

On Lincoln, AAUW, and Economic Recovery

Linda D. Hallman, AAUW Executive Director



Dear AAUW Friends:

Today[February 12, 2009] I was honored to attend the national ceremony celebrating President Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday. As you can imagine, it was a wonderful event - held in the grandeur of the U.S. Capitol Rotunda but tempered by the real challenges before us. The crisis facing America today is very different from the one that faced President Lincoln, but as President Obama stated this morning, "We are once again debating the critical issues of our time. Let us remember that we are doing so as servants to the same flag, as representatives of the same people, and as stakeholders in a common future." Those words get to the heart of AAUW's mission, and specifically what AAUW has been doing to get our nation back to work and our economy moving again.

As the recession has deepened, we at AAUW have been stepping up our efforts to fight for working women and their families. I wanted to take this moment to fill you in on our latest work, update you on our progress, and keep you informed on where we stand on these critical issues.

We believe wholeheartedly that the most pressing national economic question is simply this: "Are we - our government, policy makers, and communities - doing everything we can to get the American people back to work?" That has led AAUW to ask a similar question: "Is AAUW doing everything we can to help get the American people back to work and to ensure that the unique concerns of women and girls are factored into policy solutions?" For the last several months, AAUW has been lobbying members of Congress on our top priorities for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act - the recovery bill -which include investments in higher education, school construction and modernization, affordable healthcare, targeted tax credits, and direct appropriations to states and localities to support critical services. The recovery package, a version of which has been passed by both chambers, has now been reconciled and is set for a final vote. This week, [AAUW sent a letter](#) to conferees urging them to include our most important priorities in the final bill. We are pleased to report that AAUW was successful in maintaining most of our key priorities in the compromise measure, including:

- A valuable tax credit to "Make Work Pay" for American families and an expansion of the Child Tax Credit to target more families in need - especially those in poverty.[\[i\]](#)
- The inclusion of an extension and increase of current unemployment benefits, which will help many hurting workers facing an even tougher job market and also represents funds that will quickly go back into the economy.
- Almost \$20 billion in appropriations for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) because, in addition to feeding the hungry, food stamps are dollar for dollar by far the most stimulative provision in the recovery and reinvestment bill.[\[ii\]](#)
- \$53.6 billion in State Fiscal Stabilization Funds to help schools maintain their education budgets and initiate critical renovation and construction projects. This education funds will save jobs as well as create them.
- The "American Opportunity Tax Credit," a \$2,500 tax credit for college tuition and other expenses, providing a targeted investment that will encourage individuals to retrain and retool through higher education - which will in turn improve their earning potential and career competitiveness. People without college degrees are much more vulnerable to being laid off than those who have this important credential, providing further evidence that the AAUW priority of investing in education is money well spent, period.
- A vital increase in the maximum Pell grant award of \$500 for the 2009-2010 school year, as well as additional funds for work-study programs, helping millions of students go to college - and stay in college.
- Providing meaningful COBRA subsidies, which will allow more American families to be able to maintain their health insurance and afford valuable preventative care after they've been laid off, which could help to avoid not only heartache but bankruptcies in the future.[\[iii\]](#)

While engaging in intense lobbying efforts on the recovery bill, AAUW has simultaneously taken the lead in promoting another form of economic stimulus: pay equity. I was so proud to have a front-row seat at the White House to watch our new president sign this AAUW priority into law - in fact, it was the first bill President Obama signed. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act fixes the Supreme Court's disastrous 2007 *Ledbetter* decision, but that's just a down payment on the truly meaningful change needed to end the pernicious wage gap. That's why, just this morning, AAUW hosted and led a key coalition meeting for the Paycheck Fairness Act. This critical legislative update to the 45-year old Equal Pay Act takes a number of steps to deter wage discrimination and to empower women to negotiate for and achieve equal pay in the workplace.

You might ask how pay equity equates to economic stimulus. Women have lost about 495,000 jobs since the beginning of the current recession in December 2007. Women's unemployment rate is up 1.6 percentage points to 5.9 percent over that same time period.[\[iv\]](#) More families than ever rely on women as a breadwinner of the family, yet women still only earn 78 cents for every dollar men do.[\[v\]](#) As a result, many working families require meaningful support simply to make ends meet.[\[vi\]](#) Consequently, pay equity - quite literally - helps families make ends meet, especially during these difficult economic times. Toward that end, in fact, we're asking that you [send a Keep the Change e-card](#) to your friends and family, asking that they write their senators and urge passage of the

Paycheck Fairness Act to help revive our economic engine.

AAUW's mission-related work is ongoing and widespread. Just last week, at the invitation of the White House, I attended the first briefing on the new White House Task Force on Middle Class Working Families. During that meeting, I addressed the need to ensure apprenticeships for women on the shovel-ready construction projects that will be funded in the short-term by the recovery package, as well as the importance of opening up the nontraditional STEM fields to women as a means of achieving long-term economic growth. In addition, AAUW has sent the White House a letter requesting that the Task Force devote a specific field hearing to the unique challenges facing women in the workplace, with an emphasis on work/life balance.

I wanted to give you a complete update on our economic recovery efforts, and that can't be done in a short note. But since I know that our members expect and deserve an AAUW that fights the good fight on multiple fronts, never resting until the job is done, I thought I would use the auspicious occasion of Lincoln's birthday to illuminate our efforts. AAUW is steadfastly working towards a more perfect Union, and your support and participation is what makes this success possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Linda D. Hallman, CAE
AAUW Executive Director

[i] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (January 26, 2009). Tax Credit Provisions in House and Senate Recovery Packages Would Lessen Growth in Poverty. Retrieved January 27, 2009 from <http://www.cbpp.org/1-26-09pov.htm>.

[ii] Zandi, Mark. (July 24, 2008). Testimony before the House Committee on Small Business hearing titled, Economic Stimulus For Small Business: A Look Back and Assessing need for Additional Relief. Retrieved February 10, 2009 from www.house.gov/smbiz/hearings/hearing-07-24-08-stimulus/Zandi.pdf.

[iii] Divided We Fail. (2008). Affordable Healthcare Platform. Retrieved December 3, 2008, from http://www.aarp.org/issues/dividedwefail/about_issues/divided_we_fail_platform_affordable_health_care.html.

[iv] Boushey, Heather. (January 2009). Equal pay for breadwinners. Retrieved January 26, 2009 from www.americanprogress.org.

[v] U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. (August 2008). *Annual Demographic Survey*.

Retrieved December 11, 2008, from http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032008/perinc/new05_000.htm.

[vi] Boushey, Heather. (January 2009). Equal pay for breadwinners. Retrieved January 26, 2009 from www.americanprogress.org.