

IT'S MY VOTE



I WILL BE HEARD



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

Voter Issue Guide

When Women Vote, We Change the Conversation

AAUW Action Fund Voter Issue Guide

Since 1881, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has been the nation's leading voice promoting 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 all the spheres of their lives, including women's economic security, education, and leadership opportunities.

From our paychecks to paid leave, access to reproductive health care to access to education, there is so much at stake each time women head to the polls. Politicians and policy makers at all levels of government routinely make decisions about issues that directly affect us and our families. But more often than not, those conversations lack 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.

AAUW and the AAUW Action Fund are dedicated to making sure every woman is registered and has the information she needs to cast her vote. 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.

It's as simple as this: When women vote, we change the conversation.

Between now and Election Day, let's start conversations about the issues that affect our families and communities. We need to ask tough questions, jump-start the discussion, and determine where our candidates stand.

This Voter Issue Guide provides nonpartisan information about the policy concerns that are critical to women and their families. Use it to prompt conversations with neighbors, family, friends, and fellow voters about what's at stake in this election. Take it to town halls and candidate forums to follow along with the debate. Consult it to develop questions to ask your candidates and your elected officials to get them on the record on the issues that matter most.

Above all, make your voice heard on Election Day — and beyond.

Pay Equity

The gender pay gap is the difference in men's and women's median earnings. According to U.S. Census data, on average, women working full-time take home about 80 cents for every dollar earned by men working full-time.¹ It is a real and lasting problem that impacts the economic security of women and their families. Despite civil rights and employment discrimination laws and advancements in women's educational and economic contributions, the pay gap persists. It affects women from all backgrounds, at all ages, and of all levels of educational achievement. Over a lifetime of work (47 years), the total estimated loss of women's earnings compared with men is \$700,000 for a high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a college graduate, and \$2 million for a professional school graduate.²

AAUW believes pay equity is not just a matter of fairness, but the key to allowing families to make ends meet. The gender pay gap is persistent, and it can only be addressed through a multipronged approach. We need policies to change entrenched structures that perpetuate the pay gap, provide women with the tools to challenge discrimination, and supply employers with the resources and tools to understand and comply with the law. 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 these terms:

- Equal pay for equal work
- Wage gap
- Pay discrimination
- Equal Pay Act
- Pay gap
- Fair pay
- Comparable worth
- Salary history
- Pay transparency
- Paycheck Fairness Act

1 Kayla R. Fontenot, Jessica L. Semega, and Melissa A. Kollar, "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2017," *Current Population Reports* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, September 2017), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.pdf>.

2 "The Wage Gap Over Time: In Real Dollars, Women See a Continuing Gap," National Committee on Pay Equity, September 2017, <https://www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html>.

Ask your candidates:

- The gender pay gap persists across all racial and ethnic groups, at different levels of educational attainment, and it is found in every state and virtually every occupation. Would you support passage of legislation to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of existing civil rights laws aimed at closing the pay gap between men and women? How would you specifically address the pay gap for women of color, many of whom suffer the largest pay gaps?
- An employer's reliance on salary history can introduce bias into the hiring process because, if a prior salary has been tainted by discrimination, it will carry forward into the next job. This practice contributes to and perpetuates the pay gap many women and people of color face in their careers. Several cities and states have passed legislation or are considering legislation that prohibits employers from relying on a potential employee's salary history to determine future pay. Federal legislation is also pending in Congress. Would you support passage of a salary history ban? What additional provisions do you believe are crucial to closing the gender pay gap?

Paid Family and Medical Leave, Parental Leave, and Sick Days

Unlike the majority of developed countries worldwide, the United States does not guarantee paid time off for illness, family care, or parental leave. When a loved one has a health crisis, or when a new child is born or adopted, far too many workers are forced to take unpaid leave, risk their jobs, or even exit the workforce altogether. Other workers have to go to work sick since they have no options for time off. This hurts everyone.

AAUW advocates for increased access to a high standard of benefits and comprehensive policies, paid family and medical leave, paid paternal leave, and paid sick days. While passage of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) 25 years ago was an important first step, significant coverage gaps mean about 40 percent of the workforce is not eligible for leave under the

FMLA.³ Many more cannot afford to take unpaid leave without undermining their families' economic security. AAUW believes our policies must enable workers to perform well, which also benefits employers and the economy.

Listen for these terms:

- Paid sick days
- Parental or maternity leave
- Work-life policies
- FAMILY Act
- Pregnancy discrimination
- Paid time off (PTO)
- Healthy Families Act
- Earned leave
- Workplace flexibility
- FMLA

Ask your candidates:

- When working people have to choose between their jobs and caring for their loved ones, it hurts our families, our communities, and our economy. What policies would you support to provide parental and medical leave for employees?
- A growing number of paid sick time laws have been passed in cities and states around the country. Would you support passage of policies 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. In May 2016, jobs that required some form of postsecondary education accounted for nearly 37 percent of employment.⁴ Moreover, the Bureau of Labor

³ Jacob Alex Klerman, Kelly Daley, and Alyssa Pozniak, "Family and Medical Leave in 2012: Executive Summary" (Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc., September 12, 2013), https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Family_Medical_Leave_Act_Survey/EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY_family_medical_leave_act_survey.pdf.

⁴ "The Economics Daily: 37 Percent of May 2016 Employment in Occupations Typically Requiring Postsecondary Education," U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 28, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/37-percent-of-may-2016-employment-in-occupations-typically-requiring-postsecondary-education.htm>.

Statistics projects that the United States will add nearly 11.5 million jobs by 2026⁵ and a majority of the fastest growing occupations call for higher education.⁶

AAUW research has found, however, that women take on disproportionately higher amounts of student debt while enrolled in college, and African American women graduate with the most debt of any group. The gender pay gap contributes to women needing two years more than men to repay those loans. As a result, women hold almost two thirds (\$890 billion) of the country's \$1.4 trillion student debt. This isn't just a student problem; it's a gender inequity problem, and it impacts us all.⁷

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. In the face of rising tuition and decreasing state investment, meaningful grant aid such as the federal Pell grant program is particularly important. Further, as rising tuition rates have prompted two thirds of all graduates to borrow money to attend college, loan repayment and forgiveness programs must be made more accessible to borrowers.

Listen for these terms:

- Student debt
- Tuition repayment
- Student loans
- Pell grants
- Loan forgiveness
- Income-based repayment
- College affordability

5 “Employment Projections: 2016-26 Summary,” U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 30, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm>.

6 “Employment Projections: Occupational Projections and Worker Characteristics,” U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 11, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/occupational-projections-and-characteristics.htm>; “Employment Projections: Fastest Growing Occupations,” U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 11, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/fastest-growing-occupations.htm>.

7 “Deeper in Debt: Women and Student Loans” (Washington, DC: American Association of University Women, May 2017), <https://www.aauw.org/research/deeper-in-debt/>.

Ask your candidates:

- Student loan debt is a \$1.4-trillion problem in the United States. AAUW advocates for increased funding for college affordability programs, income-driven repayment programs, student loan forgiveness programs, and expanded Pell grants. As an elected official, what policies would you support to make college more affordable and loan payments more manageable for borrowers?
- On average, women in the U.S. carry more student loan debt, and take longer to pay it off, than men. African American women and Latinas especially struggle financially while repaying college loans. What can be done to make changes to our student debt system in order to reduce the burden on women?

Campus Sexual Harassment and Violence

When college campuses are hostile because of sexual harassment and violence, students aren't safe. When students don't feel safe, they cannot learn. AAUW's own research revealed that two thirds of college students and nearly half of students in grades 7–12 experienced sexual harassment.⁸ Research also shows that incidents of sexual assault are shockingly prevalent on college campuses nationwide.⁹ In addition, more than one in five college women experiences physical abuse, sexual abuse, or threats of physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner.¹⁰

AAUW advocates for school climates free from discrimination, including harassment, bullying, and sexual violence. AAUW supports ensuring the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice enforce our federal civil rights

8 “Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus” (Washington, DC: American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, December 2005), <https://www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/drawing-the-line-sexual-harassment-on-campus.pdf>; “Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School” (Washington, DC: American Association of University Women, November 2011), <https://www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/Crossing-the-Line-Sexual-Harassment-at-School.pdf>.

9 Tyler Kingsdale, “Sexual Assault Statistics Can Be Confusing, But They're Not The Point,” *The Huffington Post*, December 15, 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/15/sexual-assault-statistics_n_6316802.html.

10 “College Dating Violence and Abuse Poll,” Break the Cycle, 2014, <http://www.breakthecycle.org/dating-violence-research/college-dating-violence-and-abuse-poll>.

laws prohibiting sex and race-based discrimination in education and don't roll back protections for students. We also advocate for schools to take proactive steps, such as conducting climate surveys and providing prevention programming to educate students, faculty, staff, and Title IX coordinators. We also stress the importance of training appropriate administrators on the relevant laws and how to respond effectively. Finally, AAUW urges Congress to pass legislation that requires states and schools to develop policies for K–12 schools that prevent bullying, sexual harassment, and violence and that implement procedures to effectively respond to such behavior.

Listen for these terms:

- Campus/school safety
- VAWA
- Campus sexual assault
- Clery Act
- Title IX
- Violence against women
- Campus climate
- Bullying
- 1 in 5
- Survivors

Ask your candidates:

- AAUW stands with survivors, and we remain committed to protecting and defending Title IX and to pursuing its vigorous enforcement. Would you push back against efforts by the current administration to weaken civil rights laws and undermine Title IX?
- Achieving full and equal educational opportunities for all students requires that student survivors have strong protections under the law. What should colleges and universities do to better address the issue of college sexual harassment and assault?

Reproductive Rights

It is critical to women's economic security to have access to quality reproductive health care and family planning and to have the control over such decisions. Unfortunately, many vulnerable women are 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* found privacy, and therefore the choice to have an abortion, to be a constitutionally protected right. This landmark decision legalized abortion for women nationwide. In order 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 these terms:

- Freedom to choose
- Family planning
- Contraception
- Reproductive health
- Pro-choice
- Right to life
- Planned Parenthood
- Comprehensive sexual education
- Title X
- Abortion
- *Roe v. Wade*

Ask your candidates:

- AAUW believes that reproductive freedom is tied to women's economic security. As an elected official, would you support legislation that protects individuals' access to affordable quality reproductive health care, including abortion care?
- Would you support public funding for family planning services and reproductive health care?



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