



# HEAR OUR VOICES

Eugene women and the choice to vote. Story by Kate Storm ☉ Photos by James Bateman

## THE SINGLE WOMEN GAP

The majority of single women who do not vote say that candidates are more interested in getting elected than in improving the government, according to a recent survey by Women's Voices, Women Vote (WVWV). "These women are very competent," said Chris Desser, co-director of the San Francisco based non-partisan WVWV. "They are not looking for a handout. They're looking for a level playing field."

country. These women have never been married or are divorced or widowed. Most earn less than \$30,000 a year. Many are single mothers who work when their children are young. Some 62 percent are, like Mitzel, between the ages of 18 and 24. In Oregon, 32 percent of single women are not registered to vote.

"These are not 'Sex and the City' voters," Desser said, exasperated with the mainstream media's "utter trivialization" of non-

Directions (WAND), said she had "no idea so many women were still disenfranchised." Cundiff wants to mobilize young single women "if we can figure out how to connect and involve them," she said. Most of WAND's members are between 40 and 80 years of age. "It's not easy for us to locate younger women," Cundiff said. The organization registers voters at Saturday Market and Paul's Bicycle Way of Life and is developing the "Powder Room Project" to post

women did not vote because they felt uninformed about the candidates and issues. "I definitely feel ignorant about politics," said 24-year-old Janna Stafford. "I don't spend much time researching or talking about politics, which does not make me feel empowered."

Some journalists are treating the news that single women don't vote as "the flavor of the month," Desser said. An overview of media coverage shows use of a "dating

## 22 MILLION SINGLE WOMEN DID NOT VOTE IN THE 2000 FEDERAL ELECTION. -WOMEN'S VOICES, WOMEN VOTE

Twenty-three-year-old Sarah Mitzel was pleased when her son, Leaf, asked, "Momma, what is peace?" Mitzel said the 3-year-old heard the word from adults with whom he interacts. "I don't listen to the news. I don't read the newspapers. I have no intention of voting," she said. "How we live is so much more complicated than politics. It is about how we relate to the world around us." Mitzel expressed confidence that her son will continue to learn peace as he grows.

Mitzel is one of 22 million single women who did not vote in the 2000 federal election, one of the largest non-voting blocs in the

voting women. Desser's group, WVWV, has studied the single-women voting bloc in key states such as Florida, Washington and Oregon. "These women see themselves as strong, independent and are proud of the fact that they're making it on their own," she said.

Media, political strategists and grassroots activists around the country are exploring how the presidential candidates can engage this group. Single women have been invisible for a long time, political organizations say. Susan Cundiff, program director of Eugene's Women's Action for New

voting information in public restrooms.

Lane County League of Women Voter's Director Janet Culvert said that the organization has "not set out to target young voters." Young people in general seem to consider voting "inconvenient, not pertinent and not important," she said. "The issues may seem complex to them, but they're important to their futures. We're concerned that everyone who can vote does." The Lane County LWV distributes "They Represent You," a voter's guide to local, state and national representatives.

The WVWV survey found that many

scheme" to portray the relationship between single women and politicians. According to *The San Francisco Chronicle* article, "Self-Determination and the Single Woman," (5/18), politicians will engage single women if they can "get them to commit." The June 15 *Village Voice* cover story on what it called "the candidates' pitiful pitch for single women," describes the lives of New York single mothers — the long subway rides and the high cost of healthcare many endure. Yet "Awkward Kerry" and "Hopeless Bush" are illustrated as two white hands in suit sleeves holding out red roses.