

How will women and families fare in the new Congress?

Highlights from an interactive chat between
AAUW California and AAUW Public Policy staff
December 2012

Q: Women made a lot of strides in the last election: our voices were heard; BUT, what is your forecast for the major issues women and families will face in the next Congress?

A: Here are some the major issues women and families will face in the next Congress:

- The Elementary and Secondary Act, which sets parameters for K-12 education and funding, is due for reauthorization. AAUW will be paying attention to many issues during this process;
 - Ensuring that Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, is vigorously enforced. Take Action to show your support for Title IX;
 - Opposing private school vouchers, which take money away from public schools;
 - Guaranteeing that charter schools are held to the same standards as other schools;
 - Requiring that schools be held accountable for demonstrating that they are meeting educational goals for all students;
 - Opposing single-sex education programs that don't pay proper attention to civil rights protections, reinforce problematic gender stereotypes, increase discrimination, and restrict the educational opportunities open to both girls and boys;
 - Supporting requirements that schools collect comprehensive data on student achievement and graduation, as having the most accessible, accurate and detailed information will encourage action specifically tailored to improve outcomes for those falling behind; and
 - Ensuring that the Workforce Investment Act, which funds career and technical education programs is as inclusive as possible.

Q: Does AAUW have a stand on the teaching of creationism in the classroom and what about a national educational goal so ALL children in US schools learn the same things?

A: Right now, AAUW does not have an explicit position on teaching creationism in the classroom, but we strongly believe in the separation of church and state. AAUW Priorities are adopted by its members at convention bi-annually. These priorities are adopted through the ideas of its members. Please feel free to read about AAUW's current policy platform and priorities [here](#).

Q: Are any of AAUW's positions items that we anticipate will be under a greater level of attack or vulnerability than in recent years? In other words, do you have any sense for what the new Congress' make-up will mean for these issues?

A: Congress' make-up will very likely mean that the House and the Senate will take different approaches to tackle these issues. This was a major sticking point in the present Congress during efforts to reauthorize ESEA, as Representatives and Senators had differing goals for the legislation. This divide will likely continue into the 113th, meaning AAUW members will have to work that much harder to make sure legislation advance our priorities.

Q: With women overwhelmingly voting for Obama (and more female members of Congress), I thought this would help to sway Congress to be more favorable to AAUW's issues. Do you think this will have any effect on furthering any of our issues? With a continued Republican majority in the House, can we realistically see changes that will positively impact women, girls, and families come from the 113th Congress?

A: AAUW is a non-partisan organization, and we seek to work with both parties to promote equity for women and girls. For example, although we have fewer women committee chairs in the 113th House of Representatives, AAUW members made a difference in lobbying for at least one Republican woman to chair a committee. We must continue to fight for more women in leadership.

There are many new Members from different backgrounds, and it's important that they're educated on AAUW's member-adopted priorities. There are several opportunities in the 113th Congress for AAUW members to advance our member-adopted priorities:

- Commit to virtual lobbying from the comfort of your home. Sign up for AAUW's Action Network.
- Get to know your representative. Call and ask for details about the next town hall — date, time, location, format for questions, and whether your representative will pose for photos. Phone numbers are on the representative's website. Ask to be added to the e-mail list — many town halls happen with little notice other than an e-mail. Research your representative's position on your issues with AAUW's most recent Congressional Voting Record.
- If you are attending a town hall or office meeting, make sure your representative knows that your views represent AAUW. Remind staff members that AAUW has 1,000 branches.
- Just drop in to your congressional district office! Most district offices are open during regular office hours to receive constituents. You might get lucky and meet the representative, but if not, bring AAUW materials to leave for your representative with a note requesting a future meeting.
- Remember to let AAUW know about your lobbying! Send your stories and pictures to AAUW Dialog and inspire other AAUW members to make a difference.

Q: What items (in regards to education and health care) that are currently covered under law are we in danger of losing?

A: AAUW is working on several education and health care bills in 2013:

- The Elementary and Secondary Act, which sets parameters for K-12 education and funding, is due for reauthorization. AAUW will be paying attention to many issues during this process:
 - Ensuring that Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, is vigorously enforced. Take Action to show your support for Title IX
 - Opposing private school vouchers, which take money away from public schools
 - Guaranteeing that charter schools are held to the same standards as other schools.
 - Requiring that schools be held accountable for demonstrating that they are meeting educational goals for all students.
 - Opposing single-sex education programs that don't pay proper attention to civil rights protections, reinforce problematic gender stereotypes, increase discrimination, and restrict the educational opportunities open to both girls and boys.
 - Supporting requirements that schools collect comprehensive data on student achievement and graduation. Having the most accessible, accurate and detailed information will encourage action specifically tailored to improve outcomes for those falling behind.
- The Higher Education Act, which is the most significant federal law for American colleges and universities. Increasing access to higher education for traditional and nontraditional students is imperative to helping women obtain financial security and economic independence.
- Although AAUW members have been working hard to get the Violence Against Women Act reauthorized in the 112th Congress, if it doesn't pass by the end of the year it will come up against in the next Congress. AAUW supports the bipartisan Senate-passed bill that would protect all victims. Take Action and urge your Representative to support VAWA for everyone!
- Both the Workforce Investment Act and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act will need reauthorizing in the 113th Congress. AAUW watches these bills closely to ensure that they promote training in careers and fields that are nontraditional for women, and help move women into higher paying occupations.

But we also must keep the pressure on the Obama Administration. AAUW believes President Obama should pay attention to women's priorities, especially since women's votes decided the 2012 election. See AAUW's list of what President Obama should do on "Day One" of his new term.

Q: Are there plans by AAUW to help state and local AAUW members fight those state issues that do so much damage to women?

A: AAUW members' work on state legislation on civil rights is extremely important. We've seen an unprecedented attack by state legislators on several of AAUW member-passed priorities. For example, the national office staff has helped AAUW members on numerous state measures on issues ranging from preventing state voucher legislation to promoting pay equity legislation and women's healthcare state initiatives.

AAUW provides training materials and technical assistance for members engaged in fights on state and local issues. Our online "Woman to Woman" organizing materials are free and also contain a power point for you to use at your branches.

Also, coming in 2013, AAUW will begin roll out of a powerful state-of-the-art legislative tracking tool (CQ StateTrack) to help AAUW state leaders take effective and timely action on policy issues in states.

Q: What are the critical issues that AAUW is working on during this interim period before the next Congress convenes?

A: AAUW members have been quite busy during the "lame duck" session. First, they have been lobbying Congress and the administration regarding the "fiscal cliff" negotiations, urging policy-makers to enact a balanced approach that 1) protects middle class tax cuts and creates jobs 2) protects important government programs that serve critical domestic needs. Members should contact their representatives now to make sure our priorities are heard.

AAUW Executive Director Linda D. Hallman, CAE, met with President Obama shortly after his re-election to remind him that the conversation on women's' priorities continues and we will hold him accountable. We will continue to pressure President Obama to move forward on our priorities, including the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, insurance coverage of women's health and contraception, implementation of No Child Left Behind waivers, and enforcement of civil rights laws such as Title IX.

AAUW has also worked with policy-makers on an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would allow female military service members to access abortion care during active duty. AAUW supports this amendment, and has been lobbying key legislators to ensure it is included in the final legislation.

AAUW has also been a key player in the fight for an inclusive reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. AAUW supports the bipartisan Senate-passed bill that would update and streamline VAWA and help ensure the continued funding of critical VAWA-supported programs. Take Action and urge your Representative to support VAWA for everyone!

Q: What will be the impact on women, girls, and families if we "go over the fiscal cliff?"

A: First, AAUW supports a balanced approach to solving our fiscal crisis. Unless there is new revenue, we will have automatic cuts to critical funding for K-12 education funding, Pell grants, workforce training, the Title X Family Planning Program, and civil rights enforcement. These are issues AAUW members have voted to make priorities. We cannot turn back the clock.

Second, we must protect important programs such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other domestic programs. These domestic programs have already been cut to reduce the deficit, and AAUW strongly believes future cuts should come from other budget areas, such as pentagon spending.

A good resource to learn more on this issue is AAUW's *Budget 101* blog series. We lay out the various issues around the "fiscal cliff" and explore why they matter to women and girls.

Q: **Going over the "fiscal cliff" could be a serious blow to women and girls, especially since women now outnumber men in colleges, are impacted more by workforce training, and Family Planning programs. Since women live longer than men, cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid would certainly impact them disproportionately. Does AAUW have a "gut" feeling if we actually can avert the cliff?**

A: Right now, we'd have to say avoiding the cliff is a toss-up. At a recent speech, Rep. Chris Van Hollen, an influential House Democrat, put the odds of going over the cliff at 50% and the odds of avoiding also at 50%. This is why it's so important that our members make their voices heard. These discussions are happening *now*, and nothing's been settled yet. There's time, although not a lot, to influence the outcome. That's why we're encouraging AAUW members to tell Congress to avoid devastating cuts to important domestic programs and to pursue additional revenue that helps close the deficit. It's not over yet, and every voice helps tips the scale.

Q: **You've mentioned Pentagon spending, but where else does AAUW advocate for on the cost-cutting side of the balanced approach for reducing the deficit?**

A: One thing is for certain, critical programs will face devastating cuts if Congress does not agree to increased revenue by letting the Bush era tax cuts expire for those in the upper income levels.

Another "meaningful reform" that AAUW supports is lifting the income cap on the Social Security payroll tax. Currently, someone who makes \$106,800 a year pays the same amount into Social Security as a billionaire, as all income above \$106,800 is exempt from the payroll tax. As a result, 94 percent of Americans pay Social Security tax on all of their income, but the wealthiest 6 percent do not. AAUW supports legislation that would make all income over \$250,000 subject to the Social Security payroll tax, putting the wealthiest Americans on equal footing with everyone else. The Chief Actuary of the Social Security Administration has projected that applying the payroll tax to income above \$250,000 will extend the full solvency of Social Security for the next 75 years, protecting the benefits of millions of Americans.

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- We invite you to continue this conversation by emailing us at votered@aauw.org.
- Follow our twitter accounts, re-tweet us, and make your own tweets: [@LisaMaatz](https://twitter.com/LisaMaatz), [@AAUWActionFund](https://twitter.com/AAUWActionFund), and [@AAUWPolicy](https://twitter.com/AAUWPolicy)
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