**ROOTED IN OUR PAST – DESTINED FOR OUR FUTURE**

**LEGISLATIVE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROJECTS**

 Child labor law, libraries, juvenile justice system . . . the list is long of the impact of federated women’s clubs on important legislation. Since its inception GFWC has had a legislative agenda and clubs and clubwomen have been and still are the local advocates for GFWC’s legislative agenda. It is through the national network of grassroots advocates that the Federation gains its political influence. GFWC has several federal legislative priorities for 2023. Our clubs need to look at the local level to see how our club programs and projects can promote those priorities. We need to examine state propositions and office candidates to determine how to promote those same priorities.

 Some of those federal priorities are:

VAWA Appropriations: The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was reauthorized in March 2022, and the FY 2023 Omnibus Appropriations bill provided historically high funding levels for these programs. GFWC urges Congress to provide significant increases in federal funding for FY 2024 to meet the needs of survivors and strengthen education and prevention.

Anti-trafficking: GFWC urges Congress to pass the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act that establishes a process to vacate convictions and expunge arrest records for certain non-violent criminal offenses committed by victims of human trafficking that directly result from or relate to having been a trafficking victim. GFWC also urges passage of the Frederick Douglas Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act which enhances Department of State activities to combat human trafficking internationally.

Strengthening Protections for Domestic Violence and Stalking Survivors Act: GFWC urges Congress to pass bipartisan legislation to fully close the “dating loophole” in federal firearms law which allows dating partners subject to final protective orders to legally possess firearms, and the “stalking loophole” which allows people convicted of misdemeanor stalking to legally possess firearms. This bill (S. 321) is in response to a February 2023 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit in *United States v. Rahimi* which struck down 30 years of federal law prohibiting those under a protective order for domestic violence from possessing firearms.

 Programs and projects relating to these pieces of legislation would be reported not only under Legislation and Public Affairs but also under Signature Program: Domestic and Sexual Violence Awareness and Prevention.

GFWC supports increased funding for the National Endowment for the Arts to enhance state and local programs that help transform communities into beautiful and resilient places through strategies that incorporate arts and culture.

**Programs and projects relating to this support would also be reported under Arts and Culture**

Pay Equity: Wage discrimination based on sex should be prohibited. It should be unlawful to require an employee to sign a contract or waiver prohibiting the employee from disclosing wage information, which is of course the way you find out if you are making the same as your coworker.

**Programs and projects relating to this priority could also be reported under Civic Engagement and Outreach.**

Global Vaccinations: GFWC urges Congress to fully fund global childhood immunizations. GFWC supports funding the CDC’s polio eradication and measles elimination programs through the Health and Human Services appropriations bill, and funding for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance) programs through the State Department/Foreign Operations appropriations bill. These efforts improve global disease detection systems that enable other nations to effectively detect and efficiently respond to a range of other diseases. Preventing diseases at their source is the most cost-effective approach, saves the most lives, and makes the world more resilient to new viruses that could cause the next pandemic.

Veterans and Caregivers: The Elizabeth Dole Home and Community Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act (S. 141) expands community-based services for aging and homebound veterans. Providing health services and assistance in home settings improves health outcomes and delays, if not prevents, nursing home placement for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Paid Family and Medical Leave: GFWC supports policies that support families and reduce health disparities in the workplace such as parental leave, paid family and medical leave, and pregnancy accommodations.

Nutrition: GFWC urges the reauthorization in the Farm Bill of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which helps more than 40 million children, seniors, working adults, veterans, and people with disabilities buy food to feed their families. Programs like SNAP Nutrition Education and the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program or Double Up Bucks will strengthen health outcomes.

 **Programs and projects supporting these area can also be reported under Health and Nutrition.**

 **In addition to the federal legislative priorities set up by GFWC, we also need to be aware of those** **issues locally that our clubs might weigh in on and how we can promote local and state legislation that will help meet our mission as federated women’s clubs.** One major project which could be both constructive and useful in all areas is to promote voter registration and voter participation.

 Consider partnering with your local chapter of the League of Women Voters if one is active in your are to assist with a voter registration drive. If you don’t have one, consider contacting your Chamber of Commerce to set up a table in a prominent location and distribute voter registration literature. The deadline for voter registration is October 10.

To promote voter participation, consider running a Voter Uber! Contact senior groups and retirement facilities and offer free transportation to the polls for early voting beginning October 10 or on election day November 7.

 Find out if your school district is trying to pass a school bond and plan a program to provide information about the issues involved. Encourage members to display yard signs, wear buttons and use other ways to promote the passage of the bond.

**Projects such as these can be reported as Civic Engagement and Outreach as well as Legislative and Public Action**

B**e** aware of issues on the ballot of state wide importance and which would affect a number of our members. There will be 14 Propositions on the ballot in November. These are actually Constitutional Amendments. Two in particular would impact a large part of our membership.

**Proposition 4** – [HJR 2](https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=882&Bill=HJR2) "The constitutional amendment to authorize the legislature to establish a temporary limit on the maximum appraised value of real property other than a residence homestead for ad valorem tax purposes; to increase the amount of the exemption from ad valorem taxation by a school district applicable to residence homesteads from $40,000 to $100,000; to adjust the amount of the limitation on school district ad valorem taxes imposed on the residence homesteads of the elderly or disabled to reflect increases in certain exemption amounts; to except certain appropriations to pay for ad valorem tax relief from the constitutional limitation on the rate of growth of appropriations; and to authorize the legislature to provide for a four-year term of office for a member of the board of directors of certain appraisal districts."

**What it means:** Texas has some of the [highest property taxes](https://www.texastribune.org/2022/04/22/texas-property-taxes-explained/) in the nation. Earlier this year, Texas lawmakers approved a [$12.7 billion](https://www.texastribune.org/2023/07/10/texas-legislature-property-tax-cuts-deal/) package of property tax cuts that [needs voter approval](https://www.texastribune.org/2023/07/27/texas-property-tax-cuts-explained/) in order to take effect.

The package would send $7.1 billion to school districts so they can lower their property tax rates. School district taxes make up the bulk of a Texas property owner's tax bill. The amendment would also raise the state's school district homestead exemption — or the slice of a home's value that can't be taxed to pay for public schools — from $40,000 to $100,000, at a cost of $5.6 billion.

The amendment also includes other tax reforms, including a temporary limit on appraisals for commercial, mineral and residential properties that don't receive a homestead exemption that are worth less than $5 million. If voters approve the idea, appraisal districts could not raise the taxable value of those properties by more than 20% each year for the next three years. The limit would expire in 2026 unless lawmakers and voters decide to extend it.

The amendment would also expand the pool of businesses that don't have to pay the state's franchise tax — and allow voters to elect three members to their local appraisal district's board of directors, which are currently appointed.

**Proposition 9 (**[**House Joint Resolution 2**](http://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HJR2)**, from the regular session)**

Voters can approve a cost-of-living adjustment for many former teachers. To combat inflation, teachers who retired before 2001 would get a 6% adjustment, those who retired between 2001-2013 would get a 4% adjustment, and those who retired between 2013-2020 would get a 2% adjustment.

 Important points your members can make in talking about the Proposition are the following:

1. No public school retiree since 9/1/2004 has ever received a costof-living adjustment. Most retired teachers are not eligible to receive Social Security; therefore, a TRS pension is their primary source of income.

 2. It won’t create a tax increase! The Texas Legislature has already set aside the funds to make this happen with voter approval.

 3. Prop 9 is ENDORSED by the Texas Retired Teachers AssociatioN.

4. The bills creating this proposed raise were approved unanimously by both houses of the Texas Legislature – a minor miracle in itself!

The history of GFWC is one of non partisan political advocacy; of identifying and supporting legislation which promotes and protects the interests of women. I challenge you to take the opportunities you have this Fall to lead your clubs to continue that proud legacy. Plan and report your efforts at Legislation and Public Affairs.