

Posted on Fri, Oct. 24, 2008

Don't forget about Joan the survivor

By BETH REINHARD

Remember those crucial voting blocs, the soccer moms of 2000 and the security moms of 2004?

Meet the survivor moms of 2008.

Many are working at a job -- or two -- and making do with 80 cents for every dollar paid to a male colleague. They frequently put off going to the doctor because there's no insurance, and frankly, who has the time?

Forget **John McCain's** working-man icon, Joe the Plumber. How about Joan, who's plumb worn out?

No wonder that the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that of the voters who haven't made up their minds, 60 percent are women.

"Women get serious right before Election Day because before that they are worried about just getting through the day and taking care of their families," said **Ruth Mandel**, a senior scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "The outcome of this election is in the hands of women."

Enter vice presidential contender **Sarah Palin**, dispatched by Republican nominee **John McCain** to shore up support in the do-or-die state of Florida. In a sign that she's after women voters, Palin will be joined Sunday by **Elisabeth Hasselbeck** from ABC's female-friendly forum, *The View*.

Talk about survivor moms. Palin birthed five children, runs Alaska, and knows how to use a gun. With the help of some seriously ripped abs, Hasselbeck finished fourth in the 2001 season of *Survivor: The Australian Outback*.

Certainly, there will be talk about breaking barriers and female empowerment at their events in Tampa and Orlando. But McCain showed a troubling lack of compassion for women in the last presidential debate, responding to Barack Obama's statement that he would ban late-term abortions as long as there were exceptions for the mother's life and health.

"Just again -- an example of the eloquence of Sen. Obama," McCain said. "Health of the mother, you know that's been stretched by the pro-abortion movement in America to mean almost anything. That's the extreme pro-abortion position. Quote, health."

Reasonable people can disagree on abortion. But to suggest -- with air quotes -- that women feign serious illness so they can end a pregnancy without a fuss, well that's got to hurt McCain with politically moderate women.

Equally ridiculous was his assertion that a health exception is "extreme." If that's true, then most of the electorate is on the fringe.

Back in 2000, McCain fought for exceptions for rape, incest and the mother's health in the GOP platform. But the McCain of 2008 told the St. Petersburg Times: "The most radical people say health. What does that mean, a headache?"

That kind of talk won't help you close the gender gap, mister.

In contrast, Palin showed the ticket's softer side when Univisión's **Jorge Ramos** asked her whether parents should talk to their children about birth control.

"Yes, use me as the example of why you should even more admittedly," said Palin, who revealed her daughter was five months pregnant shortly after she joined the ticket. "My daughter, of course, she is 18 years old, but has really been forced to grow up very quickly now and starting her own family and you know, life has changed so quickly for her. And she is a good and responsible and very kind-hearted young, strong woman and she is going to be just fine. But if we can use this, and if my daughter Bristol can use her story as a kind of teaching tool for others, then so be it. Let us do that."

Now that's the kind of candor a survivor mom can appreciate.

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