

# Pay Equity Conference

Call, write, or e-mail your Congressional representatives and senators and lobby your West Virginia legislature on behalf of pay equity for women! That was the emphatic message from speakers at the April 18 Pay Equity Conference held in the Falcon Center at Fairmont State University.

Leaders were Lisa Maatz from AAUW, West Virginia House of Delegates member Barbara Evans Fleischauer, and student panelists from FSU. They all reiterated the importance of speaking out and taking action to bring about fairness in the workplace for women.

This AAUW-WV-sponsored event was made possible by a Public Policy Impact Grant from the Association, in cooperation with FSU. Lisa Maatz, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, came in person from Washington to explain how AAUW is working on Capitol Hill to get two important Fair Pay bills passed in Congress.

She pointed out that women continue to earn less than men in comparable employment situations. College educated women experience this pay gap even in their first jobs after graduation, and ten years later the gap has only widened. AAUW has long sought to remedy this unfairness. Its 2006 study *Behind the Pay Gap* carefully analyzes causes, and its recent support of the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, signed into law in January, is AAUW's latest successful effort to address workplace inequities.

But more action is needed immediately, Lisa Maatz noted, as Senate Bill 182, the Paycheck Fairness Act, needs more co-sponsors to pass. Senators Byrd and Rockefeller must be urged to support this updating and strengthening of the 45-year-old Equal Pay Act. Also, the Fair Pay Act, which amends the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, is expected to be introduced in Congress on Equal Pay Day (April 28) by Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC).

"Get in touch with your Senators! West Virginia is key to successful passage of these bills!" Lisa Maatz urged. She pointed out, moreover, that our state ranks 50th in the statistics on equal pay in 2007, with women overall earning 65 cents to men's \$1.00. (College educated women earned 67 cents—just a little better.) "Keep the change until women have real change!" has become AAUW's rallying cry, as far as pay equity goes.

WV Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, from the 44th District, herself a member of Morgantown AAUW Branch, explained what is being done in the state legislature to get equal pay for equal work. Thanks to lobbying by members of AAUW, Business and Professional Women, and the League of Women Voters, some legislation was passed in the 1990's, and the pay gap, especially for women state workers, has been lessening gradually.

A special legislative session will occur in May 2009 to deal with the state budget. Delegate Fleischauer suggested the following wording as a guide in sending letters and e-mails to our respective delegates and senators:

"As you may know, our state has its own equal pay bill for state employees, passed in 1998. Every year, money is placed in the state budget to gradually reduce the pay gap. Employees in female dominated jobs have gotten small wage increases, but at the current rate, it will take years to reach pay equity.

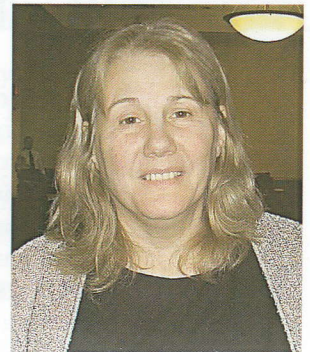
"Please do everything you can to increase the pay equity line item in the state budget to \$600,000. Because it will be matched by an equivalent amount of federal funding, this will really make a dent in the pay gap for state employees."

Delegate Fleischauer also noted that legislative committees meet once a month between annual sessions to study prospective legislation. She is interested in remedying the lack of pregnancy leave and lack of insurance coverage for pregnancy for women faculty in the state-run colleges and universities. She encourages citizens to "come and lobby the legislature. They do pay attention." In addition, she thinks more women should run for office to lessen the current gender imbalance in the legislature.

In the afternoon session of the conference, a panel of students, moderated



Lisa Maatz, AAUW Director of Public Policy and Government Relations



Christina Vogt, President of WV NOW



Amanda Barber, president AAUW-FSU student satellite



Barbara Fleischauer, WV Delegate and Morgantown branch member