

AAUW members go to Raleigh

More than 80 advocates gathered in Raleigh, April 1, during Advocacy Day. The women were present for activities which took place before the General Assembly. AAUW members have long maintained a presence at this annual event, which offers the opportunity for contact with representatives and to voice concerns.

Elaine Ostrowski, Sue Mengert, Mary Fran Schickedantz and Sandra Abromitis, shown at right in front of the North Carolina Legislative Building, joined with other AAUW members Mari Pino del Rosario, Evelyn Lyngre, Mary Peterson, and Nancy Shoemaker in representing the Asheville, Greensboro, Raleigh/Wake County, Twin Rivers/New Bern and Jacksonville Regional branches.

Join in the virtual advocacy campaign in support of these issues. Go to www.ppaction.org or www.ncwu.org to participate. If the campaign is closed when you read this, follow the NCWU links to get the current status of the bills and information on how to contact your legislators. Personal letters may be even more effective.



AAUW public policy efforts get results

By Elaine Ostrowski, AAUW NC Public Policy Chairperson

The new sessions of the U.S. Congress and the N.C. General Assembly, which began in January 2009, are now in full swing. Both federal and state bodies are considering legislation of special interest to AAUW, and members are encouraged to actively advocate for AAUW's public policy positions.

Following the historic passage of the Lillie Ledbetter Act earlier this year, AAUW is now pushing hard for adoption of the Paycheck Fairness Act which has been passed by House and is now awaiting action in the Senate (SB 766). AAUW NC signed on to a letter from AAUW in support of the Act sent to Congressional members in February. There is still time for N.C. branch members to help secure passage of this important legislation. Members can use AAUW's Action Alert at www.aauw.org/advocacy to contact our two Senators to urge their support of the Act.

In a related activity, AAUW has launched a campaign named "Keep the Change" to continue the fight against wage discrimination and to secure equal pay for women. In 2007, women's earnings averaged almost 78 cents on the dollar compared to men, up from just under 77 cents in 2006 – an increase of only one cent on the dollar. In response, AAUW says "One cent is chump change. It isn't real change. Keep the change until women have real change." AAUW is encouraging branches to participate in the Keep the Change campaign, and has provided ideas and resources for branches to use throughout the year on AAUW's Pay Equity Web page.

Push for equal pay continues

As part of the nationwide campaign, AAUW branches throughout the country marked Equal Pay Day on April 28 by scheduling events

in their communities to publicize the need for pay equity. April 28 symbolizes how far into the year American women must work to earn as much as men earned in the previous year.

Public policy strategy revealed

Also at the national level, AAUW has drafted the biennial Public Policy Program for 2009-2011, which is posted on the AAUW Web site. A conference call with AAUW Public Policy Committee and staff and state chairs was held in early March to secure state input on the program, which has no substantive changes from the 2007-2009. The new program will be presented for adoption at the AAUW Convention in June. Once adopted, AAUW NC will use it to guide the state's ongoing advocacy efforts such as those highlighted at this year's N.C. Women's Advocacy Day.

Advocacy Day focuses on issues

Sponsored by N.C. Women United, Women's Advocacy Day was held on April 1, 2009 in Raleigh. AAUW branch members from Asheville, Greensboro, Raleigh/Wake County, Twin Rivers/New Bern and Jacksonville Regional participated in the event and met with their elected representatives to promote the 2009 N.C. Women's Legislative Agenda. The Agenda listed 15 issues for the General Assembly's consideration, including three that have been specifically endorsed by AAUW NC:

- Healthy Youth Act (S221/H88), which would provide a parental option for comprehensive sex education. The Act was passed by the House and at press time was still under consideration in the Senate where it has been referred to committee.
- School Violence Prevention Act (S526/H548), which would require all schools

to adopt policies that clearly define and prohibit bullying and harassment. The Act was passed by the Senate and at press time was still under consideration in the House where it has been referred to committee.

- Healthy Families & Healthy Workplaces Act (S534/H177), which would provide access to paid sick days. Although introduced in both houses, the Act was not passed by either in time for further consideration this legislative session.

AAUW NC more recently endorsed a fourth bill, the Voter Pre-registration and Education Act (H1260), which provides for pre-registration of individuals who are 16 or 17 years old and expands instruction on the importance of voting in the high school social studies curriculum. This Act passed the House and is being reviewed by a Senate committee.

See NCWU site for Agenda details

More detailed information on the 2009 Women's Legislative Agenda is available on the NCWU Web site. The Agenda was developed from discussions held during the Women's Agenda Assemblies conducted throughout the state last fall and which included AAUW members.

In other state public policy news, AAUW NC is investigating the cost-effectiveness of buying into AAUW's Action Network/Two Minute Activist system for states. The state-level system would give North Carolina the ability to alert branch members about upcoming state legislation based on AAUW's public policy priorities and allow members to send messages to state legislators advocating for AAUW's positions. The state's cost to access the system would be approximately \$1,200 per year. The feasibility of using the system in North Carolina is currently under review.