

President's Website Message

Once again we are in the height of hurricane season and our hearts go out to those in South Florida and the Panhandle, as well as those in Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana who are coping with devastating losses from Hurricane Katrina. After Florida's four major storms last year, we hoped for a calmer summer and fall, but this storm was a major disaster. We should all be generous in making contributions to the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and other groups that are equipped to help in this kind of situation.

I hope all our branches are excited about starting a new year. It is always wonderful to start seeing friends who are returning to Florida after being away. We have an important mission in AAUW, to promote equity and education for women and girls, but our friendships developed through working together, are very valuable to us.

In addition to being a part of the Florida Women's Consortium, Florida AAUW has joined two coalition efforts this year. First, we are part of the Coalition for Fair Adoption, which is working to eliminate the prohibition against gay individuals or couples adopting children. They can be foster parents, but when they want to adopt, they are denied that right.

The second is the Committee for Fair Elections which is supporting a petition drive to change the way voting district lines are drawn in the State.

Not a single incumbent in Florida's State Legislature or in Florida's U.S. Congressional delegation was defeated in 2004. In that cycle, 72.5% of state legislative races had only one major party candidate. Of the 142 seats up for re-election, 103 were uncontested by a major party. That made Florida the second least competitive state behind Arkansas.

Redistricting is the process of redrawing state legislative and congressional district boundaries. Historically, the primary goal was to adjust political boundaries to account for changes in population.

However, as new developments in computer technology have become more sophisticated, the original intent of redistricting has been lost. Instead of drawing districts that ensure elections are fair, data are manipulated to create districts that favor political parties and incumbents. As a result, competitive elections are now the exception, rather than the rule.

Allowing legislators to draw their own districts is like having "the fox guard the henhouse". Consequently, Florida citizens are left without a voice - without opposition and competitive elections, politicians have little incentive to be responsive to their constituents.

It is clearly a conflict of interest to vest the legislature with redistricting responsibilities. By doing so, we allow partisan politics to be put ahead of Florida's needs. The petitions

call for removing politicians from the process and establishing a non-partisan commission to redraw district lines.

Please go to the website: www.committeeforfairelections.com to sign a petition or to request copies of the petition to give to others. There you will find maps of the districts in Florida and you will see just how ridiculous they can be. This is a very worthwhile project for branch public policy committees to undertake.

As we start a new AAUW year, work hard to accomplish our mission – but remember to have fun as you do it.

Carol Newnam