



Public Policy News

A monthly dispatch from the AAUW California Public Policy Team

GEARING UP FOR THE MIDTERMS

Primary Election - June 2, 2026

The Public Policy Committee has prepared voter guides and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) resources for the upcoming primaries. The guides are nonpartisan and present candidates' positions on policy issues that are important to AAUW, based on their voting records and public statements.

Voter guides are now available for four closely contested U.S. House races identified by Swing Left: CA-22, CA-48, CA-13, and CA-45. Guides are also available for the eight gubernatorial candidates.

This year's gubernatorial primary is especially significant due to California's "jungle primary" system, in which the two candidates receiving the most votes - regardless of party affiliation - will advance to the November general election.

You can find AAUW California's electronic Voter Guides [HERE](#). A printable handout for the gubernatorial race can be found [HERE](#). And printable QR code bookmarks that direct others to the electronic guides can be found [HERE](#).

LOBBY DAYS 2026

AAUW in Action

Thank you to the AAUW activists who helped make Lobby Days 2026 a success! Nearly 200 members from 64 branches turned out to advance our priority legislation. Meetings have been held with 80 legislative offices, with a few more still to come.

See page 6 for the full article detailing the event. And don't miss the Lobby Days 2026 photo gallery [HERE](#).

If you missed it...

- AAUW California and Lift Up Public Schools Webinar Series
 - Part I - School Districts 101: How They Work. See the recording [HERE](#).
 - Part II - School Board Trustee, Leadership. See the recording [HERE](#).
 - Part III - Why School Boards Matter to Everyone. See the recording [HERE](#).
- CA Superintendent of Public Instruction Candidate Forum - Sponsored by Contemporary Policy Institute with cohost AAUW California. See the recording [HERE](#).
- AAUW Webinar - It's My Vote! 2026: From Issues That Matter to Actions That Count. See the recording [HERE](#).

BRANCH PUBLIC POLICY CHAIRS' MEETING



LAST MEETING OF THE YEAR!

PEER GROUP MEETING
Friday June 5, 2026
at 1:30pm Pacific
[ZOOM LINK HERE](#)

Click [HERE](#) for meeting information.



Peer Group Meetings are bi-monthly on Fridays at 1:30pm. All are welcome!

If you miss a Peer Group Meeting, Recordings and Slide Decks can be found [HERE](#) under Public Policy

SIGN UP FOR ACTION ALERTS [HERE](#).



WHERE IS THAT?

Key links to your public policy resources:

- [Google Workspace](#)
- Contact us at publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org
- Tell us about your branch public policy events by filling out this [form](#).

FOLLOW US ON [RESISTBOT HERE](#).



Three Steps to Take Action in May

Focus: Get Ready to Get Out the Vote (CA Primaries)



Taking action is as easy as 1-2-3! Each month we provide you with a short list of targeted action-items focused on a topic-area that we care about. This month our focus is on GETTING OUT THE VOTE. If you want more options for action, please visit the [AAUW California public policy website](#) or stop by our peer group meetings.

Take Action: Get Ready to Get Out The Vote (CA Primaries)

1

STEP 1: Self-Focused: Education



- See AAUW California's Primary Election Voter Guide [HERE](#).
- Learn how California's "jungle primary" system may be [especially consequential](#) in this year's gubernatorial primary election.
- Check Out AAUW's [Election Resources](#) and the [2026 Voter Issue Guide](#).

STEP 2: Other-Focused: Education & Connection



- Share what you've learned about the potential consequences of our "jungle primary" with your friends and family.
- Meet up with a few branch members to watch AAUW National's webinar "[It's My Vote! 2026: From Issues That Matter to Actions That Count](#)" together.

2

STEP 3: Politically-Focused



- If you are in U.S. Congressional districts CA-22, CA-48, CA-13 and CA-45: please share the [AAUW California Congressional Voter Guides](#) with your community.
- If you are in California: please share the [AAUW California Gubernatorial Voter Guides](#) with your community.
- Encourage people in your community to VOTE, using the resources provided by AAUW California and AAUW National. Use these two resources for tabling: Print this [handout](#) double-sided. And/or make QR code bookmarks on cardstock using [this file](#) (your choice to use border or no-border).

3

You can also sign on to encourage California legislators to support two of our priority bills in 2026, which seek to strengthen voting rights in California. Click on the images to be directly connected to the AAUW California petitions page.

TELL STATE LEGISLATURES (CALIF. ONLY)

Make Voting in California Accessible for Everyone (SB 1360)

TEXT SIGN PRQZEP TO 50409

TELL STATE LEGISLATURES (CALIF. ONLY)

Support the California Voting Rights Act of 2026 (SB 1164)

TEXT SIGN PYLSMC TO 50409

Talking To 5th Graders About Gender Equity

AAUW California Public Policy Answers Student Questions

By Missy Maceyko & Amy Hom, Co-Chairs, AAUW California Public Policy Committee

A group of fifth graders from Pleasant Hill, CA recently reached out to us as part of a class project focused on making a positive impact in the world. They chose to explore gender equity and asked us several thoughtful questions. Their questions—and our responses—feel especially relevant for all of us right now, particularly in light of issues like the Heritage Foundation 2026 initiative “Saving American and Saving the Family” that Missy has been highlighting. We thought you would enjoy reading the exchange.

What do you think is the biggest problem in gender equality today?



First, we like to talk about gender equity rather than equality. When we use the word equality we assume that everyone is starting from the same point. When everyone starts from the same point, it seems logical that everyone receives the same treatment. Equity recognizes that not everyone starts from the same point—some people specifically begin from a disadvantage. Equity allows us to acknowledge this and offer resources and support to meet their needs, so that everyone actually DOES start from the same point (and therefore have equal opportunity). An example: let’s say that someone in your class falls down on the playground and cuts their knee. Ouch! They are now hurt and in need of a bandaid. Equity would be giving the bandaid ONLY to the classmate that fell down, because they now need it. Equality would be giving a bandaid to everyone in the class, regardless of need.

Now, the biggest problem? Whew! That’s a hard question. We think that the biggest problem is the same one that has existed for a very long time: the exclusion of certain people based on very silly and unscientific ideas about what it means to be feminine or masculine or a girl or a boy.

Can girls climb mountains? Can boys wear dresses? The answer, of course, is YES to both. The girls who want to climb mountains are strong and skilled enough to climb mountains. And anyone can wear a dress!

The big problem is that too many people—often powerful people—jump to conclusions about ALL girls and ALL boys—about what they are able to do and what they should do. When someone falls outside of their ideas about ALL girls and ALL boys, they often make negative judgments—or worse, try to force those who fall outside of their ideas about what is “normal” to be/do/act in the ways that they see as “correct.”

There are a lot of powerful people right now who are trying to force certain people to wear dresses and to limit other people from wearing them.

And there are most certainly a lot of powerful people right now who say that ALL girls are weaker than ALL boys, which assumes that ALL boys are naturally better at climbing mountains (and that girls should not climb mountains, especially not with boys, because girls are naturally weaker and will get hurt). None of this is true—some PEOPLE like to wear dresses and some PEOPLE are more equipped to climb mountains. Not everything about human difference is about gender and there are many good, normal, and correct ways to be boys and girls.

What was the most important thing that happened to change gender equality?

In the United States, some of the most important changes to gender equity have been brought on by the passage of laws that have sought to address gender-based inequalities and to level the playing field for all people.



[CLICK HERE](#) TO ACCESS A TEXT-BASED COPY OF THE CONVERSATION

Talking to 5th Graders About Gender Equity (cont'd)

Some examples include:

- **Women's Suffrage** - The ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920 gave women the right to vote. (Note that the 19th amendment removed sex as a barrier, but only for white women over the age of 21. Some groups of women, such as Native American women, young women (age 18-21), and Asian-American women were not afforded the right to vote until much later in the 20th century, and race-based barriers remained for all women of color until the passage of specific laws, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965.)
- **Equal Pay Act of 1963** - Prohibited sex-based wage discrimination, i.e. men and women performing the same work must be paid equally.
- **Civil Rights Act of 1964** - prohibited employment discrimination (e.g., hiring, firing, promotion, etc.) based on things like gender, race, and nationality.
- **Reproductive Rights** - providing legal access to contraception, especially legalization of the birth control pill in 1965, which allowed more women to participate in education and the workforce.



How Are You Changing Gender Equality Today?

AAUW California's work is guided by our 4 public policy priorities - Economic Security for All Women, Equal Access to Quality Public Education for All Students, Social and Racial Justice for All Members of Society, and Increased Representation of Women in Leadership Roles. We advocate for state legislation that will advance these priorities, lobbying the legislature and Governor for their support in order to get these bills passed into law. Here are a few of the bills we are working to advance in California this year:

- California Assembly Bill (AB) 1766 and AB 1845 focus on education and prevention of human trafficking in K-12 and higher education, respectively. The majority of human trafficking victims (61%) are women and girls.
- California AB 1845 prohibits insurance companies from denying coverage to people because of their race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex - including pregnancy and gender identity.
- California AB 1784 would require postsecondary educational institutions to ensure equal access to programs for undergraduate students experiencing pregnancy or a pregnancy-related condition

You can see all of the bills we are supporting this year [HERE](#).

During election years, we also create guides for voters to tell them more about the positions of candidates in competitive federal Congressional races in California. Because the U.S. House of Representatives is so narrowly divided, having just a few more members who support gender equity in Washington, D.C. can make a real difference in the direction of the nation.

What do you think is the most important thing we can do to change gender equality?

Recognizing how we think about gender is a small but very important thing. If we aren't aware of how we think about gender—including how we think about ourselves and how we respond to things like girls climbing mountains or boys wearing dresses—we might accidentally create more inequity. We need to pay attention to how, and when, we respond negatively or positively to ourselves and others based on gender—and ask ourselves why.

For instance, we need to stop and ask: do we think of women as the person who should be responsible for taking care of everything at home? If yes, why?



Talking to 5th Graders About Gender Equity (cont'd)

Women are not “naturally” better at taking care of things at home. However, historically in the United States, women have been marked as the primary person in the family who is responsible for taking care of the cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, taking care of kids, and caring for elderly parents.

Anyone can, of course, do any of these things at home and do them equally well. But in many families, women are responsible for all of these household things, in addition to having a job to make money for the household. This is like having two jobs—one that is unpaid! That does not seem fair, right? Having to do all of that work to keep a household running means that her career growth is limited - this is a big part of the reason why women, overall, make less money than men, and why women do not make up a larger portion of elected office holders. We can make a big difference in the world by simply stopping to make sure that we, too, do not assume that women should take care of everything at home—and that we make decisions in the future that challenge these ideas, like insisting that household chores are shared equally among everyone in our home.

What Are You Trying to Achieve for Gender Equality?

- Fair treatment of everyone who has been marginalized on the basis of gender—and letting everyone know that we have to fight extra hard for those who face many different forms of marginalization at the same time (e.g., immigration status, ethnicity, and gender).
- Pay equity: making sure that everyone is paid the same wage for doing the same work, no matter who they are.
- Bodily autonomy: making sure everyone is able to make decisions about what to do with their own body, without influence or interference from others.
- Freedom from violence: creating environments where everyone can thrive by eliminating existing violence as well as the threat of violence.
- Equal access to education: ensuring that everyone has equal access to quality education, and the tools they need to succeed.
- Promoting changes that bring about more women in leadership across the United States.



What Can We Do Through Our Project to Help You Achieve Your Goals?

Educate your friends, classmates, parents and relatives. Let them know that gender equity has not been fully realized in the United States, especially among certain groups of women, even as you remind them that significant progress has been made overall over the last 100 years.

- Women today make \$.81 for every \$1.00 earned by men.
- Ideally the people who represent us in government also represent the wider U.S. population, which tends to be 50% women and 50% men. However, Congress remains far less ethnically, racially, and gender diverse than the U.S. as a whole.
- The U.S. Senate consists of 74 men and 26 women—and only 5 of these women are women of color—and the U.S. House of Representatives consists of 280 men and 151 women.
- In terms of leadership—we have STILL NEVER had a woman President of the United States!
- And only 11% of big powerful Fortune 500 companies today are led by women.

Encourage your friends and family to challenge gender stereotypes.

- Equalize chores. For example, boys can babysit, wash dishes and vacuum, and girls can help fix stuff and mow the lawn.
- Read books and watch shows that depict women in STEM careers or positions of power, and depict men in nurturing roles
- Choose your language with care. Girls are “confident” rather than “bossy”. Don’t say “boys don’t cry” - it’s a positive thing for boys to show emotion.
- Talk about stereotypes you see in video games or on TV, and why they may be unfair.

Recommend good books for your class to read and discuss breaking stereotypes, important women in history, and gender identity. **And keep being curious and asking great questions.**

Lobby Days 2026 - A New Approach Delivers Strong Results



By Amy Hom, Co-chair AAUW California Public Policy Committee

The Public Policy Committee extends sincere thanks to the many members who participated in Lobby Days 2026. Nearly 200 members from 64 branches stepped forward to advocate for AAUW California's priority legislation. To date, 80 meetings have been held, with a few more still to come.

This year we took a new approach, emphasizing in-district meetings. Inspired by the Redlands Branch's success last year - where four of eight in-district meetings were held directly with legislators - we shifted away from Sacramento-based meetings in favor of local engagement. The shift was strongly supported by members in a November survey, with most expressing a preference for meeting with district offices.

While this approach placed significant responsibility on Team Leaders to coordinate meetings locally, their persistence paid off. Most Team Leaders who followed up consistently were able to secure meetings - often with the legislator. **We are deeply grateful for the Team Leaders' time, energy, and determination that made this year's Lobby Days such a success.**

The results speak for themselves. Of the 44 district office meetings reported so far, 22 were held with legislators - a remarkable outcome. By comparison, only 2 of 32 reported Zoom meetings were with legislators, consistent with the results of last year's Sacramento and Zoom formats.

The visit reports we have received reflect the high quality of members' experiences with legislators and their staff. Many offices were already familiar with and very complimentary of AAUW. Those who were not familiar with us came away impressed by all the things we do.

District meetings, in particular, allowed for meaningful conversations. Many lasted 30 minutes or longer, with some extending to 45 minutes or even a full hour. For members who made long drives, the warm reception and substantive dialogue made the effort worthwhile. Nearly all reports indicated that the participants truly enjoyed their experience.

Here are a few of the reflections that Team Leaders have shared:



• "Fantastic meeting! Senator Laird gave us a full hour. He was warm, humorous, and attentive to each speaker."

• "Had a great meeting with Assemblymember Schultz which lasted about 45 minutes. He is very accessible and easy going and a pleasure to speak with. We connected well."

• "Assemblymember Aguiar-Curry was very personable and made our conversations comfortable and supportive. She has very similar values as ours - she is chair of the Women's Caucus - so it felt like we were preaching to the choir!"



• "Senator Cabaldon was very engaged and had a lot to say about the bills, having read the Fact Sheets ahead of our visit."

• "Assemblymember Irwin was pro all three bills and mentioned the idea of possibly sponsoring another bill for the 2027 legislative session."



• "Senator Menjivar's staff expressed great enthusiasm for AAUW after hearing about the things we do. She was really happy to learn more about us, and wished she knew about Tech Trek as a teenager."

• "Assemblymember Hadwick seemed very interested in our scholarship programs at the Branch level, and said we could contact her in the future for donations."

• "Senator Limon was highly complimentary about AAUW's work and very much aligned with our values and mission."



• "Senator Grayson was very engaged and thoughtful in his responses and support. He indicated that he would be interested in co-sponsoring AB 1845."

• Assemblymember Lowenthal was very congenial. He expressed interest in co-sponsoring AB 1876, and he unexpectedly volunteered to donate to Tech Trek."

• "This was an incredible experience. It felt like we were making a difference in regards to advocating for these important assembly bills."

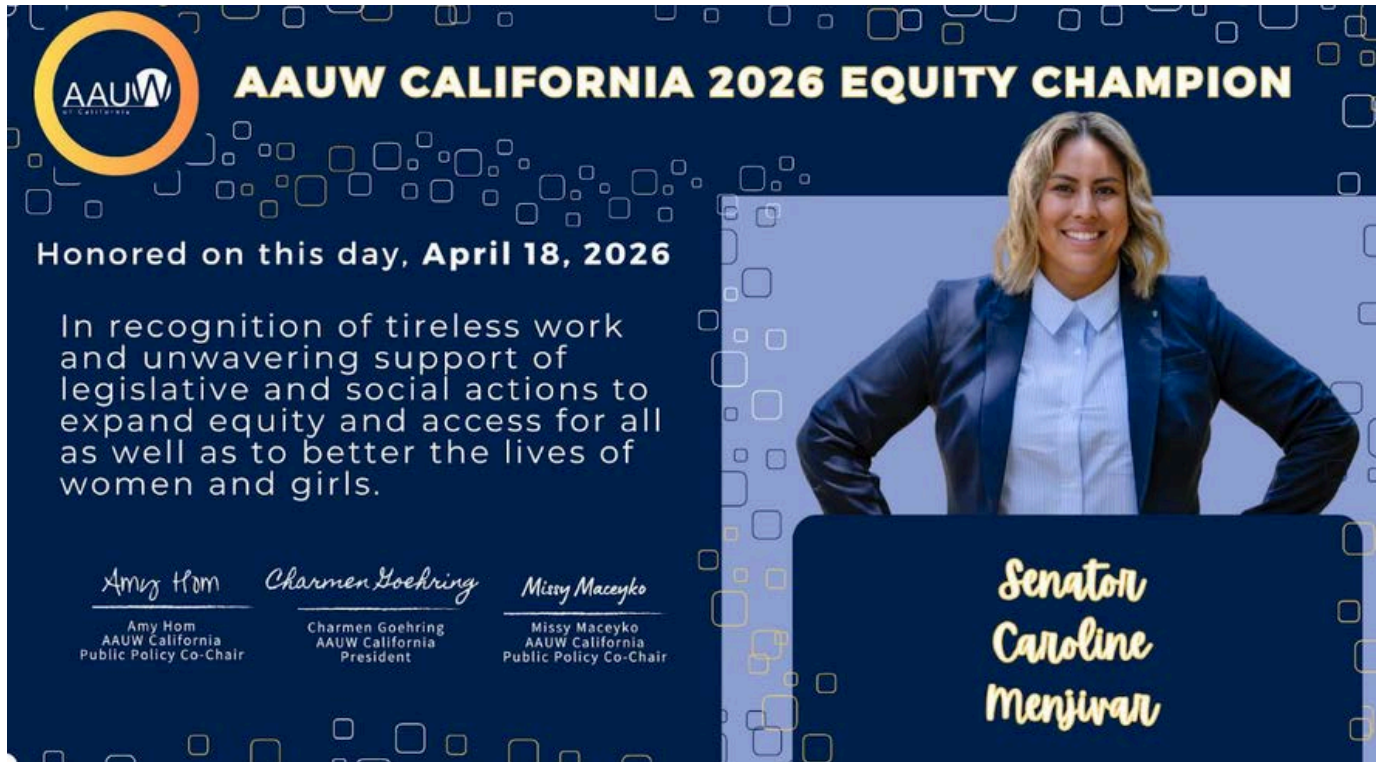
These experiences reflect the power of advocacy. When our members show up and speak with a unified voice, we can make a real difference.



(Don't miss the Lobby Days 2026 photo gallery - you can find it [HERE](#).)

CLICK [HERE](#) TO ACCESS A TEXT-BASED COPY OF THE NL ARTICLE

AAUW CALIFORNIA HONORS 2026 EQUITY CHAMPION SENATOR CAROLINE MENJIVAR



The Equity Champion award is offered to a legislator or public figure each year. It recognizes their efforts and unwavering support for expanding equity and access for all as they work to better the lives of women and girls.

This year our awardee is Senator Caroline Menjivar. Senator Caroline Menjivar (she/her/ella) has been in office since December 2022. She represents Burbank and the San Fernando Valley in California's 20th Senate District. She is a first-generation American, daughter of Salvadorean immigrants, born and raised in the communities she now represents.

Initially, Senator Menjivar's career goal was to become a City of Los Angeles firefighter, but a hiring freeze altered those plans. Inspired by her time at the Reseda High School Police Academy Magnet, she decided instead to enlist in the Marine Corps, serving from 2009 to 2016. After leaving the Marines, she worked the graveyard shift as an EMT and as a DV therapist while putting herself through school at CSUN and UCLA.

In addition to Senator Menjivar's impressive education and work history, she has been a huge champion for gender equity. Her lived experiences paved the road that brought her to the State Senate, and to her dedication to equity work. For instance, Don't Ask, Don't Tell was a military policy until 2011, and the Senator was impacted by this discriminatory policy as she was, at the time, in a relationship with her now wife. Senator Menjivar's has also been a fellow on the L.A. Mayor's Gender Equity Team and has served as non-profit Director at Meet Each Need with Dignity (MEND), a non-profit dedicated to fighting poverty. She has volunteered on the Board of Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Los Angeles Chapter; she has been on Advisory Board of Help Group's Kaleidoscope, supporting LGBTQ+ youth and families; and has served as the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer for San Fernando Valley Young Dems Club.

The senator has now applied her dedication to gender equity to the kinds of policy that she writes and advocates for in the senate.

In the relatively short time since she has been elected, Sen Menjivar has been a huge champion of AAUW CA's work. Since 2023, she has authored four of our support bills, including SB 418, which prohibits insurance companies from discrimination. This was an A-priority bill last year, and it serves as the model for this year's AB 1876.

Other AAUW California support bills authored by Menjivar over the past few years include:

- SB 953 2024 - which sought to add menstrual products to the list of covered benefits under Medi-Cal.
- SB 954 2024 - which sought to make condoms accessible to students grades 9-12.

Senator Menjivar has also supported our priority bills on many important issues with 'Aye' votes in committees and on the floor. This includes bills concerning:

- Forcing reporting of Title IX compliance by universities;
- Supporting Cal-Bridge pathway for STEM students to pursue PhDs;
- Prohibiting book banning and curricula censorship;
- Promoting teen dating violence education;
- Eliminating cost sharing for medical care following a rape;
- Regulating digital exploitation, such as:
 - making it a crime to share images or personal information of health care providers with intent to harm;
 - holding big tech accountable for child exploitation;
 - holding social media platforms accountable for delivering unlawful and harmful communications;
 - prohibiting posting of digitized sexually explicit material of minor;
 - regulating social media, including addiction by child users; and
 - regulating AI generated images of minors

She has also supported bills to eliminate employment discrimination against family caregivers and to create greater support for the LGBTQ+ community, including through creation of a specific LGBTQ+ commission.

This year, AAUW California has support bills authored by Menjivar as well, including SB 1390, which requires online dating service providers to conduct a criminal background check on users.

AAUW California offers a hearty THANK YOU to Senator Menjivar for her commitment to gender equity!



If you want to see the Public Policy remarks at the Annual meeting, and Menjivar's acceptance, navigate to 1:17



Two Major Updates from AAUW National

U.S. Supreme Court Update

On April 29, 2026, the Supreme Court issued a devastating decision in *Louisiana v. Callais*, striking down Louisiana's second majority-Black congressional district and sharply narrowing protections under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

- See AAUW's press release: <https://www.aauw.org/resources/news/media/press-releases/aauw-condemns-supreme-courts-decision-in-louisiana-v-callais-calls-for-renewed-commitment-to-voting-rights/>.
- We're discussing next steps and materials to share as we think about how important voter education will be throughout this year – both on the issues at stake and in informing our communities on how they can make their voices heard at the ballot box.

U.S. Department of Education Update

The Department of Education released its final rule on federal student loans, which will be published in the Federal Register tomorrow. Earlier this year, AAUW members and advocates submitted 1,500+ public comments opposing the proposed rule.

The final rule implements major changes to the federal student loan system enacted in last year's budget reconciliation law that will narrow access to higher education, especially for Black and Hispanic/Latina women, first-generation students, and student parents. These changes are set to go into effect on July 1, 2026 for new borrowers.

- See the published rule here: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/05/01/2026-08556/reimagining-and-improving-student-education-federal-student-loan-program-final-regulations>. We'll be sharing AAUW's response and more information on impact soon.
- We're working to pass legislation in California this year that will offset some of these losses by offering new forms of state-driven financial support for students who are seeking professional degrees but who cannot afford to pay out of pocket ([AB 2345](#)). CA legislators are getting creative.

Saving America? New Heritage Foundation Report

In January 2026, the Heritage Foundation, creators of Project 2025, released a new report entitled "[Saving America by Saving the Family: A Foundation for the Next 250 Years.](#)" Like Project 2025, the 2026 report offers a series of policy-based "solutions" to things that AAUW members rarely label as "problems," like no-fault divorce and the decline in teen pregnancy. If you want to learn more about report findings and recommendations, Missy has been up to her eyeballs in this report for the last month. As of the writing of PP News, she has released three installments of a four-part series on her substack [HERE](#).

- [Introduction](#)
- [Part 1: Have Kids or Society Will Collapse](#)
- [Part 2: Stop Having Kids or Society Will Collapse-How Problematic Families Are Destroying the Government](#)
- [Part 3: The Women Who Are Debasing Our Future](#)

Part 4, "The Policies That Will Save America" will be released the first full week of May. You can follow Missy on Substack to be alerted when she publishes new pieces or subscribe to have new pieces sent to your inbox--or look for links in future installments of PP news.

