

# BADGER BRIEFS



Volume 83 No. 2

November 2025

## FORWARD

EMPOWER

CONNECT

## INSPIRE



### So...Who is the Woman in the Convention Logo?

The Statue "Forward" was created in 1893 by Jean Pond Miner, a Wisconsin artist studying at the Art Institute of Chicago. The Janesville Ladies Afternoon Club and Jean's art professor, Lorado Taft, recommended that she should create a statue representing the Wisconsin motto "Forward" for the Wisconsin exhibit at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. At this time, it was very unusual for a woman to be chosen for this assignment.

The statue symbolizes Wisconsin's forward-thinking mindset and a reminder to embrace change and strive for improvements...ideas that are still relevant today, and are goals for AAUW as well.

After the exposition, the statue was purchased by a woman's suffragette organization and presented to the state. In 1895, the statue was installed on the grounds of the state capitol. In 1995, there was significant weathering of the statue and women from across the state raised funds for a replica to be cast in bronze. The original is in the Wisconsin Historical Society headquarters.

Jean Pond Miner was born in Menasha, Wisconsin in 1865. After college, she studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1896, she married lawyer Alonzo Coburn in Madison. After her marriage, she continued her work as a sculptor and remained active in her art until shortly before her death at age 101 in 1967. Imagine all of the changes that she witnessed for women during her long life. We are still working to move women forward, and once again a women's organization is supporting the ideals of the statue as our convention logo.

The convention committee is hard at work getting  
ready for the

**Wisconsin 105<sup>th</sup> State AAUW Convention.**

Mark your calendars for

**April 17 – 18, 2026 at**

**DoubleTree by Hilton Madison**

Watch for more information in the coming months.



## President's Message by Deb Thiel

Time to value our values. Why is that important? The truths we hold self-evident, seemingly so clear in one moment, can blow apart in the next. So, our rationale and commitment beg review from time to time.



I venture to say we in AAUW joined our organization not only for the purpose of serving our own needs but with the intent of building a better future beyond our own lives. Most of us know firsthand of the barriers and challenges challenges women face socioeconomically. We know that the key to education can unlock resources to growth, and that enhanced earning power enhances self-esteem, career and life options and ultimately the actualization of one's full potential.

When many individuals are raised up, especially when women are, we know that society, community and family are also elevated. How can that goal be trashed and derided? I don't know the answer, but it's obvious to me that we have more to do.

We need to educate others on why our values are important not only to us but to them, their children, and for society. We need to help those whose potential is dismissed by others, so they don't lose sight of that potential, and we need to continue to offer the wonderful opportunities, scholarships and support we've always worked for.

The commitment and effort so many of you put forward on behalf of women and girls fills me with hope and joy. I am so honored to be your President! There are so many worthy collaborations through the State. Spreading out the work amongst many through their committees, meetings, and projects creates more synergy. Never forget the Board is YOUR board – ALL members who are interested in working on any of the committees should feel free to step forward and shout out!

Some committees looking for wider representation include:

- **STEM/Student Empowerment Committee** - if you are passionate about middle/high school age development this is for you.
- **Public Policy** has many projects in mind, including organizing a statewide Legislative Day.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion** is building momentum to move words into action.

Contact me or the Chair if you are interested in these areas or others. Also check out our Facebook page and website to see what's going on and to support each other.



## Tax Deductible Donations for our Branches!

We are in discussions with Specialty Payments, the company that has been handling our online State Convention reservations and Silent Auction payments; and, are excited about the possibility of offering Wisconsin AAUW members the opportunity to make tax deductible donations to their branches.

From their website:

“SPDonate is a 501(c)(3) public charity that is dedicated to engaging and assisting for Profit and Nonprofit Entities and Individuals with fundraising donations, including acting as a fiscal sponsor.

SPDonate provides a fundraising platform that enables anyone to create charitable causes that can accept tax deductible contributions.”

Watch for more information coming to Presidents soon!

*Chris Taylor*  
*VP Funds Development*

## Spotlight around Wisconsin: Fourth Member of the Wisconsin State Assembly



By: Deborah J Thiel



Last Fall I highlighted three AAUW members who serve as Representatives to the Wisconsin State Assembly. Today I want to introduce you to one more, **Joan Fitzgerald (D) Assembly District 46 from the Fort Atkinson Branch.**

With over 33 years' experience as a math teacher at Jefferson High School, Joan could have opted for a comfortable retirement in 2020. Instead, she chose to live dynamically, giving even more to the community. She served as one of the Jefferson County Supervisors from 2019 - 2024, before being elected to the State Assembly in 2024. In her current role as a Representative, Joan serves on the Ways and Means Committee and Workforce Development, Labor, and Integrated Employment Committee. Focusing on public education and community safety, Joan always works to make positive changes happen to improve the lives of people.

Joan is an active member of AAUW Fort Atkinson Branch. Her co-members value her insights and enthusiasm. In October, Joan provided the program to her branch, which I heard was "absolutely fabulous!" We are so proud of her work and that she is an active AAUW member!



## FORWARD AAUW-WISCONSIN

The State of Wisconsin's motto is "Forward," adopted as the official state motto in 1851. It reflects Wisconsin's ongoing drive to be a national leader and its commitment to progress and innovation. The statue on the Capitol building in Madison is named Forward and faces south. It symbolizes the start of a new day and progress.

AAUW WI also has these goals and aspirations in fulfilling AAUW's mission. One way this is accomplished is by the active role the membership plays at the branch and state levels. Carol Surges, the previous AAUW WI Membership VP, laid down a challenge at the end of the last fiscal year to add 13 new members to the branches to move ahead (Forward) and surpass Illinois. This would put AAUW WI in the top five nationally for membership.

As of today, there are 78 new members! What an accomplishment! Other factors will determine whether AAUW WI will make the top five states list for membership. I would say, though, that we are well on our way.

Feb 1, 2026, is the day National takes the final membership count, so there is plenty of time to continue this growth. In addition to adding new members, retaining our current members is very important. While unavoidable factors such as the death of a member, a move to another area, and students graduating can lead to a decrease in branch membership, providing a mix of mission-based programs and fun meetings is an essential way to retain current members.

Congratulations to all the branches that added members! **FORWARD!**

Judy Hangartner  
Membership VP

# AAUW WI Public Policy

**Barb Peterson and Stephanie Malaney, Co-Chairs**

The committee continues to work on several projects including focus on election issues and getting out the vote. I have included in this report several links that might be useful to individuals and branches as they continue to inform themselves.

The Public Policy Committee is open to everyone and meets twice a month on the second and third Monday of the month at 4 PM. All information is sent to committee members, Branch presidents, and WI Board members. If you are interested in joining the committee contact, Stephanie Malaney [smalaney5@aol.com](mailto:smalaney5@aol.com).

**AAUW WI Public Policy** <https://aauw-wi.aauw.net/public-policy/>  
**Public Policy Drop Down Menu**  
2024-26 AAUW WI Public Policy Statement  
Resolutions  
**Resources listed on Public Policy Page**  
[Connect the Dots](#)  
[Amplify Your Voice](#)  
[Wisconsin deserves fair maps \(Video\)](#)  
[Facts About Public, Private and Charter Schools \(PowerPoint\)](#)  
[Facts About Public, Private and Charter Schools \(Fact Sheet\)](#)  
[AAUW Information on School Funding \(Fact Sheet\)](#)



Barb



Stephanie

## AAUW Resources

**Explore the Issues** <https://www.aauw.org/issues/>

**Education** <https://www.aauw.org/issues/education/>

**Economic Security** <https://www.aauw.org/issues/economic-security/>

**Social Justice & Civil Rights** <https://www.aauw.org/issues/civil-rights/>

**Advocacy**

**Take Action** <https://www.aauw.org/act/>

**Signup for Action Network** <https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist/>

There are several actions on the page for members.

**AAUW Public Policy Priorities** <https://www.aauw.org/resources/policy/aauw-public-policy-priorities/>

**Policy Updates** <https://www.aauw.org/resources/policy/documents/>

Check on AAUW work

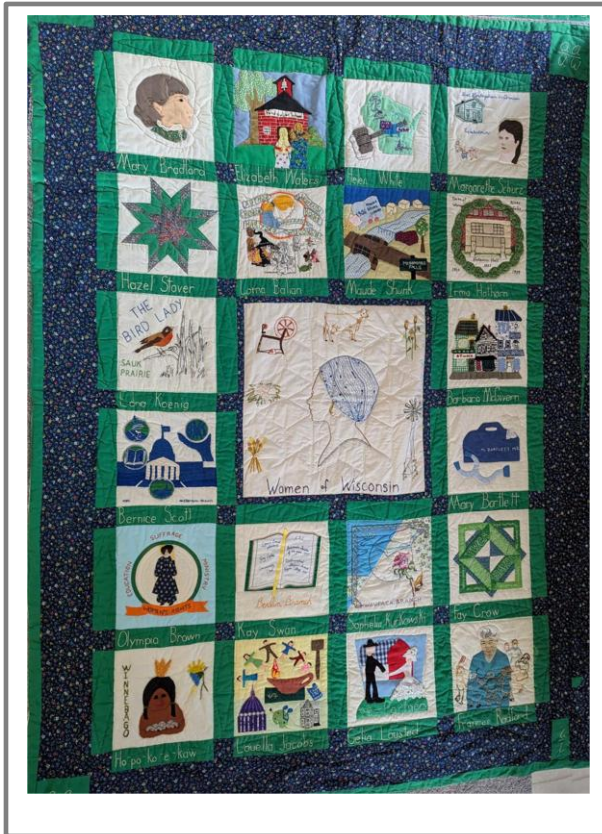
**Advocacy Toolkit** <https://www.aauw.org/resources/policy/advocacy-toolkit/>

**Election Resources** <https://www.aauw.org/resources/policy/get-involved-in-elections/>

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## Looking back...

Did you know that AAUW-Wisconsin once made a quilt? Right now, all that's known is the quilt has 20 equal-sized squares and one larger central square. Each square focuses on a different significant Wisconsin woman. Their names are embroidered in the surrounding borders. Several of the squares are identified to a specific branch – some of them now disbanded. I presume the individual branches made the quilts. If you know anything about the origin of this quilt, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact Carol Surges, AAUW-WI Historian, at [surgesca@gmail.com](mailto:surgesca@gmail.com)



## Two Governors-Elect Fight for Women's Rights

Two strong women lawmakers won gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia this month. But, did you know that the two are longstanding close friends? They shared an apartment together on Capitol Hill when they were both freshmen Congress members after their respective state elections in 2018. *The Washington Post* indicates that they “spent time eating frozen entrées from Trader Joe’s.” The women are Mikie Sherrill, Governor-Elect of New Jersey and Abigail Spanberger, Governor-Elect of Virginia.



**Mikie Sherrill** graduated from the US Naval Academy and then spent 10 years on active duty in the Navy, including flying missions throughout Europe and the Middle East as a Sea King helicopter pilot. After leaving the Navy in 2003, Sherrill earned her JD degree from

Georgetown University Law School. She was employed as a lawyer before joining the US Attorney’s Office in New Jersey, eventually rising to Assistant US Attorney.

Among the causes Sherrill champions are reproductive rights and access to education. She says, “. . . I’ve led the fight to protect women’s access to emergency abortion care, block efforts to ban medication abortion like mifepristone, and ensure military servicewomen have access to abortion and contraception, no matter where they are stationed.” As a member of Congress, she introduced legislation to provide high-quality tutoring to students. As governor, she vows to increase the amount of mental health care services in schools and to make school lunches available at no cost for every student in New Jersey.

**Abigail Spanberger** earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Virginia and MBA from a dual-degree program between Purdue University and the GISMA business school in Germany. She later worked for the US Postal Inspection Service, investigating federal narcotics and money laundering cases. In July 2006, Spanberger joined the CIA as a caseworker, gathering information about nuclear proliferation and terrorism. In 2018, she won the election to become US House of Representatives member in Virginia’s 7<sup>th</sup> congressional district.



As a congresswoman, Spanberger joined several caucuses, including the LGBT Equality Caucus and the Congressional Caucus for the Equal Rights Amendment. She sponsored several important bills, such as the Linking Seniors to Needed Legal Services Act of 2024, the Child Rescue Act, and the Targeting Online Sales of Fentanyl Act. She says, “As Governor, I will always defend women’s reproductive rights.”

Mikie Sherrill and Abigail Spanberger remain friends, texting each other for support during their gubernatorial campaigns.



## Changes to the Five Star Program Advancement and Governance Criteria



AAUW National has announced important updates to the AAUW Five Star Program that give branches more flexibility while strengthening their alignment with national priorities.

**Advancement Star:** Branches may now count contributions not only to the Greatest Needs Fund but also to the Defend Higher Education Fund or the Public Policy Fund\* toward their Advancement criteria. This change opens more meaningful ways for branches and members to support the areas they're passionate about, while still fulfilling star-earning goals.

**Governance & Sustainability Star:** Branches are required to update their bylaws by June 30, 2026 to reflect the changes approved by AAUW membership in 2023. By doing so, branches will now fulfill one of the new criteria for the Governance and Sustainability Star.

**Note:** Wisconsin branches are also required to submit bylaws to Sara Ramaker, AAUW WI Bylaws chair, [ramaker.sara@gmail.com](mailto:ramaker.sara@gmail.com). Sara has requested a clean copy of your bylaws (no need to indicate where changes were made) by June 1, 2026.

- If a branch updates Articles I-VII as mandated by AAUW National and makes no other changes, they must be approved by the branch board before submitting them to Sara.
- If a branch includes additional changes beyond those required for Articles I-VII, board members or full membership (per your branch bylaws) must vote to approve the changes prior to submitting them to Sara.

\* Public Policy Fund Support: We encourage branches and members to direct Public Policy contributions to the newly designated fund (#4514) over the former fund (#4337). This new fund fuels advocacy initiatives across key issues like pay equity, student debt, Title IX, and increased mobilization of our Action Network.

We will honor all gifts made to the former fund (#4337) through the end of the fiscal year while we complete this transition. This change ensures your support aligns with our updated structure and maximizes impact. Thank you for your continued advocacy and leadership in advancing AAUW's mission through public policy.

Carole Salinas, AAUW WI President-elect  
Sara Ramaker, AAUW WI Bylaws Chair



Carole



Sara

### Sheboygan STEM Program

I am so excited to tell you about an amazing day, I spent in Sheboygan. I'm so proud of this branch and all of the effort they put into making a great day for middle school girls, grades 6-8, many who have participated all three years.

This is the ninth year that the STEM program has been offered in Sheboygan and many of the branch members have tirelessly worked to make this a success year after year.

It was such a joy to watch the girls explore, discover and participate in robotic surgery, dissection of a cow uterus and ask pertinent questions of the presenters.

It was mentioned that if one of the girls entered a program in STEM, it was worth all the effort. Thanks Sheboygan! You are AMAZING! You are keeping the mission of equity for girls and women and all, front and center.

Debbie I am grateful for you.

Roder, District 5 Coordinator

## Moving Words Into Action: Highlights from AAUW-WI DEI Branch Discussions

Our monthly AAUW-WI DEI discussions are fun and energizing — we always learn so much from each other! Across our branches, members are sharing creative ways to move beyond books and conversations into meaningful community action. Here's a glimpse of what some branches have been up to.



### River Falls — Contact: Jo Ann Prout

The River Falls Branch is planning a university-based poverty simulation to deepen understanding of economic inequities and systemic barriers. Members also enjoyed a book discussion on *The Woman They Could Not Silence* by Kate Moore and are considering inviting a UW–River Falls speaker to discuss racism. A recent trip to the Minnesota Historical Society included exhibits on feminism and Julia Child, offering engaging opportunities for both branch members and the public

### La Crosse — Contact: June Reinert

The La Crosse Branch continues to emphasize DEI and social justice themes through literature and film. Members share community engagement updates from local organizations and events, helping expand awareness and encourage participation in ongoing equity efforts.

### Northwoods — Contact: Kathleen Marshall

Members welcomed Amanda Goodenough, a 2024 state convention speaker, who shared insights on servant leadership and community outreach. Several guests attended and appreciated the lively discussion focused on leadership grounded in equity and inclusion. Local partnerships are thriving, with special recognition this month for two Wisconsin businesses making an impact: • Minocqua Brewing Company – recognized for progressive advocacy ([Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/MBCBrews](https://www.facebook.com/MBCBrews), Blog: <https://kirkbangstad.substack.com>) • Penzey's Spices – applauded for outspoken support of social justice ([Facebook: https://m.facebook.com/Penzeys/about](https://m.facebook.com/Penzeys/about)) Members are encouraged to follow and engage with these community-minded companies online.

### Green Bay Area — Contact: Terri Gulyas

Our DEI Committee is reading *Bone of the Bone: Essays on America by a Daughter of the Working Class* by Sarah Smarsh, exploring the often-overlooked diversity within our own families. We've also joined the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin for a DEI webinar series led by Kole Torres, Diversity Manager for LWVWI, which includes *The DEI Journey with Local Leagues*. Locally, many participated in the “No Kings” protest with Indivisible Brown County to promote civic engagement and inclusive democracy.

### Janesville — Contact: Leslie Brunsell

The Janesville Branch discussed a recent Gazette article about civic engagement and the “America First” rally coinciding with the No Kings march read more: [https://www.gazettextra.com/news/local/wewill-be-respectful-until-they-are-not-two-groups-with-starkly-different-views-set/article\\_2f96029e-3067-4\\_e5d-8cad-3a0af7c9e023.html](https://www.gazettextra.com/news/local/wewill-be-respectful-until-they-are-not-two-groups-with-starkly-different-views-set/article_2f96029e-3067-4_e5d-8cad-3a0af7c9e023.html). In response, members launched Dialogue and Learning: Maintaining Diverse Discussions and Listening Sessions — safe spaces for open, constructive community dialogue on current tensions and shared values. (This page may not be available, search for starkly different views to find the article once the Gazette page opens)

## From Words to Actions

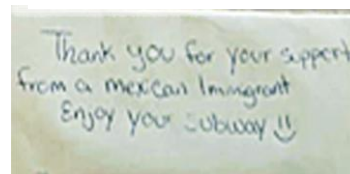
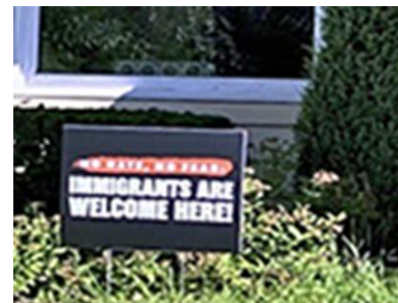
As one member reminded us, sometimes it's the simple acts that make the biggest difference: "You know I have the sign in front of my house that says, 'No hate, no fear. Immigrants are welcome here.' Tonight, when I came home, I found a kind note taped to my door. Someone had written—well, actually, here's what I saw:"

*What a wonderful surprise to get this lovely note and know we can make a difference in a simple action.*

That small moment of connection shows how kindness and visibility matter. Other easy ways to make a difference include:

- Flying diversity flags or posting inclusive yard signs
- Using bumper stickers with positive social messages
- Hosting community conversations that invite neighbors to listen, share, and learn together

Let's keep finding those everyday ways to move words into action — and build communities rooted in empathy, equity, and inclusion.



## Resolutions: We need to be more aware of their existence!

1. Use them in programing for the coming year
2. Consider updating them if appropriate.

We have had very good intentions that have often been lost to most as soon as the convention ended. While we always encourage bringing up new issues that we feel we want to address....

I can send you the link to any so you can read it in its entirety.

I venture to suggest that all continue to be current!

Feel free to get in touch with me if you have thoughts or questions as we consider Resolutions for the coming year. They can be presented by individuals, groups or branches. If you are considering a topic, let me know if you need help with the format..

A draft of a proposed Resolution needs to be sent to me by Jan 21st. The Resolution Committee: WI AAUW President, President Elect, Public Policy Co-Chairs and Resolutions Chair will review them. They will be shared at the Jan. 24th AAUW-WI State Board meeting.

Kathy Walsh  
Resolutions Chair  
847-528-21201  
[kath3032@gmail.com](mailto:kath3032@gmail.com)



**2013** Gun Violence  
**2013** Voting Rights  
**2014** Human Trafficking  
**2015** Redistricting  
**2015** Student Loan Refinancing  
**2017** Support Victims of Sexual Assault  
**2017** Water Resolution  
**2018 - 2021** No resolutions due to COVID  
**2022** Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Curriculum  
**2022** Climate Change  
**2023** Afghan Women  
**2023** Land Acknowledgement  
**2024** Wisconsin Resolution on Anti-Racism  
**2025** AAUW Wisconsin Resolution on Upholding the Civil Rights of Americans who Identify as LGBTQ+  
**2025** AAUW WISCONSIN Resolution on Constitutional Amendment to Eliminate Big Money in Politics  
The above are all Resolutions AAUW WI members have passed at conventions since 2013!

# AAUW WI State Board 2024-25

## Executive Board

## Appointed Board

**President** Deb Thiel  
[dick.deb@gmail.com](mailto:dick.deb@gmail.com)

**President Elect** Carole Salinas  
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**Resolutions Chair** Kathy Walsh  
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**STEM /Student Empowerment Chair**  
Pat Phillips  
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Make an Impact  
Join AAUW  
Legacy Circle

Lucy Harvey  
[lois3545@aol.com](mailto:lois3545@aol.com)

Bonnie Diehl  
[bdiehl81@gmail.co](mailto:bdiehl81@gmail.co)



<https://www.aauw.org/resources/member/ways-to-give-aauw/leave-a-legacy/>

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AAUW National  
AAUW.org

*Badger Briefs* articles due 2 weeks after State board meetings.  
Special issues may be sent as needed.  
The issues will be sent to branches to be forwarded to their members.

## Board Meetings: Due Dates:

October 24<sup>th</sup>  
January 24<sup>th</sup>  
April 17<sup>th</sup>

November 7<sup>th</sup>  
**February 7<sup>th</sup>**  
May 9<sup>th</sup>

Send articles with subject line: *Badger Briefs* Article to:  
[rjadams65@frontier.com](mailto:rjadams65@frontier.com)