

CALIFORNIA ONLINE PROGRAM SUMMARY
“HOW WILL YOU VOTE”
APRIL 17-MAY 22, 2017

The purpose of this program was to examine the AAUW National Election public policy program, proposals and resolutions before the voting closed on June 15th. Jo Harberson and Cheryl Sorokin, Online members and on the National’s Governance Committee were so helpful in explaining the pros and cons. Several of the proposals were submitted by California Online members Jo Harberson, Sandy Kirkpatrick, and Krys Wulff.

We first started with the Public Policy Program. Member #1 expertly explained the process with these words:

Basically every two years the list of public policy issues (the public policy program) is developed by the Public Policy Committee after gathering input from members, branches, state organizations, and national staff. A draft list of issues is posted on the national website and input solicited re wording and other changes, additions, deletions. The proposed program is then sent to the board, which reviews it and then approves submission to the membership for a vote.

In general the Public Policy Program adopted by the membership then serves as the basis for our advocacy/lobbying efforts at the national level, and of course provides guidance to states and branches on issues to focus on at state and local levels.

This year there was some discussion in the Governance Committee (generated by our attorneys advising us on bylaw issues) as to whether the membership should continue to vote on the Public Policy Program. The attorneys initially saw the use of the word “program” as indicating something similar to various types of programs that AAUW offers, e.g.NCCWSL, Tech Trek, Smart Start, Work Smart. These are all programs

which are part of regular operations and the purview of the board, without need for membership approval. It was the consensus of the Governance Committee that our Public Policy Program was qualitatively different and more in the nature of a list of priorities or a platform and that members definitely would want to retain the right to approve these priorities. To help minimize confusion and to avoid what might be considered inconsistent use of the term “program”, the committee recommended that the term “Public Policy Program” used in Article XIII4b be changed to “Public Policy Priorities.” You will see that bylaw change recommendation on page E18 of the online voter guide.

The most discussion resulted from Proposal 1 and Proposal 2 that were the most controversial. Member #3 explained:

As I read Proposal 1 and the directions before it, Proposal 1 would be implemented only if Proposal 2 is not adopted. To me this means that a new category of membership, "advocate" would be instituted if the full removal of a degree requirement is not adopted. This first proposal seems to allow for an additional category of membership which does not require a degree and also would not give the advocate all of the rights and responsibilities of an Individual member (which is added in Article IV, Section 2), An advocate could not vote on AAUW business (such as elections, bylaws and public policy priorities) serve as an officer or Director, serve on AAUW committees, and could not serve as the designated contact for administration or finance of an AAUW affiliate.

In all our discussions about the Bylaws proposals, we should keep in mind that the AAUW Board supports the adoption of all the proposals.

Two differing opinions were voiced by Member #1 & Member #2- their arguments are important to include in this summary.

Member #1: My personal views on these amendments—not speaking for the Governance Committee here, just me—is that I am supportive, although not wildly so, of the Advocate idea for individuals who support the mission, but don’t meet the educational requirements, but I am not in favor of idea of eliminating education requirements for full membership. Education (higher education in particular) has been a cornerstone of this organization from inception and I fear that eliminating that requirement would significantly change the organization. That might be ok, but a membership with less education may not be as inclined to keep education as a cornerstone of our activities. Additionally, there are rafts of information that prove that education is the single biggest factor in women breaking out of poverty and/or low status jobs, and in achieving higher salaries regardless of class or the particular job/position, so it really seems counterintuitive to me to not continue our traditional and long-standing membership requirement. I do understand the “lack of equality” idea, but I think our membership should be seen as a model for what works and has lifted women to higher economic, social and cultural levels. Education means a better chance of success for women and girls. That said, I’m ok with the idea of finding some way to encourage women who don’t meet the requirements to support our mission, and to allow them, especially at the branch level, to actively participate in branch/national programs. I think the Advocate membership would achieve that, although, as someone pointed out in this chain, there may be some difficulties in administering another category of membership that doesn’t get to vote or run for office.

Member #2 countered with: Since it appears we’re now discussing Proposal #2 as well as #1...

I respectfully disagree that one needs a degree to value and/or promote higher education. We all know people who do not have a degree who are brilliant and who have greased the path for others to achieve that education that, for whatever reason, was not available to them. Likewise, we all know people with degrees whose value for education (not to mention equity) is appallingly lacking.

Nor do I believe that removing the degree requirement for membership will change the basic values of our organization, including the focus on education as the path to achievement and opportunity.

So I strongly support Proposal #2. My name is listed in the Voter Guide as the member submitting Proposal #2, but it was the work of a dedicated group of active AAUW members who fervently believe in the AAUW mission. We have a [website](#) that explains the position in more detail, and one of the pages has a useful list of [Discussion Points](#) to consider as we debate this issue. As this [webpage](#) points out, clearly a person's perspective shapes how she looks at the degree requirement.

Some of the questions worth considering:

- **How important is AAUW's mission to you and why?**
- **Have you ever told someone they aren't eligible for membership? How did it make them feel? How did it make you feel?**
- **List friends, colleagues, and public figures who haven't pursued an associate degree or higher and their reasons why. How does it limit them from working for equity? (For examples, click [HERE](#).)**
- **What does a branch gain or lose by accepting members without degrees?**

- **What did AAUW lose by expanding membership to men (1987)? To those with associate degrees (2005)? Or by accepting all accredited colleges and universities?**
- **What message does the degree requirement send to the public about AAUW?**
- **How would eliminating the degree requirement hurt our efforts to break through barriers for women and girls?**
- **Now that the percentage of women earning degrees is equivalent to or exceeds the percentage of men, isn't it time to open membership to all people committed to breaking through barriers for women and girls?**

Proposal 3 speaks to Article IV of the AAUW Bylaws in regards to "all forms of memberships" being moved to a new section of 2d.

Proposal 4 is asking to amend Article V to change the date of when the Nominations Committee be appointed - January 1 to March 1.

Again, Member #1 gave a complete explanation of Proposal 4:

The suggested timing change for appointment of the Nominating Committee was requested by the board originally (i.e. the Governance Committee was asked by the board to look at the suggested change). The change has to do with timing related to getting the board (elected in June of odd numbered years) up to speed before making appointments to the Nominating Committee. The board meets three times a year, June, October and February. Currently appointments to the committee need to be done at the October meeting, which for some board members is their first actual meeting following election. This amendment allows a new board more time to get acclimated to its role and to priorities for committee assignments before having to appoint the Nominating Committee.

Proposal 5 is created to eliminate language that requires specific voting methods. I don't see anything too earth-shaking about it. Does anyone else?

Proposal 6 wants to remove language preventing board members from serving as standing committee chairs. The AAUW attorneys have recommended this amendment - best listen to them. Right?

Member #3 gave some insight into Proposal 6: **For proposal 6, my only concern is twofold and probably not mutually inclusive: board members are assigned internal committee work and often have a lot on their plates. Adding serving on standing committees increases their responsibilities and workload. The flip side is that it is getting increasingly difficult to find qualified people to actually apply for national committees, so maybe the thought is that this might help alleviate the problem.**

If the attorneys, the governance committee and board found this to be a best practice for non-profits, I would concur.

Proposal 7 is suggesting a change from the term "Public Policy Program" to "Public Policy Priorities." Member #1 restated information shared in the discussion for Proposal #1.

Member #3 responded:

[Member #1] gave a very succinct answer as to the process the Governance Committee went through in proposing the first wording (based upon legal counsel recommendation, but legal counsel did not understand the scope of programs and the connection of public policy.) For many years, we have all referred to the Public Policy Program as our Public Policy Priorities, so I felt it would be just a semantic interpretation. The Governance Committee agreed and allowed the amendment to go forward for the vote. The Public Policy Priorities are something that all members should have a

voice and vote. The other programs are part of the responsibilities of the board and staff.

Proposal 8 is seeking to change the percentage of reaching a quorum from 5% to 3%. The rationale for this is because of the low AAUW voter turnout in the last three years.

The discussion on Proposal #8 began with this introduction from one of the Governance Committee members: **This amendment was presented on advice of legal counsel. Washington, D.C. code permits the lower percentage of 3%. Do read the rationale on page E19 of the Spring 2017 Outlook, especially the last two sentences: "In 2013, only 5.4 percent of the membership cast votes. AAUW was dangerously close to being unable to count the vote". I'm urging all the members I know to vote. Let's all do that.**

Other members expressed concern that so few members vote. Member #1 responded: **[I] totally agree... that it is a shame more people don't vote, but it seems to be a problem not only with nonprofit membership organizations, i.e., homeowner associations, corporate shareholder annual meetings, the local, state and national elections (sigh). At any rate, I think the trend with large nonprofit membership associations in particular is to reduce the membership quorum requirements to the lowest level permitted by state law (and that % will vary across the country). Those levels are typically set fairly low in part because of legislative recognition of the difficulty of getting quorums in membership organization settings. When something requires a membership vote, the association is literally stymied if no quorum is obtained, and so high quorum requirements present a real risk. Of course the same is true for other types of organizations, and they are forced to spend \$\$ to re-solicit votes, or to pay for proxy solicitors to pull in votes. Because many large membership organizations simply have more difficulty getting enough**

members to vote and because of their size and the expense of resoliciting, a failure to achieve quorum can be particularly difficult for them to deal with.

Resolutions:

There was some important information shared by Member #2 in regards to the two resolutions of the Equal Rights Amendment and Human Trafficking.

As for these two resolutions on our AAUW ballot, I was SO pleased to see both of them. Many branches in the Bay Area have had excellent programs on Human Trafficking in the past few years and they have really opened eyes to how pervasive a problem it is — right here in every town, not just in some faraway place. Although trafficking doesn't just impact girls/women (nor is it just sex trafficking), its impact on women and families is horrific. It is modern day slavery, and I heartily agree that it should be a focus of AAUW priorities.

As for the ERA.... As you watch the “50/50 Day” film (www.letitripple.org/films/50-50/), you'll note that the movement to pass the ERA started shortly after the 19th Amendment was ratified, giving women the vote. My grandmother was part in the cohort of activists who demanded the right to vote, and then immediately fought for the ERA. (I own a book bag of hers that she purchased at an AAUW convention in the 1970s that has “ERA NOW” splashed all over it. She must be turning over in her grave, knowing it still hasn't passed!

Thank you to all who participated in this program. It is the California Online board's wish that the members are now prepared to vote.

Cathy Foxhoven
California Online Program Chair