

file

July 27, 1995

Melanne Verveer
Office of the First Lady
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Ms. Verveer:

We wanted to give you the results from the focus groups we commissioned as our first step in the EMILY's List Women Vote! project. The focus group sessions are to be followed by a national poll, designed to gain further information about this important segment of the voting population. We will continue to keep you apprised of our findings.

The focus groups were convened in Chicago, Illinois on May 31, 1995 and Tacoma, Washington on June 1, 1995. In each city one session consisted of drop-off voters, (those who voted Democratic in 1992 but did not vote in 1994) and one session of ticket splitters, (those who voted Democratic in 1992, but switched parties in the 1994 Congressional races).

Enclosed you will find a one hour distillation of eight hours of videoed sessions and a memo from Celinda Lake and Tom Kiley, outlining the results of the groups. The women discuss their opinions on politics as well as specific issues, so a table of contents is also enclosed.

We will continue to send you information on the progress of Women Vote! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,


Mary Beth Cahill
Executive Director

cc: enclosures

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DEMOCRATIC
WOMEN

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**EMILY'S LIST WOMEN'S VOTE PROJECT
NON-COLLEGE EDUCATED WOMEN VOTERS
FOCUS GROUPS JUNE 1995**

KEY: CTS: Chicago Ticket Splitters
CDO: Chicago Drop-Off Voters
TTS: Tacoma Ticket Splitters
TDO: Tacoma Drop-Off Voters

I. THE CONTEXT

The mood of these voters is unhappy, frustrated, and angry.
They are struggling to make ends meet.

II. MESSAGES

CRIME
HEALTH CARE
RETIREMENT
EDUCATION
ABORTION

CONCLUSION: The strongest message is economic security.

III. WHO IS ON YOUR SIDE?

The enemy is Congress and politics, not Republicans and not Democrats.

DEMOCRATS
REPUBLICANS
NEWT GINGRICH
THE RADICAL RIGHT
BILL CLINTON
HILLARY CLINTON

IV. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

WHAT KEEPS WOMEN FROM VOTING?

V. CHOOSING CANDIDATES

WOMEN AS CANDIDATES
CANDIDATES ON THE ISSUES -- Who is Better?

TO: Mary Beth Cahill, EMILY's List

FROM: Celinda Lake, Lake Research
Tom Kiley, Marttila & Kiley

SUBJECT: Focus Group Findings

DATE: June 22, 1995

This memorandum summarizes findings from four focus groups conducted among women in Chicago on May 31, 1995, and in Tacoma on June 1, 1995. In each city, two groups were conducted -- one among ticket-splitters and one among drop-off voters. Ticket-splitters were recruited from a list of registered voters, and screened for women who are not strong partisans, who do not vote straight tickets, and who have no more than two years of college education. Drop-off voters were recruited from a list of registered voters who voted in 1992 but not in 1994, and screened for women who are Democratic-leaning or independent, and who do not have a college education.

SUMMARY

Following is a brief overview of the focus group findings:

- We cannot underestimate how stressed these women are. They are stretched to the limit, and they are short two precious resources: time and money.
- When these women worry about the economy, they worry in very specific, personal terms about their ability to make ends meet for one more day. They also feel that woman bear the brunt of the economic problems -- not only do they work, but they also take care of the family.
- Profound cynicism, not apathy, marks these voters' attitudes. A fundamental question is whether this cynicism can be turned into activism. They are angry at gridlock, infighting and government that serves special interests rather than the interests of the people who elect them. Fundamentally, they believe that the United States has the resources to help them, but that the politicians choose not to. When they do not vote, it is because they do not believe that voting makes a difference: no matter who they vote into office, nothing will change.
- These women believe that nobody is on their side -- not Democrats, not Republicans, and not any individual they can name. Their anger is focused at Congress broadly, by which they mean politicians. They believe that politicians do not understand their problems, and that they care only about their own narrow political interests.

- These voters claim they choose how to vote on the basis of "issues," but this is often a code word for values and character. They respond most strongly to candidates who visibly understand and relate to their lives.
- Although they often resist admitting it, and in fact may deny it if pressed, these voters clearly believe that women candidates are more likely to understand their lives and share their priorities.
- The strongest message for mobilizing these voters is one which focuses on economic security, and on the things which make is possible for families to survive. Language should focus on immediate economic needs as specifically as possible, rather than on abstract notions of strengthening the economy. The contrast can focus on those in touch with and willing to prioritize the things that real families need. These women feel that few people are on their side, and the strongest rhetoric here can therefore have a distinctly populist edge.

THE CONTEXT

To describe the mood of these women, it is impossible to use stronger language than they use themselves. These are the words they use to describe how they are feeling about the direction of the country:

depressed	concerned	disgusted
unassured	sad	frustrated
disappointed	nervous	cynical
pissed off	angry	powerless
desperate	scared	uncomfortable

This overpowering negativity has two related sources: severe economic anxiety and a deep cynicism about politics. These women fear for their own families' economic survival, and they do not believe that politicians understand that fear. In fact, they tend to believe that politicians are choosing not to help, and this angers them.

Stress and economic anxiety

These women are struggling to survive and their lives are stretched thin, short of two precious resources in women's lives: time and money. They face immediate economic pressures. They do not worry in the abstract about the economy; they worry in very specific personal terms about their wages, their bills, and their ability to make ends meet for one more day. They feel torn between job and family, and describe their own lives as "stressed," "complicated," "overworked," "underpaid," and a "juggling act":

It seems like you just can't get ahead. You do one thing and it just seems like every time you do something, something happens or you run into something. The money just doesn't go far enough any more. Between paying for -- I pay for five kids so it is really hard to get it to stretch. When the car breaks, we are completely finished. (*Chicago ticket-splitter*)

My husband works for a living. He has a mediocre job. We have three children and it is a struggle to have everything that by law you have to have -- let's say car insurance and all of these things that you have to do and keep your heads above water. There just doesn't seem to be enough money or enough high-paying jobs to go around. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

It is also important to note that these voters have a strong sense that women bear the brunt of economic problems and anxiety. They see women as carrying the load for their families, doing double-duty for job and for family. Men have one job they have to do well, but women have two or more. They also feel discrimination in the workplace, and think it is even harder for women to escape from low-paying jobs. These women are clear: women get paid less for the same work and have less opportunity for advancement.

The demands are high on women, I think, personally. First of all, women never were allowed to grow in a company before. There is a lot of -- my company where I come from, it is chauvinistic. It really is.... Upper management -- they are nice people but it's like ah, you are a woman. You are supposed to go home and cook dinner every night for your family. You're supposed to -- but get this project done by 12 o'clock. Make sure this is here. I need you to work overtime. It is stressful. *(Chicago drop-off)*

They put eight to ten hours a day and you are putting in at least ten hours a day by the time you commute to work and you are wiped out. They need time. You have to spend time with them doing their homework and giving them some input. Women's jobs are never done. When you fall in bed at ten o'clock is when their day is over. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

Underlying all of this is deep frustration that women do not have the option of caring for their children full-time. These women feel trapped. Working is not a choice for these women; it is necessary for their economic survival: "because of the economy, mothers have to go out of the home and work." But although they cannot afford to stay home with their children, the only jobs they can get barely cover child care costs and the government provides no help. As one concluded, "we need the support from the government so people can stay home with the kids" ... "this is not a male/female issue."

You are second-class citizens. You really are.... They don't go after the men and the men get all these tax cuts and everything else. There are breaks and the women who are supporting the children without any assistance are the ones that are having to fight and to struggle and the kids are the ones that are suffering. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

I think about my one daughter who is expecting her first baby. Two of them are working. She desperately wants to take off for this baby when it is born. Give her a chance to start raising a baby. She is not going to be able to. They live in our two-flat. My mother and I have a two-flat. They live upstairs so they are paying minimal rent -- just enough so that we can all cover the mortgage together. She's got a car that half the time doesn't run. He's got a brand new truck because he has to travel a long way away to work. She's not going to be able to stay home because they've got outrageous bills and they are just mounting up by things happening -- Christmas and weddings and things that go on. That is what's so depressing. I was able to stay home for ten years, work part time and you can't do that any more. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

I would love to be home with my kids, but I'm forced to -- I've got a six-month-old. I nursed that baby. I love my children but I'm telling my husband. You know, this Christmas rush, I think I really need to go and do the Christmas rush and try to get a job. He's looking at me like why? I'm

like well think about it honey, you've got three kids. You bring home about \$1,000 a month and we're not making it very well. We struggle from paycheck to paycheck. We scrimp. We are looking at things like what can we sell in our house this time. It's awful. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

It really makes me angry that women can't stay home. Someone has to raise the kids. It's not a male/female issue. When they used to say years ago, men had it all, I can't wait. They never had it all. If they did have more than we had, it was because we enabled them to go off to work with a clearer conscience because we were home with the children. So if we, as women, are going to be out working, someone has to be raising the kids. Ideally, it is one of the parents. But because of the way situations are today, it is impossible. I was real lucky. I'm able to work out of my house so I have a physical presence there even if I'm not as attentive as I could have been but at least I'm there in body. I really sympathize with the situation. You just have to turn your kids over and it is not a matter of what you want to do, it's a matter of what you have to do. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

These women are also angry at a system they describe as helping those who don't deserve it, while providing those who need and deserve help (that is, their own families) with no support. These women have a strong sense that too many people abuse the welfare system, refusing to work, and therefore stealing benefits and tax dollars from people who work hard and deserve the help. Consistently, these women complain that they are turned down for benefits they genuinely need because they earn too much, working at jobs they hate because it's the responsible thing to do, while people who are lazy and irresponsible get the benefits. Moreover, these are the women who work as waitresses without day care or insurance and see women on welfare getting both for doing nothing.

Well, I'm a welfare mom, I guess, since I get food stamps and my kids get free lunch. But the thing is, you don't go on welfare because you want to. You go on welfare because you can't feed your children. And you go on welfare because the system leaves you no other choice. My husband served 13 years in the military, served in the Gulf War on the front line and yet the military said sorry, we don't need you any more. And he gets out. Nine-hundred dollars a month. Five people in my family and we're being denied welfare because my vehicle is worth too much money. You can't have more than \$2,000 total. Everything you own cannot be worth more than \$2,000. So we're denied. I think priorities are wrong. They're going to put a \$67 million stadium in Seattle, but 400 Tacoma teachers are being laid off. Priorities are way out of whack. *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

I just had a heart attack and I'm not able to go back to work for three months but because I have \$40 over the limit, you don't even qualify. I worked all my life. Why isn't there something for this? Where these other people, they get on welfare -- they go and when I see them in the lines and see their shopping carts and mine, it's amazing. *(Chicago drop-off)*

They are making it too easy. I've locked in. My husband was at -- my husband was out of work for two and a half years and I tell you since the day he was laid off I pushed him, go find a job, go find a job. I am tired of going in and cashing that welfare check and having people look at me. I used to dress skuzzy just so people wouldn't look at me bad. I used to watch girls that were 18 and 19 years old going in and cashing out welfare checks going into welfare. I'm thinking, good golly, is this what the world has come to that they just go in and live off of welfare? Most people said, oh, they owe it to me. It's like what are we owing you? We owe you nothing. You need to work. But speaking of those benefits things, though, my husband does work. He works for a very small company. She owns two stores. She can't even afford to give us health care benefits. My kids are on the medical, welfare. Me and my husband are not even covered because it's like they

will not -- they kicked us off after a year after my husband started working. But I fought to get my kids back on because I thought if anybody should be covered, it should be my kids. (*Tacoma drop-off*)

Their economic stress also gives these voters a powerful parochial focus. They believe that the country spends too much helping other countries, and that it does so at the expense of people at home. This is part of a broader political question to these women -- "why don't we take care of our own?" They repeat again and again: "we don't do enough for our own country," "we help everybody but our own." This translates into strong anti-foreign and anti-immigrant feelings:

My concern is about the future. What is going to happen to our children, our children's children? The way the economy -- I don't know just things in general. Primarily, I guess, where is our country. We are helping everybody but our own people here. I don't understand. (*Chicago drop-off*)

It just seems like we don't do enough for our own country. We have homeless and we have people that want us to work for a minimum wage but you can't live on that. We are always send money and troops to everybody else. So I guess that makes me sad. I'd like to see more help here at home. (*Tacoma drop-off*)

What I think there is a problem with is immigration. I'm second-generation to this country. My grandparents came here but they came here. They got a job and they worked. You get these people that are coming here and nobody wants to work. All they want to do is sit back. (*Tacoma drop-off*)

I agree with her. And the other thing is welfare. Foreigners are coming in this country who never ever worked for Social Security. How many who are age 65 are drawing it are not American citizens and are not even Americans yet? They haven't even taken the oath and they're drawing Social Security. My dad has diabetes, served in the Korean War and was denied -- denied his Social Security because he wasn't at the medical point where they thought he should draw, so I'm with her. (*Tacoma ticket-splitter*)

Finally, these voters have great concern for children -- their own and America's. This has the potential to be a prime motivator in their vote. They fear declining morals, deteriorating neighborhoods and families, violence and crime, and lack of opportunity. They worry their children are unsafe even in schools. High policy priorities for them include child support enforcement and quality child care.

Political cynicism

Profound cynicism, not just apathy, marks these voters' attitudes. A fundamental question is whether cynicism can be turned to activism. They are angry at gridlock, infighting, and government that serves special interests rather than the interests of the people who elect them. These are populist voters, angered by a number of big institutions, including the self-serving elite called politicians. Fundamentally, these voters believe that the United States has the resources to help them, but that politicians choose not to. Said a Tacoma ticket-splitter, "they can give themselves retirement. So why can't they do it for us? They can do it. They choose not to." These voters see politicians as rich ("they have nannies or maybe chauffeurs,

cooks, maids") and as getting richer on the taxpayers' back. "A \$100,000 a year comes out a \$3 million guy. Only in America," said another Tacoma ticket-splitter.

Fundamentally, they see politicians as completely out-of-touch with the lives that most people live, spending their time and energy on partisan bickering, looking only to help themselves and the monied special interests that elected them. They want them to "stop fighting with each other" and to "be accountable for what they say and what they do" (Tacoma ticket-splitter). They are "fighting and whining," "playing Republican and Democrat." And they don't believe politicians understand their lives: "every time I picture Congress, it is just this vision I have in my head. They are always in this building, sitting in these chairs. They are not out in the real world," said a Chicago drop-off voter. Said another, "they are just distant. They have no idea of what we are going through, what we [talkover] day by day."

These voters also detest the lack of accountability in the political system. They perceive a huge gap between what politicians say and what they do. There is "no control," "they can waste our money and don't have to balance their budgets like we do." They "say things and never follow through." "They lie" and "only care about getting re-elected." "They are con people." They feel Washington gets to even the best of them. As one woman said, "even the ones who go in with their ideals get there and can't do it."

ISSUES AND MESSAGES

The issues that matter most to these women are the issues that most directly affect their own ability to survive economically: child care, education (both for themselves and their children), health care (where they are focused on costs), Social Security and retirement, pay and promotion, and children's issues.

Child care

Child care is a key issue to these voters, because it gives them opportunities in the job market. In an ideal world, these women would have "every job incorporate day care for women that needed it" (Chicago drop-off). They see child care as part of their economic worries, and they want policies that make child care more affordable and accessible.

I was making \$12 an hour plus benefits and everything else as a dental assistant. My husband and I really sat down and looked at our taxes and looked at everything else and with me working it put us in the next tax bracket. We were actually making less. By the time we paid the day care for two kids -- before and after school, paid for my driving back and forth because we had to second car. We were actually making less than if we stayed home with our children. (Tacoma drop-off)

I think government could help with day care. I mean, I left my job. I worked grocery for five years and it was really hard. The money was real good, but it was hard finding a baby-sitter every weekend and every evening. So I think if they could help somehow with just day care alone, you know. It's hard trying to find a baby-sitter to work every weekend and every night. (Tacoma ticket-splitter)

I think that a deduction somehow through your regular paycheck. I mean, if you have enough women who are working or men, I guess, too, but if there was a building -- if all of us put in, you know, \$200 or.... *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

Child care is also an issue where these voters think women candidates would be much more receptive than men:

Yeah, I think it is because she understands it better. I think in order to get where they are, they needed more help and a different kind of way to get there than the man did. So if they wanted to have a traditional work, marriage, children type thing, they struggled more and so they know what a woman has to go through to get in their position. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

Real quickly, I worked in a business office and the manager that we had was married but had no children. She had no understanding at all for the other women in the office who had children. Possibly someone came down with chickenpox and you had to miss a day of work. She had no understanding for that whatsoever until she had her own child. As soon as she had her own child, boy things changed a little bit. She came to understand what some of us other women were going through. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

Education

These women see education as the best path to economic security for themselves and their children, but it's often out of reach:

They have to get more educated and demand for the paper and pay. All the women, basically, in the offices are doing all the work but they are not getting any credit only because they do have to stay at home and raise the family. If they can't make it, they have to go out into the work force. But they haven't been prepared for it. *(Chicago drop-off)*

If you don't want to go to school and you don't want to advance yourself, you're going to make \$4.90 and you're going to live with it. *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

And when you see what your taxes are when they break it down for what you are paying on your escrow taxes on your house -- what you are paying in there. The largest chunk is for school. School taxes, not for street. It's not for roads, not for buildings but for education. And I'm all for education. My kids are not in school any more and I think that is the greatest thing in the world if they took 100 percent of the taxes for education, it would be great. Because the more educated kids are, the less they are in trouble. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

Not all of us have \$60,000 to fork over for a college degree. *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

Health care

Health care remains a high priority for these voters. Their focus, however, is not on access, availability or quality. Primarily, they are frustrated and angered by constantly rising costs:

A lot of the same things she was saying just as far as trying to raise kids. My husband is working. And medical bills. That's been -- I've been in the hospital three times in the last seven years with kidney stones. And we're still paying on them. My husband has insurance and they pay 80 percent but 80 percent on some of these bills is outrageous. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

[What should the government do?]

I agree on the health benefits.... It's ridiculous. Four hundred dollars a month for two people for health insurance. That is more than my first house payment was. That's gross. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

Retirement

These women are most fearful for themselves about their own retirement, a particularly acute concern for homemakers as well as working women. They believe that Social Security will have disappeared by the time they retire, and that they'll be on their own. Even if Social Security survives, they understand that their history of low-paying jobs and their attempts to stay home with their children mean that their benefits will be meager, and they find this fundamentally unfair.

Really scary because Social Security, you can't count on it. And like with me, I raised my kids. I was a single mother. I had to take low-paying jobs and the amount that I get on Social Security is what, \$380 a month or something like that. What can I buy with that? You can't. *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

Well, I lived in a man's world for many, many years until I finally decided I'm tired of fighting it and went into real estate and I'm not relying on any outside funds for my retirement. I'm going to be grateful, but I'm just trying to set myself up to make my own money and to be ready for it. I don't know, I have a daughter that's 31 with three kids that works her tail off and has a great supporting husband, you know, and raises three great kids. I just tried to raise my children, took, to plan for retirement because it's not going to be there for you, Social Security. *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

I think, too, that there is just -- like you have to be concerned if Social Security is going to be there. There is such a whole environment -- like I feel that the politicians really aren't in touch with us or really care about us or what is happening to the people. It's like their whole concern is sort of perpetuating their own jobs and hanging on to what they have. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

I don't think by the time -- I'm 36 and when I get to the age to retire -- and then like now, I haven't been working for the last eight years so I don't have money being put into a profit-sharing or I will probably once my youngest one gets old enough. But that's going to be quite a few years from now. I'm may go back to work part time but there won't be enough put in for me in a retirement or pension fund and then medical. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

And years and years of paying, paying. I'm going to be working for probably another 30 years and I'm going to keep on paying it and they keep telling you that you'd better save your own 401-K and your IRAs because you are on your own. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

Personal Safety

Crime and violence are also important issues for these women, but they seem to blame government less than they blame individuals and -- particularly -- irresponsible parents for the problem. In fact, their concerns about crime center more on their fears for their children than on their own personal safety. They frequently mention their fears of danger in the public schools, of children bringing guns to school, and they worry about their children's safety in their own neighborhoods.

I am afraid to send her to a public school because I just don't feel she should have to go through metal detectors to get an education. Then I've got to work a second job to pay for a private school so I don't have to worry about that. That's what makes it really sad. You think what is her world when she becomes an adult. What is it going to be like with all the violence that is happening. I'm afraid to let her walk anywhere. I used to walk everywhere to go out, or to a bowling alley or a movie. You've got to drive them. You've got to pick them up. It's a real sad. (*Chicago ticket-splitter*)

Look at the White House. In the last two weeks, I mean, two, three people have gotten over the fence. Just crime. I mean, my daughter is in high school. We came from private school and public school this year, it was really frightening. I was really concerned as far as her safety because of guns, just weapons in general in the school system. There are security guards, there are police officers there all the time. It's like being in prison, you know. But that's her way of being kept safe, you know. (*Tacoma ticket-splitter*)

My greatest concern is my children because they don't get the opportunity to be kids. You have to watch everything they do. I think things are worse out here than in the Chicago area. You have specific areas that you stay out of. Here someone is coming who is friends and tried to run him down on a car on his bicycle. I almost broke it in half. He tells me -- he says, mom, you are so paranoid. I said you don't think I have a reason to be paranoid? One of his friend's mothers is a 911 operator. She feels the same way I do and it is just being a kid -- they don't even get the chance to grow up without -- you can't walk out your door and we live in Park [inaudible]. It's not in the city but still you've got those same concerns. That is my biggest thing is my kids. To grow up -- like I said I grew up just outside of Chicago and we walked. You went to the parks. You didn't feel threatened. You didn't feel afraid. I am more afraid here than I ever did back there. (*Tacoma drop-off*)

This concern for their children also translates into frustration with what they perceive as declining morals and values. Said a Chicago ticket-splitter: "being the parent of teenagers, I see the morals and television programs, MTV and all the moral issues that are one there -- or lack of. It is very disgusting and depressing to have children growing up in this type of an atmosphere." These women resent their loss of control over their own lives and their children's lives and futures.

Choice

Abortion also raises powerful feelings, but opinions are divided. For those who are pro-choice, however, this is a defining issue.

[What do you dislike about Republicans?]

I classified them as conservative and I agree with her as far as them being even close, family, moral, judgment. I think they try to cut the choice of the people. I guess if I had to take one issue in particular, I would say abortion rights and Republicans are known to be against that. (*Tacoma drop-off*)

[I like that the Democrats are] pro-choice. What I mean is though I personally, unless it's for medical reasons or I was raped, I could not have an abortion. I personally couldn't do it, but I have no right to tell another woman what she can and can't do with her body. So I would not take the right away. (*Tacoma ticket-splitter*)

Everybody has their opinion, but I think that particular group and as far as I'm concerned, that cuts to people's choice. (*Chicago drop-off*)

Those issues provide Democrats with a powerful message to mobilize these women with economic security at the core. Republicans, however, also have a potential message to these women, who are concerned about high taxes, big government, wasteful spending of their money and welfare reform. These voters will also vote for change and right now the Republicans seem more like the party of change, the Democrats more like the big spending defenders of the status quo.

Working in our favor, however, is the fact that these women are also populist pro-women voters, particularly the non-voting portion. They believe women "are treated as second-class citizens" by everyone from city hall to car dealers to their employers, and they respond to populist rhetoric from this vantage point.

THE MESSAGE -- ECONOMIC SECURITY AND CHANGE

The strongest message for mobilizing these women is one which focuses on economic security and on the things which make it possible for families to survive. Language should focus on immediate economic needs as specifically as possible, rather than on abstract notions of strengthening the economy. The contrast can focus on those in touch with and willing to prioritize the things that real families need. These women feel that few elected officials are on their side and responding to their economic needs. The strongest rhetoric here can therefore have a distinctly populist edge.¹

It is a dialogue in these own women's words that taps their frustration and desperation: "everything has deteriorated," "you can't get ahead." These women fear for their children and believe a bad economy has robbed them of the ability to do anything to help. "You are working three of those McDonalds jobs just to make ends meet" ... "Exactly, you are running yourself ragged and paying most of your money out to someone else to watch your kids." These women see little improvement in the future and fear for women's lives ten years from now in a world where "you can't count on Social Security," "you are trapped in low-paying jobs," and full-time jobs are being converted to part-time jobs that are "just enough not to give benefits."

These voters see little value in the status quo. As one woman said, "if things don't change, it will probably be a living hell." They believe that Bill Clinton supported change, but that he is "in over his head," "he's trying but can't get it done," "he's impotent because of the lobbyists." They worry that Democrats "don't like change," "are stuck in the mud," and "don't want change." They voted for change in 1992 and some voted for it again in 1994. Others did not vote in disgust, because they had not gotten the change they were promised.

¹ However, as we've seen with other swing voters, the argument is not that the wealthy are bad, but that they should contribute their fair share, and that they shouldn't benefit at the expense of others.

Who is on their side?

Perhaps most striking is that most of these women believe that *no one* is on their side -- not Democrats, not Republicans, not any individual they can name. As discussed above, their anger is largely focused on Congress broadly, by which they mean politicians. They do not believe that politicians understand their lives, and they see Congress as spending all its time and energy on partisan bickering, rather than on actually working to solve problems. The enemy for these voters is less Democrats or Republicans than Congress and politics as usual.

These voters can think of few people on their side. The lack of a spokesperson mutes the power of messages to these voters. These women are more inclined to see Princess Diana and dead presidents like Lincoln as more on their side than anyone now in office.

Their anger at Congress notwithstanding, these women do see Democrats as somewhat more sympathetic than Republicans. They believe that Democrats tend to be more focused on the middle class -- the working class -- while Republicans' first priority is the wealthy -- the "plantation owners," the "upper echelon." At the same time, they also believe that Democrats have been irresponsible, spending too much money, while they believe that Republicans are more likely to actually bring change:

[What comes to mind when I say "Democrats"?)

Big spenders

Fat cats -- they want us to pay for everything.

They overspend.

The money gets thrown out there without a great deal of thought as to what is actually happening to it in the end.

Where is it coming from? They spend, spend, spend, but where is it coming from?

They're wasting our money.

They give themselves more raises and more perks and we're getting less and less.

[What are the good things about Republicans?]

I like their ideas on welfare reform.

They want to reduce the size of government. If done properly, that's a good thing.

I think they are trying to reduce the national debt and balance the budget.

Most of these women personally dislike Gingrich, and they do not believe he understands their lives at all. They do not trust him and think he is trying to be more powerful than his position as Speaker should allow him to be.

Again, just -- I don't know. He seems like he's always putting down Democrats or the people who are more for the people. He has nothing good to say about any of those people who are more for us. (*Tacoma drop-off*)

He doesn't have a clue. I really don't think so. When he is talking about these tax breaks, on the one hand, he is talking about how we have to balance the budget, then he is talking about tax breaks for people with incomes up to \$200,000 a year. He is all caught up in

this fundamentalist religious ho ha. I could go on and on. I can't stand him.
(Chicago ticket-splitter)

I think he is scamming the country. He's got his classes. He's got his television program as well, Eyes on the Classes. He's also got the House, Senate. He's got everything going for him and technically, according to the paper, by law he shouldn't have all that. The government shouldn't be backing up most of his stuff. (Chicago drop-off)

Ticket-splitters see the radical right as a powerful threat. They associate the radical right with "Newt Gingrich," "Jimmy Bakker," "fanatics," "right-wingers" and "the militia." Their biggest fears are that the radical right will impose its values on people's personal lives and invade their privacy.

I think bringing religion into the politics -- like you said. I'm all for morality. I'm all for us all living by the Golden Rule and everything, but this prayer in school stuff. That is not something that should be handled at school. That is your personal life. Your at-home stuff. Abortion issues -- to me, that should not be a political theme. I think they are bringing their churches into the whole voting thing. It was just in *Time* magazine just a week or two ago. This young guy -- I can't remember his name but he's got this big following going because he's real -- he's good-looking. He's young. He's got a couple kids and he's a preacher and he is going to be vaulted to be the new leader. I'm like that -- I don't like that because that is just like forcing it down my throat.
(Chicago ticket-splitter)

I think they want their morality to be *the* morality. (Chicago ticket-splitter)

Well, all these right-wingers, I'm really scared of them. I really am. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that said "Please, Lord, Save Me From Your Bawlers" and I believe it. I think they've gone too far out. (Tacoma ticket-splitter)

No, it doesn't make sense to me. I think everybody should exercise their religion to their beliefs. I don't like people imposing their thoughts or beliefs on me or my children. (Tacoma ticket-splitter)

Drop-off voters, however, have a somewhat mixed sense of who the radical right is, and thus see them as a much less serious threat.

Sounds like somebody is trying to cram religion down my throat, I guess. (Tacoma drop-off)

The thing that I think is so funny is the right wing doesn't even go with religion. The right wings I know, none of them are Christians so the two don't even, in my mind, don't even belong in the same sentence. (Tacoma drop-off)

I feel like that too. I don't make the connection at all. When I hear that, I'm like that doesn't make sense because these people are not Christians so why do they attach that to that? (Tacoma drop-off)

That's -- I don't know about here but I don't want the country being run by people who think they should lead it using the Bible as a strict set of laws. (Chicago drop-off)

Either in their own small communities or some of these small towns that are run that way. I don't - there are some in both parties that I would consider that way. (Chicago drop-off)

Like a David Koresh-type to where they have followers. They have power and depending on their

beliefs, there is all different religious leaders. *(Chicago drop-off)*

[Are they a threat, or are they just a few people? How big a threat are they?]

I think it is growing.

It's definitely growing.

Look at the guy that blew Oklahoma and the Michigan -- all those....

The militias.

Were they are religious organization? I thought that was a militant organization?

Yeah, I don't think that's the religious.

But you know, they are people that are real disgusted with the way the government is.

And they start joining all these different things and that is what is happening.

And when that came out, it wasn't like this is just a one little group. This is the first time we all heard. This is all over the country they have these things: Boise, Idaho, and Michigan....

I'm trying to think if I've heard about like this Oklahoma thing -- if anything religious has been said about it. I heard that it was a militant group and that, like you said, is the first time I knew they were all around. But I don't remember hearing anything about them being a religious....

Well, the preacher came on, though, and he talked about how religious they are.

(Chicago ticket-splitter)

These women want to like President Clinton, and many make every effort to give him the benefit of the doubt. They want to say that he's trying, and that he has the right intentions. The problem is that they see him as indecisive and as incapable of taking a stand on the issues they care about. When he does, he can't always get things done or follow through. The Perot voters among these women are much more negative.

Well, I don't think our president really gets it. I think he says he gets it and he really tries to act like he gets it, but I don't think he gets it at all. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

He vacillates so much. He will say one thing and then two weeks later or a month later it is something else. It's like the guy doesn't have any hard-core conviction is my feeling about him. I would like it better if I disagreed with him that he stood out for what he said. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

He doesn't follow through and I agree with Kathleen here. He is basically a good person. He means well. He's just not getting the job done. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

He has tried. Like I said, when he was elected I voted for him because of all the good things he said to get him elected. Now, it's like he's changing everything to make everybody happy. It's like why not keep to what you put forth.... *(Tacoma drop-off)*


I think the same way the rest of the ladies here. I think he wants to do so much but he doesn't follow through on anything. He just keeps talking and talking. Then it's like -- we get excited. Oh yeah, that sounds good and nothing is ever followed through on. *(Chicago drop-off)*

These voters have mixed reactions to Hillary Clinton. The defectors dislike that "she pushes Bill Clinton" and "tries to be president." They direct their resentment of class and "professional women" toward her. However, the drop-off voters generally expressed tremendous admiration for Hillary. "She's for children and women," "she's intelligent," "she's well-read," "she's a worker and gets her hands dirty."

She runs the government. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

I wish she were president. *(Chicago drop-off)*

She gets out there and she understands what's going on. *(Chicago drop-off)*

 She is from here. She is one of us. She is one of the down-to-earth people.
(Chicago drop-off)

Perhaps the main ally these women see is other women, although they will not admit that directly. They are excited when they hear women candidates are running, but often feel a class difference with "the women in suits" and "women professional politicians." They do, however, articulate a kind of populist feminism -- a sense that women are in the same boat, and that women can be relied on to care and to help.

PARTICIPATION

Many drop-off voters express their reluctance to vote on election day as deep cynicism. They feel that their own vote will not necessarily make a difference, so why bother. They also feel that they voted for a change in 1992 and did not get it, and tend to believe that politicians will not care about their constituents, no matter who is elected -- so, again, why bother? The defectors feel if they don't vote, "they can't complain." The drop-off voters believe that if they don't vote, "they can't be blamed."

The cynicism of these drop-off voters is different from the gentle apathy of voters in the 50s and 70s. This represents deep alienation. They believe "no matter who's in, it's the same," "same promises, different faces." They report "they weren't excited enough or disgusted enough" to vote and don't "want to vote a bad one in" or do the politicians "a favor." As one reported, she refused to "vote for them" to give them anything. These are also low information voters and "don't want to vote for someone they know nothing about." Their cynicism acts as a further filter on their low information. Their lives are balkanized and they bring few resources to the table.

Sometimes you feel it just doesn't matter. You've got something going in your life. You are not going to stop it and run out to vote because it is going to make a big change in the world.
(Chicago drop-off)

I think they think it doesn't matter who is in there. It's not going to make any difference because it never has. They are thinking it never has. I don't care if there is Democrat in there or a Republican in there. It's always the same, so they are like what does it matter. I hear people talk like that all the time. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

It's almost the same. I wouldn't vote -- you just get disgusted. It's the same old stuff. *(Chicago drop-off)*

That is true. They tell you the same things and they never follow through. *(Chicago drop-off)*

People figure it's not going to make any difference. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

I did not vote on purpose because I'm exactly like you. I think they are all the same and for me to go there and pull a lever, I might cancel out somebody who maybe they know something that I

don't know that could be positive. For me to just go in there and vote for somebody that I didn't feel good about, or that I don't know them well enough to vote.... *(Tacoma drop-off)*

Why go out there and bother? Nobody is doing anything. They say one thing and then they don't do anything. They are changing their mind and we just lose everything all the way around.
(Chicago drop-off)

These voters feel "helpless." They are "fed up," but can't figure out anything effective to do in a world where there "is no difference between Republicans and Democrats."

While suspicious of vote by mail and possible fraud, drop-off voters share more of a populist identity with other women, and are more responsive to a woman-to-woman appeal to vote.

I just think that at some level they are trying to reach out to women and let them know that we understand any problems you are having, or whatever -- just trying to reach out to women in general. That is a good thing. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

CHOOSING CANDIDATES

These voters talk about issues, but values and character more than issues drive their vote. They vote "for change" and "for who speaks to me in my heart." These voters respond positively to women candidates, but they are often reluctant to admit any preference based on gender. Thus, when asked how they would respond if a woman were running for Congress in their area, their first reaction is "good for her!" Then, they quickly pull back into skepticism and into claiming that they vote on the issues, rather than on gender.

I feel sorry for her right at first and then I think, well, I give -- well, good for her. At least she's got the guts to try. But I do -- first of all, I go oh, God, I feel sorry for her. I don't know. It just seems like women, if you don't get browbeaten, verbally abused or whatever it is, I don't care in any walk of life a woman tries, if you think back in history, how many really do you remember that were -- did something fantastic, I guess. *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

Yeah, I'd like to know her background, but I would be happy to see that a woman.... *(Chicago drop-off)*

Good for her [when I hear a woman is running for Congress]. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

Right, and then you have to read her position. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

You also have to see, too, if she is following the men or if she is going for the women. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

Although these women claim they vote on issues, what they really mean is "values." When pushed to explain which issues matter to them, they immediately return to a description of values.

When I vote, I really look at the person's decisions on issues that are important to me. For example, how they have voted in the past on issues concerning people and if people have been losing over the long term because they voted to take these away from them. I don't think that person is qualified to really care about us. Just lots of little things. *(Tacoma ticket-splitter)*

Who speaks to me -- in my heart. Who sits there and speaks to me thinking this person is going to make a change for the better and not for the worse. Someone that is going to do something. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

Similarly, when asked directly, they will often deny that women are any different than men. As conversation evolves, however, they will freely generalize about the issues that women are better on, and about how women are likely to be more compassionate and to understand their lives better.

If it was that equal, I would vote for the woman. Maybe hoping that she'd get more child care issues or education issues passed than more military spending or less graft with gun control, hopefully. Hopefully, because they haven't been in power or women haven't had that kind of responsibility. *(Chicago ticket-splitter)*

Women don't feel like they owe anybody anything. See, once you get into power, I don't owe you a thing. Where men have this little patronage type of thing. Well, you did me a favor so I'm going to do you a favor. A lot of women are like, tough, I'm here now. *(Chicago drop-off)*

We've got a hormonal thing that goes on in our bodies that allow us to be sympathetic. We have a tendency to listen more and come to a better conclusion whereas men, they just kind of think one way and that is the only way. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

The candidates that left the most positive impression on these women were candidates who seemed to understand their lives, and whose slightly rougher edges made them seem more ordinary. They want candidates in touch with women's lives, sharing their multiple roles, and who are not too "upper class." At the same time, they demand a certain degree of professionalism and strength. They leap on women who seem soft or weak, saying that she'd be "eaten alive."

I thought she was a people-person. In her first ad she was with, I think, every kind of background. She was with kids; she was with working people; she was with the police. I don't know. She came across -- I don't know -- warm. Like she would be for you. *(Chicago drop-off)*

I think she addressed the issues -- what mattered and I think that is what I liked about her. She addressed what matters and not the hubbub of all that other kind of stuff out there. She addressed what mattered and that is what I liked about her. *(Tacoma drop-off)*

She was herself. She didn't have to dress all fancy. She just -- I felt she was very educated. She can deal with the average person -- any person she could [talkover] *(Chicago drop-off)*

She seemed like a real person speaking, not the smooth, polished. *(Chicago drop-off)*

It just struck me, too, the way she was shown talking to kids in a classroom, talking to somebody on a job site. That said to me that she actually goes out and makes it a point to try to get different people's points of view, making an effort, rather than I'm here at the kingdom, come see me. (*Tacoma ticket-splitter*)

Or, as a Tacoma ticket-splitter said: "she spoke on a level that I think just about anybody could understand. Working class. Just the basics."