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## Unmarried Women On Health Care Unmarried Women Driving Change on Leading Domestic Issue

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund

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Unmarried women represent one of the most reliable Democratic cohorts in the electorate. In 2004, they delivered a 25-point margin to John Kerry while married women supported his opponent by 11 points for a 36 point marriage gap. Similarly, in the 2006 elections, unmarried women supported Democratic congressional candidates by a 66 to 32 percent margin.<sup>1</sup> Energizing this vote is key to maximizing progressive opportunities in the 2008 elections. To that end, this report explores unmarried women's reactions to the leading domestic issue of the cycle, health care.

We find unmarried women leading the charge for fundamental change in health care. Unsatisfied and impatient with tinkering around the margins of a system that, to them, is broken, unmarried women push the envelope for sweeping change, in numbers that well exceed other voters. This outcome is not surprising, given the economic insecurity of this demographic group and the role health care and health care costs play in that insecurity. Unlike married people, these women have no real support network, no second income with benefits to brace them if the worst should happen or if they should lose their jobs.

Perhaps more important for progressives to understand is what, specifically, unmarried women look for in health care reform. Naturally, unmarried women struggle with the rising costs of health care, and, importantly, unmarried women report paying, on average, more for their health care than married voters. Unmarried women also insist on high quality and share the progressive goal of universal coverage as a normative value. But it is health care security, more than any other change, that drives the issue among unmarried women.<sup>2</sup> What unmarried women most want is health care that can never be taken away from them.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Election Poll's Exit Polls, conducted by Edison Mitofsky, November in 2004. The 2006 data from Edison/Mitofsky/CNN Network Exit Poll.

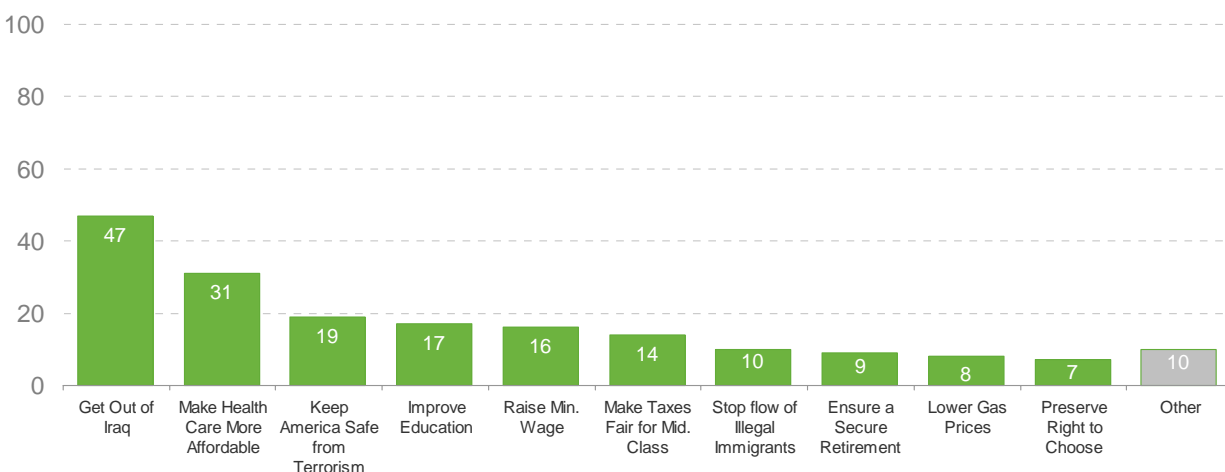
<sup>2</sup> This is true among the rest of the electorate as well.

## Reform Health Care Now

Health care is one of the leading domestic issues among all voters; it finds even more traction among unmarried women. All told, 45 percent of voters believe health care should be one of the top two or three issues for the Congress and next President. This jumps to 59 percent among unmarried women.<sup>3</sup> In a WVWV survey of 1000 unmarried women (voters and non-voters), health care ranked second only to getting out of Iraq as the leading priority for the new Congress and scored 12 points above any other issue.<sup>4</sup>

### Priorities of Unmarried Women

*What would you most like to see Congress achieve over the next two years? Would you like to see Congress:*



Note: Data from January 2007 WVWV survey of 1000 Unmarried Women Adults.

The concern over this issue rises from some basic economic facts about the unmarried population. Unmarried women earn less and are less likely to have jobs with good benefits than married men or women. Compared to married women, married men, and unmarried men, unmarried women have the lowest mean personal earnings at \$37,264 and only make 56 cents for every dollar a married man earns.<sup>5</sup> Despite this gap in income, unmarried women report paying *double* what married women do for their health care. Because health care is so expensive for unmarried women, both in absolute and relative terms, they, unsurprisingly, go uncovered at a higher rate; 14.8 percent of unmarried women lack coverage compared to just 7.6 percent of the married population as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Based on Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted May 29-31, 2007.

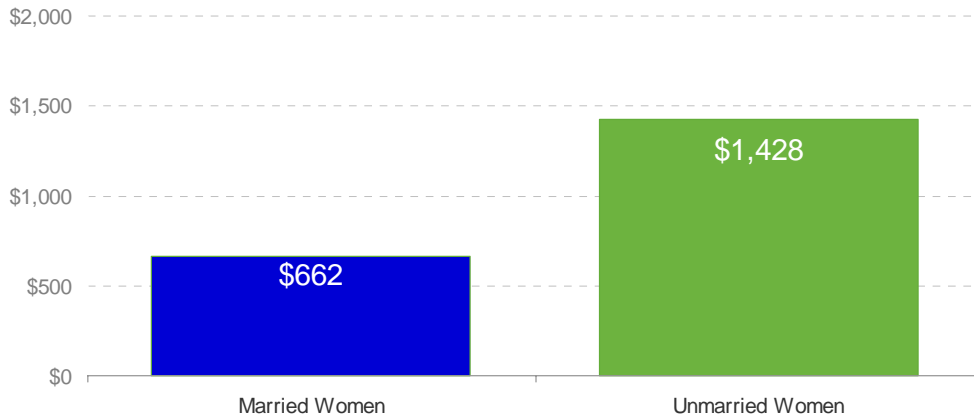
<sup>4</sup> Based on WVWV survey of 1000 unmarried women (voters and nonvoters) conducted January 28-30, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Based on 2006 Current Population survey from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Labor

<sup>6</sup> Based on Scarborough USA, 2006

### Self Reported Monthly Healthcare Expenses

About how much do you pay each month on health care expenses? This would include the cost of insurance and out-of-pocket costs for things like doctor's visits, treatments and prescription drugs.



Note: Based on Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted May 29-31, 2007

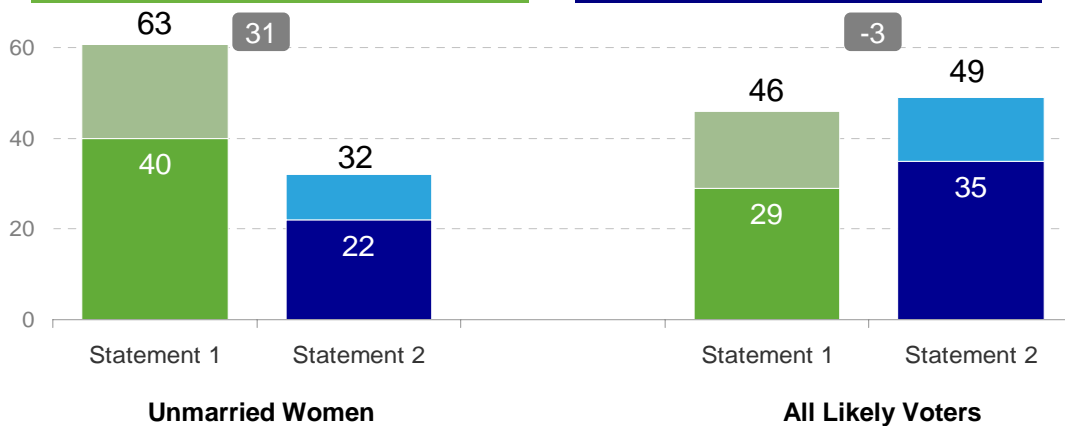
The result is a population disproportionately interested in fundamental change in the American health care system. American voters in general may shy away from “radical” steps such as importing a Canadian-style system. Unmarried women, however, embrace such a powerful step. A Canadian system may not be the ideal reform among unmarried women or the best political step for energizing their vote, but their support for such a system testifies to their fundamental desire for change.

### Changes to Health Care System

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements about health care reform for the country. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

Now is the time for single payer health insurance that is funded and administered by the U.S. government. This Canadian-style system would guarantee affordable health care coverage for all Americans and reduce costs by streamlining the administration of health care.

We need to make changes to our health care system, but we cannot put it in the hands of the government. While health care accounts for 15 percent of our economy, a government takeover is a radical move that will reduce quality of care and eliminate a patient's choice of doctor.



Note: Based on Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted May 29-31, 2007

## What Kind of Reform?

Reform advocates need to approach health care both in terms of broad values and political themes inherent in the health system and, at a more basic level, how this reform could change the lives of unmarried women. In short, we need to pay attention to what, specifically, unmarried women say they want to change about their health care.

And that is health care security.

With the exception of maintaining quality, having health care security trumps all other personal health care priorities, not only among unmarried women, but among the broader electorate as well. 83 percent of unmarried women in the WVWV January, 2007 survey described themselves as more likely (61 percent much more likely) to support a candidate for Congress who would “encourage states to develop universal health care plans, where the government, employers, providers and the uninsured share the responsibility so that every person has health insurance.”

## Preferred Priorities on Health Care

<b>Statement Pairs:</b> <i>Now I am going to read you some pairs of statements about your own health care priorities. After I read each pair please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view.</i> <sup>7</sup>	<b>All Likely Voters</b>	<b>Unmarried Women</b>
Knowing I will always have health care coverage is the more important thing to me.	65	66
Lowering health care costs is the more important thing to me.	33	33
Knowing I will always have health care coverage is the more important thing to me.	57	63
Improving quality is the more important thing to me.	39	32
Knowing I will always have health care coverage is the more important thing to me.	57	57
Maintaining choices and seeing my own doctor is the more important thing to me.	38	35
Making sure I have access to the best medical treatment is more important to me.	52	53
Knowing I will always have health care coverage is the more important thing to me.	46	47

Unmarried women respond well to a number of healthcare proposals, some more sweeping than others. An impressive 67 percent of unmarried women, versus 53 percent of the

<sup>7</sup> Based on Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted May 29-31, 2007.

electorate, would be much more likely to support a candidate who advocates expanding SCHIP and Medicaid to cover every American child. In fact, when asked in our January survey to chose from a list of domestic issues, unmarried women ranked SCHIP as their top priority for the new Congress.<sup>8</sup> Unmarried women also want their candidates to require insurance companies to keep their plans open to everyone and to support increased investments in preventative care.

## Reaction to Health Care Proposals

<i>Now I am going to read you some proposals to reform health care some candidates for Congress have talked about. After each one I read please tell me whether it would make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely or less likely to support a candidate for Congress advocating this proposal?</i> <sup>9</sup>	<b>All Likely Voters: Much More Likely</b>	<b>Unmarried Women: Much More Likely</b>
Expanding Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to make sure every American child has health insurance.	53	67
Requiring insurance companies to keep their plans open to everyone, regardless of age, medical history or preexisting conditions.	43	53
Investing in more preventive health care such as providing incentives for people who lead healthy lives and making sure everyone has cancer screening.	36	48

## Conclusion

For a population that often lacks both the economic resources to afford good quality health care and, as important, the social support to maintain coverage in the event of a lost job or cut benefits, few issues seem more important. But progressives also need to address the health care issue from the perspective average people experience it, at the personal, day-to-day level. Without question, unmarried women believe no one should be priced out of health care and support universal health care as a normative value. What is also appealing about such a system, however, is that it also means their own health care can never be taken away from them. This is why the focus on health care security is so politically important, particularly for a group of voters (and would-be voters) whose economic standing is marginal.

Unmarried women are the people most in need of substantial health care reform and are the most interested in supporting a candidate who understands the impact such reform could have on their lives. If progressives want to build on their gains of 2006, they will have few greater priorities in 2008 than engaging these women on health care. The electoral participation of this group still trails their much less progressive married counterparts, and boosting this participation will be a key factor in determining the success or failure of the 2008 cycle. If candidates can connect with this group on issues they care about, like health care, then more unmarried women will turn out to vote, a result that could tip the scales in progressives' favor in 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Based on WVWV survey of 1000 unmarried women (voters and nonvoters) conducted January 28-30, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Based on Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted May 29-31, 2007.