

AAUW-NYS Public Policy Counterpart Newsletter

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It is time to update the New York State Biennial Action Priorities

Every two years, the state updates our state Action Priorities through a vote of the membership at the Convention business meeting. After the contentious political campaign season we have just come through, many issues were raised both in New York and around the nation. **I'm looking for your input as we examine our current priorities and consider what our Action Priorities should be for 2013-15.**

Some of the issues that have already been offered include working on election and voting reform and civil rights like violence against women. **Please consider carefully the current priorities listed below and send me your ideas for any modifications to existing priorities and suggestions for additional areas we might support as a state.**

I will need to hear from you by **January 15, 2013** in order to have time include those ideas that get support. Please e-mail your ideas to seymour6985@verizon.net and put **New York State Biennial Action Priorities suggestions** in the subject line.

2011-2013 BIENNIAL ACTION PRIORITIES, AAUW-NYS (Adopted April 2011)

Biennial priorities for action are chosen according to the criteria of viability, critical need, strong member support, and potential for distinctive AAUW contribution. These AAUW NYS Public Policy Action Priorities do not preclude members, branches or the state from acting on any other issues clearly stated in the AAUW Public Policy Program.

1. To support a strong system of public education in New York State that promotes gender fairness, equity and diversity, AAUW New York State advocates:

- Adequate and equitable funding for quality public education for all students
- Vigorous enforcement of Title IX
- Protection of programs that meet the needs of girls in elementary and secondary education
- Opposition to the use of public funds for non-public elementary and secondary education

- Responsible funding for all levels of education, including early childhood education

2. To achieve economic self-sufficiency for all women, AAUW New York State advocates:

- Fairness in compensation, including pay equity, Social Security and other pension benefits for women
 - Equitable access and advancement in employment
 - Vigorous enforcement of employment anti-discrimination statutes
 - Access to affordable, quality, comprehensive health care; and choice in reproductive health care for all women
 - Programs that provide women with education, training, and support for success in the workforce and improve women's earning potential, including women's entrepreneurship.
 - Greater availability of and access to quality, affordable dependent care
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The 13 in '13 Public Policy Challenge:

Now that the 2012 election is over, it is time to focus on the work of inspiring our lawmakers to work in our best interests. This will include educating ourselves and our members and the public about our issues, following closely the actions of our elected officials (local, state and federal), and advocating for positive action on AAUW priorities.

As a way to motivate and direct our efforts, I am announcing the **13 in '13 Public Policy Challenge!** I challenge each branch to take 13 (or more) actions in 2013 that will create a ground swell of broadly-based grassroots action here in the Empire State.

There are suggestions for action and a score sheet. And there are plenty of ideas so you as individuals can take the Challenge, as well!

Learn more at: <http://www.aauw-nys.org/pp.htm>

2013 PUBLIC POLICY TAKING ACTION AWARD Application

Attached is the application for your branch to fill out for the Public Policy Awards that will be handed out at Convention 2013 in Lake Placid, NY in April. You worked this year on your GOTV efforts, so be sure to make sure you get all the details down on paper so your sister branches will be able to recognize your efforts as well! The application is also available to fill in on-line at the state website:

http://www.aauw-nys.org/branch_incentives.htm

Introducing CQ StateTracker:

Those of you who attended the State Leadership Conference in Cazenovia last July will remember hearing about a brand new tool in our advocacy arsenal that would be coming this fall. AAUW's Public Policy Department is assisting us to configure CQ StateTracker

so we can follow the legislative twists and turns in Albany. CQ StateTracker is a game-changer for AAUW-NY's advocacy on AAUW priority issues. Through its policy experts in Washington, D.C., AAUW already has the capability to track federal legislation down to this specific, instantaneous level, and CQ StateTracker will extend that capability to state legislation in our state. (These are more of your dues dollars at work!)

The general categories areas we'll be tracking initially include Education, Civil Rights, Voting, Economic Security, Veterans, and the Environment. You can learn more about the program and see the full list of key words linked here:

<http://www.aauw-nys.org/pp.htm>

In addition, AAUW held an AAUW State PP Chair call in November with the CQ StateTrack and Equal Pay Day as the main topics. AAUW Director of Public Policy and Government Relations Lisa Maatz and State Grassroots Advocacy Manager Kimberly Fountain gave a comprehensive overview of CQ StateTrack. If you missed the call or would like to re-listen to it, access the recording at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/btf8vr4>.

Equal Pay Day: April 9, 2013

AAUW has made available their updated Pay Equity Resource Kit. This kit provides background information on pay equity you can use to educate your state, your branch, and your community. It also provides suggestions for programming and advocacy, including tools you, your state and branch, and your allies can use to make a difference for pay equity. This resource kit is available on the AAUW website at <http://tinyurl.com/csmm66t>.

Barbara Bonsignore and Janet Watkins of AAUW of Michigan shared their ideas and advice for Equal Pay Day on a recent AAUW State PP Chair. If you missed the call or would like to re-listen to it, access it at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/btf8vr4>.

Here is a link to the AAUW of Michigan website: www.aauwmi.org. In the middle of the homepage, you will see a big red Equal Pay Day button. If you click on it, it takes you to the page AAUW of Michigan used last year for Equal Pay Day. There you can see the logos of AAUW of Michigan's coalition partners. If you click on any of the documents in the right corner of the page, you can see the press release, the Equal Pay Day Statement of Purpose, and other materials that were used as part of the publicity campaign. There are some great ideas for your own branch efforts.

Organizing a 2013 AAUW Advocacy Day

At the Fall board meeting, the AAUW-NYS State Board authorized a committee to get to work on creating a 2013 AAUW Advocacy Day in Albany. The 2012 event, on Equal Pay Day - April 17, was successful and we want to build on that day with an even better one in 2013.

If you are interested in helping us work toward that goal, please let me know. We'll be working electronically just as we did last year. Because of my own family obligations (a beach wedding in Florida the week before our Convention in Lake Placid), I am happy to help coordinate these efforts, but I'll depend to those of you in the area to actually attend!

Post Election News:

The post-election dust has settled in the NYS Senate; we are looking at two years of hybrid government leadership. We used to have three men in a room deciding the fate of the state; now there are four. This means our signature AAUW issues will still have to be carefully worked through the Senate to ensure action.

Senate Majority Coalition forms

Five independent Democrats to join Republicans in deal

For the first time in modern memory, the state Senate won't operate under the authority of a majority leader when it convenes in January. Instead, two "conference leaders" will jointly steer the operation of the Senate: Republican Dean Skelos and Jeff Klein of the breakaway Independent Democratic Conference. The unprecedented deal will see control of the Senate shared between the 31-member Republican conference and the five-member IDC — including new addition Malcolm Smith of Queens, a former leader of the chamber's frequently fractious mainline Democrats.

<http://tinyurl.com/bpujbq3>

Cuomo gives Senate partners a 'litmus test,' wants support for minimum-wage hike, campaign reforms

Raising the minimum wage and reforming the state's campaign-finance laws are among the issues Gov. Andrew Cuomo says will be key to gaining his support for a new power-sharing agreement in the state Senate. In an op-ed piece released Wednesday, the Democratic governor laid out a 10-point "litmus test" for the coalition between Senate Republicans and the five-member Independent Democratic Conference. The two conferences announced a deal Tuesday that calls for sharing equal authority of the chamber, preventing Senate Democrats from taking control.

<http://tinyurl.com/d68442o>

Regardless of who is leading the state legislature, we face a series of issues that can not be ignored much longer:

Issue: NY Education Faces Its Own Fiscal Cliff

NY bus tour for education heads to Albany

Hundreds of students, parents and teachers are getting ready to head to Albany to ask Gov. Andrew Cuomo and lawmakers for more money for education. Organizers say 10-

15 buses will depart from every corner of New York Dec. 5. Once in Albany, the group will march from the State Museum to the Capital. The event is being called the Educate NY Now Express tour and is a response to deep cuts in state education aid combined with a new property tax cap limiting what districts can raise through tax increases. Cuomo's last budget increased school aid by \$805 million but districts say that doesn't nearly make up for what they've lost. Meanwhile, a group that won a funding court case against the state in 2006 says it's considering another lawsuit.

<http://tinyurl.com/cc8on77>

Post Educate NY Now Bus Tour Action to Take:

- ♦ Send a letter to the Governor and Legislature calling on them to keep their commitment and invest in New York State's students
- ♦ Meet with your local legislators, and tell them what the education crisis looks like in your district

http://salsa.democracynaction.org/o/425/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=11823

Group May Sue Over Money Owed to Poor New York School Districts

Six years after New York's highest court forced the state to substantially increase financing to poor school districts, the group that won that ruling is threatening a new lawsuit unless Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and the Legislature come up with billions of extra dollars for those districts. Saying the state is at least \$5 billion behind on a 2007 financing agreement that followed the court ruling, the group, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, contends that Mr. Cuomo's aid cuts, and his cap on property tax increases, have once more exacerbated the financing gap between rich and poor districts.

<http://tinyurl.com/chafygm>

North country politicians differ on school aid formula changes

When it comes to the complicated formula that's used to dole out state money to public schools, the devil is in the details, according to Thomas R. Burns, superintendent of the St. Lawrence-Lewis Board of Cooperative Educational Services. That's why he's taking a cautious approach to forming an opinion on separate legislation proposals by Assemblywoman Addie J. Russell, D-Theresa, and state Sen. Patricia A. Ritchie, R-Heuvelton. Both lawmakers are fighting to have more funding diverted to low-wealth school districts like those in Northern New York, but they disagree on the best way to change the state aid formula to make that happen. With several area schools predicting bankruptcy unless something changes, lobbying for more school funding has moved into high gear. Mr. Burns said education officials are analyzing how the different proposals would affect public schools on a district-by-district basis. Among those studying possible formula changes is Richard G. Timbs, executive director of the Statewide School Finance Consortium. Other organizations following the situation and analyzing the aid formula proposals include the New York State Council of School Superintendents and the Rural Schools Association, he said.

<http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20121205/NEWS03/712059857>

Regional High School advocates ready for 2013 legislative session

As Morristown, Hermon-DeKalb and Heuvelton Central Schools contemplate a regional high school, administrators and state officials are preparing to take the cause to Albany. Thomas R. Burns, district superintendent at St. Lawrence-Lewis Board of Cooperative Educational Services, said similar legislation passed the Senate in 2012 and with pressure may be able to clear the Assembly in 2013. Senate Bill 7486, brought to the floor by Senator John J. Flanagan, R-Smithtown, would give local school districts across the state the ability to form regional high schools. But Mr. Flanagan's bill has so far failed to make it out of the Senate. Under current legislation, school districts may merge or send their students to another district and pay tuition. Mr. Burns said there is a chance Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo will officially recommend that the Legislature give the green light to regional high schools within the next two weeks. "The Education Reform Commission is supposed to issue a report as early as this week or next week. Regional high schools may be one of the recommendations," Mr. Burns said.

<http://www.mpcourier.com/article/20121204/DCO01/712049901>

Report details dropout issues

Sixteen percent of teens and young adults in New York are neither in school nor the workforce, part of a national problem that could lead to "dire consequences" for the younger generation's financial stability, according the latest Kids Count report released Monday by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. High school dropouts are having a harder time landing traditional entry-level jobs in retail and fast-food restaurants due to competition from older candidates with more experience. Front-line service providers say that the recent recession has added to the problem. Nationally, there are 6.5 million youth 16 to 24 years old who are neither in the workforce nor in school — about 17 percent of that age group, according to the report. New York accounts for 406,000 of those young people, according to the foundation.

<http://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Report-details-dropout-issues-4085662.php>

Issue: A Living/Minimum Wage

The battle lines have already been drawn on this issue now that the NYS Senate leadership issue is clear.

Business group warns wage hike will kill jobs

A new report from a business-backed group claims an increase in New York's minimum wage would cause significant harm to the state's small businesses, causing significant job loss over the next decade. The National Federation of Independent Business -- one of the most ardent opponents of a wage hike -- released the report Tuesday morning. The study found Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver's proposal to increase the hourly rate from \$7.25 to \$8.50 and tie it to the rate of inflation would result in 22,000 less jobs over 10 years, resulting in a \$2.5 billion hit to the economy.

A March report by the Senate's Independent Democratic Conference found increasing the hourly wage would be positive for the state's economy, to the tune of \$600 million and 4,800 new jobs. The conference's leader, Sen. Jeff Klein of the Bronx, is the Senate

sponsor of the bill. Democrats in the state Legislature have been pushing a minimum-wage increase, saying it is long overdue and would help the economy because the low-wage earners would spend more money. The Independent Democratic Conference entered into a power-sharing agreement with Senate Republicans on Tuesday, ensuring the breakaway conference equal authority over which bills are put to a vote. **Klein signaled that a bill to increase the minimum wage will be put to a vote in 2013.**
<http://tinyurl.com/bn32p8l>

Employees at Billion Dollar Companies Fight for a Living Wage

One in four workers in the United States is employed in a low-wage job. That includes many people in the food service industry, retail employees, janitors, hotel workers, agricultural laborers, and many others who make the U.S. economy tick; notably, many of these workers are also women and people of color, and the workers' educational level tends to be lower than that of the general population. While this underclass labors, large companies like their employers profit, often immensely so. Growth is up for firms like Walmart, despite economic problems, indicating that their business strategy is effective. A key part of that strategy involves underpaying their workers. With a federal minimum wage set at \$7.25, far too low for the cost of living in many areas, low-wage workers are often forced to work multiple jobs while still struggling to pay the bills. In addition, they are rarely entitled to benefits like health care, retirement accounts, paid sick days, and paid time off. U.S. workers are working harder and longer than ever before, but that's not balanced by greater productivity, just more profits for their employers.
<http://tinyurl.com/c9zx3ul>

Issue: Redistricting

NYC Districting Commission Scraps The Maps

The city districting commission voted Tuesday to scrap its new City Council maps
<http://tinyurl.com/dxnkzmt>

6 Oneida County legislators picked to determine district lines

The members of the committee that will create the new districts for the Oneida County Board of legislators have been selected. The six-member committee consists of four Republicans and three Democrats chosen by Board of Legislators Chairman Gerald Fiorini of Rome.
<http://tinyurl.com/cc32ppe>

Nassau United Redistricting Coalition

Common Cause/NY, Latino Justice PRLDEF, League of Women Voters of Nassau County and La Fuente-Long Island Civic Participation Project announced a new initiative to refocus the Nassau County redistricting process, and help defuse partisan warfare. The groups decried what they call a shameful political hostage situation where politicians put their personal and partisan interest in the redistricting outcome far ahead of the welfare of Nassau County residents. **The Nassau County United Redistricting Coalition is a non-**

partisan civic engagement coalition, which supports inclusive, balanced and fair Nassau County Legislative Districting, the drawing of legislative lines to adjust for changes in population. The coalition believes that an approach that protects the voting rights of all communities in Nassau County will assist in promoting reform of the redistricting process in Nassau County. Check out the new website and sign up for email updates: <http://www.nassauunitedredistricting.org/>

Issue: Fair Elections

Democracy for Sale: A Case for Fair Elections in New York State.

Money in politics threatens our government, shaking trust in our democracy. We want government of the many not government of the monied. Learn how public campaign financing in New York State can help restore a broken system. The League of Women Voters New York City has partnered with The Brennan Center For Justice at New York University Law School which is underwriting the program, and with Demos, a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy and research advocacy organization in sponsoring the event scheduled for Wednesday, December 12, 2012 from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at The Community Church of New York, Assembly Hall, located at 40 East 35th Street between Park and Madison Avenues. Learn more: <http://tinyurl.com/d74cocl>.

Campaign Finance is a Women's Democracy Issue

Two Supreme Court decisions (*Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* and, later, *American Tradition Partnership v. State of Montana*) and an appellate court decision (*SpeechNow v. Federal Election Commission*) have fundamentally transformed our political system and our democracy to a degree we've just been able to grasp from the results of this year's elections, when an unprecedented \$6 billion was spent on the federal elections: presidential, Senate and House combined. Never has our electoral process been more captive to vast sums of money from a handful of large corporations and wealthy individuals.

SpeechNow allows not-for-profit organizations to accept unlimited contributions from individuals for independent expenditures, which birthed (i) "super PACs," which can accept unlimited contributions but must disclose donors and (ii) especially pernicious, tax-exempt -- or 501(c)(3) -- organizations (often referred to as non-disclosing groups or dark money groups), which are not required to disclose the sources of their funding -- especially pernicious. Civil rights organizations have so far mainly hung back from campaign finance reform, believing, understandably, that each organization's primary concern is its respective community of interest. However, we are entitled to a government that represents all of America -- women, not just largely white males; people of color; the working class, not just management; and small business owners, not just large corporations -- rather than one that is controlled by the wealthiest individuals and the largest companies.

<http://tinyurl.com/crk87ro>

Issue: Voting reform

U.S. Sen. Boxer files 'LINE' Act to cap voting waits at one hour

A four hour wait to vote may be OK for Florida Gov. Rick Scott, but it's unacceptable to U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, a California Democrat who introduced legislation targeting long lines in Florida, Virginia and Ohio. Boxer's proposed "LINE," or Lines Interfere with National Elections, Act would set national standards of a maximum waiting time of one hour at any polling place in federal elections. And the bill would require states, including Florida, where voters waited in long lines to implement plans to fix the problems before the next federal election. Boxer's proposal would require the U.S. Attorney General to issue new national standards by Jan. 1, 2014 regarding the minimum number of voting machines, election workers, and other election resources necessary to hold federal elections, according to a press release issued by her office.

<http://tinyurl.com/d8kmduj>

Issue: Student Loans

Student-Loan Collection Targeted for Overhaul in Congress

Congress will consider overhauling debt collection in the \$100 billion-a-year U.S. student loan program, replacing it with automatic withdrawals from borrowers' paychecks tied to their income -- a system used in the U.K. Legislation that Wisconsin Republican Representative Tom Petri plans to introduce as soon as this week would require employers to withhold payments from wages in the same way they do taxes. Payments would be capped at 15 percent of borrowers' income after basic living expenses. The plan would resemble those in the U.K., Australia and New Zealand. Since the money would be withdrawn automatically and tied to income, borrowers would no longer have to negotiate with collectors and loan-servicing companies, which often offer a confusing array of deferral and forbearance options after a job loss or illness. The Education Department would manage the withdrawals, with help from the Internal Revenue Service. In the election campaign, President Barack Obama touted the income-based program as a way to make it easier for students to pay back their loans, while unsuccessful challenger Mitt Romney said it encourages students to take on more debt. Last year, 5 million borrowers were in default -- generally meaning they had failed to make payments for at least 270 days -- on \$67 billion in loans, more than twice the amount in 2003. Through the new system, based on experience in the U.K., 98 percent of borrowers could meet their loan payments through automatic payroll withholding, according to Petri's office. The Education Department already has the power, without a court order, to seize a part of wages, tax refunds and Social Security payments to collect on student loans. There is no statute of limitation. The legislation would tie the interest charged to Treasury market rates. Currently, students in the most popular program pay as much as 6.8 percent. In another boon to borrowers, the plan would cap interest owed at 50 percent of a loan's face value at the time of graduation, giving a break to lower-income borrowers who take longer than the standard 10 years to repay loans. For a student who took out \$27,000 in loans, about the national average for a graduate of a four-year program who borrowed, the interest couldn't exceed \$13,500. Student loans,

which can rarely be canceled through bankruptcy, can balloon to several times their original size, after adding interest and collection fees.

<http://tinyurl.com/cerylpp>

NYS Law Update:

New law limits when businesses can demand your Social Security number

Businesses that ask consumers for their Social Security numbers had better have a good reason starting next week. On Dec. 12, a new state law limiting the rights of businesses to ask consumers for their Social Security number takes effect. Companies, as well as individuals, will be barred from requiring individuals to disclose their Social Security account numbers except under certain circumstances. They also will be prohibited from refusing to provide any service based on a person's refusal to disclose his Social Security number. The law, which was approved by the state Legislature and signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo this summer, strengthens an existing law that prohibits persons and entities from intentionally making available to the public an individual's Social Security number.

<http://tinyurl.com/cn38nk4>

Screen the "United States of ALEC"

The documentary, the "**United States of ALEC**," presented and narrated by Bill Moyers, focuses on the **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)**. The film shows the outsize influence ALEC exercises on our democratic processes by giving American corporations unprecedented power to influence legislation in every state in the country. Common Cause filed a complaint with the IRS against ALEC, claiming that they are in fact a lobbying organization and not a non-profit charity as they claim on their taxes. Common Cause has extra copies of the documentary as well as discussion materials to facilitate a screening party. Contact Sam Massol if you would like to host a screening party (smassol@commoncause.org or 212-691-6421 x203).

AAUW NYS Facebook:

Remember to "like" our state Facebook page and stay up to date with all the breaking AAUW news. <http://www.facebook.com/AAUW.NYS> Share things from our page to yours and help us build our social network for change!

Share your advocacy successes and sign up for 13 in '13 Challenge!!

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!