

IT'S MY VOTE



I WILL BE HEARD



A A U W A C T I O N F U N D

AAUW Voter Issue Guide

When Women Vote, We Change the Conversation

Dear Women Voters:

Politicians and policy makers routinely make decisions about issues that directly affect women and families, including our paychecks, access to reproductive health care, violence against women, and education funding. But more often than not, the conversation lacks women's voices.

As we enter this season of political punditry and campaign promises, it's more important than ever to identify those who would best represent our values and those who would roll back our rights.

Between now and Election Day, let's start conversations about the issues that affect our families and communities. We need to ask tough questions, jumpstart the dialogue, and determine where our candidates stand. We want the facts, and we need to speak truth to power.

It's a simple as this: When women vote, we change the conversation. Be sure to lend your voice in this election.

Yours in AAUW,



Linda D. Hallman
AAUW Chief Executive Officer



Patricia Fae Ho
Chair, AAUW Board of Directors

Since 1881, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has been the nation's leading voice promoting education and equity for women and girls. AAUW and the AAUW Action Fund encourage women voters to get involved in the political process and to better understand the impact that legislative action—or lack thereof—can have on their lives and those of the people they love.

From congressional inaction on the Paycheck Fairness Act to frequent attacks on our reproductive rights, the current political landscape—which increasingly focuses on social issues—seldom includes or responds to women's voices. To create real change, women must be part of the conversation, and the most powerful way for us to chime in is at the polls.

AAUW is dedicated to making sure every woman is registered to vote and has the information she needs to cast her ballot. The AAUW Action Fund produces voter education materials each election cycle, including head-to-head candidate comparisons and voter guides on key ballot initiatives and policy issues. This voter issue guide provides nonpartisan information about priority issues and tips for evaluating candidates' policies for empowering women and girls.

Gender Pay Gap

The pay gap is the difference between men's and women's median earnings, and it is a real and lasting problem. Despite civil rights laws and advancements in women's education and economic contributions, the pay gap affects women from all backgrounds, at all ages, and at all levels of educational achievement. On average, women working full time are paid about 79 cents for every dollar paid to men working full time. Over a lifetime of work (47 years), the total estimated loss of women's pay compared with men's is \$700,000 for a high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a college graduate, and \$2 million for a professional school graduate.¹ The pay gap is even larger for women of color.

¹ National Committee on Pay Equity. (2015). *The wage gap over time*. www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html.

AAUW believes that pay equity and equal opportunity are a matter of simple fairness. While the legislative and executive branches have taken some steps to ensure pay equity, additional action is needed to provide more effective equal pay protections. AAUW advocates for strong pay equity legislation, targeted executive actions, clear regulations, and strong enforcement to protect employees and assist employers as they strive to follow the law.

Listen for the candidates' discussion of these terms:

- Equal pay for equal work, wage gap, wage/pay discrimination, Equal Pay Act, pay gap, fair pay, comparable worth

Ask the candidates these questions:

- How would you address the pay gap between men and women? How would you address the pay gap for women of color and mothers?
- Do you support passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act to close legal loopholes and improve the effectiveness of existing civil rights laws aimed at closing the pay gap between men and women?

Family Leave and Paid Sick Days

Unlike the majority of developed countries worldwide, the United States does not guarantee paid annual leave or vacation, paid time off for illness or family care, or paid parental leave. When a loved one has a health crisis or when a new child is born or adopted, far too many American workers are forced to take unpaid leave, risk their jobs, or even exit the workforce altogether.

AAUW works toward greater work-life balance by advocating for increased access to a high standard of benefits and policies, including earned paid sick days and paid family leave. While the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was an important first step, significant coverage gaps have meant that more than 40 percent of workers are ineligible for FMLA leave,²

² Klerman, Jacob, Kelly Daley, & Alyssa Pozniak. (2012). *Family and medical leave in 2012: Executive summary*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.

and many more cannot afford to take unpaid leave without undermining their families' economic security. AAUW believes that our policies must enable workers to perform well and employers to be profitable—and that we can do both while meeting the needs of working families.

Listen for the candidates' discussion of these terms:

- FAMILY Act, maternity leave, FMLA, paid sick days, parental leave, pregnancy discrimination, paid time off, paid leave, Healthy Families Act

Ask the candidates these questions:

- Do you support the passage of legislation that would provide paid parental and medical leave for all employees, including those working for the federal government?
- Do you support the passage of federal legislation that would require companies to allow employees to earn a minimum number of paid sick days each year?

College Affordability

Higher education is no longer a luxury—it's a necessity. At current rates, by 2020 the United States will add nearly 17 million jobs requiring at least some postsecondary education due to employment growth and replacement of workers who retire or otherwise permanently leave an occupation. Moreover, the number of jobs requiring a graduate degree is estimated to grow by about 2.4 million by 2020.³

As the skill requirements of jobs continue to increase, AAUW believes that higher education must be made more easily accessible to all students—and that students should not have to mortgage their futures in the process. With tuition increasing and state investment decreasing, meaningful grant aid such as the federal Pell grant program is particularly important. Further,

³ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2013). *Employment Projections: 2012–22 Summary*. www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm.

since rising tuition rates have prompted two-thirds of graduates to borrow money to attend college, loan repayment and forgiveness programs must be made more manageable for borrowers.

Listen for the candidates' discussion of these terms:

- College debt, tuition repayment, student loans, Pell grants, loan forgiveness, income-based repayment

Ask the candidates these questions:

- In 2013, college students graduated with an average of \$26,000 in debt. What can we do to help make college more affordable and loan payments more manageable?
- Do you support increasing funding for college affordability programs, income-based repayment programs, student loan forgiveness programs, and Pell grants?

Campus Sexual Violence

When college campuses are hostile because of sexual violence, students aren't safe. When students don't feel safe, they cannot learn. AAUW's own research revealed an epidemic of sexual violence in schools, with two-thirds of college students and nearly half of students in grades 7–12 reporting that they had experienced sexual harassment.^{4,5} A 2007 study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that 1 in 5 women is a target of attempted or completed sexual assault while in college.⁶

AAUW advocates for equitable climates free of harassment and bullying, as well as freedom from sexual violence and fear of violence in schools. AAUW supports increased enforcement of federal civil rights laws, including Title IX, by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, including additional funding for these agencies to provide technical assistance so that schools follow the law. We also advocate for additional support to help schools

⁴ AAUW. (2005). *Drawing the line: Sexual harassment on campus*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁵ AAUW. (2011). *Crossing the line: Sexual harassment at school*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁶ Krebs, C. P., Lindquist, C. H., Warner, T. D., Fisher, B. S., & Martin, S. L. (2007). *The campus sexual assault (CSA) study*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

provide proactive prevention programs that educate students, faculty, staff, and Title IX coordinators and that train appropriate administrators on all relevant laws as well as best practices to respond effectively. Finally, AAUW urges Congress to pass legislation that requires states and schools to develop policies for K–12 schools in two areas: preventing bullying, sexual harassment, and violence and implementing procedures to effectively respond to such behavior.

Listen for the candidates' discussion of these terms:

- Campus/school safety, VAWA, campus sexual assault, Clery Act, Title IX, violence against women, campus climate, bullying, hate crimes

Ask the candidates these questions:

- In addition to following Title IX regulations, what should colleges and universities do to better address the issue of campus sexual assault?
- Do you support increasing resources to promote prevention efforts and stronger enforcement of federal laws prohibiting bullying, harassment, and campus sexual assault?

Reproductive Rights

Critical to gender equity is the ability of women to access quality reproductive health care and be free to make their own decisions about that care. This includes family planning that fosters self-sufficiency and promotes preventive health care. Unfortunately, many vulnerable American women are being denied fundamental control of their reproductive lives due to increasing restrictions successfully advanced by lawmakers at both the state and federal levels. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion for all women and found abortion to be a constitutionally protected right. For this to be more than just an abstract right, women must have real access to a full range of reproductive health and family planning options.

AAUW supports choice in the determination of one's reproductive life and increased access to health care and family planning services. AAUW also supports medically accurate and age-appropriate comprehensive sexual education. AAUW trusts that every woman has the ability to make her own informed choices regarding her reproductive life within the dictates of her own moral and religious beliefs. Further, AAUW believes that these deeply personal decisions should be made without government interference.

Listen for the candidates' discussion of these terms:

- Freedom to choose, family planning, contraception, reproductive health, pro-choice, right to life, Planned Parenthood, comprehensive sexual education

Ask the candidates these questions:

- Do you support public funding for family planning services and reproductive health care?
- Do you support legislation that protects individuals' access to affordable quality reproductive health care, including abortion care?



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