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The Current

A publication of the LaCrosse, WI AAUW Branch
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President's Perspective?



January Column

by Lema Kabashi, Branch President

A new year often arrives with renewed hope for growth, progress, and the possibility of a better world. It is a time when we reflect on where we have been and imagine where we want to go, including a future in which women and girls everywhere have equal opportunities to learn, work, lead, and thrive. This hope fuels our commitment to building a more just and equitable society, even as we confront the reality that progress is neither guaranteed nor permanent.

Gender equality and freedom from discrimination are not abstract ideals, they are fundamental human rights. Yet, rather than moving forward, evidence increasingly shows that the United States is taking steps backward. Following the 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, more than a dozen states enacted near-total abortion bans or severe restrictions, limiting access to reproductive healthcare for millions of women, particularly those with low incomes and those living in rural areas (Guttmacher Institute, 2023). Women in the United States continue to earn, on average, 84 cents for every dollar earned by men, with Black women earning 64 cents and Latina women 57 cents, reflecting persistent and widening economic inequities (AAUW, 2024). Despite decades of advocacy, women hold fewer than 30% of seats in Congress and less than 11% of Fortune 500 CEO positions (Center for American Women and Politics, 2024). Additionally, ongoing legal and political challenges to Title IX threaten protections that have been critical to advancing gender equity in education (AAUW, 2023). Together, these data points illustrate not progress, but a measurable step backward from hard-won gains.

Unfortunately, these challenges are not unique to the U.S. Gender inequality is a global issue, shaped by cultural norms, economic structures, and persistent

discrimination. At our January general meeting, we will hear from Dr. Sona Kazemi, who will share her experiences and insights from her country of origin, reminding us that these struggles cross borders and cultures.

As a woman from Kosovo, I have witnessed firsthand how deeply entrenched gender discrimination can limit opportunity. According to the *Kosovo Gender Country Profile*, economic inequality persists, with a higher percentage of women living below the poverty line compared to men. Gender-based discrimination in the labor market remains a significant barrier, with women less likely to participate in the workforce due to societal expectations, unpaid care responsibilities, and structural inequities (UN Women, 2024).

The barriers I encountered on my own journey made clear how discrimination can quietly, but powerfully, pull women down, or prevent them from even beginning the journey toward independence and success. These realities reinforce why AAUW's work matters now more than ever. Gender equality requires vigilance, advocacy, and collective action, both locally and globally. Together, we must continue to raise our voices, support one another, and push for a future where progress moves forward, not backward.

January Meeting

Gender Equality and Discrimination

presentation by Dr. Sona Kazemi



January 10, 2026

9:30am Registration, 9:45am Brunch, 10:15am Meeting; 10:30am Program

Viterbo University School of Nursing, Rm 101, 10th & Jackson Sts, La Crosse
(parking available in the lot next to the building)

Happy New Year! You are cordially invited to start 2026 with a great program!

Goals: Provide information about gender disparities, and about ways to overcome and prevent gender related barriers in society.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY:

Dr. Sona Kazemi is an Assistant Professor in the department of Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Previously, from 2018 to 2022, she held multiple postdoctoral fellowships with the Society of Fellows: Human Rights, Past, Presents, Futures, at the Ohio State University where she taught courses in "Global Inequality," "Global Human Rights" and "Disability Experience in the Contemporary World" and conducted multiple research projects. Also, from September 2020 to April 2021, Dr. Kazemi was Provost's Research Justice at the Intersections Fellow at Mills College in Oakland, California. Her first monograph, ***"Disabling Relations: Wounded Bodyminds & Transnational Praxis"***, is under contract with Temple University Press with a scheduled December 2025 release. Dr. Kazemi is currently working on her second monograph - tentatively

titled ***“Transnational Psychiatric and Prison Abolition: Disablement, Resistance, and Collective Care in Prison”*** and two edited anthologies, one of which is under contract with Canadian Scholars Press. Dr. Kazemi is the Society for Disability Studies’ 2018 recipient of the honorable mention for the prestigious award of Irving K. Zola Award for emerging scholars in Disability Studies. She is currently the associate editor for the Global Ideas’ Section at Review of Disability Studies, an International Journal (<https://www.uwlax.edu/profile/skazemi/>).

We encourage all to invite a friend, colleague, or acquaintance to share the morning with us and learn about AAUW and the topic of the day!

Brunch: Cost \$13; pay with cash or check

Menu: Egg dish, potatoes, fruit, croissants, coffee (regular and decaf), tea, and hot water with tea bags. Gluten-free options provided.

Please RSVP by January 4 to the email which will be sent from Robert at 608.788.0595 or richards.rob2@eagle.uwlax.edu.

RSVP

Email RSVP by Robert Richardson

RSVP Modus Operandi: Fourteen days prior to a branch meeting, each member with an active email address receives from Robert an email message with a request to reply by 11:59 pm on the Sunday prior to the Saturday meeting, October thru May. We need all members to reply so we know how many members/guests plan to attend and how many request the meal. On Monday, we need to report both numbers to the catering service. Aramark prepares food/beverages in a quantity that aligns with the latter number, and the Branch is invoiced based on that number. Program committee members arrange seating based on the total attendance number.

Treasurer's Report

by Andrea Hansen & Noreen Holmes

Checking account, November 1-30, 2025:

Starting Balance: \$8,724.90

...Outflows: \$961.44

...Inflows: \$580.00

November 30 ending balance: \$8,343.90



Checking account balance as of **December 20, 2025**: \$8,320.81

Membership News

by Barb Fischer, VP Membership



Condolences

Our deepest condolences to the family and friends of **Linda Lee (Meyer) Kempf**. She was a 40-year member of our AAUW Branch and was involved with the *Art Fair on the Green* and many of our activities. [Linda Kempf's Obituary](#)

Well Wishes to the Following Members

- **Marilyn Hempstead** is continuing to heal from pneumonia.
- **June Reinert** is now home and is healing from a respiratory infection.

Changes for Our Directory

Please make the following changes in your directory for Connie Welch. Her zip code should be 54603 and her email should be conniwelch@aol.com.

Happy New Year!

AAUW In Action (AIA)

Monday, January 12 @ 4 pm via ZOOM

Erica will send out an agenda and Zoom link prior to the meeting.



The Banned Book bookmarks have been well-received! Our initial print of 250 is almost gone so we'll be doing another printing and have them available at the January meeting. If you'd like some for your area Little Free Libraries, or to hand out at an event, please let Erica know and we'll make arrangements to get them to you. I can also send you the file to print on your own. We'll continue collecting banned books from your personal libraries (used books) for sharing in the area for the rest of the year.

We have our 3 panelists for the **March 3, 2026 International Women's Day** event: Assem Izmukhanova (Kazakhstan), Lisbeth Reynertson (our branch member, Denmark) and Ngozi Nduka (Nigeria). *Save the date! We'll be doing a period products collection at this event.*

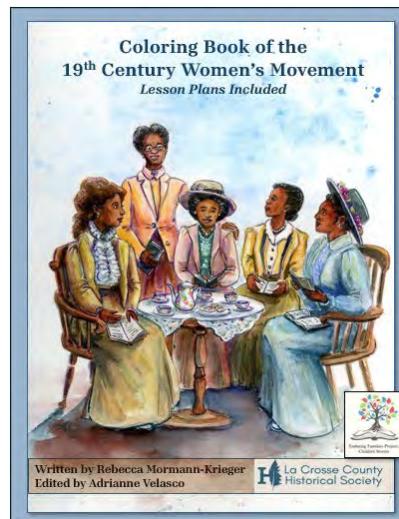
Our branch sponsors 3 internships: Diversity; Social Media and Public Policy. We'll be posting them at UWL and Viterbo for the spring semester. If you know a student who would be interested, please direct them to our branch [website](#) for details and contact information.

In the December newsletter, we talked about our **birthday cake kits** for food pantries idea. We'll start collecting items at the January general meeting (January 10) and continue collecting them at the February 14th meeting. We'll plan on assembling the kits in March for distribution to the food pantries in March. The items we'll collect are:

- box cake mixes
- cans of lemon-lime pop (7up, Sprite, etc...)
- tub of frosting
- 9 x 13 aluminum pan
- small bag of balloons
- general kids birthday card
- small paper party plates and napkins
- small shaker of sprinkles

Thank you for any donations!

Ann Epstein and Andrea Hansen are working on a couple of activities for **Women's History Month in March**: an Intergenerational game and a Women's History trivia game. They would love to have your help with planning and working these fun events. Please contact them and volunteer!



Rebecca Mormann-Kreiger reports that the **Enduring Family Project: Children's Stories** received a grant from Herb Kohl Philanthropies to print the 19th Century Women's Movement Coloring Book. Books will be available in February. If you have a need for the coloring books, please let me know. **Lifting as We Rise**, story of the 19th Century Women's Movement, will be out in spring 2026.

For more information, please email Erica at moogs56@hotmail.com.

Scholarships & Grants

by Robert Richardson, Co-Chair



The Scholarships & Grants Committee (SGC) continues our work.

Interested to be added to the reader-cadre? Contact Sharon DeCicco or Robert Richardson <[Learn more](#)>

Equity and Belonging Committee Corner

by June Reinert, Equity and Belonging Chair

The R word

An unfortunate incident occurred in President Trump's political statement in response to Governor Tim Walz on Thanksgiving.

President Trump ripped Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz as "seriously retarded" — and suggested Rep. Ilhan Omar "probably came into the USA illegally" — in a rage-filled Thanksgiving message about immigration.

Trump, 79, hurled the insult as he accused Walz, who had been Kamala Harris' running mate in her failed presidential election bid, of allowing an influx of hundreds of thousands of Somali migrants to take over his "once great state."

The "R" Word ~ Evolving Language and Why it Matters **We Speak Advocacy**

Weaver Special Education Advocacy & Coaching, LLC
Janell Weaver, Advocate & Owner



Certainly, you've noticed it too. What was once off-limits is back on the table. Suddenly used so widely and so casually as to make you feel like you're delusional for feeling any way about it. It isn't just showing up throughout social media every single day. It is also showing up in face-to-face conversations with people I thought would have a little more _____ (awareness, sense, courtesy, compassion, decency, etc.) to avoid using that word, especially around me. No, wait. Let's call it what it is. It isn't just a word. It's a slur.

The "R" word.

Some people think they are so funny or so clever when they take this slur and create a new insult out of it. I'm sure you've seen or heard examples, and I don't care to repeat them here. I find all variations of the slur offensive.

But why? Why does this slur feel like a gut punch? Because our language and the words we choose to speak reveal our views of the world and our attitudes toward the people in it. When you use the r-slur to insult your buddy or to complain about something that happened at work, whether you realize it or not, you're telling me exactly what you think about people with intellectual disabilities.

Surprised? Pause and ponder that for a moment. If it never occurred to you that the r-slur is a shocking gut punch to people with intellectual disabilities and those who care deeply about their rights and well-being, think about what you've inadvertently been communicating. I am going to assume that readers of this post are open to examining how ableism may show up. Your language is one way.

As Rosa Marcellino's brother, Nick, put it, "When you think about it, what you call people is how you treat people." When President Obama signed Rosa's Law, he quoted Rosa's brother, Nick, and added, "If we change the words, maybe it will be the start of a new attitude toward people with disabilities."



In 2010, Rosa Marcellino (a young girl with Down Syndrome) and her family advocated for the removal of the r-word from federal documents. On Oct. 5, 2010 President Obama signed Rosa's Law.

I planned to write a little bit about the evolution of this slur, but everyone knows that it was previously used as a medical term. Everyone knows that it morphed into an insult. Everyone knew to stop using it because **it is harmful to an entire group of vulnerable people**. And now, somehow, everyone has forgotten???

I reject that. People haven't forgotten. Unfortunately, we have "leaders" who model speech that is gross, harmful, indecent, nonsensical, and just plain false as acceptable, desirable even. I think many people enjoy gut-punching others. The cruelty is the point, right??? I hope readers of this post will help me apply the brakes and reverse this trend. We care for each other. That's it.

If you have begun using this slur, I want to request that you stop. It isn't funny. You aren't being clever. Strike it from your vocabulary and substitute a word that doesn't put down an entire group of people. **Our words matter!**

Language is powerful; it shapes perceptions, fosters empathy, or perpetuates harm. The words we use can either build bridges or create barriers, especially for marginalized groups. By consciously choosing respectful language, we not only affirm the dignity of those with intellectual disabilities but also help create a more inclusive and compassionate community for everyone.

**STAY
TUNED**

Stay tuned for an Inclusive Infusion activity at our next AAUW meeting in January. We will include an additional look at the words of persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their reactions to the R word.

STEM Student Empowerment & Mentoring Committee

by Diana Elena Moran Sanchez Thundercloud, New STEM Coordinator/Chair



January 20 @ 6-7 pm. Via ZOOM.



**STEM. Science. Technology.
Engineering. Math.**

"STEM & Social Innovation -- Interweaving the Humanities & Critical Inquiry: Spring Lecture/Discussion Series" (Feb-

May) Online.

There is power in a CIRCLE of Learners. Engaged Learning. Discussions. Shared "Readings" and/or the "Visual". To have mutual respect too -- to feel safe to inquire and explore. To learn in community. Hard discussions. To disagree too. There is also power in being in a "Circle" -- to learn together. Even though it is a ZOOM meeting/lecture. There is power in hearing from guest lecturers who may share new information or inspire you to ask critical questions. To be in a community of Learners who represent many unique communities. Gratitude for those who Mentor. Mentorship can be formal or informal. To pay attention. To notice. To Uplift. To support women into the entrance into a new academic/professional field.

NOTE: I will be sharing in the next newsletter the series of Lectures/Discussion for Spring 2026 around STEM & Humanities/Social Innovation topics via ZOOM. (Feb.-May, 2025)

Undergraduate & Graduate Studies in STEM: To keep abreast of policy changes impacting STEM at various levels. Community Education.

January Meeting, 2026.

STEM Empowerment & Middle/High School Education. (K-12)

Review STEM programs at the statewide level to assist in putting together a state-wide list. High quality programs that we may want to support students. Summer Workshops/Conferences. The State-Committee on STEM will discuss possible scholarship funding sources for the future. This is a new Committee!

NOTE: If you are aware of STEM related workshops/conferences/programs in our REGION -- let me know so that we can update the State-wide LIST.

We will slowly go through the list to see recommendations of high quality programs -- around Empowerment -- for future students. You can email me that name at dmoranthundercloud@gmail.com.

You are Invited: STEM general meeting on January 20. 2026, 6-7 pm via ZOOM.

To discuss the importance of STEM in AAUW. We are working to create a master list of educational programs /workshops /conferences in the region that has STEM focused education for Girls. Middle-school youth. (See above.)

- To discuss the future STEM Lecture series. (2026-2027)
- To discuss opportunities to be a STEM MENTOR. Or if you are looking for Mentorship in your field.

You can meet from your own home or office via ZOOM.

February: Guest Announcement. (February/March/April/May)

We will have a series of four invited guests to share about the intersection of STEM and the Humanities via ZOOM. I will post more in the AAUW Newsletter.

**Knowledge makes us better Advocates for Women and Girls. STEM.*

UPDATE: November (2025) as STEM Coordinator, I attended:

- League of Women Voters, Civic Education & Engagement/Updates. K-12 Education. LaCrosse School District. Wisconsin DPI/Local School District.
- Outreach: Visited the Onalaska Historic Museum (Science & History, Ho-Chunk Display Located at the Onalaska Public Library.)
- Attended a Webinar on Agricultural & Farm Policy in Wisconsin. To learn more about how current Farm Policy may impact K-12 Education and Funding. UW-Madison Extension. Rural Wisconsin.
- Will attend a Webinar, Spring, Land Stewardship Project. Farming & Conservation. Holistic Financial Literacy.
- Reviewed STEM Literacy Curriculum (Grades 4-8) that was shared with me through the Summer Workshop on STEM Mentorship & Training, Texas A&M University (NSF Grant). Middle School Youth. I may share about this curriculum during one of our STEM Lectures, Spring. Strategies & Teaching/STEM. K-12.
- I attended as the STEM Coordinator the AAUW Meeting on Public Policy, Attended as a guest. STEM is included in the AAUW State-Wide "Policy Priorities". The Committee is reviewing Public Policy Priorities for the next few years. The Committee is in progress--with revisions--to submit at the state-level over the next few months.
- Stayed abreast of local, national, and international issues that concern issues of STEM and Women and Girls.

I look forward to our STEM Committee Meeting on January 20th. Please feel free to email me directly for more information, dmoranthundercloud@gmail.com. I will send out the ZOOM link in January to those who may be interested.

The STEM Committee upholds the AAUW policy of EQUITY for all women and girls in Education. Equity and Belonging. Research. Advocacy. Empowerment.

Public Policy

by Silvana F Richardson

Wisconsin Needs a Permanent Fair Voting Maps Solution

While Wisconsin currently has fair maps, these are only in place until the 2030 Census. We need legislation to ensure FAIR VOTING MAPS. One proposed solution is enacting Independent Redistricting Commission legislation.



If you attended last year's AAUW State Convention, you may have learned that Fair Maps leaders across the state have been working on a draft proposal for an Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC). Right now, leaders and advocates are educating Wisconsinites about what an IRC is and why a legislative fix is needed to end gerrymandering. IRCs are meant to make redistricting more transparent and impartial by establishing standards for who can serve on the commission for redistricting and what criteria must be followed when maps are drawn.

Our state organization encourages us to learn more about this effort to end gerrymandering and ensure that all citizens have full access to vote. Go to: [Wisconsin Fair Maps Coalition](#). AAUW stands for the expansion of voting rights and the promotion of equitable participation in the political process. Let's ensure these for future generations.

ON THE WEB

by Barb Fischer

Check out [**AAUW Two-Minute Activist**](#) webpage on our National site - AAUW.org. To reach the next goal only 361 are needed. Actions already taken are at 1639. AAUW's strength is our collective voice. Everyone is asked to take the pledge for gender equity.



Go to: <https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist>

Join AAUW in the fight for gender equity! Take an action click "Sign Up" to get regular "Two-Minute Activist" alerts on when and how to engage on pressing issues.

Advocacy Toolkit

Two February Events!

THE LIBRARIANS (film/documentary) showing scheduled the first week of February @ [Sparta Cinema 6](#) following with discussion from the [Sparta Free Library](#) Librarians, (www.spartalibrary.org/calendar).



Librarians emerge as first responders in the fight for democracy and our First Amendment Rights. As they well know, controlling the flow of ideas means control over communities.



America's war on books is more than a war on words. *THE LIBRARIANS*, a new feature documentary from Academy Award® nominee and Peabody Award winner Kim A. Snyder.

In Texas, the Krause List targets 850 books focused on race and LGBTQ+ stories – triggering sweeping book bans across the U.S. at an unprecedented rate. As tensions escalate, librarians connect the dots from heated school and library board meetings nationwide to lay bare the underpinnings of extremism fueling the censorship efforts. Despite facing harassment, threats, and laws aimed at criminalizing their work – the librarians' rallying cry for freedom to read is a chilling cautionary tale.

This film is a collaboration between the Sparta Cinema6 and the Sparta Free Library.



Join us in February for civic learning and discussion @ the Sparta Free Library, (www.spartalibrary.org/calendar).



Wisconsin League of Women Voters (LWV) Issues Briefing series (2025) about our current constitutional crisis. Mondays from 1-3 pm.

- **February 2:** "The Crisis in our Executive Branch"
- **February 9:** "The Crisis in our Legislative Branch"
- **February 16:** "The Crisis in our Judicial Branch"



Participate in the entire series, or drop in on any of the individual sessions. No registration is required.

This series is a collaboration between the Sparta Free Library and the LWV.

[Visit our AAUW-WI website to learn more about us!](#)





LA CROSSE (WI)

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