

# Ready, Set, **Vote!**

## **AAUW's Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout Program**

By Lisa Maatz

*Women have a tremendous amount at stake on November 4, 2008, and we know it.*

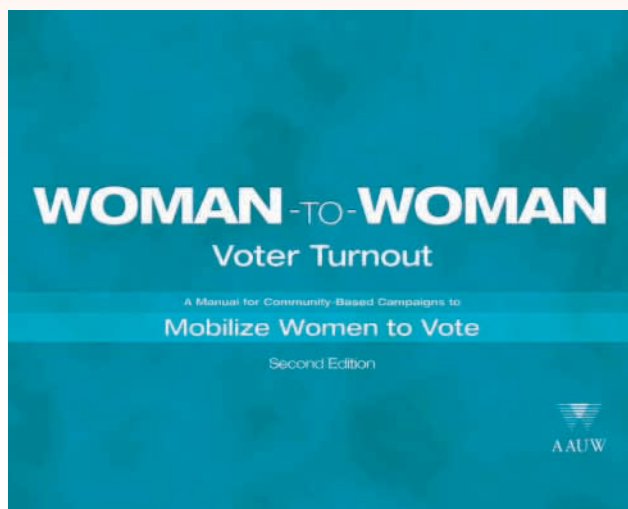
*This spring, women voters of all ages flooded polling places and caucuses in record numbers.*

*Now it's time to get ready for November with AAUW's Voter Turnout Program.*

A part of AAUW's long-time voter education campaign, our Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout Program rests on this simple but profound premise: the more women speak their minds, the more likely the issues we care about will rise to the top in policy debates. Voting is a critical way that women can use our political voices to make positive change, as the suffragists recognized long ago. And despite the well-documented gender gap, in which more women vote than men, many women still don't exercise their franchise. AAUW's Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout Program and members across the country are working to change that.

Up for grabs this election year are 35 Senate seats (two more than usual thanks to some special elections), 435 House seats (plus the five nonvoting delegates, including the race in Washington, D.C.), and—in one of the most historic and watchable races ever—the keys to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Also up for debate is some old-style thinking about red states and blue states, as well as swing states and purple states. The status quo is being challenged, and new voters are a big part of the reason for this shift. Many of these new voters are women college students, who are not just voting for the first time but also getting personally involved in the campaigns.

Truly, politics as usual is not the norm this election. Just ask likely Republican presidential nominee and decorated veteran John McCain. The pundits said he didn't have enough money to gas up his campaign bus in January, yet now the maverick candi-



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date tops the GOP ticket. Or ask Hillary Clinton, whose frontrunner/presumptive nominee status was upended by Barack Obama, the charismatic freshman senator who seems to have come out of nowhere. That a woman was a national party frontrunner—and was seen by many as the likely nominee when the race began—should have been our first clue that, in this election, many of the old rules no longer apply.

The congressional elections find the Democrats working to defend their newly won majorities in both the House and Senate, at a time when Congress is about as unpopular as lame-duck President George W. Bush. The House Democrats took a rare prize, snatching the seat of retiring Rep. Dennis Hastert (R-IL). The longest-serving Republican Speaker of the House, Hastert resigned at the end of 2007 and watched his solidly Republican district go blue in a March special election. Democrats immediately tried to pronounce the race a bellwether for the fall, but a lot can happen in five months, and this loss could just as easily help Republicans rally the troops.

Congress is vital to advancing AAUW's member-adopted Public Policy Program. Not only does the legislative branch hold the power of the purse, determining priority programs through the allocation of our tax dollars, but it also plays a critical oversight role in ensuring that the executive branch implements laws in ways that are consistent with congressional intent. AAUW, through our dedicated membership, has long worked to educate elected officials about AAUW priority issues. Branches coordi-

nate issue forums, host candidate debates, and hold in-district meetings with their members of Congress; AAUW members also take the time to send letters to Congress or write letters to the editor using AAUW's Action Network e-advocacy system.

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Through AAUW's voter education campaign, AAUW members also seek to hold members of Congress accountable for their actions—or lack thereof—on behalf of women and girls. We do this by compiling and distributing nonpartisan voter guides, as well as our *AAUW Congressional Voting Record*, to the public. The voting record, which AAUW has been publishing for more than 25 years, provides the roll call votes of all members of Congress on key AAUW issues each session. It is widely distributed and, this year, is included as a special pullout section in this issue of *Outlook*. I hope you'll share it with friends, family, and others who care about electing policy makers who are committed to equity for women and girls.

The White House also wields great influence to advance, ignore, or even hinder AAUW priority issues. It's no secret that many longtime AAUW priorities are vulnerable to poor enforcement or unfavorable regulatory changes, including the Family and Medical Leave Act and Title IX, the law that prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs that receive federal funds. Other issues, like pay discrimination and affir-



Lilly Ledbetter speaks in support of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, along with AAUW's Lisa Maatz (left) and Deborah Frett (right) of Business and Professional Women/USA, on Equal Pay Day.

## AAUW's Member-Endorsed Public Policy Program: How It's Implemented

AAUW's tradition of advancing equity for women and girls through political means dates back to our earliest days. In 1913, members began our first pay equity efforts with a report on U.S. civil service job classifications and compensation. As early as 1922, AAUW's legislative program called for a reclassification of the U.S. civil service and for a repeal of salary restrictions in the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau. Even then, AAUW's research efforts informed our policy agenda, and today they remain closely linked.

AAUW conducts advocacy work by lobbying policy makers, mobilizing our membership, educating voters, and increasing public awareness of issues, all to influence the debate on AAUW's priorities. AAUW's Washington-based policy efforts and actions in the field are carefully coordinated to ensure maximum effect. For example, in any given week, a congressional office may hear from AAUW's Capitol Hill Lobby Corps and professional staff, as well as from you, their constituents, who also happen to be AAUW members. These contacts, via phone and e-mail, all focus on the same issue and convey a coordinated message. This synergy is the key to a successful grassroots effort.

AAUW's advocacy work has always been political in nature; this is a key point. AAUW is absolutely, positively nonpartisan: we do not favor one party over another, and we do not endorse partisan candidates. Our strength has always been that we advance our priorities in a nonpartisan fashion, with elected officials from all political stripes. Not only does this policy reflect the multi-partisan nature of our membership, it's simply the smart thing to do to be successful in Washington, D.C.

From AAUW's very beginnings, however, members have taken a stand on political questions: women's suffrage, pay equity, Title IX, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and many more. AAUW's advocacy on behalf of these issues stems from our political positions about women's equity. Our goal is always to advance policies that break down educational and economic barriers so that all women and girls have a fair chance. Sometimes, of course, AAUW plays the spoiler, and we do our best to block legislation that we believe is not in women's best interest.

But how does AAUW make these political decisions? AAUW's advocacy relies on our member-endorsed Public Policy Program, which is developed and voted on by the membership and rests directly on AAUW's mission. The AAUW Public Policy and Government Relations Department—with input from the member leaders of the AAUW Public Policy Committee—implements the program. But it is AAUW member advocates across the country—members like you, who speak their minds, engage in voter education programs, and lead community-based coalitions—that truly advance AAUW's mission through our policy work.



mative action, are affected by the quality and commitment of presidential appointees to such entities as the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Still other executive agencies set the tone for women's equity issues throughout the federal government: the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau and the Offices of Civil Rights at both the Department of Justice and the Department of Education are just a few key examples.


The tone and tenor of any presidential administration—its priorities and philosophies—understandably have a ripple effect throughout the executive branch. This “shadow presidency,” while not as visible as the partisan byplay in Congress or budget battles between the White House and Capitol Hill, nonetheless provides the foundation that can determine progress or gridlock on issues critical to AAUW's member-adopted Public Policy Program. And then, of course, there is the U.S. Supreme Court, where so many of women's gains have been forged and protected. The president and the Senate control these lifetime appointments. Consider the case of *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company* (2007) and its detrimental effect on pay equity issues, and you will understand the enormous influence high court decisions can have on women's lives—and even women's paychecks.

Clearly, then, the voter education campaign is an important element of AAUW's grassroots advocacy and one of the tools we use to move the mission forward. Since the program's expansion in 1995, when we began to target nonmembers as well as members, AAUW has conducted voter education and get-out-the-vote activities in almost every state. The campaign has achieved

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success in educating women voters—particularly those hard to reach drop-off or newly registered voters—on the issues at stake for women. States and branches that undertake voter education campaigns also find that the program plays a key role in recruiting and retaining AAUW members, building branch and state capacity, and forging diverse partnerships. The program can also help to increase AAUW's visibility and foster leadership development among our members.

Central to the campaign, and newly revised for 2008, is the *Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout* manual. This original and well-received AAUW publication guides members and coalition partners step-by-step through putting together an effective get-out-the-vote campaign.

The Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout Program builds on AAUW's strengths. With more than 1,200 branches and a presence in every congressional district, AAUW has the reach to mobilize women voters across the country. AAUW also has the community ties and solid reputation with other organizations needed to build local coalitions and implement community-based campaigns. Perhaps most important, AAUW has a nationwide membership that includes Middle America—not just the two coasts—and Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. AAUW's Woman-to-Woman program doesn't tell women how to vote; it simply tells women how much we value their vote and urges them to get to the polls. 

*Lisa Maatz is AAUW's director of public policy and government relations.*

### **Tools for Your 2008 Woman-to-Woman Voter Education Campaign**

(available at [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org) unless otherwise noted)

- The *Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout* manual, a newly revised step-by-step guide for putting together a great campaign
- *AAUW Congressional Voting Record*, 110th Congress, First Session
- AAUW voter guide template (includes how-to information)
- AAUW media advisory template (to publicize your efforts)
- AAUW position papers
- AAUW “Power of One Vote” signs, buttons, stickers, and postcards to publicize your activities and energize your volunteers; also “I Am the Face of Pay Equity” signs and stickers (e-mail [VoterEd@aauw.org](mailto:VoterEd@aauw.org) to request them, while supplies last)
- AAUW “Power of One Vote” e-card to encourage women to get to the polls
- *Washington Update*, AAUW's members-only, weekly e-bulletin providing the latest policy updates and programming information, including voter education campaign ideas (e-mail [VoterEd@aauw.org](mailto:VoterEd@aauw.org) to sign up)
- AAUW voter education campaign website, filled with tips, suggestions, and useful links