

# The AAUW Footsteps Project:

## Building Women's Political Capacity

"Because Equity is Still an Issue."

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### Walking in the Footsteps of... Building Women's Political Capacity

There is a classic [Maxine](#) cartoon from 2007 which reads, "A female president would only be a good idea if you wanted the country run right for some reason."

Well, 2010 was not a presidential election year, but it was the first time in 30 years that fewer women went to Washington for the 112th Congress in January. Women lost ground getting into federal office, and we will also see far fewer of our issues come to floor of the House and Senate for discussion, let alone for action.

A report from government watchdog groups shows NYS candidates raised about \$246 million for statewide and legislative races in 2010, including nearly \$72 million in the gubernatorial campaign. Of that amount, individual contributors accounted for \$83 million, businesses or trade associations gave almost \$67 million, three times as much as the \$21 million from unions. Totals included \$25 million in donations from other candidates and almost \$14 million from political parties.

So the glass ceiling also has a pretty deep cash barrier. Given these numbers, we have to find ways to identify and encourage more women to think about running for office, and we have to do it sooner in their political careers. While many women only think about running for office once their families are raised or they retire, that is too late to break into politics and be in the game long enough to get to a high enough level of government to really start effecting change.

So, what can AAUW branches and members do to create a climate where more women consider getting into public life sooner? AAUW-NYS has a new program initiative called "Walking in the Footsteps of..." designed to foster a local climate where women can learn from their political history, find mentors, and encourage talented women they know (or are) to consider appointed or elected office.

The Footsteps project will run through Election Day 2012 (although we hope you will continue efforts beyond that date).

Branches can research the political history of their area to learn about and teach others about the legal and political contributions of local women. (Perhaps you have already done this as part of the NYS Women Biography Project.)

Invite women office holders in your area to a non-partisan meeting to discuss how they got into office, what the barriers and challenges were, and the contributions they make as women. Ask them to create a mentor program for other women thinking about running.

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## Why We Need More Women's Voices in Washintgon:

- Women's Economic Equity - Equal Pay and Paycheck Fairness
- Women's Health Care & Reproductive Health Care Issues
- Women's Retirement Security
- Status of Women Issues
- Women's Judicial Issues
- Education and STEM Issues for Women and Girls
- Issues Affecting Poor Women & their Families
- Women's Rights at Home and Internationally

### For Further Reading:

- In the News: [Among Women in Congress, a Bond of Friendship](#)
  - In the News: [Lawmakers Try Again on Stop-Child-Marriage Bill](#)
  - In the News: [Female Lawmakers Carry the Banner for Gun Control](#)
  - In the News: [Congresswomen Electrify Planned Parenthood Abortion Debate](#)
  - In the News: [Shocking Statistics on Women & Retirement](#)
  - In the News: [How Retirement Is Being Reinvented Worldwide](#)
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## Resources:

### National Young Women's Political Leadership Program in Washington, D.C.

Running Start's nationally renowned, highly competitive Young Women's Political Leadership Program introduces high school girls to the importance of women in political leadership. The program will be held in Washington, D.C., July 18–23, 2011. It is free to participants, and travel scholarships to Washington are available for those in need. Applications are due February 16!

AAUW believes in the necessity of building a greater pipeline of women running for office to diminish the long-standing gender gap in political leadership. That is why we are so proud of programs like [Elect Her – Campus Women Win](#), which trains college women to run for campus office. Help encourage leadership potential in women you

know by helping us support programs like the Women's Campaign Forum [She Should Run](#).

## **The 2012 Project**

In response to the growing presence of [women](#) running for elected office, the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University is launching [The 2012 Project](#), a national, non-partisan campaign to identify and increase the number of women in legislative office. The campaign focuses on women from the baby boomer generation.

AAUW supports closing the political leadership gender gap. AAUW's [Elect Her](#) initiative specifically focuses on increasing the number of women running for public office. Elect Her trains and encourages young women to run for student government and helps women view themselves as political candidates for the future. For more information, [click here](#).

## **Women's Groups Target Sexism in Campaigns**

Advocates for women running for office have [launched](#) the "Name It, Change It" campaign, an effort to track sexist comments in the media and put pressure on advertisers supporting those media figures. American University's Women in Politics Institute found that women are less likely than men to consider running for office because they perceive an unfair political environment. Currently, the U.S. is 82nd in the world for representation of women in political office.

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