 **The AAUWL** EARLY FALL 2020

Newsletter for the Danbury Area Branch of

American Association of University Women

Editor: Toni Kenner Pepe

*The purpose of AAUW is to advance equity for women and girls*

*through advocacy, education, and research.*

**President’s Letter** *by Julia P. Horne*

I want to extend kudos and many thanks to Toni Pepe for using our AAUWL and Feather newsletters to keep in contact with our branch members. These communications have been vital for us as an organization during this COVID-19, since we have not been able to see each other and have face to face meetings. We all appreciate you, Toni!

Rosemary Woolwich is in rehab after breaking her hip, Marge Guerin has had some balance concerns and Toni had surgery below her eye. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers and feel free to send them well wishes. Frankie Bramen, our recording secretary, has submitted her resignation due to personal concerns. Our sincerest thanks to her for the service she has rendered to our organization.

Our board members had a Zoom meeting on August 31st. Unfortunately, some of our members could not connect to the meeting, so we will try to rectify the problems and concerns for future meetings. Due to COVID-19, the board decided that we will hold our in-person 80th year branch celebration in September 2021. We will raise a virtual toast in celebration this Thursday, September 17, 2020. I will send an invitation by email. Members may join in the toast by Zoom, conference call, or by raising a glass

at home at the time chosen. Here is the toast:

*Congratulations to the Danbury Branch of AAUW for rendering 80 years of outstanding service to the Greater Danbury community. Today, we honor our organizers and the members of our branch. May we always be filled with enthusiasm for all of the work we do to advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research. Salute!*

Toni has asked our six past presidents who are still branch members to write about their special memories/achievements during their tenure. They are June Tompkins (1973-75), Sophie Godward (1979-83), Toni K. Pepe (1995-99), Rosemary Woolwich (2003-07), myself (2007-2011), and Marge Guerin (2011-15). Their accounts will be featured in the AAUWL, beginning with June Tompkins in this issue.

Kay Santuro, our Scholarship Chair, reports that Mr. Kris Nanavaty has agreed to fund his scholarship for two more years. How exciting! Kay will give us more updates on our Scholarship program at the next meeting, and our University Representative Jess Kraybill will update us on current conditions at WCSU.

For our October virtual meeting, the focus will be on public policy, the election and mail-in voting, and voter information from AAUW, the League of Women Voters, and Vote Smart. Meeting details will follow. Please note the following debate announcement by the League of Women Voters of Northern Fairfield County and the compilation from National AAUW by our Public Policy Chair Sophie Godward.

Meanwhile, enjoy the beautiful weather and stay safe!

**My Years as Danbury Area Branch President 1973-75** *by June Tompkins*

 I am very proud and pleased to be numbered among past presidents of our Danbury Area Branch of AAUW. For years we have been working tirelessly to advance higher education for girls and women, many of whom would give up on their dreams of attending college were it not for us. I joined the Danbury branch in 1969, upon my graduation from college, being put to work right away as fellowships chairman. In 1973 I became branch president. After completing my term of office, I served as scholarship chairman and, later on, as newsletter editor.

Our branch used to hold book and author dinners to benefit our scholarship program on a Tuesday evening in the spring, that being our usual meeting time. These dinners were held at Western Connecticut State College in the student union building, and the food was prepared by the cafeteria staff. It was later agreed upon by all that a book and author luncheon on Saturday would attract more people, which proved to be the case.

The first luncheon, held while I was president, was a Hawaiian luau. Among our guest authors was Merle Miller, who had recently written *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman.* Our second luncheon had an international theme. Now, of course, luncheons are held at different restaurants in the Danbury vicinity.

I’m grateful to all my fellow AAUW members and friends, most of them now deceased, who were active in the branch when I was president and who helped me immensely. We were truly a team dedicated to making a positive difference in our community and in the lives of deserving students bound for college.

Along with each of you, I look forward to getting together in person next year when we will be celebrating 80 plus years since the founding of our branch. The future looks bright to me! I’m glad to have had the honor of serving such a wonderful organization.

**Congressional Debate at WCSU 10/5** *by Judy Griemsmann, President,* LWVNFC

A 5th Congressional District debate between the Republican candidate, David Sullivan, and the Democratic candidate, Jahana Hayes, will be held on Monday, October 5th from 7:00 -8:30 p.m. on the WCSU downtown campus. There will be no live audience for the debate, which will be both live streamed and recorded for viewing on YouTube and the WCSU website during or after the event. The **League of Women Voters of Northern Fairfield County**, the **League of Women Voters of Litchfield County** and **Western Connecticut State University** are co-sponsoring this event.

2020 Public Policy News compiled by Sophie Godward

Maintaining Our Democratic Systems in the Midst of the Pandemic and Other Challenges

In March of this year in the midst of the pandemic, **the Voting Rights Task Force of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights,** concerned with the democratic process of voting and the public’s safety in light of the threat of Covid-19, wrote to Members of Congress, Governors, and State Election Officials, urging them to adopt and fund a number of policies to insure both the public’s safety and the orderly conduct of the 2020 primary and general elections. Accessibility for those voters who have historically faced barriers to the ballot including Black, Latino, Asian, Native-American, voters with disabilities, and students is emphasized. (1) More than 200 organizations signed on to this letter. AAUW is represented on the Board of the organization by Kimberly Churches, AAUW Chief Executive Officer, and the League of Women Voters is represented by LWV Chief Executive Officer Virginia Kase.

**Recommendations by the Task Force concerning voter registration and voting options.** Concerning **voter registration**, accessible online voter registration (OVR) in all states, this being the safest method by which citizens register to vote, is proposed; same day voter registration should be available for all voters; and voter registration deadlines should be extended by the states.Concerning **voting options**, it is recommended that the states allow at least two weeks of early-in person voting reducing long lines and administrative stress on Election Day. In addition mail-in ballot options should be made available to all registered voters with directions as to how to cast their completed ballots. (2) Connecticut does not permit early in-person voting. In-person voting is available on Election Day.

Since the writing of this letter by the Leadership Conference, there have been other challenges to the voting process. In particular the Post Office has come under attack. The Post Office, America’s oldest civilian institution, was created under Article 1 section 8 of the Constitution which authorizes Congress to establish post offices and post roads. The Post Office is responsible for delivering mail both personal and business, packages, medications, and other essentials to people at home. However, the government is undermining this service by removing infrastructure and curtailing employee overtime during an election year when the postal service is responsible for handling mail-in ballots for the general election as well as responses to the 2020 census.(3) Our 5th Congressional District Representative, Congresswoman Jahanna Hayes, states that Connecticut residents deserve the chance to be counted and have a say in who represents their interests in state and federal offices. She has taken action to defend these rights by cosponsoring several legislative acts such as Delivering for America Act (which would maintain reliable postal services during the Covid-19 emergency), Protect our Post Offices Act (which would appropriate $25 billion to USPS to remain available until 2022), and by signing on to letters to the Postmaster General and the Senate Leadership in support of $25 billion in funding for the USPS.(4)

The League of Women Voters has taken the issue of protecting voting access at the “ballot box and mail box” to the Courts by filing a lawsuit against the Postmaster General and the United States Postal Service. The lawsuit asserts that recent changes to postal service procedures and equipment presents an undue burden on the fundamental right to vote. Undermining the Post Office’s ability to do its work of delivering election ballots is an attack on our democracy. (5)

The House of Representatives met recently in an emergency session and passed the Delivering for America Act with bipartisan support. The bill would provide $25 billion to the USPS for direct emergency relief; require that election mail be handled as “first class mail”; halt the removal of high speed mail sorting machines and neighborhood collection boxes, and reverse previously implemented changes that would delay mail delivery. (6) The bill now needs action by the Senate, who went home until after Labor Day.

In this pandemic world in which we all reside, it is crucial to our democracy that our citizens exercise their right to vote freely if they wish by mail-in ballot or in person and maintain their voice in the governing of our country on the local, state, and federal level.

Voting in Connecticut

Connecticut does not have in-person early voting or no-excuse absentee voting. This year, the absentee ballot will have a box for Covid-19 and everyone is eligible to check the Covid-19 box as their reason for voting by absentee ballot.

Voters eligible to vote in Connecticut can do so by voting in person at the polls on Election Day Nov. 3, 2020 or by submitting an absentee ballot due to Covid-19. Check the Covid-19 box on the application.

The Secretary of State will send an application for an absentee ballot to all voters eligible to vote in the election by mid-September. It is named Application for Absentee Ballot, Form ED-3. Complete the application and file it with your Town Clerk as soon as possible.

The Town Clerk will process your application and mail you an absentee ballot beginning 31 days before a general election.

**Complete the ballot. Insert the folded ballot into the inner envelope.**

**Sign, date, and seal it.** This is very important, since ballots will only be counted if the inner envelope is signed.

**Insert the sealed inner ballot into the outer envelope and seal it.**

Return it to your town clerk by mail or in a secure drop box. Only complete absentee ballots received before the close of the polls on the day of the election will be counted.

Each city or town will have at least one secure drop box located near the town hall.

**Remember to Vote on Tuesday, November 3, 2020**

**Either in person at the polls on the day of the election or**

**By absentee ballot received by 8 PM on Election Day**

1)(2) Washington, D.C. Letter from the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights March 17, 2020 (3)(6) AAUW Washington Update August 27, 2020 (4) Representative Jahana Hayes (CT 05JH Outreach) August 17, 2020 (5) League of Women Voters August 31, 2020