



March 31, 2020

AAUW Indiana (PA) County Branch

<http://indiana-pa.aauw.net/>

Dear Commissioners Sherene Hess and Robin Gorman,

Today is Equal-Pay-Day! March 31, 2020, symbolizes just how far into the year U.S. women had to work to earn what men earned in 2019. And we celebrate you - our commissioners - for your work in the county office. You are role models for us women, working to improve the county's economy for women, children, and their families.

I'm wondering today - how are we doing as AAUW member in our efforts to close the pay gap? Yes, we did make some progress this year - exactly 3 days - last year it was April 2. But overall, I'm sure you know, women still make just 81.6 cents for every dollar that men make. And by race it's a different story; Black women make 62 cents; Latinas 54 cents; Native American women 57 cents.

Here's some better news. AAUW data show that after accounting for hours worked, career field, education, and employment sector, the gender wage gap shrinks to only 7% which is why we AAUW women place a high priority on education and especially leadership opportunities for women and girls. So let's talk about Equal-Pay-Day as an Equal-Say-Day in which we celebrate women's leadership in a few sectors of our lives -

Women's Leadership in our County. Can we call today an Equal-Say-Day in Indiana's Court House? Yes! You, Commissioner Hess and Commissioner Gorman, have evened the playing field in in our county. Our board of three commissioners is now 66% women!

Women's Leadership in Pennsylvania's General Assembly. Is today an Equal-Say-Day at the state level? No. Only ¼ of our political leaders are women. There are 64 women overall averaging 25% - 52 are members of the State House (26%), and 12 are PA Senators (24%). And, guess what, Sherene Hess and Robin Gorman, we are so glad you are here because none of those 64 women represent our county - in fact we have 0% women serving as PA legislators.

Women's Leadership Nationally. Is today an Equal-Say-Day in Washington? No. The average percentage is ¼, about the same as the state. To date in the entire history of the U.S. Senate, only 57 women have served, with 26 serving at this time (26%); and 101 women (23.2%) serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Again, none of the 127 women in our U.S. Congress represent our county - in fact we have 0% women representing us in the U.S. Congress.

Women's Leadership in the Supreme Court. Is today an Equal-Say-Day in this branch of government? No. Even though, the United States Supreme Court today has the highest percentage of Women Justices, only 1/3, 33%, or 3 in 9 are women.

Women's Leadership Overall in Politics. In summary, is today an Equal-Say-Day in politics? No. There has never been a majority of women serving in either the PA Legislature, the U.S. Congress or the Supreme Court.

Women's Leadership in our Spiritual Life. Is today an Equal-Say-Day for women leaders in our religious institutions? No. I ask this because our spirituality is so important now as we face the Corona pandemic. This year on International Women's Day, March 8, a group of protestors did gather outside of New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral in a march calling for the ordination of women. In fact, of the churches and synagogues in America that do ordain women, only about 11% of those congregations in the U.S. are led by women clergy. I think we do need more women leaders in this important sector of our lives.

Women Leadership in Today's Pandemic. What about COVID-19? Can we claim an Equal-Say-Day for women now? I'm hopeful that we will hear more articulate voices from both women and men leaders to offer assistance today. For I am certain that women are not focusing on gender-pay-equity today. Rather, I am sure women are focused, as we always are, on solving our most pressing social crisis. We want a clear voice to help us through, to give us clear answers, and we look to women to provide some of those voices. We hope for credible reporting from our women leaders, heads of government, journalists, and our medical community.

For example, we applaud excellent women journalists like Yamiche Alcindor from PBS for seeking answers, even though she had to endure sexist remarks calling her nasty and uncooperative - remarks that seemed inappropriate and exceedingly harsh. And, we are so glad that Governor Gretchen Whitmer is standing as a strong Michigan woman leader, in the midst of dismissive remarks, and leading Michigan with a plea for crucial medical supplies.

And finally - here's a bright spot - a Women Leader and Scientist, among many, for today! Dr. Deborah Birx is serving on the COVID-19 response team of eight appointed by the President. She's Pennsylvania's own woman and leader - a graduate of Carlisle High School and Penn State. So nice to celebrate a woman who is providing the nation with clear-headed advice and leadership, giving Americans the information they need to stay safe.

In closing, I assure you that we citizens of Indiana County, and especially AAUW, are very proud of calling Commissioners Sherene Hess and Robin Gorman our leaders in today's "Equal-Say-Day." We look forward to you leading our community in a society that can give each one of us an equal voice. Happy Equal-Pay and Equal-Say-Day!

With warm wishes, Dr. Susan Wheatley, AAUW-IC President
Cc: AAUW-IC Membership