

*The American Association of University Women*

# *The TORCH*

*, April, 2023*

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Peggy Drennan Cihl, Editor.*

## **PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE**

### **AAUW Fort Myers Theme for April**

#### **Empowering women and girls through education!**



Greeting Members,  
We have chosen "Empowering women and girls through education" as the April Theme. This month our Meeting, Program and Luncheon will focus on the Young Women that have been selected during the 2022-23 year to receive the AAUW Fort Myers/Lee County Branch Scholarships and Awards. They have all been invited to join us at the April Luncheon. We will be able to meet and greet these young women as they embark on their educational journey. This will be a great

opportunity to see our Scholarship fundraising efforts in action.

Please join us on Saturday, April 15 to welcome them.

#### **The following are the summaries of the March Board and General meeting:**

- The election was conducted to elect three positions to the 2023-24 Executive Board. Congratulations to:
  - President Elect – Nancy Schoenstein
  - Secretary – Patricia Crowe
  - VP Programs – Jill Jennings
- Program – April speaker will be Cheryl Tromley who will briefly address the Scholarship Recipients. Cheryl and Devera Graf have planned the special celebration.
- Membership – It is time for members to renew their membership for 2023-24. We encourage members to renew ASAP to be included in the Directory.

- Seven new members were introduced and warmly welcomed.
- Scholarship – Judith Sims is introducing a new scholarship in memory of her husband, Norton Sims. Norton was a strong supporter of our AAUW Branch and a familiar face at many branch events. More information will be forthcoming.
- Public Policy – Suzan Harden updated the board and members that were present regarding the AAUW Florida views on bills in the current legislative session. Please refer to her article at the end of the TORCH.
- Peggy Cihi and Cecile Brennan are in the process of setting up a date for the Bingo Gala. Watch for updates.
- An End-of-the-Year Social gathering is being held on Thursday, May 4 at the Landings, Picnic Pointe. It will begin at 11:30 and will be FUN! Please save the date.

“A woman is like a tea bag; you don’t know her full strength until you put her in hot water!”  
Eleanor Roosevelt

Janet George and Bonnie Ryan  
Fort Myers/Lee County Branch, Inc.

### **MAY LUNCHEON MARK YOUR CALENDAR and SAVE THE DATE**



**Date: Thursday May 4, 2023**  
**Time: 11:30 am**  
**Place: Picnic Pointe-The Landings**

The May Luncheon will not disappoint. Our outgoing Presidents, Janet George and Bonnie Ryan, have an exciting luncheon program planned. Details will follow in the next two weeks in an e-mail blast to all members.



*Picturesque Picnic Pointe*



We have two book clubs. Each welcomes new members.

### **Cover Girls Book Club**

Cover Girls is now meeting in members' homes. Zoom will be available for those who are out of town or unable to otherwise attend. The meeting time is generally the second Wednesday of each month from 1 pm to 3 pm. The selection for April is Sandbar Sisters. Contact Carol Fuechsel at [cbfuechsel@gmail.com](mailto:cbfuechsel@gmail.com) for more information.

### **Page Turners Book Club**

Page Turners Book Club Meeting will be held on Thursday, May 25 at 12:45 pm. The book is a classic chosen by the group each year. This year's choice is "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain. Contact Lynn Felice if you have questions or are interested in joining our group at: [lfelice@embarqmail.com](mailto:lfelice@embarqmail.com)

## **Woman of Interest**

**Danica Patrick** is an American former professional racing driver. She is the most successful woman in the history of American open-wheel car racing—her victory in the 2008 Indy Japan 300 is the only win by a woman in an IndyCar Series race.

Born to a working-class family in Beloit, Wisconsin, Patrick began karting at the age of ten and achieved early success by winning her class in the World Karting Association Grand National Championship three times in the mid-1990s. She dropped out of high school with her parents' permission in 1998, and moved to the United Kingdom to further her career.

She first drove in the IndyCar Series with Rahal Letterman Racing in 2005 and took three pole positions, equaling Tomas Scheckter's record of poles in a rookie season. She was named the Rookie of the Year for both the 2005 Indianapolis 500 and the 2005 IndyCar Series.

She saw her finish a career-high third at the Indianapolis 500, the best performance by any woman at the race. Patrick's overall form declined during 2010, but she still managed two-second-places before leaving IndyCar after the 2011 season to focus on stock car racing full-time.

### **Danica Patrick**



Patrick at the 2017 Camping World 500



**Join Us For  
Our Luncheon and Program**

**The Landings Yacht, Golf & Tennis  
Club, 5200 South Landings Drive**

**OUR MEETING DATE:**

**Saturday, April 15 2023**

**Gathering: 11:30 A.M.**

**Location: The Garden Dining Room**

***Luncheon Menu:***

***Rolls, Coffee, Tea***

***Choice 1 CHICKEN PARMESAN SERVED  
with creamy risotto and chef vegetable.***

***Choice 2: PEAR DELIGHT SALAD with  
GRILLED CHICKEN- caramelized pear  
slices , feta cheese and almonds on mixed  
greens with raspberry vinaigrette dressing.***

***Choice 3: Vegan Meal. Chef's choice***

***Dessert: Chef's Choice or Fruit Cup***

***Beverages are available.***

***Wait staff will accept charge cards  
for beverages.***

**The value of luncheon is \$27.00.**

***Reservations are required.  
Please indicate choice of menu.***



**PAYMENT IS EXPECTED**

**to insure your reservation.**

**Payment is made in advance by mail  
with a check made out to AAUW.**

**Contact Carolyn Nance with your  
choice of menu by e-mail, phone or  
when you send in your check.**

**Carolyn's contact is:**

**[cnance5240@gmail.com](mailto:cnance5240@gmail.com)**

**or at**

**(239) 785-9993**

**Send choice of menu and check to  
Carolyn Nance  
11674 Lady Anne Circle  
Cape Coral, FL 33991**

**For e-mail, please note  
AAUW Reservations as the subject.**

**Contact Carolyn Nance no later than  
Monday, April 10.**

**Cancellations must be made no later  
than Tuesday, April 11.**

**(Meetings end in May and begin again  
the third Saturday in September.)**





### **Why PayPal?**

AAUW will soon be using **PayPal** to accept online payments for membership dues, luncheon payments, and donations. **You are not required to have a PayPal account to use the online payment form.** Instead, you can simply enter your credit card information like you would at any other online website to make a payment. PayPal accounts are not required to make online payments. PayPal is very secure and can give a double layer of protection when using online shopping.

### **What information is required to open a Personal PayPal account?**

1. First and last name.
2. Address.
3. Phone number.
4. Email address

**How does PayPal work?** PayPal acts as an intermediary between your money and a merchant. It securely connects to a bank account or credit card. You then use your PayPal account to shop.

**What is the safest form of payment?** By and large, **credit cards** are easily the most secure and safe payment method to use when you shop online. Credit cards use online security features like encryption and fraud monitoring to keep your accounts and personal information safe. Link your PayPal account to your credit card.

**What fees does PayPal charge for transactions?** Using a personal PayPal account is free in most cases if you want to send or receive money, donate or pay for things through a PayPal account inside the U.S.

### **How do I use PayPal goods and services?**

1. Enter the phone number, contact name or email address of the person you're sending money to, or select a contact that's already attached to your account.
2. Enter the payment amount and add a note.
3. Select "Paying for an item or service" in the pop-up that appears.

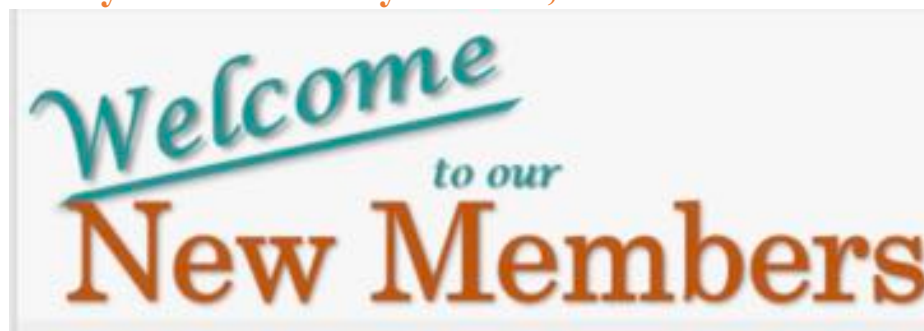
**How safe is PayPal goods and services?** PayPal monitors every transaction 24/7 to help prevent against fraud, email phishing and identity theft. **Every transaction is heavily guarded behind our next-level encryption.** If something seems suspicious, our dedicated team of security specialists is immediately on it to help protect you from fraudulent transactions.

**Will PayPal cover me if I get scammed?** When something goes wrong with your eligible transactions, **PayPal Buyer Protection has you covered.**

**How do I open a PayPal account?** Go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and click Sign Up. · Select **Sign Up** for a **Personal Account**. Then follow the prompts.

**This payment method will be available in the fall of 2023.**

## AAUW Fort Myers/Lee County Branch, Inc.



### New Branch Members 2023-2024

- Catherine Allen
- Astoria Aviles
- Charlotte Barkley
- Brenda Collins
- Margot Flinn
- Carol Marston-Foucher
- Jodi Harrison
- Janet Ion
- Jeanette Ion
- Julie Iverson
- Nedy Staerber
- Carol Watson



### INTRODUCING OUR NEW SCHOLARS

#### Scholarship Co-Chairs: Cheryl Tromley and Devera Graf

We are so excited to be able to introduce you to our 2022-2023 scholars. We hope that you will attend our celebration luncheon on April

15 and have the opportunity to meet them in person!!

(For a further description of our scholarships, please refer to the end of this article)

The *AAUW Star Bright Scholarship* awards one \$1,000 scholarship to a female student attending the second semester at (in alternating years) Fort Myers or Cape Coral Technical College. **Our winner this year is Anne Noel**, who is working toward a degree in Practical Nursing. She is described as “...a hardworking, enthusiastic student with a lot of compassion for the sick.”

This scholarship is a lifeline for her. She did not know if she would be able to attend her final semester, because she did not know how she would pay for it. The counselor said

Anne actually did a “happy dance” when she found out that she had been selected. When we talked with her, she was in tears and could not stop thanking us. She is a wonderful example of the importance of what we do.

The ***AAUW Lee County High School Scholarship*** awards one \$1,000 scholarship per year to a graduating female student with financial need chosen by the school counselor. This year we were fortunate to have the funds to offer two of these scholarships. **The first winner is Sophia Perez** from North Fort Myers High School. She will be attending the University of Miami next fall. When we met her, she could not believe that she was the one person in her school picked by the counselors to receive this award. It means a lot to her, as it will help her reach her goals in college, and because her hard work was recognized. She sends her sincere thanks to our members for the support and to her school’s counselors for selecting her. **The second winner is Janeth Rubio** from Fort Myers High School. She will be attending FSW. She is a first-generation college-bound student who plans to study nursing. This award will be a great help to her. She expressed her heartfelt thanks to AAUW and her school counselors for choosing her. Her counselors said she was a wonderful young woman and very deserving of this award.

The ***Marie Glasgow and AAUW Friends STEM Award Fund*** awards \$500 to a Middle School girl who is a winner in the Junior Division of (in alternating years) the Edison-Kiwanis Science Fair or Thomas Edison Festival of Light Regional Inventors Fair. **This year’s winner is Emily Farnsworth** from the Alva School for her entry in the Inventor’s Fair. Her project is *The Flat Feet Focus Flippers*. In addition to the Marie Glasgow and AAUW Friends STEM award, Emily was also invited to attend the *Raytheon National Invention Convention* held at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan this summer. Emily is not the only inventor

in her family. Both her older and younger sisters won awards at the Inventor’s Fair.

The ***AAUW Thomas Edison and Kiwanis Regional Science & Engineering Fair Award*** provides a \$300 prize to a female entrant in the Thomas Alva Edison & Kiwanis Regional Science and Engineering Fair. **This year’s winner is Kurukulasuriya Fernando**, who attends Dunbar High School, for her project: *Phytochemical Analysis, Determination of Antibacterial and Antioxidant Activity of Leaf Extracts of Six Native Plants: Pseudophoenix sargentii, Byrsonima lucida, Glandularia maritima, Illicium parviflorum, Pinus elliottii, and Ulmus alata*. In addition to winning the AAUW Science Fair Award, Kurukulasuriya also received other awards that evening. She also received accolades for the project she presented at this year’s Inventor’s Fair. Unfortunately, we will not have the opportunity to meet Kurukulasuriya at our luncheon, as she will be in Orlando for the state *Mua Alpha Theta Math Convention*.

The ***AAUW Thomas Edison and Kiwanis Regional Science & Engineering Fair Emerging Research Scholar Award*** provides a \$300 prize to a female entrant for a project that shows promise with the purpose of encouraging her participation in future years. **This year’s winner is Julianna Bendeck**, who attends Bonita Springs High School, for her project: *The Importance of Altruism in Schools: Do Altruistic Student-Teacher Relationships Foster an Intrinsic “Willingness to Learn” Amongst Highschool Students?* Although we could not present the award to her in person, because she was competing in another competition, Devera met her mother who was so happy that we recognized Julianna’s strong effort and expressed eagerness to attend the luncheon.

The ***AAUW FGCU Endowed Scholarship*** awards one (approximately) \$2,000 scholarship to a female student pursuing an undergraduate degree at FGCU who resides in

the five-county (Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, Hendry) area. **This year's winner is Madison Logan**, a sophomore majoring in Pre-Marketing. She wrote to "express [her] utmost gratitude," assuring us that she "will take full advantage of this achievement." In addition to being a full-time student she volunteers at *Special Populations*, *Ronald McDonald House*, and her local church, St. John XXIII.

The ***AAUW Sue Gottcent Memorial Endowed Scholarship*** awards one \$2,000 scholarship to a Lee County female student aged 25 or older who attends an institute of higher education that is part of the Florida State University system. **The current winner is Kaci Barber** who is working toward a degree in social work.

The ***AAUW FSW State College Endowed Scholarship*** awards one \$1,000 scholarship to a female Lee County student attending the Fort Myers Campus of FSW. **This year's winner, Beth Bullion**, is majoring in Business Supervision and Management. She will be unable to attend the luncheon because of a previous commitment but has sent the following: "Thank you for your generosity in this scholarship. I feel very honored to be a recipient of this award. Your support is helping me reach my goal of graduating in May 2023."



Here are updated descriptions of the following awards.

***AAUW STEM Awards:*** Established in 2001 to encourage high school girls in STEM

fields, it awards of two entrants in the Thomas Alva Edison & Kiwanis Regional Science and Engineering Fair. Recipients must present a unique, quality topic, and conduct their own research. Judging is done by members of the Scholarship Committee. The first award, the *AAUW Thomas Edison and Kiwanis Regional Science & Engineering Fair Award*, provides a \$300 prize to a third or fourth place female entrant in the Thomas Alva Edison & Kiwanis Regional Science and Engineering Fair. The second award, the *AAUW Thomas Edison and Kiwanis Regional Science & Engineering Fair Emerging Research Scholar Award*, provides a \$300 prize to a female entrant for a project that shows promise with the purpose of encouraging her participation in future years.

**Marie Glasgow and AAUW Friends STEM Award Fund:** Established in 2019 in honor of Marie Glasgow, president of AAUW Fort Myers/Lee Co. Branch for two terms. It is awarded each year with the goal of improving educational opportunities by rewarding young Middle School girl(s) who are winners at the Junior Division of Edison-Kiwanis Science Fair or Thomas Edison Festival of Light Regional Inventors Fair. In even numbered years the award will go to a Lee County Middle School (grades 6-8) girl participating in the Junior Division of the Edison- Kiwanis Regional Science Fair. The winner should demonstrate meritorious effort but is not a major winner (i.e., third or fourth place.) The project must be STEM related and show proof of own research. In odd numbered years the award will go to a Lee County Middle School (grades 6-8) girl participating in the Thomas Edison Festival of Light Regional Inventor's Fair. The winner should show meritorious effort but is not a major winner (i.e., third or fourth place.). The projects could benefit Mankind or the Environment. Judging for both awards is done by the Special Award Staff. The award judges may suggest different selection criteria but must seek approval of donor prior to award disbursement.



## In The Spotlight

Dr. Laura Frost has had a long career in higher education. She spent her first 17 years as a chemistry professor mainly at Georgia Southern University where she achieved the rank of full professor. In 2012 she moved to Fort Myers to direct the Whitaker Center for STEM Education at Florida Gulf Coast University. In her efforts to find funding for the GEMS program (Girls in Engineering, Math and Sciences) she stumbled across the AAUW and their community action grants and met Janet George (current co-president) through member Cathy Tucker. She got a national AAUW grant for GEMS that year and joined the Lee County branch. You may have seen her in the fashion show that year. She gave a talk about the GEMS program at one of the branch meetings (pre-COVID). Dr. Frost now serves as Associate Dean for the College of Arts and Sciences at FGCU where she works with faculty and graduate students. Her passion lies in inclusion both in the classroom and the workplace. She still assists with the GEMS program and is extremely thankful for the AAUW-Lee Country Branch's commitment to the program over the years. There are two GEMS events being planned for Spring 2023. She currently serves the branch through your scholarship committee and assists in making connections with the University when asked. When not working, she enjoys running, outdoor activities, time with her family and in the last year has taken up Pilates.



### 2022-2023 MEETING DATES and Torch Production Schedule

SEND ARTICLES TO [peggycihi@comcast.net](mailto:peggycihi@comcast.net)

**Meeting Date**  
May 20, 2023

**Deadline for Articles**  
April 26, 2023

**Mail Torch Date**  
May 10, 2023

## Introducing our president for 2023-2024



Our incoming president for next year will be **Cecile Brennan**. Cecile is from Ohio, having recently retired from teaching full-time at John Carroll University. As a snowbird, Cecile was looking for a way to engage and give back in her new Fort Myers Community. She joined AAUW in 2021, where she felt welcomed and energized by our mission to support and empower women. In her position Cecile would like to assess how to provide the most assistance without duplicating other efforts and continue our tradition of welcoming others to our intellectually engaged and socially minded AAUW Branch.



Great Decisions is a discussion group focusing on foreign policy matters. We meet virtually the first Friday of the month, February through June and September through November. The topics for discussion are developed by the Foreign Policy Association ([www.fpa.org](http://www.fpa.org)). FPA creates a discussion booklet with analyses of the topics developed by experts in the field. A series of lectures called Master Classes is provided to offer additional information regarding each topic. Discussion group participants take turns leading the discussions.

The next Great Decisions discussion will be held Friday, April 14, at 12:30 p.m. via Zoom. Our next topic is *China and America: back to the future?* This discussion promises to be timely, thought-provoking, and interesting. We meet the first Friday of each month. If anyone is interested in joining in, books can be ordered at the regular price of \$35 plus shipping and handling. All members are welcome!

If you would like to participate in the discussion as a guest, contact Suzan Harden for further information. If you did not order a book and would like to participate in the discussions, please contact Suzan at [skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:skh062653@gmail.com).



Great Decisions met on March 3 to discuss the topic “War Crimes,” with Cheryl Tromley leading the discussion. On March 17, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced war crimes charges being filed against Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, and Maria Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children’s Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, stemming from the world-wide condemnation of Russia’s practice of removing children from families in Ukraine and offering them for adoption in Russia during the current war in Ukraine.

Conversation in our local Great Decisions group began to buzz, as we had just conducted a very animated discussion of the topic. As a result of our discussion, we had learned how difficult the decision is to bring war crimes charges, the many viewpoints that must be reconciled to come to that decision, and the difficulty processing such charges and determining consequences. We will be following this story.

Discussion Leader, Cheryl Tromley has submitted this summary of the discussion:

### **Cheryl Tromley**

The Great Decisions Group always has wonderful discussions, but last weeks was especially meaningful given the timeliness of the topic: *War Crimes: What are they? How can they be prosecuted?* We all agreed that, following our meeting, we felt much better able to understand the current situation in Ukraine and Russia. While the topic is too complex to be effectively summarized in this short article, I do want to give you at least a flavor of our discussion.

As was said in our reading, “...we’ve seen mounting evidence of Russian war crimes including the rape, torture, and murder of civilians, the bombing of schools and hospitals, and the abuse of prisoners-of-war. Horrifying stories about the kidnapping and deportation of Ukrainian children and shocking images of mass graves outside of Kyiv put the world on high alert.”<sup>1</sup>

Maybe you have felt like I did, overwhelmed by the horror of it but helpless to completely understand, much less do anything about it. Following our reading and discussion I felt no less horrified, but I felt less overwhelmed, and somehow less helpless.

Our reading and video provided an in-depth overview of “What are the different categories of war crimes under international law? And what kind of institutions are in place to investigate and prosecute them? How effective is our current system of international law, and what are the chances of bringing Russian soldiers, officers, and leaders to justice. Finally, what kind of role could or should the United States, which is not a member of the ICC (International Criminal Court), play in these efforts?”

(Continued on the next page.)

Based on this comprehensive introduction, we discussed, developed a clearer understanding of, but not necessarily a conclusion about the following questions:

- What is the relative importance of the establishment of an international law code vs. the preservation of state sovereignty?
- Is there value to rulings by international courts even if they have no way to enforce those rulings? For example, we have just seen that Putin has been charged, by the ICC with war crimes involving the kidnapping of Ukrainian children. However, because Russia is not a signatory to the ICC, any ruling would be all but impossible to enforce. This problem relates directly to the first question. Russia, the United States, and approximately 70 other states, including China and India, have opted not to join the ICC because of state sovereignty concerns. This clearly limits the effectiveness of the ICC.
- Is it time to make changes to the UN security council where Russia has consistently used its veto powers to avoid any actions against itself or its leaders?
- Given the mechanisms available, what would be the best course of action to hold Russian soldiers and leaders responsible for the war crimes they have committed in Ukraine?

<sup>1</sup> Hirsch, F. (2023) War crimes: what are they? How can they be prosecuted? *Great Decisions*, 2023 Edition, 17-28, 2023, Foreign Policy Association, Inc.

It was a far-reaching, interesting, and informative discussion.



### **AAUW National Election Kickoff: Look for New Voting Vendor**

AAUW National's [member election](#) opens Wednesday, April 5. Don't miss your opportunity to vote on our directors, bylaws amendments and changes to our Public Policy Priorities. This year, AAUW is using a new third-party vendor to administer AAUW's membership vote. Your ballot and unique voting credentials will be emailed to you directly from [vote@simplyvoting.com](mailto:vote@simplyvoting.com).

Please add [vote@simplyvoting.com](mailto:vote@simplyvoting.com) to your safe sender list to ensure you receive your electronic ballot.



## INTEREST GROUPS/COORDINATORS

### BOOK GROUPS

Carol Fuechsel, Coordinator  
[cbfuechsel@gmail.com](mailto:cbfuechsel@gmail.com)

Book Club Meets  
Cover Girls 2nd Wednesday, 1 PM  
Page Turners 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday, 12:30 PM  
(The book clubs accept new members. If interested, please contact Carol Fuechsel.)

### BRIDGE

Kathy Jones, Coordinator  
[Kathyj1972@hotmail.com](mailto:Kathyj1972@hotmail.com)

### HAND & FOOT

Carolyn Nance, Coordinator  
Meets –1<sup>st</sup> Monday each month  
[cnance5240@gmail.com](mailto:cnance5240@gmail.com)

### MAHJONG

Carolyn Nance, Coordinator  
Meets –3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday each month  
[cnance5240@gmail.com](mailto:cnance5240@gmail.com)

### GREAT DECISIONS

Suzan Harden, Coordinator  
Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Friday of the month  
[skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:skh062653@gmail.com)

### NATURE WALKS and DAY TRIPS

Jemetta Hunt, Coordinator  
[jemetta@aol.com](mailto:jemetta@aol.com)

### TOOLS FOR ADVOCACY

Suzan Harden Coordinator  
[Skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:Skh062653@gmail.com)

New Interest Groups Are Welcome

Contact: Bonnie Ryan  
[bonniemarieryan@aol.com](mailto:bonniemarieryan@aol.com)

Janet George  
[bfjegeorge@comcast.net](mailto:bfjegeorge@comcast.net)

## AAUW Fort Myers/Lee County Branch, Inc.

### 2022-2023 Officers

#### *Elected – Executive Board*

Co-Presidents – Bonnie Ryan  
and Janet George  
Past President – Kathleen Haibach  
Vice President, Elect – Cecile Brennan  
Vice President of Programs –  
Jill Jennings  
Vice President Membership –  
Jemetta Hunt  
Secretary –Patricia Crowe  
Treasurer – Mary Kellner

#### *Appointed Officers – Board Members*

Public Policy – Suzan Harden  
Co-Chairs of Scholarship —  
Cheryl Tromley and Devera Graf  
Communications/Website/Facebook —  
Mary Lou Chamberlain  
Ways and Means – Peggy Cihl  
Strategic Planning—  
Kathleen Haibach

#### *Standing Committees*

Torch Editor – Peggy Cihl  
Records Retention – Executive Board  
Science Fair - Cathy Tucker  
Diversity Officer - Lisa Crotty  
Strategic Plan –(open)

#### *Ancillary Positions*

Reservations – Carolyn Nance assisted by  
Lynn Felice  
Sunshine – Mary Jane McDowell  
Greeters – Board Members  
Torch Circulation –  
Jemetta Hunt (US Mail)  
Kathy Jones (E-mail)

## PUBLIC POLICY

### AAUW FORT MYERS/LEE COUNTY March 2023 Torch Update

AAUW Florida Lobby Days were held March 14 and 15 in Tallahassee for the purpose of advocating for bills proposed for the 2023 Legislative Session that support the AAUW mission and opposing bills that contradict the mission. The two bills of primary interest this year are HB1/SB202 – School Choice and CS/HB999 – CS/SB266 – Public Postsecondary Educational Institutions. (The Senate titled this bill “Higher Education.”)

HB1/SB 202 creates a universal voucher system in the state of Florida. This bill will remove all income requirements for eligibility for the vouchers, although the bill stipulates that the poorest students should still be given priority for consideration. The funds used for any student’s school choice voucher are deducted from the funds appropriated for that student’s school district. The cost estimated for implementation of this bill is up to \$4 billion in the 23/24 school year. The Florida Policy Institute researched potential fiscal impacts for each of Florida’s 67 counties; the estimate for Lee County is \$88 million. Other major concerns of this bill are quality of the curriculum provided in some private and charter schools, the limited qualifications some teachers may have, and the statistics that show a high percentage of students who have chosen this option return to the local school district within two years, farther behind than before they left. An amendment to require private schools to honor the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) developed by the local school district was defeated. There also is no requirement that students who are deemed eligible for a voucher will get a seat in a desirable school. The AAUW FL talking points for this bill are attached to this edition of the Torch. AAUW FL opposes passage. However, the House has already approved this bill 83-27 and sent it to the Senate for consideration.

CS/HB999 – CS/SB266 – Public Postsecondary Educational Institutions is drawing concern from around the country, primarily for its attack on tenure and academic freedom. Current requirements are that professors undergo a tenure review every five years. This bill proposes that a tenure review can be initiated at any time “for cause.” The Senate version of the bill was amended to clarify that “cause” cannot include a professor’s political affiliation, participation in constitutionally protected speech, or engagement in constitutionally protected activities. The State is targeting social studies and humanities courses. Among other things, the original bills called for the elimination of courses relating to Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Studies, Critical Ethnic Studies, Radical Feminist Theory, Radical Gender Theory, Queer Theory, Critical Social Justice, or Intersectionality. The House version of the bill still contains those prohibitions; the Senate version has eliminated them. Although much attention has been given to the bill’s implication that such organizations as social justice activism groups and Black fraternities and sororities would be prohibited on campus, the sponsor of the House Bill, Rep. Andrade, stated those organizations can continue to exist but faculty cannot supervise them. College presidents would have the authority to disregard any input into faculty hiring decisions except from their executive teams. No university can require staff to commit to a philosophy of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Talking Points for this bill are not yet available and will be shared as soon as they are. AAUW FL opposes this bill. This bill has not yet passed either the House or the Senate, but it is moving rapidly through the process.

In addition, AAUW supports bills regarding Equal Rights for Men and Women, the continued crackdown on human trafficking in our state, and bills written to address women’s health and equal opportunity.

A brief review of all the bills on which AAUW is focused is attached to this edition of the Torch. Remember that this is just a sampling of the bills being considered. General bills regarding property insurance, homeowners’ regulations, business regulations, etc., fall outside the purview of AAUW. There could be many bills you would have interest in. See the attached chart for information about how to access that information.

**AAUW Florida Priority:**

The American Association of University Women of Florida advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research.

**HB1/SB202 – SCHOOL CHOICE****Background**

Florida offers vouchers that parents can use to pay for educational services offered by a variety of providers through several scholarship programs: the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) scholarship; the Family Empowerment Scholarship Educational Opportunities (FES-EO); the Family Empowerment Scholarship Unique Abilities (FES-UA) for students with disabilities; the HOPE Scholarship program (for students who have been subjected to bullying, harassment, physical attack, and other forms of abuse at school); the New Worlds Reading Scholarship Accounts (for K-5 students who have performed significantly below grade level on state reading assessments). School choice options in Florida include private schools, charter schools, virtual education, magnet schools, and home schools.

There are income and eligibility restrictions on the program as it stands now. Students in households earning up to 375% of the federal poverty level (\$104,063 for a family of four in 2022-23) are eligible for scholarships. Students who qualify under 200% of the federal poverty level (\$55,500 for a family of four) are eligible for full scholarships worth up to \$7,408. Funds can be used for tuition, resources, tutoring, transportation, and other related educational services. In the 21/22 school year, Florida ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the nation in the amount of money spent for school choice programs, spending approximately \$1.2 billion (roughly 4 percent of the total spent for K-12 education).

There are two Scholarship Funding Organizations (SFOs): A.A.A. Scholarship Foundation, FL, LLC located in Tampa and Step Up for Students, located in Jacksonville.

**What HB1/SB202 Will Do**

The primary purpose of HB1/SB202 is to revise Florida's School Choice program to remove income and eligibility requirements, making school choice available to any student in Florida and resulting in what is referred to as "universal choice." The bill provides definitions for all aspects of the school choice program; removes income requirements; revises the authorized uses of scholarship funds; defines responsibilities for all parties involved including parents and students; determines how award amounts are calculated; determines the extent of time scholarship funds can be made available to a student; defines ways participation could be restricted; defines public school district responsibilities for notifying parents of choice options; revises system to require direct funds transfers rather than endorsements of warrants; and otherwise defines all aspects of the management of the program. A link to the complete text of the bill is provided below.

HB1/SB202 will allow the children of parents whose household income does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level (\$51,338 for a family of four) to get priority to receive an FTC or FES-EO scholarship.

## **Financial Impact of Passage**

The funds for this bill will be diverted from local public-school districts. The Education Law Center and Florida Policy Institute estimate the following costs to Florida taxpayers from HB1:

- \$1.1 billion for 124,063 students currently receiving FES vouchers.
- \$890 million for 104,477 new FES vouchers for current public-school students once the family income cap is lifted.
- \$1.9 billion for 219,017 new FES vouchers for current private school students newly eligible for vouchers.
- \$85 million for 10,000 new FES vouchers for home-schooled students newly eligible for vouchers.

Click on the link in “Resources” to see proposed financial impact for your county.

## **Concerns**

- ✓ Even though a student has qualified for a scholarship, it does not guarantee acceptance in a program. Also, the scholarship may not be enough to pay the cost of the desired educational program and to arrange for transportation. It would still be up to the family to make up the difference.
- ✓ The program has the potential to disproportionately benefit students who already have the financial resources to afford a private school education. An amendment proposed to cap income eligibility at \$1 million was defeated.
- ✓ There is no provision in the bill requiring private schools to cap tuition increases. There is nothing to stop for-profit schools from greatly increasing their profit at the expense of local public-school districts.
- ✓ There are concerns about private schools denying admission to students with disabilities, claiming they cannot provide the services needed as described on a student’s IEP. An amendment proposed to require private schools to do so was defeated.
- ✓ There is no way to determine how the loss of public funds will affect local facilities, curriculum offerings, staffing issues, and availability of resources for students.
- ✓ Teacher certification is not as tightly regulated in non-public schools.
- ✓ Measures of accountability may not equal those in public schools.

## **Relationship to AAUW Florida Mission**

AAUW Florida aligns its public policy mission with AAUW. From the AAUW website:

AAUW believes that high-quality public education is the foundation of a democratic society and the key to improving economic prosperity and gender equality. We advocate equitable access to education and climates free of harassment, bullying, and sexual assault. We support academic freedom, civic education, protection from censorship, bias-free education, and responsible funding for all levels of education, including early childhood education and programs for students with disabilities. We advocate for increased and more equitable access to higher education, that is affordable and yields high quality credentials or degrees. We promote intentional, equity-focused efforts to close the persistent learning and opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students from low-income and minority groups.

## **Position of AAUW Florida**

The passage of HB1/SB202 contradicts AAUW’s mission to support a strong, equitable public education system. The position of AAUW Florida is to oppose passage of HB1/SB202.

## **Resources:**

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=76982> Text of Florida HB1  
[www.fldoe.org](http://www.fldoe.org) Search for “School Choice.”



[www.edchoice.org/school-choice/state/florida/](http://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/state/florida/) On the right, click on the “Fast Facts” tab. Easy-to-read graphics illustrating where Florida’s K-12 education dollars are spent and where students are attending school.

<https://news.wfsu.org/state-news/2023-01-29/bill-to-expand-floridas-school-voucher-programs-gets-mixed-reaction>

[Florida's school choice bill clears first hurdle | WJCT News](#)

[Florida HB 1 and SB 202 \(2023\): Potential Fiscal Impacts \(floridapolicy.org\)](#) (Includes an interactive map that allows the reader to see potential impact county by county)

## INTEREST GROUP

### Tools for Advocacy

Last fall our branch began a special interest group called ***Tools for Advocacy***. The purpose of this group is to keep a finger on the pulse of political discussions that may result in bills either supporting or oppressing AAUW’s missions. The intention was that we would share information, discussion strategies for advocating with legislators and exploring tools citizens can use to track legislation all during the year, not just through the legislative session. If you are interested in participating in this group, please let Suzan Harden know.

With two major bills being considered having long-term consequences on AAUW’s mission of equity in education for women and girls, we would like to have one meeting prior to the end of this legislative session, which is May 5, 2023.

The ***Tools for Advocacy*** special interest group has had one meeting. The second meeting was scheduled for right after the hurricane went through, so we are just getting ourselves back together again.

Anyone can join *Tools for Advocacy*. Our goal is to follow legislation related to the issues important to AAUW’s Strategic Plan and to coordinate advocacy efforts. Contact Lisa Crotty or Suzan Harden if you are interested.

Lisa Crotty [lisajcrotty@gmail.com](mailto:lisajcrotty@gmail.com) and  
Suzan Harden [Skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:Skh062653@gmail.com)

**AAUW FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2023**  
Updated March 21, 2023

Bill	Sponsor	AAUW Position	Current Activity
HB51/SB590 – Prohibited Discrimination Based on Hairstyle in the Education System	Rep. Driskell/Sen. Powell	Support	3/7 – 1 <sup>st</sup> reading in both House and Senate 3/21 – No further action.
HCR513/SCR270 – Equal Rights for Men and Women	Rep. Joseph/Sen. Berman	Support	House: Referred to: Judiciary; Constitutional Rights, Rule of Law & Government; Operations. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7. 3/21 – No further action.
HB59/SB166 – Human Trafficking and Prostitution	Rep. Skidmore/Sen. Berman	Support	House: Reviewed by Criminal Justice; Judiciary; Justice Appropriations; 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7. Senate: Referred to Criminal Justice; Appropriations. Introduced 3/7. 3/21 – No further action.
HB651/SB326 – Human Trafficking	Rep. Robinson/Sen. Osgood	Support	House: Referred to Criminal Justice; Justice Appropriations; Judiciary. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7 Senate: Referred to Criminal Justice; Appropriations on Health&Human Svcs; Fiscal Policy. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7 3/21 – No further action.
HB389/SB334 – Menstrual Hygiene Products in Public Schools (Learning with Dignity Act)	Rep. Skidmore/Sen. Book	Support	House: Referred to Education Quality; PreK-12 Appropriations; Education&Employment. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7. Senate: Referred to Education PreK-12; Appropriations Committee on Education; Fiscal Policy. Introduced 3/7. 3/21 – No Further action.
HB1/SB202 – School Choice	Rep. Tuck/Sen. Simon	Oppose	House: Read for 3 <sup>rd</sup> time 3/17 Senate: Approved primarily along party lines in the Appropriations Committee on Education Appropriations, and Education PreK-12 Committees. 3/21: The House passed this bill 83-27 on 3/17 and forwarded it to the Senate. Contact your senator for input.
SB276/SB330 – Crimes Evidencing Prejudice	Sen. Polsky/Sen. Berman	Support	Senate: Referred to Criminal Justice; Judiciary; Rules. Introduced 3/7. 3/21 – No further action.

Bills	Sponsors	AAUW Position	Current Activity
HB663/SB576 – Employee Leave and Wage History	Rep. Casello/Sen. Book	Support	House: Referred to Regulatory Reform and Economic Development; Constitutional Rights, Rule of Law and Government Operations; Commerce; State Administration & Technology Appropriations Subcommittee. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7 Senate: Referred to Governmental Oversight and Accountability; Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment, and General Government; Fiscal Policy. Introduced 3/7. 3/21 – No further action
HB431/SB486 – Solicitation of Minors to Commit Lewd or Lascivious Acts (This is an oddly-titled bill, the purpose of which would be to clarify the definition of this crime and who can be charged.)	Rep. Baker/Sen. Bradley	Support	House: Referred to Criminal Justice; Judiciary; Justice Appropriations. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7. Senate: Referred to Criminal Justice; Fiscal Policy; Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice. 3/21 – Favorable by Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice – YEAS 12; NAYS 0
CS/HB999 – CS/SB266 – Public Postsecondary Educational Institutions  Note: The Senate has removed the prohibition on courses related to CRT, Ethnic Studies, Gender Studies, etc. The House version still contains the prohibition.	Rep. Andrade/Sen. Grall	Oppose	House: Referred to Postsecondary Education & Workforce; Higher Education Appropriations; Education and Employment. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reading 3/7. Senate: Referred to Education Postsecondary; Appropriations Committee on Education. 3/21 – Senate: CS by Education Postsecondary read 1 <sup>st</sup> time.

For more information about any bill, go to [www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov). On the first page, you can scroll through the entire list of bills that have been proposed for this session. (That list goes on for many pages.) There is also a line to put in the number of a specific bill to search for that bill. On the page for each bill, you will see the activity for that particular bill. You can also track any bill of interest. If you do so, you will get an email every time there is action on the bill. Also, when you sign in to [www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov) you can see at the top what they are discussing currently and click in to see it live.



## STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE (SPC) REPORT

February 28, 2023 SPC meeting

### Brief history of SPC:

In October 2021 Kathleen Haibach and Jemetta Hunt proposed an ad hoc SPC, chaired by Lisa Crotty, to develop a 2-year strategic plan for our branch. This plan incorporated both National and State plans to assist our branch with achieving the AAUW mission of **advancing gender equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy**. Our branch is only 1 of 3 Florida branches to have a Strategic Plan.

The following recommendations of the committee were presented and accepted by the Board April 2022 and updated at the February 2023 committee meeting:

1. Appoint Diversity Officer.  
Lisa Crotty accepted the position 4/22.
2. Make SPC a Standing Committee.  
This was established at the 4/22 meeting
3. STEAM (add Art to STEM)  
See recommendations below.
4. Collaborate with other Florida Branches.  
Our Presidents have collaborated with Venice and Naples on speaker presentations.
5. Increase/retain membership.  
Nine new members have been added.  
Create a Member Retention Plan  
See recommendations below.
6. Create an Editorial Board to ensure monthly themed messaging.  
See recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS made by this committee  
February 2023:

1. Establish subcommittees responsible for implementing tasks recommended by the SPC and approved by the Branch Board. These subcommittees would also provide opportunities for members to participate in our Branch projects:

- (1) Scholarship-subcommittee established 2022-continuing to explore STEAM. (Art in STEM)
- (2) Membership-looking for subcommittee volunteers to assist with various membership duties including New Member Mentorship Program. Contact Jemetta Hunt. [jemetta@aol.com](mailto:jemetta@aol.com)

(3) Public Policy

Looking for subcommittee volunteers to assist with following Florida State legislation and policy as related to AAUW women's advocacy mission. Contact Suzan Harden.

[Shk062653@gmail.com](mailto:Shk062653@gmail.com)

2. Editorial Board will be replaced with Communication Committee which will ensure monthly-themed messaging in the Torch/Website/Facebook/ Programs-Cecile Brennan our incoming President will oversee this committee.

3. Review of the current SPC worksheet recommended by the Committee to revise the SPC worksheet. .Responsibility of Kathleen Haibach and Tamara Pigott.

4. Recommended SPC meet two times a year to evaluate/revise our *Branch Strategic Plan*. Next meeting will be Zoom August 2023, followed by a report to membership.

5. Nancy Schoenstein, our incoming President Elect, will assist Mary Kellner with finance duties .

6. Collaborative efforts will continue to be ongoing between our branch and other Florida branches initiated by individual committees. The Scholarship Committee will continue to collaborate with community universities and teaching institutions.

Respectfully submitted  
Kathleen Haibach and Tamara Pigott  
Strategic Planning Committee Co-Chairmen



Fort Myers / Lee County Branch, Inc.  
P.O Box 2115  
Fort Myers, FL 33901-2115

**Donate Today to help the Fort Myers Branch Advance Equity for Women**

**Use my Gift for:** ☐ **Operating Expenses** ☐ **Unrestricted** ☐ **Scholarships\*** ☐

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Is the gift in honor or memory of someone? If so please complete the following:**

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**In Honor of** \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information for person honored or family of person remembered:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Street Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State & Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** Should you want to specify a specific Branch scholarship or award please name below: (See list at: <https://fmlc-fl.aauw.net> under tab Philanthropy: Scholarships, Awards)  
Scholarship/ Award: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to AAUW Fort Myers / Lee County, Inc. and mail to:**  
**AAUW – ATTN: Treasurer, PO Box 2115, Fort Myers, FL 33901- 2115**

AAUW Fort Myers/Lee Co FL is a 501 (c) 3 not for profit organization and gifts may be tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

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**Membership and Interest Form**  
**AAUW Fort Myers/Lee County Branch, Inc.**  
**July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024**

**Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **First Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Florida Address (Is this a new or edited prior address in Florida? Circle: Y or N)**

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates usually in Lee County: ☐ Full Time or ☐ Seasonal, from: \_\_\_\_\_ to: \_\_\_\_\_

**Out of Season Address ( Is this a new or edited out of season address? Circle: Y or N)**

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Information--**Will be included in the directory and used to send branch communications such as the Torch.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone-Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone-Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate: Month/Day: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

**Education**—As you would prefer to be included in the directory. Education: Degree(s)/Year/College/University(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Level of Membership**

\$63.00 ☐ New Member (Reduced cost for first year membership! Welcome!)

\$99.00 ☐ Renewing Branch Member

\$27.00 ☐ Dual Member—Primary membership with another branch. Primary branch: \_\_\_\_\_

\$27.00 ☐ Paid Life Member

\$0.00 ☐ Honorary Life Member

**Payment:** Mail the Membership Form with your check, payable to **AAUW Fort Myers/Lee County Branch Inc.**

AAUW Fort Myers/Lee Co Branch, Inc.

P.O. Box 2115

Fort Myers, FL 33902-2115

**All questions regarding membership may be sent by email to Jemetta Hunt, Membership VP, [jemetta@aol.com](mailto:jemetta@aol.com)**

**My interests would be in the following Committees and Interest Groups**

Check	Committees	Check	Interest Groups
	Membership/Directory		Book Group
	Public Policy		Bridge
	Scholarships		Hand and Foot
	Communications		Mahjongg
	Ways and Means/Fundraising		Nature Walks
	Torch Newsletter Production Editing		Tools for Advocacy
	Strategic Planning		Great Decisions
	Field Trips		Other:



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