

# Singles Rights Advocate

*Newsletter of the Singles Rights Lobby for Unmarried Adults, Couples, Parents, and Families*

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## First in a Series on Political Parties

### "Marital Status Gap" Helps Democrats But Not Unmarried Voters

Exit polls and other sources confirm the existence of a major "marital status gap" in voting patterns over the last several national elections. As a group, married voters consistently favor Republican candidates while unmarried voters generally support Democrats.

But the back scratching is not always mutual. Although the Republican Party tends to support policies favoring married couples, the Democratic Party largely ignores unmarried voters as a specific constituency.

#### Unmarried Voters Tend to Support Democrats

MSNBC reported the results of a national exit poll conducted during the 1998 national elections. Some 67% of voters who were surveyed said they were currently married. A slight majority of them (51%) voted for a Republican congressional candidate, while 46% voted for a Democrat. Of the 33% who were unmarried, a large majority (62%) voted for a Democrat, while only 35% voted for a Republican.

The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research said there has been a decrease in the so-called "gender gap" in Congressional elections, with a decline from 16 points in 1994 to 12 points in 1998. In contrast, however, the organization emphasized that "the marriage gap widened."

The group's analysis of exit poll data found that "[u]nmarried voters in 1998 preferred

Democrats to Republicans by a ratio of 60 to 38, while married voters preferred Democrats by 53 to 45."

Americans for Tax Reform also noted a shrinking "gender gap" and a widening "marriage gap," stating that "[w]hile there isn't a Republican gender gap, there is a marriage gap. Married voters vote 55-44 Republican over Democrat and unmarried voters vote 61-36 Democrat over Republican."

Other studies confirm that marital status plays an important role in voting patterns. A Los Angeles Times review of exit polls conducted during the 1996 presidential election showed that unmarried voters supported the Democratic candidate in a big way. Some 56% of unmarried voters went for Clinton, compared with 33% for Dole and 9% for Perot. A small plurality of married voters supported the Republican candidate, with 47% voting for Dole, compared with 44% for Clinton and 8% for Perot.

When the New York Times analyzed Congressional races over a 16 year period, the result was the same. Unmarried voters generally supported Democratic candidates by a wide margin.

For example, in 1998 there was a gap of 10 points in the voting patterns of unmarried men, with 55% casting ballots for Democratic candidates. Unmarried women had an even larger split, with 64% voting for Democrats and 36% for Republicans. *(continued on page 2)*

The significance of the marital status gap in 1998 is apparent when one contrasts it with general voting patterns. That year, 51% of all voters (regardless of marital status) voted for Republicans with 49% casting ballots for Democrats in House races.

While the disparity has varied in House races from election to election over the past 16 years, the New York Times study showed rather consistently that unmarried voters tend to support Democrat candidates by a significant margin. In some elections the gap was dramatic. In 1982, for example, unmarried men favored Democrats by a 22 point spread as did unmarried women with a disparity of 30 points.

A *Global Watch Bulletin* published after the 1998 general elections by Truth in Media concluded that “[a] trend toward greater polarization of America is also evidence when it comes to voter’s marital status.” Based on voting patterns in House races over the past 18 years, the group observed that “[m]arried Americans have always preferred the GOP, but never more so than in 1998. Conversely, unmarried Americans swung further to the left.”

Family Research Council, a conservative group based in Washington, D.C. published a report in 1996 in which it claimed that “the most significant fault line in American politics may be between marrieds and unmarrieds rather than between men and women.”

A national survey conducted by the Christian Science Monitor in 1998 found that among women, “there is an enormous gap by marital status; married women narrowly favor Democratic policies (33%-31%), while unmarried women express confidence in the Democrats by an expansive 50%-22% margin.”

### **Unmarried Adults are 80 Million Strong**

Census figures show that more than 80 million unmarried adults live in the United States. Some 10 million reside in California.

In all but 10 states, more than 40% of the adult population is not married. In some states, such as Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, and

Louisiana, the *majority* of adult women are not married.

In most major cities, the *majority* of the entire adult population is unmarried.

The group of “unmarrieds” includes people who have never married, as well as those who are divorced or widowed. The family and household arrangements of this population are quite diverse.

About 25% of the nation’s households consist of single people living alone. Another 10% involve single parent families.

More than six million adults live with a roommate or domestic partner and many of them are raising children. Millions of other single adults live with a parent or with other relatives.

### **Marital Status Discrimination is Widespread**

Some 21 states violate the privacy rights of unmarried adults with laws regulating their bedroom behavior. Ten states make it a crime for a man and woman to live together out of wedlock. Nine states criminalize consensual sexual intercourse in private. Oral sex between consenting adults is a crime in 17 states.

Although government studies have documented widespread discrimination against single people and unmarried couples in housing, employment, business practices, child custody and visitation, and government policies, federal law does not outlaw marital status discrimination.

All states have civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race and religion. A large majority also prohibit sex discrimination. But among the 50 states, marital status discrimination is forbidden by only 19 states for employment and by 22 states for housing. Because of this gap in the law, most businesses are allowed to make decisions based on group stereotypes rather than individual merit.

Many judges show disrespect for unmarried couples. Some refer to these relationships as “meretricious,” an old legal term that pertains to prostitution. Other call them “illicit relations.” A few refer to a female domestic partner as a “concubine.”

*(continued on page 7)*

(For use by unmarried voters / Send to the candidates in your area)

## Congressional Candidate Survey on Family Diversity, Domestic Partnership, and Marital Status Discrimination

Name of Candidate \_\_\_\_\_ Party Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_ Congressional District \_\_\_\_\_

### Question about Family Diversity:

1. In a national survey done by Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co., 1,200 adults were asked to select a **definition of family**. A minority (22%) selected a restrictive definition: "a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption." The majority (74%) selected an inclusive definition: "a group of people who love and care for each other."

Which of these definitions would you select? Please note, this question is limited to the definition of "family" and has nothing to do with changing the definition of "marriage."

\_\_\_ A "family" is a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption, and I would limit benefits and protections in federal law to persons so related.

\_\_\_ A "family" is a group of people who love and care for each other, and I would use an inclusive definition of family in federal legislation so that benefits and protections would apply to household members who function as a family unit even if they are not related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

\_\_\_ Both of the above.

### Questions on Marital Status Discrimination:

2. There are more than 80 million unmarried adults in the United States, which means that single people are one of the largest groups in the nation. Currently, more than 40% of all adults in the United States are not married. Despite their large numbers, widespread marital status discrimination has been documented by state and local government study commissions. Please answer the following questions about your position on marital status discrimination. (Select only one answer for each category.)

#### 2(a). General Philosophy

\_\_\_ I believe that married people deserve more rights than single people.

\_\_\_ I believe in equal rights for all people, regardless of their marital status.

## 2(b). Housing Discrimination

Civil rights statutes in 23 states prohibit marital status discrimination in housing. The federal civil rights act, however, does not include the term "marital status" in the list of prohibited forms of discrimination.

I believe that the federal fair housing law should be amended so that "marital status" discrimination by a for-profit landlord is illegal under federal law.

I believe that "marital status" should not be added to the federal fair housing law.

## 2(c). Religious Liberties Protection Act

A few years ago, Congress passed a Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The United States Supreme Court declared that statute unconstitutional as a violation of the doctrine of separation of powers because the court concluded that Congress was trying to regulate constitutional protections which only the court can do. A new bill has been introduced, called the Religious Liberties Protection Act. Many civil liberties groups are now opposing the new bill unless it is amended so that it does not override state and local nondiscrimination laws which forbid discrimination on the basis of marital status, sexual orientation, and other areas from which "religious" for-profit business owners might seek to be exempted.

I believe that for-profit business owners should not be allowed to discriminate against tenants, employees, or consumers in the name of religion. I therefore believe that the Religious Liberties Protection Act should be amended so that it does not create an exemption from civil rights laws that regulate businesses.

I support the Religious Liberties Protection Act without any amendments.

## Questions about Domestic Partnership:

3. Some state governments, dozens of municipalities, and hundreds of private employers now provide **health, dental, and leave benefits to the domestic partners** of their employees. The term "domestic partnership" has customarily been defined as: (1) two unmarried adults; (2) living together as a family unit; (3) sharing the common necessities of life; and (4) assuming responsibility for the general welfare of each other. Some government and private employers restrict domestic partnership benefits to same-sex couples. Most allow all unmarried couples, regardless of gender, to apply for domestic partnership benefits. Groups such as the National Organization for Women, Congress of California Seniors, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and American Federation of Government Employees, support gender-neutral domestic partner benefits plans.

I support the extension of employment benefits to domestic partners of federal employees, but I believe that such benefits should be *limited* to same-sex couples, as a bill introduced by Senator Paul Wellstone would do if passed.

I support domestic partner benefits for federal workers, but I oppose the "same-sex only" limitation. I believe that all domestic partners should be eligible for benefits, *regardless of their gender*, as a bill introduced by Congressman Barney Frank would do if passed.

I oppose all domestic partner benefits programs.

4. Federal law discriminates against domestic partners in various ways. The following is a list of some legislative changes which could remedy this so that marital status discrimination against domestic partners would be eliminated. (Select one answer for each.)

**A. Unmarried Penalty in Taxation of Workplace Benefits as Income.**

If a worker receives health, dental, and other benefits for a spouse or child, federal law does not treat the benefits compensation as income and therefore no tax is withheld from the worker's paycheck for these benefits. However, in most cases the same benefits given to a domestic partner are treated as taxable income with tax withheld from the paycheck.

I would support legislation to make domestic partner benefits non-taxable, just as benefits for other family dependents are not taxable as income.

I agree with the current system which taxes domestic partner benefits.

**B. Unmarried Penalty in Joint Income Tax Returns.**

A married couple has the option of filing a joint income tax return if the couple so chooses. This can result in a decrease in income taxes if one spouse is a high wage earner while the other spouse has no wage income at all or has a lower wage income. Domestic partners do not currently have the option of filing a joint tax return, as each must file a separate return, therefore depriving the couple of an opportunity to reduce their tax burden by equally sharing the income as a married couple can.

I would support legislation to allow unmarried couples to file a joint federal income tax return if they were registered as domestic partners under state or local law.

I agree with the current system which treats each member of a domestic partnership as an individual and therefore does not allow them to file a joint return.

**C. Unmarried Penalty in Estate tax.**

Federal law generally does not impose an estate tax when one spouse dies and leaves his or her estate to the surviving spouse. However, if a domestic partner dies and leaves assets over \$650,000 to the surviving partner, a substantial federal estate tax is imposed and taken from the assets prior to their transfer.

I would support legislation to exempt from federal estate tax the transfer of assets to a domestic partner if the decedent and his or her partner were registered as domestic partners under a state or local domestic partnership law.

I agree with the current system which treats each member of a domestic partnership as strangers rather than family members and therefore imposes federal estate taxes when assets are transferred after a domestic partner dies.

I would abolish federal estate tax entirely so that married and unmarried people are treated alike with respect to the transfer of assets upon their death.

## **5. Local option on domestic partner benefits and protections.**

### **A. District of Columbia**

In 1993, the city council of the District of Columbia voted to establish a local registry for domestic partners. The council also voted to extend health and other employment benefits to the domestic partners of local government employees. Each year since then, Congress has used its supervisory powers over the district and has voted to prohibit the district from implementing these programs.

I support local option on domestic partnership benefits and protections and believe that Congress should not intervene to prohibit such local programs.

I disapprove of domestic partner programs and I believe that it is proper for Congress to prohibit the District of Columbia from implementing such a program.

### **B. San Francisco**

In 1997, the City of San Francisco amended its city contractor nondiscrimination law so that city would not do business with a company if the company discriminates against domestic partners, for example, if the company were to give benefits to employees with spouses but not to employees with domestic partners. That law has been upheld by a federal court, except for airline companies which the court exempted due to federal preemption principles. Congressman Riggs, however, introduced a bill to cut off federal housing money to San Francisco or any other city that would pass such local protections for domestic partners.

I believe that in a federalism such as ours, a city should have the right to impose restrictions prohibiting the use of local taxpayer money being given to businesses which the city believes is unfairly discriminating against local citizens. I therefore believe that it is inappropriate for Congress to use the power of the "purse string" to penalize cities which may pass a city contractor nondiscrimination law prohibiting discrimination against domestic partners.

I would support a measure, such as the Riggs bill, to cut off various forms of federal funding to any state or municipal government which passes a civil rights law to prohibit businesses from discriminating against local domestic partners.

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### **EXPLANATIONS:**

Please use another sheet of paper and return it to us along with this questionnaire if you would like to explain any of the answers to your questions.

Singles Rights Lobby does not endorse or oppose candidates. The results of this survey will be made available to the public so that voters are aware of the positions of candidates on these issues.

### **RETURN COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

Singles Rights Lobby  
P.O. Box 65756, Los Angeles, CA 90065  
(323) 257-2277 / fax (323) 258-8099  
[unmarried@earthlink.net](mailto:unmarried@earthlink.net)  
[www.singlesrights.org](http://www.singlesrights.org)

Lawmakers and judges often stigmatize children born to unmarried parents. Statutes in 13 states refer to such children as “bastards” and several other states label them as “illegitimate children.” In 37 states, it is the judges who call the children “illegitimate.”

### **Democratic Party Ignores Unmarried Voters**

Politics generally involve a system in which partisan loyalty is rewarded. “Vote for me and I will help you” is the norm.

Gays and lesbians as a voting block are a classic example of how this system works. Gay voters tend to support Democrats by a wide margin and, in return, the Democratic Party pays close attention to the concerns of this constituency.

About 4% of voters surveyed in exit polls during the 1998 general elections reported they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. While self-identified heterosexual voters were nearly evenly split (50%-49%) between Democratic and Republican candidates, gay and lesbian voters heavily favored Democrats by a margin of 64% to 35%.

Although the gay and lesbian voting block is rather small, the Democratic Party has used a variety of methods to repay this group for its loyalty.

Sexual orientation discrimination is mentioned in the national party platform and in the by-laws of the Democratic National Committee. The DNC has a specific staff member assigned to “Gay and Lesbian Outreach.” The DNC also gives domestic partner benefits to employees with same-sex partners. This year, the party is requiring that 10% of the delegates to its national convention must be reserved for openly gay or lesbian Democrats.

The way the Democratic Party treats unmarried voters – some 33% of all voters nationally – is very different. While a word search of the DNC website showed 9 hits for “sexual orientation,” the term “marital status” is not used even once on its website. Nowhere are unmarried voters mentioned as a group. No percentage of

convention delegates are being reserved for unmarried Democrats.

The Democratic Party platform does not call for an end to marital status discrimination. This omission is consistent with the employee benefits policies of the DNC which itself engages in marital status discrimination. Unmarried heterosexual employees of the DNC are required to marry in order to obtain health benefits for their partners. The party does not allow unmarried heterosexuals to participate in its domestic partner benefits program.

### **Conclusion**

The Democratic Party can continue to ignore unmarried voters as a class. The DNC can continue to exclude unmarried heterosexual employees from its domestic partner benefits program. The party platform can remain silent on the issue of marital status discrimination. But a policy of silence on the rights of unmarried Americans may backfire.

Voters often become angry when they feel betrayed by politicians they have supported. This may trigger a search for alternatives. The election of Jesse Ventura as the Governor of Minnesota is the most recent example of this dynamic in action.

Voters also can become apathetic when they feel the political system is unresponsive to their needs. Apathy may cause people to stay at home rather than go to the voting booth on election day.

As the nation gears up for the 2000 elections, it would be logical for Democrats to pay attention to *all* of their loyal constituencies. But there are no visible signs of outreach to unmarried Democrats, or a hint that unmarried voters will be mentioned on the DNC website, or that marital status discrimination will ever be included in the party’s platform.

Karma may catch up with the Democratic Party. What goes around comes around. If it continues to ignore unmarried voters and their issues, it should not be a surprise if unmarried voters begin to ignore the Democratic Party. ◇◇◇

# Support Singles Rights Lobby

Singles Rights Lobby is the legislative advocacy affiliate of the American Association for Single People. We are the only national organization representing the political interests of some 80 million adults in the United States who are unmarried.

We invite you to support Singles Rights Lobby and to become a member of the American Association for Single People. AASP and Singles Rights Lobby work together as a team.

AASP is a tax-exempt nonprofit which works through educational means to promote the well being and civil rights of unmarried adults and domestic partners. Donations to AASP are tax deductible.

You can become a member of AASP by making a donation of \$10 or more to AASP. Call AASP at (800) 993-AASP for a brochure and application, or you can obtain an application form on its website at [www.singlepeople.org](http://www.singlepeople.org).

Singles Rights Lobby works in the political arena, promoting and opposing legislation as well as prodding politicians and political parties to pay attention to the needs of unmarried Americans.

Although Singles Rights Lobby is a nonprofit corporation, donations to it are not tax deductible because of the political nature of our work. All participants in the organization are volunteers. We have no paid staff. Please make a donation to help defray our telephone, travel, postage, copying, and other expenses.

Please complete this form and return it with your check made payable to Singles Rights Lobby.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

My donation as indicated is enclosed:

\$10  \$25  \$50  \$100  \_\_\_\_\_

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[www.singlesrights.org](http://www.singlesrights.org)

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