



January 2026

## AAUW California Public Policy Symposium



### THE SCHOOL BOARD PROJECT: DEFENDING THE FRONTLINE OF DEMOCRACY

✓ Saturday, Jan 31<sup>st</sup>

🕒 9am - 12:30pm Virtual

FREE  
PUBLIC EVENT  
REGISTER HERE



#### FEDERAL CHALLENGES TO CALIFORNIA LAWS

Learn where California's protective laws against book banning, curriculum censorship, and attacks on LGBTQ+ students currently stand in light of recent Federal education policy changes  
*Richard Barrera, MPP – Trustee of the San Diego School Board*

#### HOW TO EFFECTIVELY MONITOR SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

Gain knowledge and skills to confidently assess school board compliance with state law and report non-compliance  
*Brianna Muller, MPP – Education Advocate, Public School Defenders Hub*

#### CHALLENGES FACING CALIFORNIA SCHOOL BOARDS

Get insights from a students' advocate, parents' advocate, and current board member  
*Ariel Bustamante – Equity and Compliance Expert, L.A. LGBTQ Center*  
*Lisa Gross, Ph.D. – California PTA Board of Managers*  
*Nancy Young, MA – Murietta School Board Trustee*

#### EFFECTIVE RECRUITING OF SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

Hear how to recruit and support great candidates from a national leader on running school board campaigns  
*Kyrstin Schuette – Executive Director, School Board Integrity Project*

#### COALITION BUILDING FOR GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT

Engage with two AAUW California Public Policy Committee members from the Danville-Alamo-Walnut Creek branch who formed a successful local education coalition  
*Ogie Strogatz, MSPH and Laurinda Ochoa, JD, Co-Founders, Lift Up Public Schools Coalition*

#### WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Concerned parents and guardians, educators, nonprofits, civic leaders, advocates, equity activists, legal advisors, media, local and state agencies.  
**AAUW members are encouraged to attend, but membership is not required.**

#### LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SCHOOL BOARD PROJECT

[aauw-ca.org/school-board-project-toolkit/](https://aauw-ca.org/school-board-project-toolkit/)

[publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org](mailto:publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org)  
[aauw-ca.org/public-policy](https://aauw-ca.org/public-policy)

See Public Policy on Page 3

## Co-President's Message

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope your holiday season was filled with good memories. As this "interesting" year rolls to an end, the new year provides renewed opportunity to strengthen our resolve and our hope for a better future for all. Your commitment to equity, education, and opportunity continues to provide avenues for a society where women and girls can thrive without barriers.

This past year, we worked to advance our mission by providing scholarships, continuing our advocacy and educational programs all through the power of collective action. Each program you supported, each conversation you sparked, and each hour you volunteered strengthened our mission and amplified our impact.

Thank you for your dedication, your leadership, and your belief in what AAUW stands for. Here's to a year of impactful ideas, meaningful connections, and continued progress toward equity for all.

Wishing you a bright, healthy, and inspiring New Year.

On behalf of the AAUW Board, I and Jennifer Foster extend our heartfelt appreciation to every member of our AAUW community.

*Syeda Inamdar*



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## **Public Policy:**

# *Defending the Frontline of Democracy*

By Jeanne Delp

**Learning never exhausts the mind--  
Leonardo De Vinci**

How does "learning" fit in with Defending the Frontline of Democracy? And what does the Frontline of Democracy mean?

According to Google AI, "It is where the battle for democratic integrity is fought daily, involving everything from ballot counting to upholding legal challenges, pointing out disinformation, challenging political pressure and threats. Frontline actors include election officials, local government officials, and legal advocates."

AAUW is a Frontline actor, also. We promote Public Policy "learning" situations to educate the electorate--individuals like yourself--and armed with new knowledge and tools, you, too, can become a defender.

One of our Public Policy Priorities includes the goal of Equal Access to Quality Education. California AAUW Public Policy board has developed a School Board Project Kit to educate members about the recent dismantling of the Department of Education and its effect on K-12 education, four-year colleges, graduate education and research, as well as adult learning opportunities. (See Page 1.)

We can all become Defenders on the Frontline of Democracy promoting equal education opportunities. SO--

Join us at the Frontline by registering for the  
Symposium on **Saturday, January 31st, 9 am-12:30 pm.**

Participants will hear a keynote address on the impact of new federal laws and policies on California's protective laws; a panel discussion on how AAUW members can support students, parents, and school board members in the face of challenges and misinformation; and participate in workshops on effectively recruiting school board members and forming collaborations for greater impact. This event is open to the public. The session will be recorded and posted to the AAUW California website after the event.

[Click HERE to Register](#) [Click HERE for the Symposium Agenda](#)

## *Lobby Days Are Coming*

Lobby Days offer an important opportunity for you to meet with legislative offices and advance our priority bills. We encourage all members to participate! In-district (local) meetings will be our primary strategy for Lobby Day 2026.

## *Changemakers*

### *Maria Corina Machado*

**Engineer, Political Activist, Nobel Peace Prize Winner**

**Researched and Written in First-Person Narrative by Phie Dai**

I am my mother's daughter, and I live by her words: "Those who are blessed with more opportunities and support are those who should give back more."

As the oldest of four daughters, I grew up in a loving Catholic family with deep roots in Venezuela. My ancestors fought for independence from Spain and established utility companies to help build our country's infrastructure. I studied industrial engineering in college and finance in graduate school because I wanted to help my father manage a steel company. I always believed I would serve my country by running a successful business and creating jobs. I never thought I would go into politics.



My first encounter with Venezuela's economic and social problems was when I was in college. I volunteered to teach young children in a low-income neighborhood of Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, in a makeshift rooftop classroom with no railings. I spent most of my time worrying that my students would fall off the edge!

After becoming a mother of three, I started the Atenea Foundation to help orphaned and homeless children in Caracas. I realized that, even in a Latin American patriarchal culture, I could make a difference in improving the lives of Venezuelans by leveraging my family's social standing and my STEM and finance education.

My path to political activism began when I joined the Yale University World Fellows Program in 2009. There, I learned to conceptualize democracy as an engineering project: define the problem, build diverse teams, gather and analyze data to optimize resources, and recognize corruption and censorship as system failures.

When I returned home, I started Súmate (Spanish for "join in"), a nonprofit that promoted free and fair elections. I also ran for and served in the National Assembly from 2011 to 2013. I won the 2024 primary as an opposition presidential candidate, but the current administration disqualified me. Due to death threats, I went into hiding. Most of my family now lives abroad for safety, but my oldest daughter chose to stay with me.

In recognition of my efforts to rebuild Venezuela's democracy, I was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October of 2025. The Nobel Committee praised me as "a woman who keeps the flame of democracy burning amid a growing darkness." In my acceptance speech, I stated with full conviction: "...peace is ultimately an act of love. This love has already set our future in motion. Venezuela will breathe again."

## BRANCH NEWS

*Editor's Note: Due to security concerns, members' home addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses are not printed in the Twig unless permission has been explicitly granted. Check your roster for member information.*

### *New Discussion on Artificial Intelligence*

By Jo Szeto

The One Book One Community Read Project focuses on one particular book each year. This year the Fremont Branch selected *The Coming Wave* by Mustafa Suleyman, a book about artificial intelligence. Our first program was held on October 7th with AI expert Angel Fuentes, professor at Evergreen Valley College. It was very well attended.

Our second program will feature AAUW members. This panel discussion is planned for January 26th from 3:30-5:30 pm at Washington West, 2500 Mowry Ave., Fremont. AAUW speakers and their topics include:

**Jo Szeto:** Introduction

**Marge Leonard:** Good Things about AI

**Sierra Wang:** Using AI to Teach Coding


**Albert Chin:** Dangers of AI

**Carolyn Zeljak:** How AI has Changed since Publication of Book in 2023


**Rick Hood:** The Necessity and Difficulty of Controlling AI

We have all heard of AI. This technology affects everyone and everything on earth. This means you and I, our children, our grandchildren, and great grandchildren all need to know more about AI. We need to read a book like *The Coming Wave*. If you haven't read the book, then you really need to come and hear about it.

To help us determine how much space will be needed at Washington West, please email [cphedgecock@hotmail.com](mailto:cphedgecock@hotmail.com) if you plan to attend.



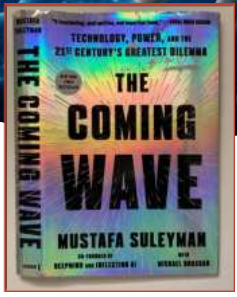
**Don't Get Swept Into the AI Tsunami!**



**One Book, One Community Read**

Our Winter 2026 program will feature a panel of AAUW members who will expand on the topics introduced in our Fall 2025 event:

- ChatGPT:** The Coming Wave summary handout
- Jo Szeto:** Host and Moderator
- Marge Leonard:** Benefits of AI
- Sierra Wang:** Applications of AI in Coding Education
- Albert Chin:** Dangers of AI
- Carolyn Zeljak:** How AI Has Changed Since Book Publication in 2023
- Rick Hood:** Necessity and Challenges of Regulating AI



**Monday, January 26, 2026**

**3:30 pm - 5:30 pm**

**Washington Health West  
Anderson Auditorium  
2500 Mowry Avenue, Fremont**

**<https://fremont-ca.aauw.net>**

**To make sure we have enough room space, please  
RSVP by email to [cphedgecock@hotmail.com](mailto:cphedgecock@hotmail.com)  
by January 20!**

The American Association of University Women's mission is to advance gender equity through research, education, and advocacy.



## *"Everyone Enjoyed the Holiday Party"*



## *Tri-Branch Lunch on February 7*

Three East Bay branches--Fremont, Hayward-Castro Valley, and Oakland-Piedmont--will be joining together for this lunch with a still-unannounced national AAUW scholarship recipient. The lunch will be at JP's Family Restaurant, 3600 Castro Valley Boulevard, Castro Valley. The meal will be buffet Italian food. The time is 12 NOON.

The cost is \$35 per person.

Fremont members can Zelle their RSVP's and \$35 Zelle payments to Judith Wolf-[bigbadwolfie@juno.com](mailto:bigbadwolfie@juno.com) or 510-468-2002 by Wednesday, February 4.

## *League Meets January 3rd*

The *Playbook of a Dictator* will be the topic when the League of Women Voters of Fremont, Newark, and Union City meets on January 3rd at Niles Discovery Church, 36600 Niles Blvd., Fremont, from 10-11:30 am.

Attendees will watch a Commonwealth Club World Affairs video with Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of UC Berkeley School of Law. In his talk, Chemerinsky enumerates multiple instances describing the troubling and dangerous direction our country has already taken and continues to take.

A discussion follows the video.

All League programs are free; donations are welcome.

For more information, visit the League website at <http://www.lwvfnuc.org/>

## *December Report From Your Board*

*From the board meeting December 5th:*

**President's Report (Syeda Inamdar):** Beyond the Bridge Event - The event showing of this film was well attended, and it had a more positive spin than the previous film about unhoused people. Housing solutions including supportive services could be developed and would likely require all agencies working together including the Chamber of Commerce.

### **Public Policy (Jeanne Delp):**

- There is interest in getting more individuals involved in supporting school boards and providing members with information such as election dates. Some school board meetings may be available online.
- Eileen and Jeanne plan to attend a January 31 educational program meeting and work together on an informational advocacy campaign article to be published in the *Twig*.

### **Program (Judy Wolf):**

- The holiday party was held December 7th from 2:30-4:30 pm.
- *The History of the Missing 28th Amendment*, a zoom meeting sponsored by the Alameda IBC, was held December 13th.
- The Bi-branch Luncheon will be February 7th in Hayward.
- A Victorian Tea is planned for March.

**Membership (Jo Szeto):** Eileen and Jo discussed activities that could engage new members and increase membership:

- Tea-N-Talk Series: It may be held on a regular basis on a Saturday so people that work can come. No RSVP required to keep it a stress-free and friendly way to connect.
- Adopt A Member: Eileen will prepare a list pairing the Board members with a new member. Board members will text, email, and communicate with new members about their interests and events.

**Membership Treasurer (Jennifer Foster):** Judy will contact the eight members who are in arrears.

**Diversity (Eileen Yap):** Considering whether DEI and Public Policy can be combined to work closely together on related issues.

### STEM (Fahria Khan):

- Dine with a Scientist: The Irvington High School Girls in STEM club has reached out to collaborate again for 2026.
- Mother-Daughter Discovery Day: Lawrence Livermore Labs approved a \$1500 grant. The Ohlone College AAUW club may be able to collaborate on this.

**Finance (Phie Dai):** The totals in Fremont Bank are \$1770, checking balance, and \$7678, saving balance.

**Social Media (Phie Dai):** Two members (Nicole and Jane) are working on expanding our social media presence on LinkedIn.

### Foundation Report:

- Syeda will represent the branch at the Foundation meeting in January and get their input on whether any updates to the by-laws are needed to better align goals including Tech Trek and Scholarships awarded.
- Money donated for the financial literacy classes may need to be refunded or repurposed.

## DEI Deconstructed

Diversity | Equity | Inclusion

*Allyship is Empathy in Action*

By Eileen Yap

## TO BE AN ALLY IS TO...

1. Take on the struggle as your own.
2. Stand up, even when you feel scared.
3. Transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it.
4. Acknowledge that even though you feel pain, the conversation is not about you.
5. Be willing to own your mistakes and de-center yourself.
6. Understand that your education is up to you and no one else.

**The Anti-Oppression Network** defines “allyship” as an “active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group.”

**Allyship** involves **listening**. Being **aware** of implicit bias. **Researching** to **educate** yourself. **Inner work** and reflection. **Outer work** and action. **Embracing discomfort**.

Watch this 2 min. video: [Allyship is Empathy in Action](#). Read more at [Guide to Allyship](#).



## **Money, Money, Money:**

# *Special Tax Deduction for Seniors*

**By Judy Wolf**

Are you aware that seniors will have an additional \$6000 tax deduction they will be able to use for the 2025 taxes? This will be in addition to their standard deduction.

However, when your income is over \$75,000 as a single person or \$150,000 as a married couple, the \$6000 will be reduced.

Most tax programs have this included and will work it out for you. However, those people doing their own taxes using paper forms should be careful not to miss this extra deduction.

For a single person whose modified adjusted gross income is \$100,000, the \$6000 would be reduced to \$4500. That is \$25,000 over the base of \$75,000. This would be multiplied by 6%, which equals \$1,500 of reduction, or \$4500 left as the extra credit.

This extra credit applies through 2028 for seniors

## *Homeless Solutions?*

A follow-up meeting to the film *Beyond the Bridge*, which offered solutions for the unhoused community, will be held January 15 at the Fukaya Room in the Fremont Main Library, 2400 Stevenson Blvd., from 6-7 pm.

The meeting will address unanswered questions from the screening audience, present updates, and plan for the next steps.

RSVP to: <https://bit.ly/HomelessnessConversation2>

## **Leadership Team**

### **Board of Directors**

Co-Presidents - **Jennifer Foster and Syeda Inamdar**

Vice President - **Jo Szeto**

Secretary - **Maritza Nevarez**

Finance Officer - **Phie Dai**

Program Chair - **Judy Wolf and Kimmi Tang**

Membership Chair - **Jo Szeto**

Membership Treasurer & AAUW Fund Chair - **Jennifer Foster**

Public Policy Chair - **Jeanne Delp**

Parliamentarian - **Carolyn Hedgecock**

Diversity Chair - **Eileen Yap**

STEM Chair - **Fahria Khan**

### **Foundation for Local Scholarships**

President - **Kathy Garfinkle**

Secretary - **Randy Fewel**

Chief Financial Officer - **Bonnie Kellogg**

Programs Officer - **Sowjanya Vutukur**

Development Officer - **Judy Wolf**

### **Special Interest Group Chairs**

Afternoon Lit - **Joyce Ruiz**

Book Talk - **Margery Leonard**

Cultural Cuisine - **Judy Wolf**

Great Decisions - **Joyce Ruiz**

One Book, One Community Read - **Margery Leonard**

Yoga for Body and Spirit - **Jo Szeto**

### **AAUW Diversity Statement**

In principle and in practice, AAUW values and seeks an inclusive membership, workforce, leadership team and board of directors. There shall be no barriers to full participation on the basis of age, disability, gender, location, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

Interest Group Meetings		
Afternoon Lit	This month the Afternoon Lit group will review <i>The Jailhouse Lawyer</i> by James Patterson and Nancy Allen. The meeting is on January 20th at 2 pm at the home of Joyce Ruiz. Please let her know if you are attending.	
Book Talk	Book Talk Interest Group is to meet at the home of Jo Szeto on January 12th from 3 to 5 pm, when Jo will lead a discussion of <i>Earthly Remains</i> by Donna Leon.	
Cultural Cuisine	<p>Cultural Cuisine Goes Japanese</p> <p>The group will dine at Satomi Sushi. Address is 5026 Mowry Ave., Fremont, around the corner from Lucky's.</p> <p>Arrive at 6:30 pm on Tuesday, January 20th.</p> <p>RSVP by Sunday, the 18th, to Judith Wolf: 510-657-5589 or <a href="mailto:judyjudyjudy1940@gmail.com">judyjudyjudy1940@gmail.com</a></p>	
Great Decisions	The 2026 Great Decisions books are here and ready to view and claim on January 28 at Suju's on Thornton Avenue at 10 am-12 pm! We will have a current events meeting, so be ready to share your latest local, national or global concerns.	
Yoga for Body and Spirit	This group meets every Monday and Thursday morning at 11:15 am at Jo Szeto's house. Lunch is included on Thursday. For more information, call Jo.	

## Important Dates

**Deadlines for articles:** 25th of the month before publication

Send items for The TWIG to Jennifer Foster at [jejenfo@yahoo.com](mailto:jejenfo@yahoo.com)

- The board of directors meets on **January 9th at 10am**. If you would like to attend a board of directors meeting but can't meet at 10 am on a Friday, write to us and let us know your schedule at [aauwfremontbranch@gmail.com](mailto:aauwfremontbranch@gmail.com).
- League of Women Voters is hosting a video talk and a discussion on *The Playbook of a Dictator* on **January 3rd at 10 am** at Niles Discovery Church. For more information, click [here](#).
- A Zoom discussion of the *Four Pivots* will be led by Charmen Goehring, AAUW-CA state president, on **January 15th, March 18th, and May 19th**.
- Attend a **Tea-N-Talk** at Jo Szeto's house on **January 24th, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm**. Join us for this brunch-lite activity to chat and connect with AAUW members. Tea, coffee, and light refreshments will be served. All members are welcome.
- Join the **"AAUW School Board Project: Defending the Frontline of Democracy,"** a half-day symposium on Zoom on **January 31st, 9 am to 12:30 pm**. Learn about the impact of new federal laws and policies on California and how AAUW members can support students, parents, and school board members in the face of challenges and misinformation. Participate in workshops on how to effectively recruit school board members and collaborate for greater impact. Register [here](#).

## Support Our Members



Enjoy new and bestselling titles for all ages personally curated by Amy and her staff at Banter Bookshop in downtown Fremont! **AAUW Fremont book club titles receive a 15% discount.** Click on the photo to browse Banter's in-store events.




Katryn Bury is the author of the 'tween detective series *Drew Leclair Gets a Clue* (nominated for 3 book awards), and *Drew Leclair Crushes the Case*. Katryn's third title, *We Are Not Alone*, hit shelves October 29th.



Need a Notary?

AAUW Member Nkechi (Bridget) Uzoegwu has joined the National Notary Association and is ready to meet your notary needs.



# January 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
4	5 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	6	7	8 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	9 BOARD MEETING @10AM AT SUJU'S ON THORNTON	10
11 BOOK TALK @ 2PM AT JO SZETO'S YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	12	13	14	15 FOUR PIVOTS ON ZOOM AT 7PM YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	16	17
18	19 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	20 AFTERNOON LIT @ 2PM CULTURAL CUISINE @ 6:30 PM AT SATOMI SUSHI ON MOWRY	21	22 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	23	24 TEA-N-TALK @10:30AM AT JO SZETO'S
25 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM OBOCR @ 3:30PM AT WASHINGTON WEST	26	27	28 GREAT DECISIONS 10AM AT SUJU'S THORNTON	29 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	30	31 AAUW-CA SYMPOSIUM ON ZOOM @9AM
2/1	2/2 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	2/3	2/4	2/5 YOGA AT JO SZETO'S @11:15AM	2/6 BOARD MEETING @10AM LOCATION TBD	2/7 BI-BRANCH LUNCHEON IN CASTRO VALLEY @ 12PM