**2011 AAUW National Convention Report by West Harris County Branch Members**

**The Big Teal Machine: A Perfect Storm**

**Renaissance Hotel in Washington D.C. June 15-19**

**This convention marked the 130th anniversary of AAUW.** Over 800 AAUW members attended from across the nation. Due to the “One Member-One Vote” process introduced for the first time this year, much more time was available for informative panels and speakers which included women in the Obama administration, discussions on women’s work-life balance, the Wal-Mart vs. Dukes legal advocacy case, and AAUW’s research on why so few women are in STEM fields and of very special note, extensive briefing and organizing of a trip to Capitol Hill to visit Senators John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison to advocate for Social Security, a National Women’s History Museum and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (Campus SaVE). Other highlights of the convention included an impressive tour of AAUW National Headquarters, a tour of women’s portraits in the National Portrait Gallery, a tour of the Women’s Suffrage section in the new Newseum, and a special night at the Brazilian Embassy.

The old saying, “You should have been there!” certainly applies to the sentiments of the five West Harris County branch members who attended - Mary Edwards, Rose Ennis, Diana Guarniere, Nancy Guilloud and Deanna Swindell. Not only was the city itself awe- inspiring, the convention gave first hand opportunities to meet the people who run our national AAUW organization and our national government to become more aware of the excellent work that is being done to achieve equity for women and girls.

**Election Results**

Polls closed on Friday, June 17, at 9 pm in the historic AAUW *One Member, One Vote* election. It was the first time AAUW members voted in a popular election by mail both electronically and by post– rather than using a delegate system at a convention to elect national officers and approve bylaws amendments and amendments to the Public Policy Program. More than 10,000 ballots were cast online and by mail since voting opened on May 1, easily meeting the required quorum of 5 percent of the membership. The number of votes cast by members this year far exceeded delegate votes cast at the 2009 convention in St. Louis. As a result, more time was available to partake in activities, hear dynamic speakers, and network.

All the proposed bylaws amendments and all the amendments to the Public Policy Program passed.

Congratulations to the newly elected AAUW National Board of Directors:

AAUW President: Carolyn Garfein

AAUW Vice President: Patricia Ho

AAUW Directors-at-Large:

Kathy Anthon, Amy Blackwell, Kathryn Braeman, Julia T. Brown, Sandra Camillo, Kathleen Cha, Charmen Goehring-Fox, Connie M. Hildebrand, Millie Hoffler-Foushee, David Kirkwood, Betsy McDowell, Dot McLane, Peggy Ryan Williams

These proposed changes were published in the Winter and Spring 2011 AAUW Outlook Magazine.

**SPECIAL TOURS AND EVENTS:**

**Tour of AAUW National Headquarters**

Many members took the opportunity to tour AAUW’s national headquarters to see where AAUW’s business and operations take place and to see, first hand, what our national dues supports. The building sits in the heart of Washington D.C. right next to The Washington Post. What is most special, we own the building! We came away thoroughly impressed with the graciousness and professionalism of the AAUW staff and with renewed faith that the dues we send to Washington are well spent.

**Tour of National Portrait Gallery**

**Tour of the new NEWSEUM**

**Night at the Brazilian Embassy**

**GENERAL SESSIONS:**

**Women of Power in the Obama Administration Panel**

Tina Tchen, chief of staff to first lady Michelle Obama and executive director of the White House Council on Women and Girls, asserted that the administration is trying to “change the DNA of the federal government” so that every agency pays attention to women’s issues in life and in the workplace.

* Russlyn H. Ali, the Department of Education’s Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, discussed her work to enforce Title IX, which she described as more guidance than “gotcha” and reiterated that the 1972 law is about more than just sports--it’s about access and safe learning environments.
* Patricia A. Shiu, Department of Labor, works to make sure government contractors follow civil rights laws and said she feels privileged to work for a president who actively asks his staff to launch equal pay and anti-discrimination initiatives.
* Jocelyn Samuels, Justice Department, discussed her work on reproductive rights—including enforcing a woman’s right to enter a health clinic without being harassed—as well as efforts to protect against employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or pregnancy.
* Lisa Maatz, AAUW Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, moderated the discussion.

West Harris County Branch members were very impressed with the competence and commitment of these strong women who diligently work behind the scenes on a daily basis, to see that equity is achieved for women and girls.

**Capitol Hill Lobby Day**

Nearly 700 convention goers joined their ranks to lobby senators and representatives on Capitol Hill to advocate for Social Security protections, permission for a National Women’s History Museum, and sponsorship and passage of the Campus SaVE Act, an anti-sexual assault bill. Members visited over 250 offices and met with lawmakers from all 50 states. AAUW Director of Public Policy and Government Relations Lisa Maatz was ecstatic with the turnout. “The Big Teal Machine took over Capitol Hill…Their visible presence was noted…I’d expect nothing less from AAUW members. We’ve got 130 years of persistence!” Lilly Ledbetter, pay equity advocate, joined the “Big Teal Machine” on the Hill to continue her advocacy on behalf of women and girls.

Texas was well represented with members from all over the state. Linda Gaul from San Antonio led the Texas contingent to Capitol Hill. Although our Texas Senators were out of town, we met with aides to both Senator John Cornyn and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. It was a very positive experience for all of us. We came away feeling we planted seeds of awareness in the minds of the aides and received gracious letters from both Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison and John Cornyn that expressed approval for the SaVE Act.

**Working With Men for Work-Life Balance Discussion**

Joan C. Williams of the Center for Work Life Law, attorney and author, stated, “The norm of work devotion is alive and well….As long as desk jobs with 90 hour weeks are seen as “heroic” expressions of masculinity, women with families will continue to be at a disadvantage. Workplace discrimination against mothers is rampant: They are less likely to be hired, and they receive lower salaries and fewer promotions.”

John W. Curtis, director of research at the American Association of University Professors spoke about the fundamental changes to the workplace necessary to bring about real equity. “Inequity in the workplace is not simply the result of women’s ‘choices’… It’s a product of traditional gender expectations, and workers and employers will need to take active steps to break out of the mold.”

Members came away from the discussion feeling there is a long way to go for equity to be reached in the workplace and continued dialog and education is an ongoing need. This is an issue that is very relevant to working women and an important issue for future programming..

**LAF and Wal-Mart Plaintiff’s Fight for Justice**

*Wal-Mart v. Dukes* plaintiff Edith Arana and Co-counsel Arcelia Hurtado, executive director of Equal Rights Advocates, spoke to AAUW about this historic workplace discrimination lawsuit. Arana described how Wal-Mart never allowed her to advance beyond her support-manager position despite her consistently exceptional performance and her 10 years of retail and supervisory experience. The AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund signed an amicus brief and gave financial support to help the case’s named plaintiffs to travel to the U.S. Supreme Court hearing on whether their case can continue as a class action. Shortly after the convention, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against going forward with the case citing it involved too large of a potential group to continue as a class action.

**Why So Few? Panel discussion**

**Lily Eskelsen,** an elementary school teacher from Utah, serves as vice president of the National Education Association, led the discussion along with **Tricia Berry**, Director, Women in Engineering Program, University of Texas, Austin; **Marie Wolbach,** Founding Director, AAUW of California Tech Trek Science Camps for Girls; **Zipporah A. Miller**, Executive Director for Professional Programs, National Science Teachers Association; and **April Osajima**, Public Policy Director, Girls Inc. The panelists talked about mentoring and encouraging women in STEM from preschool to graduate school, in homes and in the classroom, through branch, professional, and personal outreach. Eskelsen emphasized that girls need to see role models in STEM early on. “They need to know that success can look like them.”

WHC Branch is currently actively engaged in studying AAUW’s research that asks the question, “Why are there so few women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) when girls show just as much aptitude and interest in those fields as boys do?”

**SKILL BUILDING SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS:**

Cynthia D’Amour, leadership strategist and author of *The Lazy Leaders’ Guide to Outrageous Results* was featured at the Saturday luncheon sponsored by AARP. She emphasized team building rather than “do it all by yourself” strategies.

Members attended various workshops

**Final Banquet Toasts AAUW’s 130 Years of Advocacy**

Saturday night’s convention banquet brought members together to celebrate the philanthropy, activism, and passion that enables AAUW to give women and girls worldwide the support they need to help them succeed in school, work, and life.

Keynote speaker Sarah Brokaw, daughter of renowned journalist Tom Brokaw, talked about her work as a psychotherapist, philanthropist, and personal coach. She outlined some of the philosophies behind her new book, *Fortytude*, which encourages women not to dread aging but to regard it as an opportunity to start a new, better chapter of life.

Eleanor Roosevelt Fund Award winner Abigail Stewart also spoke about her research on women’s lives, personalities, and activism. She is a psychologist, researcher, and University of Michigan professor. She is a winner of the Carolyn Wood Sherif Award from the American Psychological Association and a founding director of the Henry A. Murray Research Center at Harvard University.

Lilly Ledbetter was presented a plaque commemorating the Lilly Ledbetter Public Policy Impact Grant Fund.

**Save the date and attend the next AAUW National Convention in the “Big Easy”, June 9-12, 2013 at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel.**