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GUEST COMMENTARY

League of Women Voters can't testify this week at the Kansas Senate. What's going on? | Opinion

BY JANET MILKOVICH *SPECIAL TO THE STAR*

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The Special Committee on Elections is giving two highly partisan groups five hours to speak, while voters' rights groups are limited to written comments. *File photo illustration*



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The League of Women Voters of Johnson County has been empowering voters and defending democracy for 71 years. As a nonpartisan grassroots organization that neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate, we have long advocated for voter information and engagement and government transparency.

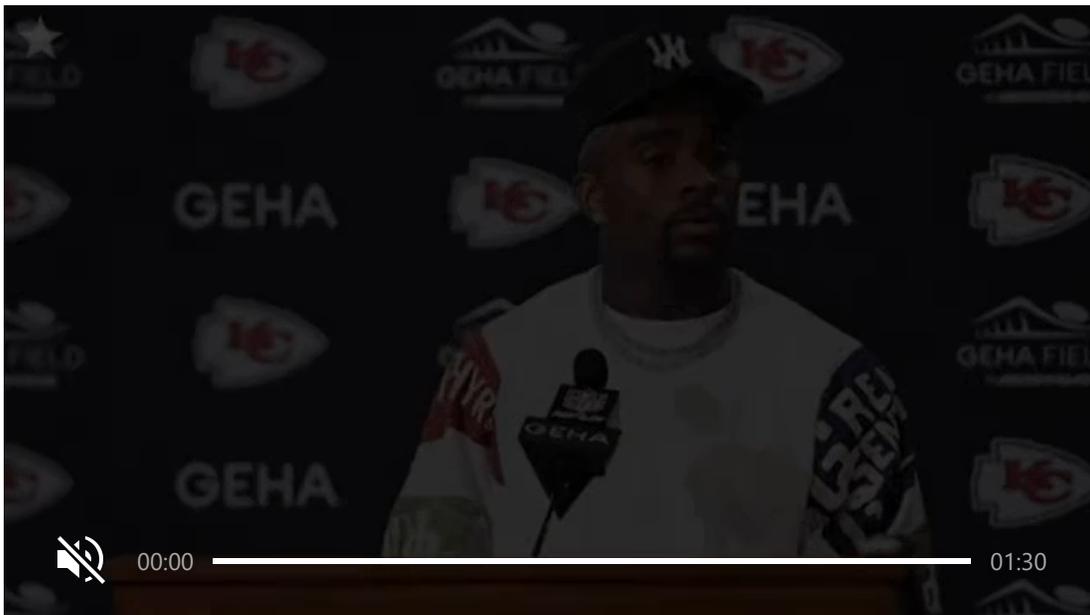
Standing on the shoulders of suffragists who demanded the right for women to vote, we are demanding the right of voter access to all residents of Kansas. If only our legislators did too. Instead, they seem intent on creating obstacles to both registering to vote and exercising the right to vote.

For example, legislation passed in the 2021-22 session (H.B. 2183 and 2332) made our efforts to register voters a crime. In the unlikely event that a League member might be mistaken for an election worker while registering voters, that member could be charged with a felony. Prior to this legislation, the nine Leagues across Kansas

registered up to 5,000 residents each year at community events. Who is registering voters now?

Recently, Johnson County Election Commissioner Fred Sherman was vilified for sending 418,000 advance mail ballot applications to active voters. The prefilled applications for a mail-in ballot request make voting more convenient for everyone, including those who reside in care centers and are unable to get to a polling place. Applications for the mail ballots for the November election have since come pouring in. Isn't that something to celebrate?

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And then there is the Kansas 2023 Special Committee on Elections, chaired by state Sen. Mike Thompson. It meets this week on Thursday and Friday. The intended purpose of select committees is to perform a particular study or investigation for a limited time period. Here's the kicker: They might be given or denied authority to report on legislation to the Kansas Senate. Regardless, they are allowed to make "well informed recommendations" about issues and bills.

How well informed can the members of any committee be when they cherry-pick who gets to provide information?

According to the [meeting agenda posted by the Kansas Legislative Research Department](#), only two groups were invited to testify at the Sept. 28 and 29 hearings. Why would [representatives from the highly partisan Foundation for Government Accountability](#) — which is not even from Kansas — and the Liberty Lions League be given nearly five hours total to testify? And why would the League of Women Voters and other voters' rights groups right here in the state be limited to submitting written testimony?

This is a concern for every Kansan who values the right and privilege of voting. Call members of the Special Committee on Elections and ask questions. Call your state senators and representatives and ask them what in the world is going on.



Want to know more? Go to kslegislature.org and use the “Find Your Legislator” tab on the left side of the homepage. Or contact the committee assistant and ask to be put on the email list so you can stay informed at Connie.Bahner@house.ks.gov

Janet Milkovich is co-president of the League of Women Voters of Johnson County.

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