. When current rhetoric describes people and groups as non-human, that is when people need to push back. She finds hope in the young reporters on the street who have fire in their bellies and are sharp.

As editor-in-chief of the non-profit *Kansas Reflector*, **Sherman Smith** has done extensive work in the Kansas State House. Before one writes a story, one must know who your audience is; it is not the lobbyist, but the everyday Kansans. He feels that more people are reading news stories. However, some people do not read traditional media outlets that fact-check their content, relying instead on social media platforms or blogs. Mr. Smith wishes that more groups like the League of Women Voters would partner with the media. To combat misinformation, one must be transparent with the facts and the news source. He gets up to 500 press releases a day, and he appreciates the stream of information coming in. Mr. Smith finds hope in the younger generation as he believes they are more civilly engaged, smarter, and have a better understanding of what is happening in the world.

Chance Swaim with the ***Wichita Eagle*** appreciates citizen journalists and said that we all must deconstruct how lies happen. Newsrooms used to be bigger. Now, there are not enough reporters to inform the public about what is going on. Investigative pieces help to debunk lies, but that takes time and money. People need to learn to think critically by analyzing the facts, evidence, and observations. On the internet, one can debunk lies quickly. We must speak up when someone does not have accurate information, or we see patterns of unreliable intelligence. A reporter can tape people to later review their statements. A significant amount of information/news is accessible on social media, while newspapers have a paywall to access certain information. Libraries are good places to do research and read a number of news publications at no cost. Mr. Swaim finds hope in the fact that our world is now more inclusive; while in the past it was a few rich white men who owned newspapers.

At the completion of the panel's presentation, Jacquie Lightcap presented each journalist with their own WOODEN SPOON to keep stirring up democracy as journalists have been for over 100 years!

The new LWVK board

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