



ROCKY MOUNTAIN VIRTUAL REGIONAL CONFERENCE REMARKS

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Good morning thank you to Diane and Susan for inviting me to join you. I'd like to add my voice to the chorus saying welcome to your first virtual regional conference. Things are very different today than they were 2 years ago at the last Regional Conference. Today we find ourselves battling the Covid pandemic and beginning to take the cover off of America's dirtiest little secret—"systemic and institutional racism" and the suppression of equal justice.

Yesterday saw Juneteenth celebrations across the country. In case people don't exactly know what Juneteenth is, think back in history remember 7 states seceded from the Union and started the Civil War. Those 7 states were the primary (but not the only) states with slaves. 3 years into the war Pres. Lincoln produced the preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, on Sept 22, 1862 it was to become effective 100 days later on Jan 1, 1863 **unless** the Confederacy surrendered and rejoined the Union within those 100 days. The proclamation freed slaves in the confederate states, if they complied, they would be **allowed** to keep their slaves. There were some notable exceptions in the proclamation, 3 confederate states had been taken by Union soldiers and were under Union control in Sept and those slaves would be freed, however the Proclamation did not speak to freeing slaves in the Union Border States or in the North. The Confederacy did not surrender w/n the specified time so on Jan 1, 1863 the Proclamation became effective. Communication was not great in those days and it was not until June 19, 1865 that word of the proclamation reached all those in Texas with Galveston being the last place where the proclamation was read aloud freeing the TX slaves. It came to be called Juneteenth. Now some of you may be thinking why is she talking about racism and Juneteenth? Because there is a **real** *nexus* between AAUW's Mission and Vision and working to help eliminate racism, and to uplift equity, diversity and inclusion. If we have been shown nothing else by the havoc wreaked by covid-19, and the response to it by the Federal, State and local governments we have seen up close and personal that there's a **desperate** need for equity, and AAUW is laser focused on real-time solutions and the rebuilding that will certainly be needed once we are past this crisis. Some people find it difficult, even impossible to say Black Lives Matter, instead saying All Lives Matter, of course all lives matter. The point of BLM is not to say that the lives of other races or ethnic groups don't matter, it's not to say that Black Lives are more important than other lives, it recognizes that the history of this country-- through its laws, policies, practices and actions has shown that Black Lives didn't matter, when you look at the disproportionate number of Blacks killed by law enforcement through use of excessive or inappropriate force with no action

taken as a consequence, when you look at the continued discrimination, disproportionately high unemployment, low wages, poor or lack of available health care, substandard housing, poor schools and the list goes on and on—decade upon decade of mistreatment have shown a pattern of Black Lives **not** mattering. The point of BLM is to say that Black Lives Matter **too**, that they matter as much as other lives, that they should **not** be treated as disposable, or crumpled up and tossed like trash.

As you think about our mission: To advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy. Then reflect on our Vision-- **Equity for all**. When women are discriminated against or treated inequitably it impacts families, neighborhoods, and communities. We know women are more likely than men to be poor or struggling, especially, Black, Latina and Native women. When **any** of us are treated inequitably it impacts **all** of us. **So-----**, working for racial equity----- benefits everyone.

In spite of the devastation visited on us by Covid 19 some real opportunities have emerged. Look at the increased use of technology by our branches and state affiliates. This is your first ever virtual regional conf. At the national level, our weekly webinars (which by the way are all available on our web site AAUW.org) have each been attended by hundreds and viewed on line by hundreds more. If you haven't been to or viewed a webinar, check them out! Begin to think about how your branch can start hosting or co-hosting one—your theme for this conference is **United In Mission**—so, collaboration and partnerships with other organizations gives you the chance to heighten AAUW's visibility; and to educate and inform yourselves and the community on relevant and current issues and solutions as well as providing information on needed resources to level the playing field. Covid has slowed us down, for some it's provided time at home with families, time to reflect; time for DIY projects. I hope you're using the time to examine your branch's governing documents and its organizational structure. Some of our branches across the country have bylaws so lengthy, detailed and complex you need both a law degree and one in organizational psychology to wade through them with even a modicum of understanding. Some have huge boards with two and three levels of VPs. It's like everyone in the branch needs to be on the board or have a title. You don't need an elaborate or bloated organizational structure with a massive board and complex bylaws to carry out your mission, you need to be **intentional** and **focused** with attention to mission, **targeted** outreach and collaborations. Narrow and fine tune your efforts to produce **IMPACT!** The women and girls AAUW has fought for -for 139 years need you today more than ever. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment — and the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act — two crucial milestones in giving women the right to vote. It's also a critical election year. With Title IX under threat, a persistent gender pay gap, and a dearth of women leaders, the stakes couldn't be higher. I talked about some upsides to sheltering at home but think about the women who were domestic violence victims before Covid; the only respite for some of them was when they or their abuser went out of the house to work. But with Covid forcing them to stay at home 24/7, layoffs, emotions running high, stress and tension have made them prisoners unable to escape. The number of domestic violence incidents has increased. Women and children will be facing eviction soon, unemployment, loss of the little stability they may have had before Covid. When they go back to the workplace they may face increased discrimination and harassment a doubling down of the bad behavior that existed before Covid.

And, while we are stuck at home—the administration has been working overtime to take away the gains we’ve made. The Dept. of Education issued new Title IX rules making it even harder for campus sexual assault victims. The results of this rule are clear: Fewer will report their assaults and harassment. Schools will be more dangerous. And, more survivors will be denied their legal right to equal access to education after experiencing sexual violence,”

Yes, the SCt shocked us this week—pleasantly so, with 2 decisions—one on transgender health care, the other on DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program). On Thursday, the prolonged uncertainty facing more than 800,000 people who have applied for DACA protection over the years was eased, when the Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision ruled that the Trump administration did not offer sufficient justification when trying to terminate the program. While the Court did good in these 2 cases, they declined to hear 8 cases which asked them to reconsider an earlier decision granting qualified immunity to law enforcement and other government officials in cases involving wrongful death due to use of excessive force.

Women were at the bottom of the pay ladder before Covid and things will likely continue to be bad for them during the economic recovery. Some good news is Target’s announcement that it will increase its hourly wage to \$15 by year’s end. However, we need to monitor how that is implemented and try to make sure employees don’t see their hours cut in half making them ineligible for health benefits.

Our staff has made the pivot from producing in the traditional workplace to telework from home. They made the transition with lightning speed and precision, continuing the important work of AAUW without missing a beat. We will continue to work toward accomplishment of those goals in our strategic plan which are funded. That brings us to restricted vs unrestricted giving. If you saw the Board town hall earlier this week you saw Board member Peggy Cabiness’ delightful and informative Lego Display, which demonstrates that with more than \$150 million in restricted funding (for Fellowships, grants, scholarships and other restricted purposes) and less than \$4 million in unrestricted funding (for policy and other programs, office and building expenses, staff and general operations) we don’t need more restricted donations, we need unrestricted donations to cover AAUW’s greatest needs, to give us the flexibility to act quickly and decisively when issues arise and to work on those projects which will bring real impact in fulfillment of our mission. In short, we can only work on those programs which are funded.

Stay safe, continue to use your masks in public, practice social distancing and keep caring for yourselves and one another. My **challenge** to you is to continue onward and upward ***United in Mission!***