10 Good Reasons Why Women Should Vote in 2004

It's About Your Health and Your Life

Did you vote in the last election? You didn't? What will convince you to vote in the 2004 election?

Facts: Eighty years ago on August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment guaranteed women the right to vote. It was a 74-year lengthy and difficult struggle. Women suffragists undertook direct action through civil disobedience, lobbying, hunger strikes, petition gathering, lectures, writings and massive parades; often they were heckled, jailed and physically abused by angry mobs. Yet, despite their tremendous contributions, the struggle for women’s meaningful civic participation through voting continues today:

♀ In 2000, 37 million women who were eligible to vote did not vote.
♀ 16 million unmarried, unregistered women did not vote.
♀ 21 million unmarried women who were eligible did not vote.
♀ Only 600 votes decided the election four years ago.

Use your vote! Make a difference!
Your vote can make a big difference to you, to your family and to your community. Your vote is your voice, and now in the November general election, this is your chance to be heard!

1. Do you have health insurance for you and your family?

Facts:
♀ Almost 45 million people -- about one in every six people -- have no health insurance. Eighty percent of these are in working families.
♀ Just under half of all 27.5% of American Indian/Alaska Natives do not have job-based health coverage and Indian Health Services (IHS) is only available on reservations.
♀ 37% of Latinas and 20% of African American women in the United States are uninsured, compared to 16% of white women.
Health care bills are one of the major reasons that families’ credit records get ruined and cause families to go bankrupt.

People of color, especially Latinas/os, are most likely to be uninsured. About one-third (32.7%) of Latinas/os, 19.6% of African Americans, and 18.8% of Asian Americans in the United States have no health insurance, compared to 11.1% of white Americans.

About 18,000 people in this country die every year of treatable diseases because they don’t have health coverage.

Women with no health insurance either delay or don’t get Pap tests or mammograms and don’t get medications that they need. Women of color experience higher incidences of chronic conditions, such as hypertension (high blood pressure) and diabetes, as compared to white women, but don’t get the health care they need.

2. Does Medicaid provide your health insurance?

Facts:
- Medicaid is an important source of health coverage for low-income families, children, pregnant women, and people with disabilities and chronic illnesses.
- Medicaid covers 17% of all African American women and 12% of Latinas.
- Without Medicaid, millions more individuals and families would be uninsured.
- Medicaid also covers important services for women and their families, including Pap tests, mammograms, prenatal and postpartum care, family planning, services to screen for and treat sexually transmitted infections, treatment for diabetes and high blood pressure, and other services to keep women healthy.
- Medicaid also provides important services to children, like immunizations, and mental health and drug treatment for teens.

But, Medicaid is under attack. States are cutting back on Medicaid and other important public services, like education.

Some in the federal government have tried to “cap” the amount of federal funds for the Medicaid program and to prevent people from enforcing their rights to Medicaid benefits.

3. Do you go to a community clinic or a county hospital for health care? Can you afford your prescription drugs?

Facts:
- Millions of people across the country depend on public and community clinics and public hospitals to get their health care. However, with rising health care costs and the cutbacks on Medicaid, it is getting harder for these health care providers to keep their doors open and to meet the communities’ needs.
- One of the reasons health care is getting more and more expensive, is that prescription drug costs keep increasing. Skyrocketing drug prices harm all of us. Nevertheless, there are too few ways that the public can negotiate to keep drug prices down. For example, in Medicare, which provides health care for seniors over age 65 and people with disabilities, the federal law prevents the government from negotiating better prices from drug companies for Medicare enrollees.
4. Does your health plan cover birth control or contraceptive devices?

Facts:
♀ For women who have health insurance, their birth control may not be covered. This means that women have to pay more out-of-pocket for their health care than men do.
♀ The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has recognized the failure of private health insurance to cover contraception, when it covers other prescription drugs, as discrimination against women.
♀ Some states, like California and New York, have passed laws that require equal coverage of contraceptives by most health insurance plans that are provided through employment. But many, many women still cannot get their contraceptive needs met through their health insurance plans.

5. If you are raped, your birth control method fails, or you have unprotected sex, will you be able to get emergency contraception?

Facts:
♀ Emergency contraception (EC) prevents a pregnancy if it is taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. While this can help millions of women avoid an unwanted pregnancy, many women and teens do not have access to EC.
♀ Opponents of birth control keep trying to argue that EC is the same as abortion. According to the most prominent medical professionals and sound scientific research, it is not.
♀ Some pharmacists and hospital emergency rooms refuse to provide EC because they are against birth control or abortion.
♀ The Food and Drug Administration recently refused to approve emergency contraception over-the-counter, so that you wouldn't have to ask a pharmacist when you need it.
♀ The federal agency went against its own staff’s, two scientific advisory panels’, and doctors’ opinions that claimed that EC is safe and effective and should be available to women and teens on the drug store shelf. Some states are passing laws requiring hospital emergency rooms to offer EC to sexual assault survivors.

6. If you get pregnant and want an abortion, will you be able to afford one or find a provider to perform an abortion?

Facts:
♀ Millions of women become pregnant unintentionally. For many, having an abortion, for personal or medical reasons, is the best option for them.
♀ It is becoming harder and harder for women to get a safe, early abortion. Since the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1977, Medicaid, Indian Health Services, and other federal public programs have limited the payment for abortions except in extreme circumstances. This means that no federal funds can be used to pay for abortions, except in the case of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother.
Only seventeen states use their own dollars to pay for all abortions for low-income women in their Medicaid programs.

Doctors who are providing this procedure are fewer and fewer. Approximately 90% of all counties in the U.S. do not have abortion providers. Some states may have only one provider.

Doctors are not getting the training they need, even when they want it. Those who provide abortion services are being intimidated by harassment, punitive laws, violence, and even murder.

This past year, the federal government passed an abortion ban law, which would put doctors in jail for performing common procedures used in early abortions. The law is not being enforced because of lawsuits.

7. Do you have family and friends in other countries that need family planning and other important health care services?

Fact:
$34 million dollars earmarked for the United Nations Population Fund to be used for family planning, making pregnancy and childbirth safer for women and to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in developing countries, continue to be in danger of not reaching the people who need it most.

8. Do your children receive accurate information on sex, sexuality and family life in their schools or community programs?

Facts:
- The federal government spends approximately $350 million on abstinence-only education.
- While youth should be encouraged to postpone sexual activity, abstinence-only education does not give youth the full information they need to protect themselves or to make the best choice for themselves.
- Research has shown that youth participating in abstinence-only education are no more likely to postpone sex until marriage and they are less likely to use birth control or condoms when they do become sexually active, as compared to youth who participated in programs that include more comprehensive information.
- In addition, federally-funded abstinence-only programs must teach that sex should be postponed until they get married. This message denies the reality of millions of loving families in the United States that include single and cohabitating parents, same-sex couples, and other families with adults who are not married.
9. Are you able to get family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, and other reproductive health services at your local hospital?

Facts:
♀ More and more of your local hospitals are being owned and operated by religious groups that limit access to health care that they don't believe in. The services that are most affected are reproductive health care and end-of-life care. These services include family planning (including sterilization and emergency contraception), HIV prevention and counseling, abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, and reproductive technologies (including preserving of eggs for cancer patients who want to preserve their ability to become parents after radiation or chemotherapy).

♀ Women in HMOs are especially restricted. For example, thousands of women in New York City are enrolled in a religious HMO that does not provide family planning. The HMO does not tell them how to access these services outside of their HMO.

♀ Elderly and terminally ill patients may not always have their wishes respected to not receive artificial nutrition and hydration at the end of their lives.

10. If you are employed, do your earnings cover your living costs?

Facts:
♀ In 2003, 35.9 million people were in poverty, an increase of 1.3 million from 2002.

♀ The African American poverty rate for 2003 was 24.4%, compared to 22.5% for Latinas/os, 11.8% for Asian Americans, and 8.2% for white Americans.

♀ The three-year average poverty rate for American Indians/Alaska Natives between 2001 and 2003 was 23.2%.

♀ Latinas/os are the most employed group, often having more than one job, but are over-represented in lower-skilled jobs. This means they are over-represented among the nation’s poor.

♀ There are not enough child-care programs for low-income families; without child-care many women cannot work.

♀ Almost half of all Latina/o families below the poverty level are headed by single women.
The bottom line is...

♀ The elected officials at all levels of government make decisions that impact your life. The election is literally in your hands.

♀ As a voter, politicians and policymakers will listen to you on these important issues.

♀ Women who cannot vote due to non-citizenship or age are counting on you. You do have the right and responsibility to vote.

♀ When women vote, we are not just voting for ourselves. We are voting for our families and our communities.

Use your vote!
Make a difference!
Su Voto Es Su Voz

SisterSong
A National Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective

Contacts:
Luz Alvarez Martinez, laluz@latinahealth.org or Rosalinda Montez Palacios, rmpalacios@latinahealth.org
· 510-534-1362 · Fax: 510-534-1364

Vote 2004.
Get Involved!

If this moves you to vote or to register to vote, please let us know by joining the SisterSong Voter Action Group at Sistersongvoteraction@yahoogroups.com. Unless you are already a Yahoo group member, please:

1. Go To www.yahoo.com
2. Click on Groups
3. Set up a Yahoo account
4. If you prefer, you may send Namorya (n.nelson@publiceye.org) an e-mail requesting to be added to the distribution list.

Register to Vote: Click here for information on how to register to vote on-line:
http://www.getouthervote.org/register.asp
https://ssl.capwiz.com/fmf1/e4/nvra/?action=form&state=

Monitor Voting Rights: On Election Day, you can report any election problems or find out about your voting rights by calling the Lawyers’ Committee Election Protection Project at 1-866-OUR-VOTE. For more information, click here: