

Women Are the Deciders, But for Which Candidate? An Interview With Pollster Celinda Lake

Martha Burk | October 15, 2012

In 2006 George W. Bush famously declared "I am the Decider" when talking about the fate of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. It's becoming increasingly clear that we have a new decider majority - women -- when it comes to the fate of the presidential candidates. Until the first disastrous presidential debate, Mitt Romney [trailed President Obama](#) by 20 points with women. But the margin has narrowed to as little as three points, and the female vote is once more up for grabs.

On top of that, women's groups and loyal supporters are disappointed (some might even say mad) at the president, not only for his dismal debate showing, but for the fact that he [didn't mention women](#) or their concerns in the debate.

Touting motherhood by the candidate's wives as we saw during both party conventions isn't going to cut it. Female voters want solid answers to real concerns, and Tuesday night will be the last best chance for both candidates to appeal to them. And what do these majority voters want? I talked with prominent pollster [Celinda Lake](#) about that recently on my radio show [Equal Time With Martha Burk](#):

MB: For years we've been hearing "women are Democrats, men are Republicans," but studies show both parties are losing members to the Independent column. Just what does the electorate look like now?

CL: In general, men are voting about seven points more Republican, and women are voting about five points more Democratic. Women tend to be more undecided, and it will be the Independent woman voter who decides this election.

MB: Why is this prototypical female voter not sure?

CL: She has serious questions about the economy and wants to know what President Obama's plans are for the future that will actually help her family. By the same token she has major reservations about Mitt Romney -- who he is, his character, and whose side he's on. She's a little bit discouraged by everyone.

MB: This is a shift from '08 when Obama carried the women's vote decisively, particularly the single women's vote.

CL: Barack Obama soundly carried the women's vote by double digits. But then we had 2010, when women voted Republican for the first time in 37 years. So women are the "show me" vote.

MB: Four years ago women were more worried about the economy than men. Has that evened out, or are women still less secure?

CL: Women are still less secure. Women are more likely to work for [the public sector] and non-profits, and their jobs are not coming back. [Pay and benefits] are recovering slower than actual jobs. Women are also extremely concerned about age discrimination. Women over 50, particularly blue-collar women, are concerned that they and their spouses will never get the kind of jobs back that they lost.

MB: Is that translating to support for one candidate or the other, or is just translating to uncertainty?

CL: It's really uncertainty. Women aren't sure either one of these candidates gets it. It would be very dangerous for these women if Romney got defined as "Mr. Fixit" for the economy. On the other hand, the Democrats have done a good job of defining Romney to women as someone who is out of touch with their lives, is more likely to fix the economy for CEOs than working families. Women voters are very torn, and I think they'll be volatile until the end of the election.

MB: Romney says he will repeal the Affordable Care Act on his first day in office. Where are women on that?

CL: Eighty percent of health care voters are women, and 80 percent of health care decision makers are women. Women are divided about Obamacare, but when you talk about the individual provisions [such as not allowing insurance companies to discriminate on gender] they are very positive. They are very disgusted with the Republicans not wanting to cover birth control.

MB: If President Obama came out and flatly stated that he's done things to help the economy like the Affordable Care Act and the stimulus, but Congress is blocking further progress, would that resonate?

CL: I think it would resonate a lot.

MB: Romney says voters don't care about tax returns, but is his failure to release tax returns going to matter?

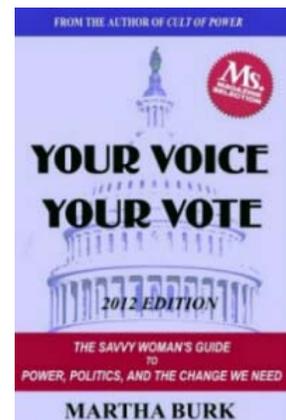
CL: Yes. People are wondering: what are you hiding? They care a lot about whether you're paying your fair share of taxes when you make millions and millions, particularly when you do it by laying off workers and shipping jobs overseas.

MB: Do people want a constitutional amendment to ban abortion?

CL: No. They absolutely do not. It's a very small minority -- around 13 percent. It's hard for people to believe how out of the mainstream the Republicans are on this issue, particularly the Tea Party.

MB: What's your best advice to candidates who want to appeal to women?

CL: Listen to the women. Women say exactly what they want. Who has concrete plans -- not macroeconomics but kitchen table economics. Who will change



the situation for their families, and help restore the middle class. Women are also sick to death of having their bodies and their lives treated as a political football.

Listen to the full Celinda Lake interview here: