

THE SPOKESWOMAN

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

President's Message

By Stephanie DeGraff-Hunt

Fall and Winter have been a busy time of the year for AAUW. As the year draws to a close, I wanted to share Fall 2025 highlights and upcoming January 2026 events.

October: A number of us participated in the October 18 “No King's Day Rally” held at Civic Center Park. The purpose was to come together as a community to uphold democracy. The following day, for the monthly Celebrate the 19th event, we met at Verena and Ray Borton's home to discuss renowned women with connections to the United Nations who are currently under consideration as candidates for the 2026 election of the United Nations Secretary-General. Verena prepared a tremendous amount of information, which we read aloud, about Annalena Baerbock (Germany), Mia Motley (Barbados), Michelle Batchelet (Chile), Amina Mohammed (Nigeria/UK), Rebeca Grynspan (Costa Rica), Alicia Bárcena (Mexico), Maria Fernanda Espinoza (Ecuador), Kristalina Georgieva (Bulgaria), and Sima Bahous (Jordan). There is a good likelihood that one of these women will become the UN Secretary-General in 2026.

Continuing with the United Nations theme, we were proud to support the reading of the Annual UN Day Proclamation held at the City Council Meeting on October 21st. This special honor was soon followed by a United Nations Day Event held at the International House on October 26th to celebrate and observe the United Nation's 80th Anniversary. The close ties between AAUW and the United Nations Association of Davis and the International House are dear to all of us.

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Nov/Dec/Jan Calendar

Saturday, November 1 - Sahaya Walks

Saturday, November 8, 9 am - Book Group Meeting by Zoom

Thursday, November 13, 7 pm - Monthly Board Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, November 19, 5:30 pm - Celebrate the 19th

Wednesday, December 3, 4 pm - Higher Education at Risk Webinar (see article)

Sunday, December 7, 2 pm to 4 pm - Reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Thursday, January 8, 7 pm - Monthly Board Meeting by Zoom

Saturday, January 10, 9 am - Monthly Book Group meeting by Zoom

Thursday, January 15 - Deadline for receipt of AAUW donations

Tuesday, January 20 - Deadline to register for the annual AAUW Fund Luncheon

**The December Board meeting, Book Group meeting, and Celebrate the 19th were not held due to the busy holiday season.*

Save the Dates - January 2026

Thursday, January 15, 11 am - AAUW webinar on “The Future of Higher Education”

Saturday, January 17, 2 pm - Annual Holiday Gathering with Tree Davis (see President's Message)

Monday, January 19 - Celebrate the 19th (Amendment); check forthcoming email

Saturday, January 31, 11:30 am to 2 pm - Capital Counties Interbranch Council AAUW Fund Luncheon; register by January 20, 2026 (see article)

November began with the Sahaya Walks fundraiser and celebration on November 1 at the International House with some of our members attending. And later, on November 22nd, for our monthly Celebrate the 19th (Amendment), a number of us attended the Folklorico Latino de Woodland performance at the Brunelle Theater on the Davis High School Campus. Sophia Palomino, one of our 2024 Tech Trek Campers, was among the performers, along with her brother Benjamin and many of their close friends. This is the second year that we have attended this special event and it was absolutely stunning. From the costumes to the intricate new dances, watching younger and older dancers come together to create such remarkable beauty was truly a sight to behold. The [Folklorico Latino de Woodland](#) was founded in 1986 by James Harvey-Keith, Helena Ochoa, and Marina Ramirez. It is a non-profit organization devoted to promoting awareness of Mexican culture by means of dance, music, song, and folklore through performances and by participation in local community events.



Sophia and Benjamin dancing at the Folklorico Latino de Woodland performance

After the performance and picture-taking with Sophia, Benjamin, and their parents, we met at Mishka's Cafe to catch up with each other and enjoy a few savory treats.

December: On Sunday, December 7, 2025, the Davis Chapter of the United Nations Association held its 19th annual reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 31 languages at the International House, with 65 participants and a total of 100 in attendance. This year focused on the significance of the 77th anniversary of the aspirational UDHR, which proclaims the inalienable rights to which everyone is entitled as a human being, regardless of race, color, religion, gender, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The UDHR is a guiding

light in how we should treat and care for each other and our planet.

I would like to acknowledge the special nature of this event, as it marked the 19th year that Verena Borton coordinated the reading of the UDHR. This involves renting the venue at International House, lining up 65 participants to read in multiple languages, sending and receiving hundreds of emails, writing and printing the program, plus baking delicious savory treats for the decorated tables, and so much more behind the scenes to make the event flow perfectly. After the reading and spontaneous responses about what particularly resonated with the attendees, Verena was honored with a framed certificate of appreciation from Edgar Trujillo, the current president of UNA Davis and Shelly Gilbride, the Executive Director of International House Davis. Our hats are off to Verena for her dedication, hard work, and advocacy.



Verena (far right) receiving a Certificate of Appreciation on Human Rights Day 2025. Left to right: Edgar Trujillo, Shelly Gilbride, Molly Thompson, Laleh Rastegarzadeh, and Verena Borton.

January, 2026: The Annual Holiday Gathering will be a Happy New Year Celebration on January 17, 2026. We will host the new executive director of Tree Davis, certified arborist Yael Franco, on Saturday, January 17th at 2:00 pm. (We postponed the meeting in December as Yael was already committed to planting trees on Saturdays and Sundays are reserved to be with her two-year-old daughter.) Yael will share a PowerPoint presentation to fill us in on the history of Tree Davis and her vision of the future as the new Executive Director. She is honored that we invited her to our annual event. Please join us on January 17th at 2:00 at my home at 2137 Saint Elias Place for Yael's presentation.

The Book Group will reconvene on Saturday, January 10th via Zoom at 9:00 am. In January, we will celebrate the 19th, which falls on Martin Luther King Jr. Day; details will be forthcoming from Gwendolyn Kaltoft. On January 31st, the Capital Counties Interbranch AAUW Fund Luncheon will be held at the North Ridge Country Club in Fair Oaks. For

even more activities and webinars, see the up-to-date calendar on the [AAUW Davis website](#), which Rhonda and student intern, Yugi, have updated and refreshed.

It has indeed been a busy and productive Fall.

Happy Holidays to you and your families,

Stephanie DeGraff-Hunt

AAUW Davis Branch President

November Book Group Meeting Recap

By Carolyn Van Hoecke

Book group members Cathy Tkach, Carolyn Van Hoecke, Rose Mary Forehand, Estelle Shiroma, Rhonda Reed, Verena Borton, and Stephanie DeGraff-Hunt met by Zoom on November 8 to discuss *The House of Doors* by Tan Twan Eng. This selection is a departure from the characters we usually read about, as each one adapts to — and conceals — behavior deemed unacceptable at the time, all while presenting themselves as conventional, upstanding citizens in colonial Penang, Malaysia. The complicated behaviors and ethical choices that they are forced to make result in the story of our protagonist Lesley Hamlyn being presented as the backstory that influenced the story, *The Letter*, authored by Somerset Maugham, who the Hamlyns entertain as an important house guest.

The group decided that the author successfully captured the atmosphere and cultural nuances of that time period. The details made clear the complex character dynamics and class distinctions of the period with descriptions of language, actions, and clothing. Adding tension to the story, the murder trial of Ethel Proudlock takes a central role and emphasizes that perceived antisocial behavior was a matter of life and death at the time and not just a social convention of lifestyle choice. Also, adding a layer of political intrigue to the several layers of sexual secrets, the activities having to do with efforts to

finance the liberation of China complicate overt and covert aspects of the story. All of the characters are constantly presented with the question of whom to trust in what circumstance.

The group explored the challenges of writing and rewriting, and what previous visiting authors have told us about their writing experiences. The conversation then shifted to the novel's portrayal of friendships among women in a class-conscious society, discussing how societal norms and values could limit genuine friendships between people with different perspectives. The group discussed their impressions of this historical fiction book, focusing on its portrayal of Chinese characters and the setting in Penang, Malaysia. They noted that the book handled the complex historical background seamlessly without resorting to "data dump" information, instead presenting it in a shadowy, underground context. The discussion also touched on the book's depiction of colonial British expats, with the group agreeing that the setting was more vibrant and historically significant than they had initially assumed.

Throughout the book, the theme of "doors" presents new doors to open and new choices to make, centered on a house displaying a literal collection of carved Malaysian doors that becomes a special hideaway place. The story consistently draws the characters into making difficult choices between desire and public convention. The story almost ends when Lesley chooses to move to South Africa with her ailing husband, Robert, leaving her complicated life with a real and a pretend affair behind in Penang as she forgives her spouse and chooses to open the door to a new chapter of life. Many years later, after Robert's death, there is one more secret door revealed, and the finale finds Lesley moving again toward that one last secret door.

The next book group meeting will be held on Saturday, January 10th at 9 am by Zoom. The January book selection is *Heroes of Environmental Diplomacy: Profiles in Courage*, edited by Felix Dodds and Chris Spence. In February, we will discuss *Coming up Short: A Memoir of My America* by Robert Reich. Contact Karen Lemcke at lemckekaren@yahoo.com if you would like to join the discussion.

Make a Tax-Deductible Gift and Support Our Mission

An email was sent to members on December 22 with information about making an end-of-year donation to AAUW. Please take a moment to check your email for details on how to give—your generosity is greatly appreciated. Consider giving to Tech Trek California, AAUW's Greatest Needs (9110), Defend Higher Education (4513), or Public Policy (4513) fund. Membership dues account for only 9% of the AAUW National budget. To see the 2024 annual report, click [HERE](#).

Every gift makes an impact; every gift can change someone's life. Contributions to these funds are fully tax-deductible. For Tech Trek donations, please make checks payable to **AAUW CA-SPF**. For all other donations, checks should be made payable to **AAUW**; if you are contributing to a specific fund, please note the fund name on your check.

Please mail checks by **January 15, 2026**, to our branch Fiscal Officer:

Gail Johnson

955 Wyatt Lane

Winters, CA 95694

Capital Counties Interbranch Council Meeting on January 31, 2026

The annual Capital Counties Interbranch Council (IBC) meeting is just around the corner. Deanne Arthur, California AAUW Fund Director, will provide an overview of AAUW funds and highlight current priority funding needs. In keeping with tradition, the Davis branch is participating in the selection of two current AAUW Fund recipients who will speak at this meeting.

All members are encouraged to attend this important meeting to be inspired, informed, and reminded of the meaningful difference AAUW makes through your involvement. Registration closes January 20, 2026. Register online [HERE](#) or send checks to the address listed in the form below. This luncheon has sold out in previous years, so we encourage you to register as soon as possible.



North Ridge Country Club, 7600 Madison Ave. Fair Oaks

You are invited! AAUW Fund Luncheon

Sponsored by your Capital Counties Interbranch Council

Saturday, January 31, 2026

11:30 – 2:00 PM

Registration, Silent Auction: 11:30

Luncheon begins at noon

Keynote speaker: Deanna Arthur, California AAUW Fund Director, explains the complexity of AAUW Funds with updates on where the money is most needed.

Scholars: two current AAUW Fund Recipients share their educational journeys.

Use the link below to reserve your spot today; deadline is January 20, 2026.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/aauw-fund-luncheon-tickets-1976494848297?aff=website>

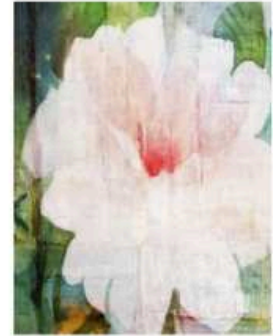
Or reserve by mail with \$35 check payable to AAUW Sacramento & send to AAUW, P.O. Box 7872, Auburn, CA 95604 (indicate menu choice on check For line).

Name _____ Branch _____
Phone _____ email _____



Menu choices (indicate at time of payment):

- ☐ Chicken Marsala w/mashed potatoes & veggies
- ☐ Butternut Squash Ravioli w/grilled veggies
- ☐ Shrimp Louie, 1000 Island dressing on side
- & Limoncello cake OR Fruit Cup



UNA Update

By Verena Borton

Transition

The UNA Davis chapter is in a transition period. President Edgar Trujillo and Verena Borton are stepping down from their leadership roles in January (while remaining active UNA members) and a new board is expected to be elected at the chapter's January 12 virtual Annual Meeting. Several individuals have registered interest in joining the board. Anyone interested in UNA Davis is welcome to join the Annual Meeting on Zoom by emailing Edgar Trujillo at edgar.trujillo@unadavis.org for the link.

Historical background of the Davis reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In the early 2000s, Verena tried unsuccessfully to interest Mary Ellen Dolcini and others to build a program around the printed poster of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that UNA-USA sent to chapters in the fall. It seemed such a logical point of departure to create knowledge about and interest in this important document. Because the time leading up to Human Rights Day, December 10, is an intensely busy time in schools, it was not an undertaking for just one person involved in school projects to take on.

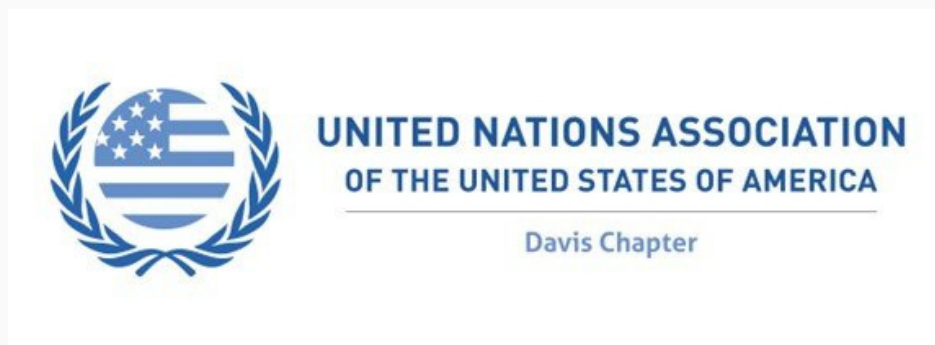
Verena retired from teaching at North Davis Elementary in June 2004 to free up the needed time that fall to develop an event where 30 community leaders were recruited to present the 30 individual articles of the UDHR in a communal reading open to the public. Soon after the successful first reading, the idea was developed to find native speakers of 30 different world languages to each read one article in their language, immediately followed by another participant reading it in English. This helped to reflect the diversity of our larger community as well as the universality of the rights. The chapter also purchased enough UDHR booklets to provide a free copy to all who attended, realizing with time how many people the world over are unaware of the existence of the UDHR. The significance of participating as reader or listener in a communal fashion – as opposed to having the whole document read to you in a formal setting – makes the Davis celebration of the UDHR's anniversary unique.

This is how this tradition initially became established. A segment for brief responses about articles that particularly resonated with readers or audience members, and why, was added to enable a deep personal involvement with human rights. Physically, the arrangement of the readers in circles is symbolically significant.



Reflections from a Participant

First-time participant and UCD student Anureet Saini said, “Although I wasn’t sure what to expect, the UDHR reading on December 7th ended up being an incredibly meaningful experience for me. Hearing each article read aloud in so many different languages made the document feel alive and deeply human. It was also eye-opening, and at times saddening, to reflect on how many of these rights are still not fully upheld despite being so clearly articulated. Still, there was something very beautiful and hopeful about coming together as a community to honor them, and listening to others share their perspectives was a powerful learning experience. I’m grateful to have been part of it and hope this tradition continues for years to come.”



AAUW National News

AAUW Webinar on “The Future of Higher Education”

January 15, 2026, 11:00 am to noon PST

In light of recent legislative and governmental actions, this important webinar provides space for leaders to discuss the future of higher education. The panel will explore current realities, and the long-term impacts and pathways forward. Panelists will provide insights from their own positions and experiences as leaders in higher education. Register [HERE](#).

Virtual Economic Empowerment Trainings

AAUW’s virtual webinar series offers expert-led training in salary negotiation, financial literacy, and career development to help women advance professionally and economically. [Explore upcoming webinars!](#)

AAUW California News

Higher Education at Risk - And How You Can Help Protect It

AAUW Silicon Valley Branch Webinar

On Wednesday, December 3, 2025, AAUW Silicon Valley Branch hosted a webinar featuring Meghan Kissell, AAUW Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy, for an in-depth discussion on how the current administration's policies are impacting higher education. Specifically, she discussed the latest repercussions for admissions, Pell Grants, student loan forgiveness, student civil rights protections, and the experiences of international students. Meghan shared how AAUW is responding and exploring ways that branches and individual members can help protect and strengthen our higher education system. The webinar is available for viewing [HERE](#).

Leah Litman Speaks to AAUW on Roe Commemoration on January 22, 2026

AAUW Silicon Valley Branch Webinar

AAUW Silicon Valley Branch invites you to join the branch's annual event, Step Out for Pro Choice. The annual event is held every year on the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision. No Rights, No Law - A discussion about the Supreme Court & attacks on reproductive rights and justice will feature keynote speaker Leah Litman, a leader for women's issues and well-known podcaster.



Professor Litman is a co-host of [Strict Scrutiny](#), a podcast about the Supreme Court of the United States, alongside Melissa Murray and Kate A. Shaw. She is a professor of law at the University of Michigan Law School and writes on constitutional law, federal courts, and federal post-conviction review. She is the author of a new book, [Lawless: How the Supreme Court Runs on Conservative Grievance, Fringe Theories, and Bad Vibes](#).

The event will be held via Zoom on Thursday, January 22nd, at 1 pm PT. Mark your calendars and register [HERE](#).

2025 Legislative Session Ends with Some Big Wins and Tough Losses for AAUW California

By Amy Hom and Missy Maceyko, Co-chairs AAUW California Public Policy

The 2025 legislative session has closed in California.

Kathy Van Osten, AAUW California's Legislative Advocate, summarized the session this way: "In 2025, 917 bills were sent to the Governor, of which he signed 794 bills and vetoed 123 bills. The 2025 Legislative Session was tumultuous as policymakers worked to address the impacts of ravaging urban wildfires in Los Angeles, to pass a State Budget that closed a \$12 billion deficit, and to address a multitude of impacts created

by the violent upheaval of federal funding and policies that have or will decimate services for Californians, that threaten existing or future projects in the State, and that threaten our educational institutions.”

With these issues in mind, AAUW California put together our 2025 Legislative Agenda, taking a support position on 26 bills, and for the first time in our recent history, taking an opposition position on 7 bills. With the blessing of the Public Policy Committee and the AAUW California Board, we were proud to advance this agenda, which confronted some of the most pressing issues that we face as a state, and a nation, around gender equity and social justice. We were also proud to take strong opposition positions this year, given the large number of bills introduced at the start of the session that were antithetical to AAUW California’s values and Public Policy Priorities.

While our A-priority support bills did not fare well this session, we are happy to report that we had a great deal of success with the rest of our support-bills as well as with stopping the opposition bills from advancing.

First the bad news: Our A-priority support bills were vetoed or gutted.

- **SB 771 was vetoed.** This A-priority bill, authored by Senator Henry Stern and sponsored by AAUW California, would have held social media companies liable if their algorithms aid or abet individual users who are breaking the law and intimidating or threatening others in online spaces. The Governor vetoed the bill, indicating that current civil rights laws have not been tested in the courts with respect to algorithms’ complicity in hate crimes, and that until existing law is deemed insufficient by the courts, SB 771 is premature.
- **SB 418 was vetoed.** This A-priority bill, authored by Senator Caroline Menjivar, would have prohibited a health service provider from denying coverage for services based upon race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex, including sexual preference or gender identity, intersex traits, and pregnancy. The Governor vetoed the bill, citing a concern that the bill’s requirement to cover prescribed hormone therapy without utilization management (UM) is likely to drive up the cost of health care.
- **AB 1098 was gutted and amended.** This A-priority bill, authored by Assemblymember Mike Fong, would have prohibited a postsecondary educational institution from discriminating against a student based on their current, potential,

or past pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions. According to the author's office, the bill had run into significant opposition from the public universities, and they chose not to continue to move the bill this year. Instead, the bill language was gutted and replaced with language that establishes the Office of the Interagency Council on Education within the Governor's Operations Agency. The amended bill was signed into law.

Now, the good news: Of our fourteen support bills that made it to the Governor's desk, eleven were signed into law. Below are some important wins:

- **AB 621 - signed into law!** This B-priority bill, authored by Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, heightens penalties for companies whose platforms distribute deepfake pornography.
- **SB 669 - signed into law!** This B-priority bill, authored by Senate President pro Tempore Mike McGuire, authorizes up to five rural hospitals throughout the state to partner with licensed birth centers to provide perinatal services in rural communities.
- **AB 260 - signed into law!** Authored by Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, this bill protects access to medication abortion.
- **SB 627- signed into law!** Authored by Senator Scott Wiener, this bill bans law enforcement officers from wearing facial coverings during their duties. **This is the first such law enacted in the nation!**

And of the seven bills that AAUW California opposed, four have become 2-year bills and three have died:

- **AB 579 is dead!** This A-priority bill, authored by Assemblymember Leticia Castillo, would have stated categorically that parents' refusal to acknowledge a child's gender identity can never be considered a form of abuse or neglect, and therefore cannot be considered in a custody dispute.
- **AB 25 is dead!** Authored by Assemblymember Carl DeMaio, this bill would have required an elections official to verify the citizenship of voters and authorized the official to require a person to provide documentation of citizenship for that purpose.
- **AB 1012 is dead!** Authored by Assemblymember Bill Essayli, this bill would have prohibited the provision of Medi-Cal to people without legal immigration status.

To see the full results of the 2025 Legislative Agenda, please go to the [Bill Tracking Report](#). The November issue of [Public Policy News](#) includes a Legislative Agenda Scorecard.

BE AS ACTIVE AS YOU CAN, BUT STAY A MEMBER
We wish you joy in whatever you celebrate in December. See you in 2026!

Formatted by Emmi Kuimelis