

THE SPOKESWOMAN

<https://davis-ca.aauw.net>

President's Message: The Latest Davis Branch Activities

By Stephanie DeGraff-Hunt, AAUW Davis Branch President

Tech Trek: We have reached out to the four junior high schools and the Davis Independent School regarding the Tech Trek STEM camp at the UCD campus during the week of July 13th to 19th. At the moment, we are waiting to receive nominations from the 7th-grade math and science teachers. Once those are received, we will immediately contact parents and students regarding the application process using the Camp Doc Program. This is our third year using Camp Doc, and it seems like a breeze now that we understand how it works. Interviews for the nominated students and their parents will be held during the first week of April, and the final selections will be made before April 15th. If you are interested in participating in the interviews, please contact me at sdegraffhunt@gmail.com. Meeting the nominees and their families is heartwarming, and we always wish to send every single one of them to Camp.

Lobby Days: Lobby Days are coming up on April 8th and 9th. This event is impressive in its scope and outreach to legislators and their staff. The AAUW California Public Policy Team is in the process of selecting three bills that are worth our time and effort to support. This year, Karen Lemcke, Rhonda Reed, and I will be part of the group from the Davis Branch. We will be joined by Viki Montera-Heckman from Sonoma. We will participate in a mandatory Zoom meeting to review effective ways to advocate for the three selected bills, learn about them in-depth, and deal with essential logistics. On April 8th, we will be meeting legislators and/or their staff in person; on April 9th, Zoom meetings are scheduled.

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March Calendar

Tuesday, March 4, 6:30 pm: City Council Meeting, AAUW Women's History Month Proclamation

Saturday, March 8, 9 am: Book Group Discussion

Sunday, March 9, 2-4 pm: UNA Davis International Women's Day Program at I-House

Thursday, March 13, 7 pm: Monthly Board Meeting via Zoom

Wednesday, March 19: Celebrate the 19th (email to follow)

Tuesday, March 25, 10 am : Webinar: What Every Woman Should Know About Social Security (see article)

Save the Date!

Sunday, April 13, 1:00 pm: In-person Book Group Meeting with Sash Bischoff, author of "Sweet Fury" (email to follow)

March Women's History Month and March 8th International Women's Day: To commemorate Women's History Month and International Women's Day on March 8th, Verena Borton suggested that the City of Davis issue a proclamation recognizing AAUW. She got the ball rolling to introduce me to Carrie Dyer, the point person for preparing and organizing the reading of proclamations by selected members of the City Council. My interest is advocacy of AAUW's public policy priorities, the cornerstones of our mission. I read and wrote a great deal about this and shared it with Carrie. Carrie requested more specific historical information, given that March is Women's History Month. To describe the history and impact of AAUW, it was necessary to explore the extensive resources available on both the [AAUW national](#) and [AAUW California](#) websites. When you visit these websites, you'll find a "Read More" option that reveals fascinating timelines highlighting AAUW's history since its founding in 1881. I highly encourage you to explore AAUW's rich legacy, as these websites present it in an engaging and informative way — it's truly worth your time.

During the March 4th City Council meeting, Councilwoman Linda Deos delivered the proclamation recognizing AAUW with warmth and sincerity. She shared her personal connections with both AAUW and the United Nations, emphasizing the profound impact of representing the U.S. at the 1985 United Nations World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya, when she was 23 years old.

After Linda Deos read the proclamation, I spoke about the mission of AAUW and described the focus and influence of our local branch. Much appreciation is due to Verena, Estelle, and Rhonda for helping me pare the description down to less than two minutes. At the end, we all had a photo taken with the City Council members. It was a very special evening with a team of AAUW members. It wouldn't have happened without everyone's support. Thank you!!



*Rhonda, Stephanie, Verena, and Estelle
with the Davis City Council members
and Mayor Bapu Vaitla.*

In recognition of Women's History month, I leave you with these links to AAUW websites about [AAUW's history](#) and [stance on Title IX](#). Additional websites highlight [national park sites that commemorate women](#), the impact of [women creating National Parks](#), and [history's boldest women travelers and explorers](#).

I hope you enjoy reading and sharing this information.

February Book Group Discussion of "Small Things Like These"

By Carolyn Van Hoecke

Our book group met on Zoom February 8, 2025. Verena Borton, Estelle Shiroma, Stephanie DeGraff-Hunt, Karen Lemcke, Barbara Durst, Valerie Olson, and Carolyn Van Hoecke attended the meeting. The February book's author is an Irish writer, Claire Keegan, who is known for her short stories. She has been published in The New Yorker, Best American Short Stories, Granta, and The Paris Review. She is also known for her novellas. Two have been adapted as films, including a film based on this book, which was released in November 2024. In 2022, "Small Things Like These" won the Orwell Prize for Political Fiction and was shortlisted for the Rathbones Folio Prize and the Booker Prize.

The story is historical fiction that takes place in the few days before Christmas and describes one of the Magdalene Laundries of Ireland that provided a place for unwed mothers to earn their keep from the 18th through the mid-20th centuries. Our fictional protagonist is Bill Furlong. Furlong means "furrow length" — the distance of one-eighth of a mile that a team of oxen could plough without resting. Through working hard and getting along well with others, he has established a coal delivery business that supports his family with enough to be comfortable but not by any means to be wealthy. He tries his best to be fair to all of his employees, suppliers, customers, and family. He is forever grateful to those who were kind and helpful during his childhood and have helped him achieve adult success.

One Sunday, this hard-working, careful, thoughtful man has tea in the morning with one of his customers, the Mother Superior; then, he goes home and changes his clothes to attend mass with his family of loving wife and five healthy, well-behaved and much beloved daughters. A short time later, he reflects on his morning's activities

and, without consulting anyone, begins to act on a heartfelt decision that will surely change his life and whose repercussions to him and his family are impossible to fully imagine. Will the story become redemptive or horrifying? The ending has been described as “exquisitely ambiguous” and left us with much to discuss.

Before the story begins, Claire Keegan added an excerpt from “The Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916” that reads as follows: *The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, **cherishing all of the children of the nation equally.***

It was commented that, brutal as parts of this tale are, it takes place in our own lifetime and the abuses of absolute power over the helpless and the ease with which the uninvolved can look the other way is still ongoing. We learned that approximately 9,000 girls and 796 babies died in 18 laundry institutions in Ireland before they were closed forever. We discussed the author’s character and plot development choices, including the concept of the “secret guiding father” also found in last month’s book choice. It was noted throughout the story that there are many references to Irish toys, games, traditional foods, clothes, and family activities of the close-knit, happy Furlong family. This is in stark contrast to the bleak, shoeless misery of the young woman whom Bill finds in the coal shed and decides to help by smuggling her out of the doors-locked, windows-barred, garden-banned virtual prison of the Magdalene Laundry.

Did he do the right thing? We spent some time trying to understand the dynamics of Bill’s decision and how his actions will be perceived by his wife, daughters, congregation, customers, and townspeople as the story ends abruptly minutes before any of these become aware of the situation. Most wanted to believe that, somehow, all the necessary people will want to accept and to help the young woman and that the future will eventually be tranquil. However, it seemed that the very ideals that made the family righteous would bar them from accepting the changes necessary to include her in their world and even if they could, the community probably could not. None of us could really believe in an imagined happy ending.

On March 8th, the book group will discuss “Tell Me Everything” by Elizabeth Strout. All are welcome to join us. Contact Karen Lemcke at lemckekaren@yahoo.com for more information.

AAUW National News

Taking Action to Safeguard Education

AAUW remains unwavering in our commitment to education and equity.

The first months of 2025 have been chaotic, to say the least. People around the country, especially here in Washington, D.C., are deeply feeling the impact of the current administration's Executive Orders. I hope you are taking care of yourself.

AAUW is standing strong. We will continue to advocate fiercely and stand firm against any threats to educational opportunities despite the uncertainty we're all feeling right now.

Many issues may need to be addressed moving forward, but now and in the future, AAUW is focused on safeguarding higher education. We strongly oppose the likely confirmation of Linda McMahon for U.S. Secretary of Education, whose leadership would endanger vital civil rights protections for students. Read our statement here for more details about how we are moving forward.

A few other things I'd like to mention:

A huge thank you: We appreciate everyone who joined us at our recent Member Gathering. Your passion and engagement energize our mission. Your voices are the foundation of our advocacy, and together, we're stronger. If you missed it, watch the recording here.

Looking ahead: State Convention season is just around the corner! We're thrilled to participate and connect with members across the country. These events are an opportunity to strategize, collaborate, and inspire one another, and I can't wait to see how our members come together this year. Click here to request a board or national staff speaker.

The bottom line: Together, we will continue to take action and push forward in the fight for equity for women and girls, knowing that our collective efforts can and will make a difference.

Thank you for your dedication and support.

In solidarity,



Gloria L. Blackwell
Chief Executive Officer

Membership Matters

By Katrina Sun Breese, Senior Director of Institutional Advancement

AAUW in Action

AAUW acts on a range of issues that align with our Public Policy Priorities through engaging our action network, advocating through social media, and signing coalition letters. In the first few weeks of the 119th Congress, we have endorsed letters on protecting Title IX and education equity (opposing Linda McMahon's nomination as U.S. Secretary of Education), civil rights (opposing H.R.28 and EO 14166), economic security (supporting the Job Protection Act), and reproductive rights. All letters of endorsement can be found [HERE](#).

AAUW Art Contest Winners! 🎨

We are thrilled to announce the [2025 AAUW Annual Art Contest winners!](#) This year's contest showcased stunning artwork from our members. The winning pieces will be featured in our exclusive notecard collection, arriving in mailboxes this spring.

Thank you for supporting and celebrating creativity in our AAUW community!

AAUW's Annual Report 2024: A Year of Impact

Discover how AAUW is advancing equity for women and girls nationwide. The Annual Report highlights key achievements, financials, and the impact of our programs over Fiscal Year 2024. This resource is part of a focus on our commitment to transparency and impact and serves as an excellent shareable. Read it [HERE!](#)

Webinar: What Every Woman Should Know About Social Security

Are you curious about the future of Social Security? On March 25th at 10:00 am PDT, join Trisha Mentzer from the SSA as she breaks down essential benefits and programs for women, helping you make informed decisions at every life stage. Register [HERE!](#)

Latest Webinar Recordings

Kick back and catch up on recordings of expert-led discussions on key topics that impact economic security, education equity, and public policy advocacy.

Featured: Table Talks: [Tips for Bold Conversations](#) and the [Winter Member Gathering!](#)

AAUW CA News

We Didn't Start the Fire.

The LA Fires are a tragedy. DEI is the solution, not the problem.

By Missy Maceyko, Co-Director, CA State Public Policy Committee

It is January 2025. Populous, beloved, and well-known neighborhoods in Los Angeles, one of the biggest metropolitan areas in the world, are on fire. For days, residents have been evacuating, firefighters have been going without sleep, and homes and iconic landmarks have been burning. Even those who are not in immediate danger are breathing in toxic air that can create diseases for generations. It seems like everyone in the city is grieving something or someone.

And yet, as the disaster unfolds, people in LA are engaging in a massive outpouring of collective mutual aid and community support for the people and animals who are displaced and suffering.

On the other hand, as Angelinos are left to cope with displacement, property damage, and loss, leading figures in national politics have seized the moment, not to offer support, but to immediately go on the attack. They are placing blame on who they felt was the most likely culprit for these horrific fires and their aftermath: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

These accusations about DEI would be laughable were they not so problematic. Blaming DEI shows a lack of understanding of what DEI is and does while also simplifying a large and complex problem related to a multitude of factors, such as weather, infrastructure, and climate change.

In sum, DEI experts say that diversity is valuable for many reasons—for addressing historical marginalization, yes, but also for increasing our problem-solving capacity and leading to innovation. Both inside and outside of the business world, [diversity is associated with](#) higher engagement, reduced turnover, and improved and more objective decision-making and problem-solving. **Diversity of thought [in inclusive teams](#) has been found to lead to [more innovation and better, higher-impact ideas](#).** Indeed, as University of Michigan professor of Complexity, Social Science, and Management, Scott Brown notes, to solve complex problems in the 21st century, like climate change, we need diverse teams who can communicate across difference: [“groups of experts, at least as we’re accustomed to thinking about them, are going to have a hard time competing with talented teams of people with relevant diverse perspectives.”](#)

We need to truly understand this problem in order to prevent future loss. Rather than vilifying DEI, we need to acknowledge that DEI is one of the best tools that we have to solve such a problem. We need to come together to leverage a diversity of experiences and perspectives.

In the case of the LA fires, DEI has also been singled out as the primary culprit due to the assumption that “DEI hiring” impacts competent leadership. Certain leaders have been targeted for what was labeled as inadequate planning, resourcing, and response, **such as Mayor Karen Bass and Fire Chief Kristin Crowley. These leaders have not only been labeled as incompetent, but also as “DEI hires.”**

The labeling of these leaders as “DEI hires” is likely because they are a woman of color and a woman who is a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, respectively. They are holding positions that have historically been held by, and associated with, cisgender and heterosexual (cis-het) white men. **Given the leadership positions that they hold, alongside their gender, sexuality, and race, any potential fallibility in their decision-making is not only labeled as incompetence, but is also tacitly attributed to their “DEI” status.**

As in this case, any association of DEI with hiring is assumed to be the antithesis of meritocracy. In other words, DEI considerations in hiring are assumed to unfairly divert jobs and benefits to “minority” candidates, who are positioned as an undeserving majority that get an opportunity because of who they are instead of being considered for their skill sets, experiences, and past accomplishments. This narrative about “DEI” and hiring clearly overlooks the fact that women like Mayor Karen Bass and Fire Chief Kristin Crowley are hired based on merit, regardless of their identity, even as they often have to overcome additional hurdles to enter into historically masculine fields and gain the qualifications and experiences to succeed.

[Accusations about the harms of DEI proliferate in the current political environment,](#) rife with threats of increased regulation and retribution. It is absolutely necessary to

¹ Cisgender is a term that means that the sex/gender you were assigned at birth aligns with your internal sense of a gendered self (gender identity) and your external gender expression. Heterosexual is a term that means that you believe that there are only two genders and that you are sexually, physically, and romantically attracted to someone of the opposite gender.

scrutinize the policy and planning of all leaders and decision-makers in LA to fully answer questions about fire mitigation and response. However, to pin the blame on DEI is to tacitly pin the blame on only those decision-makers who are not cis-het white men and/or on those who are supportive of the kind of work that is needed to engage a range of perspectives.

Over the last few years, and accelerating after January 20, 2025, state and federal level policy changes and pronouncements in the United States have not only (seemingly) forced DEI from federally funded programs, but also created a chilling effect, leading some large corporations and public universities to (seemingly) [pull back from DEI initiatives](#). Because the work is so important to solving complex problems and maintaining functional organizations in a diverse society, where possible, it will continue under other names and initiatives. However, given the well-known benefits of business-integrated DEI strategies in a globalized economy, DEI work will—and must—continue to solve big problems.

UNA Update

By Verena Borton

Despite national upheaval in all aspects of the United Nations' role and work, our local chapter has been adjusting and currently stays focused on Sunday, March 9 when we present one of our annual signature events: **United Nations International Women's Day** at International House Davis.

Humphrey Fellow Forhat Chowdhury will share stories about remarkable Bangladeshi women throughout history who have paved the way to greater gender equality – stories not likely familiar to a largely Western audience.

Continuing with a focus on Sustainable Development Goal #5, Gender Equality, we are featuring artwork and brief comments by members of local Girl Scout Troop 2195 under the heading “Challenging Stereotypes.” Each of the young girls has researched a woman or girl that inspired them to not follow typical stereotypes.



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Davis Chapter

international ^{DAVIS}
house

Join Us to Celebrate UN International Women's Day with Advocacy and Art!

Sunday, March 9, 2025 | 2pm - 4pm
10 College Park Drive, Davis CA



Forhat
Chowdhury
Humphrey Fellow



**Girl Scouts of
America**
Girl Scout Troop 2195

PRESENTATIONS:

Local Girl Scout Troop 2195 Challenges Stereotypes

Artwork created by Girl Scout Troop 2195 showcasing women trailblazers who have inspired them

Bangladeshi Women Paving The Way

Forhat Chowdhury, passionate advocate for women's rights, shares efforts to advance gender equality in Bangladesh

RSVP Today: unadavis.org/events

FREE

One in Four Countries Report Backlash Against Women's Rights in 2024

As reported by UN Women

“The basic rights of women and girls are facing unprecedented growing threats worldwide, from higher levels of discrimination to weaker legal protections - and less funding for programs and institutions which support and protect women. UN Women's latest report Women's Rights in Review 30 Years after Beijing, published ahead of the UN 50th International Women's Day on 8 March, shows that in 2024, nearly a quarter of governments worldwide reported a backlash on women's rights.

Despite decades of advocacy, economic instability, the climate crisis, rising conflicts and political pushback have contributed to a worsening landscape for gender equality.

Alarming, UN Women reports that a woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes by a family member or intimate partner.

The digital space is also exacerbating gender disparities, the UN agency argues, with artificial intelligence and some social media platforms amplifying harmful stereotypes. Meanwhile, women and girls remain underrepresented in digital and tech-related fields.

In the past decade, there has been a disturbing 50% increase in the number of women and girls directly exposed to conflict, and women's rights defenders confront daily harassment, personal attacks and even death.

These findings underscore that crises such as COVID-19, soaring food and fuel prices, and the undermining of democratic institutions are not just slowing progress - but actively reversing gains.”

Reflecting the chaotic actions of the Trump administration in recent weeks as they affect the United Nations, here are some commentaries:

“The U.S. Government has terminated all funding agreements for **UNFPA**, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. The impact that this will have on the women and girls we serve will be devastating.” **(Funding update from UNFPA)**

Our Global Humanitarian System is Collapsing by Mark Leon Goldberg

“When a man-made or natural disaster strikes, aid agencies must turn to donors, hat in hand, to fundraise for the response. This includes UN agencies like the World Food Program and UNICEF, as well as international NGOs like the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children. Over the years, the UN has established a mechanism to consolidate these agencies through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

It's a relatively straightforward and streamlined process: agencies outline their needs, and donors pledge funds to support the response. Historically, the United States has been the largest single donor, accounting for about 40% of all emergency humanitarian relief funding.

But now, that funding has been abruptly cut.

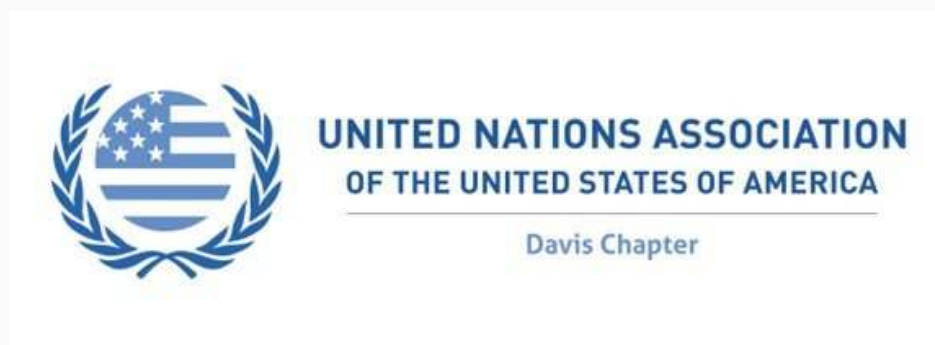
The consequences of this decision have been profound, both for the people who rely on humanitarian assistance and for the professionals who have dedicated their careers to relief work.”

Changes in UNA-USA

The UNA-USA Global Engagement Summit has now been completely cancelled for 2025. The traditional UNA-USA Leadership Summit in Washington has been separated into a meeting in June exclusively dedicated to advocacy, with an informational and training leadership meeting at the end of the year in St. Louis.

UNICEF

Since the appeal in the February Spokeswoman, two donations have been received for deposit at the UNICEF Donations account at First Northern Bank, 434 Second Street, Davis, CA 95616. Please consider adding to those donations so that we may soon be able to send a check to UNICEF's Every Child Fund to help out the world's children whose humanitarian assistance has been severely slashed by the U.S. administration.



BE AS ACTIVE AS YOU CAN, BUT STAY A MEMBER!

“If you think you are too small to make a difference, you haven't spent the night with a mosquito.” African proverb

Formatted by Emmi Kuimelis