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The WVWV survey, while useful in many respects, defines women by their marital status. Women who do not intend to marry because of personal philosophy or sexual orientation are not recognized. "We're talking about more mainstream women," Dessler said. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the gay, lesbian and bisexual vote comprises at least five percent of the general electorate. When one WVWV survey says that women are "delaying marriage, or are divorcing and not remarrying," it ignores a group of single women.



to cast their ballot. If voting is understood as civic responsibility and has social support, single women might be more willing to vote.

In Eugene, the cultural context for voting could sometimes be described as anti-voting. "When I hear the word politics," Mitzel said, "I think of it as something I'm fighting against." Mitzel's choice not to vote stems from a belief that "the United States democracy is not sustainable," she said. "Just like I would not support a farm that is not organic, I do not choose to support a system that is not sustainable."

The choice to vote is a decision to partici-

'22 MILLION SINGLE WOMEN CAN ABSOLUTELY CHANGE THE FACE OF AMERICAN POLITICS.'

-HOLLY KNIGHT, MAINSTREET MOMS OPPOSE BUSH

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

Mobilizing the single women's vote is an idea that has taken Eugene by storm. Many feel that if more women voted, politicians would address more issues important to them.

"When you vote, the politicians listen to you," said Justin Barker, Eugene Canvas Director of the New Voters Project (NVP). A nationwide group, NVP registers non-voters and targets 18 to 24 year olds.

The issues that most concern single women are those that directly affect their lives and the lives of their children. According to WVWV, single women want the government to provide affordable health care, improve education, ensure job security and protect the environment. "If single women vote, some of the key issues like education and health care reform will be in the forefront during the next four years," said Andrew McGuire, director of the Sequoia Leadership Center, a get-out-the-vote campaign targeting single women.

WVWV found that 68 percent of married women versus 52 percent of single women voted in 2000. Married women tend to vote more conservatively while single women are more likely to be pro-peace and pro-choice. They support gay marriage more than their married counterparts.

Central to engaging single women in politics is placing voting in what Dessler calls its "cultural context." Making voting "as ordinary as going to the grocery store takes it out of the abstract," she said. NVP canvasser Sura Cox has registered several single mothers that "don't have time to be in political groups," she said. "They may feel isolated in their families and from one another."

One WVWV summary concluded that, "social integration is one of the most important determinants of political participation." Stafford is planning to vote in the federal election for the first time because "friends have told me about their personal experiences hearing Kucinich speak." The WVWV survey found that single women who had volunteered in the last year were more likely

pate in a political system. "Ideologically, the democratic process has very few flaws," said 25-year-old Lydia Bartholow. "In a capitalist society, however, the corporations and corporate rule ultimately make the decisions." According to Dessler, a lot of single women "don't believe their vote matters in the face of corporations."

Bartholow thinks that her ballot carries weight locally but does not vote in federal elections. "Voting doesn't do any harm," she said, "but it creates a façade of having a voice when you don't." A prison abolition activist with Break the Chains, Bartholow said, "We need to think about other ways we can make our voices heard."

Other grassroots activists argue that the single-women vote could move politics to the left. Holly Knight of the Eugene chapter of Mainstreet Moms Oppose Bush (MMOB), spends most of her time when she has childcare working to mobilize unregistered women. She believes that "22 million single women can absolutely change the face of American politics."

Sound familiar? The rift between non-voters such as Bartholow and the Eugene groups working to engage single women harks back to when women first gained the right to vote. The suffragettes argued that women are the more progressive sex. If women vote, they said, the government will have to protect human rights.

Anarchic feminists such as Emma Goldman scoffed at the notion. In her 1917 essay, "The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation," Goldman wrote: "There is no hope even that woman, with her right to vote, will ever purify politics." She argued that politics is immoral because it is a "reflex of the business and industrial world."

The government has changed since 1917. Laws are in place to support equal rights, higher quality labor conditions and women's health. Barker has registered several people through NVP that consider themselves anarchists. "I'm not so pro-government either," he said. "But I think voting is so essential because this is the system we have today."

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