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To: Interested Parties

From: Celinda Lake, Joshua Ulibarri and Karen Emmerson

Re: Talking Points on Unmarried Women and the 2010 Midterm Elections

Date: November 5, 2010

Summary

- 1- Unmarried women are a key bloc of the progressive base. Democratic losses could have been lessened had unmarried women been targeted with stronger turnout efforts so that their representation at the ballot box matched their overall makeup in the electorate.
- 2- Unmarried women continue to be one of the strongest progressive voting blocs. The marital gap is more than twice the size of the gender gap. Unmarried women favored Democrats by 25 points and were 10 points more likely than voters overall to approve of President Obama's job performance.
- 3- Unmarried women remain underrepresented at the ballot box this year. They comprise a fourth of all eligible voters (25.3%) but were only a fifth of voters this year (19%).
- 4- Unmarried women were slightly less enthusiastic to vote this year compared to voters overall (28% much more enthusiastic than other years compared to 34% for all voters). Had the enthusiasm gap been smaller it would likely have meant higher turnout and could have meant the difference in close elections across the country.
- 5- Kitchen table and family budget issues matter to unmarried women. Like other voters, the economy and jobs drove the decision making process for unmarried women.
- 6- Unmarried women were slightly more likely than other voters to decide their vote in this final month of campaigning. This means there were opportunities for Republicans to win their vote and close the gap and for Democrats to win their support and increase the gap. Given their less intense enthusiasm and tendency to decide later, progressive votes were left on the table.

The key data points are explained below:

- **Representation:** Unmarried women comprise 24.7% of all adults in this country and comprise 25.3% of all eligible voters.¹ In 2008, they represented 23.2%² of all voters in that election and this year that share dropped to 19%. Unmarried men represented 13% of all voters this midterm but comprise 20.4% of all eligible voters.³
- **The Marital Gap:** Overall, voters favored Republicans 51% to 46% for Democrats. The marital gap was between 32 and 36 points. The gender gap overall was 14 points. Unmarried women favored the Democratic candidate over the Republican candidate by 61% to 36%. In contrast, married women voted for the Republican candidate over the Democratic candidate by 54% to 43%. The 25-point advantage for Democrats among unmarried women and the 11-point advantage for Republicans among married women meant the marital gap was 36 points this year among women. The gender gap (without breaking marital status) is 14-points with women favoring Democrats by 1 point and men favoring Republicans by 13 points. There is still a gender gap among married voters with married women only going Republican by 11 points while married men voted heavily for Republicans (59% to 38%). Unmarried men voted Democratic (54% to 43% for Republicans) for a 32-point marital gap among men.
 - In the last midterm elections of 2006, unmarried women voted for Democrats (66% to 32%) while married women split their vote (50% Republican to 48% Democrat). Married men supported Republicans (51% for Republicans to 47% for Democrats) and unmarried men went for Democrats (62% for Democrats to 36% for Republicans).⁴ In 2006, the overall gender gap stood at 17 points with women favoring Democrats by 13 points (56% for Democrats to 43% for Republicans) and men tilting to Republicans by 4 points (51% for Republicans to 47% for Democrats).
 - In 2008, unmarried women voted for President Obama with 70% compared to just 29% for Senator McCain. Married women voted for McCain (51% to 49%). Women overall went for Obama by 13 points (56% for Obama to 43% for McCain). In 2004, unmarried women supported Senator Kerry over President Bush by 62% to 37%. Women overall went for Kerry (51% to 48%) while men went for Bush (55% to 44%).
- **Attitudes Toward President Obama:** Unmarried women continue to be one of the strongest supporters of President Obama. Among all midterm voters, the Presidents job approval stands at 40% excellent or good and 59% just fair or poor. Comparatively, just half of unmarried women believe the President is doing either a just fair (21%) or poor (26%) job. While 50% believe he is doing an excellent (19%) or good (31%) job. Married women hold a different view: 40% excellent/good and 59% just fair/poor. Among men,

¹ Current Population Survey 2010

² Current Population Survey, November 2008 Supplement

³ Lake Research Partners Election Eve/Election Night survey of 2,400 2010 voters with an oversample of unmarried women. The survey reached 2,000 respondents on a landline phone and 400 voters on a cellular phone. The survey was conducted October 31-November 2, 2010.

⁴ National Election Pool Exit Poll, 2008

only 30% of married men believe Obama is doing an excellent or good job while 46% of unmarried men feel that way.

- **Enthusiasm:** Unmarried women, like other progressive voting blocs, were less enthusiastic about voting this year compared to other marital and gender groups. Just over a quarter of unmarried voters (28%) said they were much more enthusiastic about voting this year. However, among all voters, 34% were much more enthusiastic to vote this year. Similarly, 34% of married women voters said they were much more enthusiastic about voting this year. This enthusiasm gap contributes to the underrepresentation among unmarried women at the ballot box.
- **Most Important Issue:** Unmarried women continue to respond to kitchen table economic messages that show candidates understand their lives. Concerns around the economy and jobs drove the vote for unmarried women. In total, 42% of unmarried women said that the economy (29%) or jobs (13%) was the most important issue as they decided their vote for Congress. Giving greater emphasis to the importance of economic security, another 9% of unmarried women said Social Security and retirement security was the most important issue. Ten percent chose health care. The dominance of economic issues (29% of all voters said the economy was most important and 12% said jobs) meant there was little difference in the data among other marital groups.
- **Later Deciders:** Unmarried women tend to decide their voting preferences slightly later than other voters even as they heavily favor Democrats. Fifty percent of unmarried women said they decided how they would vote within the last month: 25% in the past month, 14% in the last week, and 11% in the last few days before the election. Married women were slightly less likely to decide this late: 25% in the past month, 8% in the last week, and 10% in the last few days before the election. More than half (55%) of all midterm voters decided at least a month ago compared to 48% of unmarried women.