



THE SAGE HEN

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2025 - 3rd Quarter



Mission Statement: To advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

A Message FROM THE PRESIDENT

Lately, I have been thinking a lot about the uncertainty in which we are living. A day does not go by without some new sensational news that causes us to react emotionally: sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. It also seems like virtually everything is interpreted through a partisan lens, frequently intended to provoke conflict and/or undermine trust.

At the same time, I keep thinking about a very special trip I just took. A group of eight of us, including several AAUW members, travelled to Sri Lanka to explore how the history and culture of this small island nation is intertwined with the philosophy of Buddhism. Our adventure was guided by Theravada Buddhist Monk Bhante Sujatha.

Each day began with a silent meditation, followed by Bhante giving our group a “theme” which we were to think about in anticipation of a discussion the following morning. Themes included Letting Go, Finding Balance, How to Deal with Our Egotistical Minds, Fear and Anxiety, among others. Bhante never lost the opportunity to challenge our assumptions to dig deeper into the meanings of the themes, often returning to the original Sanskrit word and meaning. Discussions were often long and deep.

Although I have been learning about and practicing mindfulness, a central principle of Buddhism, for about 10 years, my Sri Lankan experience reminded me of the importance of responding (rather than reacting) to our uncertain times. We are constantly bombarded with information and experiences, often throwing us off balance. Our immediate reaction is to try to anticipate their meaning, often resulting in a “fight or flight” reaction.

Mindfulness emphasizes meeting each moment as it is; not as we wish it were or what we fear it might be. It is critical to take a moment to observe our thoughts, emotions, and circumstances without immediately trying to change or escape them. This allows for space to be created between experience and reaction. It is thus possible to thoughtfully respond to the situation rather than being enslaved by an emotional reaction.

Taking this time to respond does not mean that we become emotionally numb or indifferent to what is going on. Rather developing an awareness of our reactions when faced with irritation, frustration, or provocation, allows us to pause before reacting with anger or impatience.

During times of uncertainty, our mental health is precious. Practicing mindfulness can be an important step to maintain balance and rebuild trust.



Janet Usinger, President
AAUW Nevada State

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Reflections in the Third Quarter: Public Policy, Assumptions, and the Work Ahead

We are in the midst of the third quarter. For many, this season carries financial weight—final projections before year-end. In education, it marks the great return—students, faculty, and staff flooding back into classrooms across K–12 and higher. Agriculture, fashion, publishing, and countless other sectors pause, assess, and pivot forward. Reflection is in the air. And for me, through a public policy lens, reflection is the urgent theme of this quarter.

My most striking realization has been how deeply my own assumptions about consensus and common goals shaped my perspective.

I grew up in Massachusetts, taught that the roots of American society were noble, idealistic, and inspiring. The Bill of Rights, the Constitution, the very laws of this nation enshrined *my* rights as a citizen. I was fired up—I had rights!

But life—through education, leadership, travel, and service—softened that idealism. Over time, I learned what history books often omit: that even movements I believed were “for me,” like the Suffragists, were not originally designed with women of color in mind. Their fight was real and significant, yes—but it wasn’t inclusive. And AAUW, too, carries a complex history that is not without contradiction.

This is the road of discovery: learning that the noble ideals of democracy and equity are not linear, not pure, and not always inclusive. Today, we are living through that same tension in real time. My Q3 has been filled with conversations, debates, and disagreements that have required me to lean on my mindfulness practices like never before—listening deeply, even when it’s uncomfortable.

When I joined AAUW in 2021, I believed our mission united us without question: “We are tenacious and trailblazing—advocating for women and girls since 1881 and into the future.” “AAUW advocates vigorous enforcement of and full access to civil and constitutional rights for all people—across race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, and geographic location.”

I assumed we were all on the same page. But just as in history, I’ve seen that even within AAUW, equality is debated. Its meaning, its scope, and its beneficiaries are constantly being redefined.

And here’s my conclusion: despite how fractured things may look, our country is *not* falling apart. What feels painful and divisive is also the work of transformation—an invitation to create stronger, more equitable systems.

That’s why I’m excited to share that our Las Vegas Branch now has a growing Public Policy Committee led by new co-chairs, Dr. Margoth Tello and Dr. Esther Pla-Cazares. And new Public Policy Chairs are slowly sprouting up around the state. Members are reaching out with questions, concerns, and ideas. Step by step, we are building momentum.

As Q3 closes, I urge every Branch leader: pause and reflect on how public policy shapes not just headlines, but the most intimate parts of our daily lives. Create spaces where members can bring their voices, their disagreements, and their passions to the table. Encourage dialogue, even when it’s hard. Growth only happens when we lean into discomfort together.





Public Policy - continued from Page 2

A Call to Action

Public policy touches everything—from our paychecks to our rights to our daily lives. As your **Nevada State Public Policy Chair**, I invite you to reach out to me with your ideas and concerns.

Nevada Branch Public Policy Chairs—are you interested in meeting virtually to connect, collaborate, and strengthen our collective voice? Together, we can make AAUW’s mission real, bold, and powerful across our state.

And this is the truth that gives me hope, organizations like AAUW have always grown stronger by working through challenges. We debated Title IX, and out of those debates came landmark advocacy that changed the landscape of education. We wrestled with pay equity, and today AAUW continues to be a national leader in closing the gender wage gap. We have navigated difference and division, and over time, emerged as one of the most powerful voices for equity in this country.

Debate, dissent, and difference of opinion are not signs of weakness—they are signs of life. They are the crucibles that have shaped AAUW into the powerful, servant-minded organization it is today.

For National AAUW Strategic Priorities follow this link:

https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2025/05/AAUW-Strategic-Priorities_OP1.pdf

All voices matter. Let’s rise together—because history shows we can, and we will.

In Solidarity,
Evelyn Thompson-Hilbert, DPP
evelyn.aauw@gmail.com





From the Boulder City Branch:

We wish to thank our Past President, Valerie McNay, for her many years of service with AAUW. She has been a huge motivator and doer for our group. Our summer activities have been productive with the inclusion of a huge collection of school supplies, which exceed prior years! We had numerous donations from both the Branch members and from the community. We continue to grow with new members.

We recently had 23 ladies join our July Summer luncheon, including two of our scholarship recipients. Our first Fall meeting will be September 10th, with a quick presentation about the October Boulder City's Chautauqua, and a main presentation from local attorney, Lola Webb, who will chat with us about Trust, Wills, Probate, and The Eighth Judicial District Court Self-Help Program.



School Supply Drive

From left: Linda Gardner, Sharon Newby,
Kathi Dew, and Anje Azizsoltani

Summer Luncheon





From the Boulder City Branch (continued):

MEET OUR NEW PRESIDENT

Dr. Angel Ball was introduced to the Boulder City Branch of AAUW as an invited speaker in 2023. She enjoyed the group so much, she joined. She now serves as Branch President and Chair of the Scholarship Committee. Dr. Ball recently retired (2024) from Nevada State University as Professor Emerita, after being Program Director of Speech Language Pathology. She was hired in 2018 to create the first graduate program on the campus: A nationally accredited program of Speech-Language Pathology, and the second in Nevada (after UNR)!

Prior to coming to Nevada, she was employed at Texas A&M University-Kingsville for 10 years, and before worked for the University of Cincinnati over a period of 15 years. She has three degrees from the University of Cincinnati: B.A. in English Literature (1985), M.A. in Speech Pathology (1987), and Ph.D. in Speech Pathology and Audiology/minor in Neurolinguistics (1998). The University of Cincinnati awarded full scholarships for both her graduate degrees. Thus, supporting scholarship opportunities for students is a primary mission of hers. Dr. Ball continues research in adult written language recovery post stroke. She loves writing, reading, gardening, swimming and walking her dog. Oh yes, and also talking!



Dr. Angel Ball



From the Capital Branch: submitted by Caroline Punches, Past President

AAUW Capital Branch membership will be convening on Saturday, September 6th at 11:00a.m. at the Governor's Mansion in Carson City. President, Jennifer Verive will preside, setting the stage for not only a wonderful day but an exciting year ahead.

The Branch was busy over the summer. Many of our members continued hiking, getting together for lunch or discussing books throughout the summer. Additionally, our members were asked to provide their thoughts about our Branch in general as well as their specific role. The results reaffirmed that our members are satisfied and engaged in our Branch! Ninety percent of our members join our Branch to meet like-minded women, to socialize and make friends! And the majority of us are here to gain knowledge, actively support the mission of AAUW and make a positive impact in our communities!

The 2025 Branch Survey results provided guidance for the 2025-26 Board of Directors at their annual retreat. AAUW Capital Branch will focus on strengthening our connections with each other and our community. Our members will begin sharing and discussing their thoughts and ideas at our membership brunch in September since there is so much that needs to be done and time is of the essence.

The 2025-26 year for the AAUW Capital Branch promises to be one of resilience and resolve!





From the Fallon Branch:

We have been dark all Summer, but awarded three \$1,000 scholarships to worthy recipients. We're looking forward to our Meet & Greet luncheon on September 6th at The Venue on Allen Road, where there will be a Taco Bar!



From the Las Vegas Branch:

Introducing the New Co-Presidents of the Las Vegas Branch

We are honored to begin our roles as AAUW Las Vegas Branch Co-Presidents. As we step into our new leadership roles, we do so with gratitude for the leaders who came before us and with renewed energy for the work ahead. We especially thank immediate past Co-Presidents Marilyn Zimmerman and Janis Schoen, past VP of Membership Shirely Hill, Newsletter and Past-President, Judy Ingham and Sunshine and Past-President, Marian Stanton for their years of dedication and leadership, which built the strong foundation we now carry forward.

Dr. Afi Bruce, originally from Ghana, has practiced internal medicine at Intermountain Health in Las Vegas for 26 years. She completed medical school at the University of Ghana Medical School and her residency at Beth Israel Hospital in New York. She has been an AAUW member since 2019.



Dr. Evelyn Thompson-Hilbert, originally from Massachusetts, earned her BS in Public Administration at USC in Los Angeles and Doctor of Public Policy degree from UNLV, with research focused on mindfulness and trauma-informed practices in workforce development systems. She has been a member of AAUW since 2021.



We remain committed to AAUW's mission and have launched a Membership Committee led by VP of Membership, Claudia Merrill, a Public Policy Committee led by Co-Chairs, Drs. Margoth Tello and Esther Pla-Cazares, and a Fundraising Committee led by Treasurer, Letti Dowell to sustain and grow our impact. We're tracking local, state, and national efforts while strengthening scholarship engagement and our digital presence.



From the Las Vegas Branch: continued from page 6

Summer highlights: volunteered at Project Marilyn combatting period poverty, (<https://projectmarilyn.com/>); our first happy hour in the Arts District at 18Bin and the 2025–26 Fundraising Committee kick-off meeting in August—together, we rise!

In solidarity and sisterhood,
Dr. Afi Bruce, MD & Dr. Evelyn Thompson-Hilbert, DPP

Co-Presidents, AAUW Las Vegas Branch

Contact us at: aauwlasvegas@gmail.com



Happy
Hour



Project Marilyn Van



Project Marilyn Step Repeat



Project Marilyn Volunteer



From the Reno Branch:

Happy Fall (or nearly so) to one and all! Unfortunately, Mother Nature, having melted the snow from our Sierras, is treating our temperatures as if we are still in the middle of summer.

As you may remember, our Reno Branch proposed a bill to be introduced in the next legislative session. During Grassroots Lobby Days, I visited with Senator Angie Taylor, who has offered to shepherd the bill through the proper channels for the next session. We are hoping that other Branches of AAUW Nevada will sign on as co-sponsors or supporters of this bill which calls for a minimal background check for candidates running for legislative office. (If your Branch is so inclined, please notify Cody Phinney, Public Policy Director, Reno AAUW, at codylaine@charter.net).

So far, this has been our Public Policy focus this year, along with the marches and gatherings opposing the government's overreach (both state and national) in policies that are dear to the heart of every AAUW member.

After two full seasons of mission-based speakers on DEI and STEAM, we have cut back this season to four regular meetings and three socials. On June 21st, members met at the home of long-time member Arlene Summerhill for our Spring picnic. There we recognized the 50-year membership of Helaine Greenburg, with a certificate from National inducting her into the Honorary Lifetime Member's Club.

On July 12th, the AAUW Reno Council members met at the home of Administrator Joanne Walen for their Summer retreat, at which they reviewed the past season and plan for the next. They—regretfully accepted the resignation of Program Chair Jody Baden, who has taken on a new role as the Coordinator of the News Literate Community.

We also have new officers: Secretary, Terri Burroughs; and Public Policy, Cody Phinney.



From the Tahoe-Nevada Branch:

The Tahoe Nevada AAUW Branch is busy enjoying summer in Tahoe with our hiking, biking, and kayaking interest groups in full swing. We had fun participating in various 4th of July activities – walking in the Heroes Parade and manning a booth at the Community Fair. We're looking forward to our summer fundraiser at Sand Harbor to enjoy social time and the "Peter and the Starcatcher" production. A portion of the ticket sales will be going toward scholarships.

We've also been taking care of business. The Governance Committee presented amended Branch bylaws which the members reviewed and approved in May. Our annual meeting in June presented our scholarship winners. We awarded two 4-year scholarships, a STEM scholarship, and a one-time scholarship in memory of Nancy Kennedy – a beloved, long time Branch member. At this meeting, the slate of officers for 2025-26 were presented and voted in. A Board retreat was held in July to assist in the transition of new officers onto the Board.

Committees are being formed to work on fundraising, governance, and financial oversight. A new Outreach position has been approved to oversee Community Education Grants, STEM, and Career Technical Education. The latter program has been a huge success with our local Rotary joining our Branch to present career opportunities that do not require a 4-year degree to our local high school students. They have numerous presenters lined up to start the school year.



From the Tahoe-Nevada Branch: continued from Page 8

Thanks to past Co-Presidents Peggy Poindexter and Barb Ortiz for their hard work throughout the past year. Thank you also to Laura Durica who has been our Communications Chair Extraordinaire.

MEET THE NEW CO-PRESIDENTS OF AAUW TAHOE-NEVADA

I am Esther Levandoski, and am the new co-president of AAUW Tahoe Nevada, along with Carolyn Smith. I have been a member of our Branch for over 10 years. As an appreciative AAUW member, I had served on our Scholarship committee, and then was the head of that committee. We have provided college scholarships (and now grants and trade school assistance) to deserving female community members for more than fifty years! It has been very fulfilling to be part of this process.

AAUW has been my contact with our Incline Village community and a source of most of my friendships. I was an elementary school teacher in Santa Cruz, CA. Originally living part-time in Incline Village, we've now been here full-time for the last 18 years. Volunteerism has always been important to me, as a Peace Corps volunteer, as a disaster volunteer for the Red Cross, and as the head of the PTA for my children's schools, as well as for many other jobs.

I look forward to a fun and fruitful year in my co-presidency, and as a participant in many of the activities that AAUW offers to us here in beautiful Incline Village, NV.



I'm Carolyn Smith and was welcomed into the AAUW Tahoe Nevada Branch in 2022 – and I mean truly welcomed! In the brief time I've been a member, I have served as Board secretary, chair for nominating and governance committees, and now as co-president with Esther Levandoski. I have had the pleasure of interacting with so many interesting women with such a variety of backgrounds – whether it's on a work project or through one of our many interest groups.

With a degree in finance, I started out working in the banking world. But after an extended backpacking trip across Europe, I realized I needed to go in a different direction. I began this new path working at a homeless shelter as the Assistant to its Executive Director. I oversaw grant applications and reporting, donor information, and just about everything else under the sun. I continued migrating up the California coast, working in county social services and senior services. My husband and I settled in Incline Village in 1995, where I continued to volunteer in the schools and various other non-profits.

The many ways our Branch supports our local schools through community education grants and STEM programs, along with educating young women about opportunities in career technical education is so exciting to me. I feel honored to continue my volunteer work with the amazing women in the AAUW Tahoe Nevada Branch



AAUW NEVADA
Sage Hen
3rd Quarter 2025

AAUW of NEVADA
2025-2026 State Leadership Council Members and Branch Presidents

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