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History shows ‘Yes’ supporters must step up the game

By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

Though it's not her place to tell people how to vote, Seward County Clerk Stacia Long does have one strong opinion about the special bond election April 8.

“We should have more people voting than we do,” she said. “I feel pretty passionate about getting people registered.”

In that respect, Long is on the same page as supporters of the USD 480 bond issue, which will present voters with two questions: should the district approve an improvement package valued at \$127 million, and should the city collect a half-cent sales tax to offset the impact on property

owners? For the project to move forward, voters must say “yes” to both questions.

With a population of about 23,000 — of which around 9,000 are on the books as registered voters, Seward County elections should draw more than the 2,000 or so voters to the polls.

“I’ve offered my services to go out and speak to groups, educate anyone who’s working to get voters registered, make sure their applications are complete,” Long said. “My big concern is that we’ll get people started registering to vote, but if they don’t follow through, their registrations will be considered incomplete.”

Long is referring to the Kansas law known as the “Safe Act,” which was implemented two years ago and has gradually tightened rules about how voters must demonstrate they are legally eligible to participate in elections. Voters must now show a photo ID at the polls. The trickier part? Registering to vote now requires proof of citizenship.

“If someone moves to Seward County from another Kansas location, and they’re a registered voter, it’s simple,” Long said. “We have one database in the state, so we can actually see that they’re registered and have shown proof of citizenship in another county.”

Voters who’ve come to Liberal from out of state, however, must provide proof of citizenship as part of the registration process. Proof may be:

— An official, state-issued birth certificate verifying U.S. citizenship

— A United States passport (may be expired)

— Naturalization papers, or the number of the certificate of naturalization

— Bureau of Indian Affairs card number, tribal treaty number or tribal enrollment number

— U.S. hospital record of birth indicating place of birth in the U.S.

— U.S. military record of service showing applicant's name and U.S. birthplace

Items like a Social Security card or a driver's license are not adequate as proof of citizenship, Long said, although a driver's license works as proof of ID when a voter arrives at the polls on voting day.

While the proof-of-citizenship requirement may seem daunting, Long said her office is eager to make it simple.

"People can take a photo of the document with their smart phones and email it to our office, or photocopy the documents when they fill out the registration cards," she said. "We don't expect them to show up and let us inspect the documents in person."

With a registration deadline of March 18 rapidly approaching, Long hoped to see an increase in traffic at her office.

"I know there have been a few registration tables set up and the school system has allowed tables where people can do that at other events," Long said. "We've had a few registrations coming in occasionally."

Still, she said the numbers haven't increased yet.

"Typically, we don't see a lot of voters show up for these special elections, and I'm not sure why. I wish I knew the answer for that," she said. "These local elections affect all of us directly,

immediately. They're really important."

Long noted that the pressure will be on those who support the bond issue to get out the vote. In general, people who are against a measure tend to show up at the polls, carrying the day. That's what happened during the last USD 480 bond election, which was soundly defeated by the naysayers.

"That's kind of how it is in everyday life," mused Long. "The people who are the most passionately against something are the ones you hear talking the most loudly. They show up to vote 'no.' People who are OK with a plan somehow don't get around to voting."

Voter registration remains open until March 18, and advance voting will begin March 29 and continue through noon April 7. Long encouraged voters to connect with the Seward County Clerk's election office, which is located in the county administration building at 515 N. Washington, phone number 626-3355. Or, visit the office's Facebook page, "Seward County Clerk/Election Office," where Long posts up-to-the-minute information. The page includes a downloadable voter registration form, along with deadlines and other information.

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