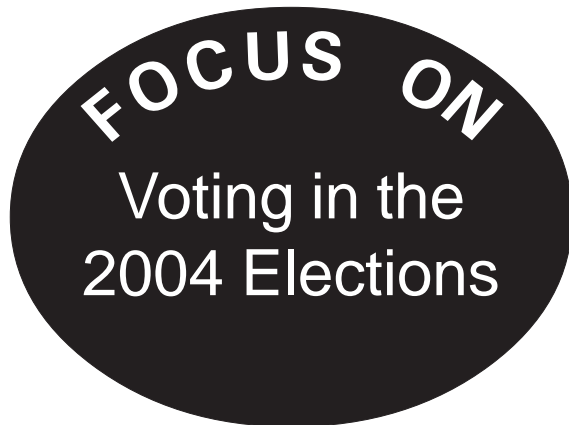


# THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues & Ideas

March 2004

Issue 18



On November 2, 2004 American voters will elect the leader of the most powerful nation in the world. What a tremendous opportunity for civic participation this is! Yet, in 2000, only 60% of Americans who could vote, did so. With this issue of *The Change Agent* we hope to encourage those who haven't voted before as well as those who are seasoned voters, to get out to the polls and make the best decision they can for our country.

In this expanded 36-page issue, we explore some of the reasons people vote and don't vote, who can vote, and who still cannot. We provide facts and analysis on several "hot" election topics, guidelines for how to pick a candidate, and finally, some ideas for conducting voter education and registration in the classroom.

Powerful narratives by naturalized citizens help us understand how they felt when they first voted in their new homeland. A young voter explains why she started voting and how she makes her voice heard. Other articles explore some of the reasons people say they don't vote. There are ample opportunities for reflection by readers on their reasons for voting or not voting. In addition, there are some updates about how voting has changed since the 2000 presidential elections and what to expect at the polls this time around. We also explore voting history, both recent and further in the past, helping to put into context the power of this basic right of all citizens.

We've added a special section for teachers to this edition with suggestions for crafting activities and using specific tools with students in order to get the most out of the articles.

A large portion of the paper is dedicated to the presentation of "hot" election issues. We focus on money and politics, security, the economy, education, and health care. Certainly, when the campaign heats up, other issues might come to the fore, but these were the ones our editorial board agreed were likely on the minds of many of our readers. We hope this is true. One caveat about this section is that some of the information may even be slightly out of date by the time you read it. Our paper has been in production since September 2003 and it's likely that by November 2004, new statistics will be available.

In line with our mission to bring justice issues into the classroom, we analyze topics through the lenses of equity and fairness. We ask who gains and who loses when certain policies get enacted, or don't. And while our social justice bias is clear, we do not endorse any particular candidate or party.

What we do encourage is for readers to gather and make sense of the enormous amount of information available, identify what issues are most important to them, what they think should be done about these issues, then pick the candidate who most closely represents their views. This is, after all, the hard work of being an informed voter.

The final section of the paper is dedicated to those programs in New England that are part of the Voter Education, Registration and Action campaign. Here you'll find some suggestions for launching VERA activities in your classroom, deadlines for voter registration in the six NE states, and some important information about the kinds of voter education and get-out-the-vote activities you can and can't engage in under law.

We are very excited to present this issue of the paper to a wide public both within and outside of New England. We hope that this issue will truly inspire people to get registered and vote. After all, it's no small thing to elect the next leader of the free world.

*Cara Anaam and Angela Orlando, editors*

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# My First Campaign

by Madhu Sridhar

I seem to have always been politically aware but not always politically active. Politics was my father's passion, and I shared it. He read daily newspapers in three different languages and was always engaging others in political debates. I started reading the newspaper back home in India when I was eleven and continued after arriving in the United States in 1974, although I was not familiar with either the political scene or the issues here.

My first ten years in this country were mainly devoted to building my career, but when my daughter was about two years old I decided to stay home with her. Although I had lived in Andover, Massachusetts for several years, I did not know many people in town. Yet, when my daughter started at a local pre-school, I volunteered to be the treasurer for the board. I followed her to the public school and served on the Parent-Teacher Organization boards. As PTO president of her elementary school, I was appalled to see students being taught in the hallways and closets and getting art classes from a cart and music lessons in the front lobby. After dropping our children off at school, other mothers and I would go to a local coffee shop and complain about the situation. It didn't take long for us to begin to get frustrated with our constant whining.

The PTO presidents met with the Superintendent of Schools on a regular basis to address the overcrowding issue. At one such meeting in 1994, the Superintendent shared his vision of renovating three existing schools to alleviate the overcrowding. He told us that the only way Andover could pay for these renovations was for town voters to approve raising their property taxes until the \$40.5 million debt that would be incurred was paid off. The Superintendent asked for a volunteer to lead this a campaign to get voter support. I looked around the room. No hands were raised. I was surprised. Isn't this what we had been complaining about for months? Didn't we want to solve the problem? Didn't this affect the education our children were receiving? I had never run any such campaign and quite honestly did not

know what was involved; in hindsight perhaps that is the reason why I raised my hand.

The drive for votes went into full swing very fast. We had limited time to educate people about the space needs in the schools. I was spending every waking moment on this effort along with caring for my two small children. When Election Day arrived, I felt sad because I could not vote; I was not a citizen. I remember vividly how hard it was for me to control my tears. I had spent 20 years in this country. I lived by the laws of the land and its Constitution. I paid my taxes. I was putting all my energy and time into getting the vote out but I could not deliver my own vote. I knew there was no one to blame but myself.

In the end, we were triumphant but for me it was a bittersweet victory. Needless to say, I applied for citizenship right away and became naturalized in 1996.

This campaign experience was a firsthand lesson in democracy for me. I learned that democracy requires a lot of day-to-day maintenance; going to school board meetings, for example, is much more effective than just complaining about education. I learned that the political process works and that one person can make a difference. I joined the League of Women Voters in 1994 and still strongly believe in its mission to promote political responsibility through the informed and active participation of citizens in government.

A participatory democracy is a democracy where citizens are actively engaged in shaping governmental policies that affect their lives and where the government solicits citizen involvement. Citizens need to get more involved in their communities, at the ballot box, in public policy debates, and in government deliberations. Democracy doesn't run by itself. It's up to us, the citizens, to make it work. Please join me in the effort!

*Madhu Sridhar is the president of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.*

# Virtues of Voting

by Pansy Francis



The first time I voted, a feeling of freedom and independence came over me, knowing my voice would be heard and that I had the right to vote. It was November 1992, the year I became a citizen of the United States. Voting gives me a feeling of empowerment to stand up for what I believe in. It helps me express my rights as a citizen and be a part of the democratic process. It also gives me the chance to make a decision on which party I believe should be in office. It's important for each person to vote because everyone's vote makes a difference.

## Encouraging Others to Vote

I would encourage others to attend meetings where the candidates discuss the issues. Some of these issues are the economy, creating new jobs for people, protecting job safety, and other health issues. Candidates might also talk about plans for giving loans to help businesses, providing programs for education, and helping families to own their own homes. The candidates will express their dreams for the American people at these meetings and there you may get a feeling of assurance and trust in the candidate. This will help you decide whom to vote for.

## Discussing Voting with Your Children

Talking with your children about voting is very important. This helps them to understand that their vote can make a major difference in their community. Encourage your children to listen to the candidates' debates and to gather information on the candidates' background. Encourage your children to vote when they turn 18 because elections will have an impact on their lives.

*Pansy Francis moved to the United States from Kingstown, Jamaica. She is a certified nurse's assistant and a member of the New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199. She earned her high school diploma from the 1199 Training Fund Adult Education Program.*

## THE POWER OF ONE

One of every 100,000 votes cast in U.S. federal elections, and one of every 15,000 votes cast in state elections, helps to decide a race in which the candidate voted for officially tied or won by one vote. You just never know when yours will be that one vote.

Here are some examples from history of how one vote made a difference:

- ◆ In 1776, one vote made English the official language of this country rather than German.
- ◆ Women won the right to vote in 1920 by passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. Tennessee, the last state who needed to pass the amendment, ratified the amendment by one vote.
- ◆ One vote elected Rutherford B. Hayes to the presidency in 1876, and the man in the Electoral College who cast that vote was an Indiana Congressman elected to his seat by one vote.
- ◆ In 1923, one vote made Adolph Hitler head of the Nazi party in Germany.
- ◆ John F. Kennedy won the presidency in 1960 by just one vote per precinct in Illinois. If one more voter in each precinct had voted for Richard Nixon, he would have received the electoral votes from Illinois and consequently become president instead of Kennedy.

Excerpted with permission from "Your Vote Makes A Difference." © 2000 League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.



# Why Vote?

by Atiya Dangleben

There are many reasons why we should vote. As we think about why we should vote we also have to think about why people don't vote. America has one of the lowest rates of voting of all of the democracies in the world. Do you vote? Why or why not?

## Overcoming Challenges to Voting

Dealing with the challenges to voting before Election Day can make voting a breeze.

- **REGISTER** to vote before the registration deadline in your state. Each state has different registration requirements. If you have already registered you do not need to register again. Voting every year keeps your registration active. If you are unsure about your registration status, call your local Election Commission.
- **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS** as you enter the polls. For example, in Massachusetts, you have the right to bring someone to the polls with you—your child, parent, someone to aid in translation, etc. If the poll worker cannot find your name on the voter list, in most states you can still vote using provisional ballots. If you need help with this, ask the poll worker for assistance. (See *What to Expect at the Polls*, page 7, for more on provisional ballots and your rights at the polls.)

Even though voting can be a challenge, it is important. Voting is the most direct way for everyday people in our society to rule. It's our chance to choose people who will work for a limited amount of time to make regulations, laws, policies, and guidelines for people to abide by. Elected officials also decide how to use tax money to support those laws, so that we have a society that works for everyone. When only some people vote, they choose people to make laws that are good for them, but not necessarily those that are good for everyone. That is why everyone should vote, so that everyone is represented by our government.

Some people feel that voting and politics do not matter in their lives, but voting and politics affect everyone, every day. Politicians make decisions about schools, roads, housing, public transportation, hospitals, business, and

many other things. Politicians also choose other people to make regulations for things that affect our daily lives: food, air, water quality, public transportation, and more. So if you eat, take the train, drink water, or breathe, then you should vote.

## When, Where and How to Vote

The answer to the when, where, and how to vote can be very confusing and it is why many people do not vote. You must have the answers to these questions in order to vote.

There can be several elections in one state in one year, but you can always count on an election being held the first Tuesday in November. This was chosen because it was convenient for the lifestyles of farmers in the 1800s. What are you usually doing on a Tuesday in the fall? When do you think it would be convenient for most Americans to vote?

Where you vote is decided by where you live. Your local election department chooses a location for people living in a certain area to vote, usually a library, school, or community center. Do you know where you vote? Do you know you may be able to vote by mail if you are not home on Election Day?

How to vote is changing in most cities. Many cities and states are buying new voting machines. Some people vote by filling in bubbles on a paper with a pen or pencil, some people pull a lever, and some people use machines (like ATMs) that have different languages, photos, and can even talk.

To find out the exact answers to these questions for your city or town you can contact the local Election Commission, or visit them online.

Voting is necessary so that our government can represent the people it is elected to serve. When we all vote, we are all represented. Make sure you have a say in who represents you and how they spend your tax money. **VOTE!**

*Atiya Dangleben is the program coordinator at Boston VOTE in Massachusetts.*

# Losing My Virginity

by Daniel Russo

A first-time voter discovers that behind the curtains, politics is almost as much fun as sex.

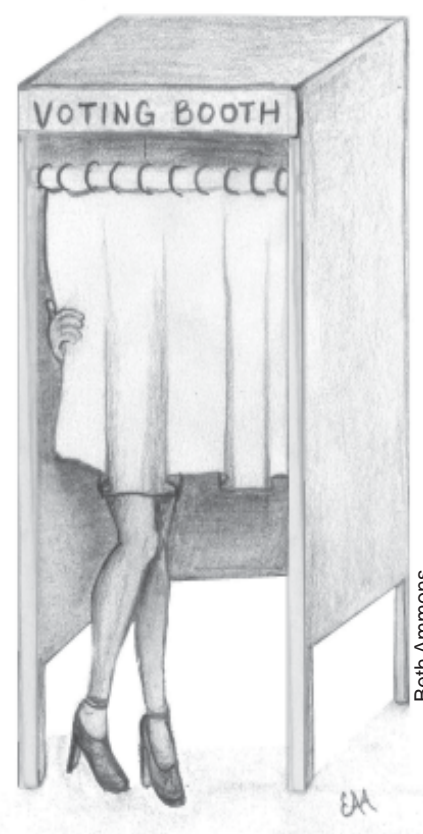
**T**hree weeks ago was my first time. I didn't last long. I was in and out in a few minutes. At first I was nervous, but once the curtains closed my inhibitions disappeared. When it was over, I felt a satisfaction that's hard to describe. Anyone who's done it would understand.

No, this wasn't a sex scene. I'm talking about voting. I've never been politically active before, but recently I began exploring new sides of myself. Trust me, it's not dirty or wrong. Young Americans, if traditional voting patterns prevail in 2004, will give far more thought to whom they want to have sex with than to whether or not their political leaders are screwing them in a different way.

Voting, however, is just the beginning of an active political life—like foreplay. You should pay attention to what politicians are doing throughout their terms in office. If you don't like their performance, don't just roll over and fall asleep. Take the initiative with phone calls, petitions, protests, and electoral campaigns. Good democracy, like good sex, requires energy and passionate participation.

Many people argue that they don't have time to get involved. I don't buy it. People make time for what matters to them. How often have you passed up a chance to knock boots because you were too busy? Be honest. Maintaining a healthy democracy isn't easy. It takes engagement and energy. If you've been a political prude up to now, it's time to lose your virginity.

Excerpted with permission from Daniel Russo.



# The Power of the Vote

## The Story of Nadia El-Sayed

by Janet Barry

*Why should I vote? What's one more vote? My vote means nothing.* Most of us eligible to vote in the United States have had thoughts like these at some point in our adult lives. And yet the truth is simple: when we don't vote, we let others speak for us. Period.

Sometimes I forget that voting is a privilege. I am quickly reminded, however, when I step outside my own country and see that many people have never had the opportunity to vote—for anything. I realize that I will never understand how that feels—to have no voice, absolutely no say in rules governing my life.

This past fall I visited World Education initiatives in Africa. Like in New England, World Education uses education to help people transform their own lives all over the world. In most of the countries where we work, people are desperately poor, but very determined to create



Women participate in democratic elections for the first time.

meaningful and prosperous lives for themselves and their families. In essence, they are just like us. Many however, have never had the chance to vote—an act that for some has dramatically changed their lives.



Women help tally votes during an election in Egypt.

Take Nadia El-Sayed. Nadia is a single mother of four school-age children living in a small village in Egypt. She became the sole provider for her children after her husband died a few years back. Through World Education's Parent Council Initiative, a program that helps parents improve the quality of education for their kids—especially girls—Nadia realized the power of her one vote.

Nadia's journey began after she learned that parents were organizing to vote for local education council representatives. Despite her feeling overwhelmed by all her responsibilities, she attended a public gathering to learn more about the election. "I never realized I could play a role in this election, and now I realize I can even run as a candidate if I want to. It is such a powerful feeling to be able to stand up for what I believe. Even if my candidate doesn't win, I still feel like at least I've made my feelings known. I could have probably won the election

had I run myself. I will be back next year, I promise, not as a voter but rather as a candidate!" said Nadia after casting her first vote ever. Nadia felt so strongly about her experience that she is now speaking out to other women about the importance of voting.

So, when you ask yourself whether or not you should go to the polls next November, remember Nadia. Look at your children. Think of your family. And then walk into the polling center and cast your vote. Take a friend, take your children, take your parents, take anyone. Because when you don't vote, you let others speak for you. Period. Just ask Nadia.

Janet Barry is the development director at World Education in Boston, MA.

World Education is the home of NELRC and *The Change Agent* newspaper. World Education works in more than 20 countries with more than 1000 communities all over the world helping people take control over their own lives through civic participation. To learn more about World Education and stories like Nadia's visit [www.worlded.org](http://www.worlded.org).



## ELECTION WORDS TO KNOW

**Absentee Ballot** - A ballot used for voting before the election instead of at your polling place.

**Ballot** - A form you mark when you vote.

**Ballot Measures** - Proposed laws the public is asked to vote on. They are also called propositions.

**Candidate** - A person who is trying to get elected.

**Campaign** - The work people do to get someone elected or to get a ballot measure passed.

**Congress** - The branch of our national government that makes laws. It has two parts: the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

**Election** - When people vote to make choices about their government.

**Eligible** - To be allowed to do or get something.

**Endorsement** - Coming out in favor of a candidate or issue.

**General Election** - The fall election where anyone can vote for any candidate.

**Nonpartisan** - Not tied to any political party or candidate.

**Political Party** - A group that shares the same views about government and works together to win elections.

**Polling Place** - The place where you go to vote.

**Precinct** - A local voting district that has its own polling place; every county has hundreds of precincts.

**Presidential** - Relating to the president.

**Primary** - The election on even numbered years that helps parties choose their candidates for the general election.

**Register** - To sign up; to get on an official list.

**Signature** - When you sign your name.

**What are some other words you have heard during the campaign? Make and list with others in your class then find out what they mean.**

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# Dunk The Vote You Count Too

by Ron Bell

In order to maintain the freedoms of democracy it is very important that each and every eligible person votes. This is what we believe at Dunk The Vote. We are a non-partisan organization that uses the theme of basketball to increase voter registration, education, and turnout. Every year we hold a basketball tournament that brings young people together to talk about voting and community building and to play some great basketball! If you want to participate, you have to be a registered voter.

At our basketball tournaments we have voting machines and show people how to use them. We invite organizations concerned with a variety of social issues, such as teenage pregnancy prevention or affordable housing or ESL-GED, to hand out their brochures or sell books or T-shirts to make young people more aware of these issues.

In 1992 Dunk The Vote was started to address a social issue. Boston was having a racial crisis because of the Stuart case, when a Black man was falsely accused of murdering a pregnant White woman. At the time I was the director of a local community center. I can remember very well how African-American men were being strip-searched right in front of my office with no regard for their civil rights. This mistreatment made me so angry that I started organizing voter registration drives at storefronts in the community. I knew that only when we voted in large enough numbers to be noticed by politicians would our concerns be taken seriously and addressed.

Since that time, Dunk The Vote has registered over 25,000 new voters. Overall voter turnout in our target precincts has increased by 33%, and in some neighborhoods by as much as 100-175%. We also hold seminars and other events to increase voter education and teach young people that democracy means you have to get involved. One graduate of our Leadership Institute program, Zachary Roscoe, said, "As a young African-American man, I did not understand that opting out of the system meant opting out of the power to change the system."



Youth participants at a 1999 Dunk The Vote event.

Dunk The Vote is sponsoring The UC2 (You Count Too) Tour, a national campaign reaching out to people on the street corners, in universities, to communities of color, to the homeless, and to people working for minimum wage. Even if you're not a citizen and can't vote you can be a volunteer, answering phones or knocking on doors. As a part of this tour, we're showing people how to start their own local chapters of Dunk The Vote.

Remember to Dunk YOUR vote in the general election on November 2, 2004.

**For more information on Dunk The Vote and to learn how to replicate this in your community, contact Ron Bell at 617-233-4238.**

*Ron Bell, born and raised in Boston, MA, has worked as a community organizer for over 20 years. His long history of building community and strengthening democracy has made him a well-respected community leader and much sought after speaker. As the founder and president of Dunk The Vote, he has helped to transform the political landscape of Boston's urban neighborhoods.*

## TWO BALLOTS

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Objective:** Students experience voting with and without adequate information.

**Get Ready**

- ✓ Make a copy of Two Ballots for each student.
- ✓ Cut the copies in half.

**Vote**

- ✓ Without any instruction, give the students Ballot A and ask them to vote.
- ✓ Tally the results on the board.
- ✓ Give the students Ballot B and ask them to vote again.
- ✓ Tally the results again on the board.

**Questions**

1. What difference was there between Ballot A and Ballot B?
2. Did you change your vote once you had the information on Ballot B?
3. Why is it important to gather information before we vote?
4. Where can we get information before voting?
5. Have you already decided who you will vote for?
6. If not, how will you get the information you need to decide?

*Beginning ESOL/Literacy students:* Help students put picture symbols next to the words on the ballot to help them understand the meaning.

### Two Ballots

Ballot A	Good	Bad	Ballot B	Good	Bad
1. ESOL/ABE/GED class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. ESOL/ABE/GED class will cost \$2,000 each year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. House	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. You can buy a big beautiful house and all the furniture for \$10,000.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Your full-time job gives you no health insurance and no vacation days.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Pay bills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. You don't have to pay any bills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adapted from Two Ballots Lesson developed by Edna Neprud, Kids Voting Georgia; Kelly Kline, Kids Voting California; and Bobbie May, Kids Voting Washington. Copyrighted 2000, Kids Voting USA. All rights reserved. Used with permission. Visit [www.kidsvotingusa.org](http://www.kidsvotingusa.org).

# How Do We Elect the President?

by Cara Anaam

In the presidential election of 2000, Al Gore got over half a million more votes nationwide than did George Bush. How then did George Bush end up as president? Bush got five more votes in the Electoral College, a system of voting that is used only in elections for the president and vice president.

## What is it?

The 12th Amendment to the United States Constitution outlines the process for electing the president of the United States. We call this process the Electoral College system. It is a method of *indirect* popular election.

On November 2, 2004, voters will cast their ballots in the presidential election. Their votes actually select a group of electors who pledge to vote for a specific candidate when the Electoral College meets in December. The “Electoral College” is the unofficial term coined in the 1800s for this group of citizens who cast the official votes that elect the president and vice president.

## How does it work?

The presidential/vice-presidential pair who wins the popular vote in any given state (except for Maine and Nebraska) receives all of the state’s Electoral College votes. In the other two states, the electoral votes are assigned in proportion to the popular vote.

In the end, the winner of the race is the candidate who receives a majority (270) of the 538 Electoral College votes. The results of the 2004 election won’t be official until the president of the Senate counts the votes out loud at a special joint session of Congress held on January 6, 2005.

Find your state on the map showing how many electoral votes each state will have in the 2004 election. How many electoral votes does your state have? What state has the most? Which states have the least?

## Why do we do it this way?

As they drafted a Constitution, the founders of our country had a difficult problem to solve in deciding how a president should be elected in a nation of 4,000,000 people spread up and down a thousand miles of the Atlantic seaboard. In 1776, there was no Internet, no television or radio networks, no newspapers that were read all over the country; communication between

## Understanding the Electoral College

states and among people in a state took a long time. Travel was difficult; there was no system of interstate highways, no planes, no cars. To get from one place to another to visit or exchange ideas, they relied on horses, boats, or their own feet.

It is also true that our nation in the beginning was composed of thirteen large and small states, all jealous of their rights and powers and suspicious of any central, national government. The founders needed to find a way of giving each state some power in the election of a president, not just the larger ones. They rejected the idea that the president should be elected by popular vote because they feared that people would only know about candidates from their own states. This would give all the power to the larger states.

## Is it the best system for today?

The system the founders designed has been used with modifications ever since. Today conditions have changed and people now have easy access to information about a range of candidates. The pros and cons of using the Electoral College system are still argued.

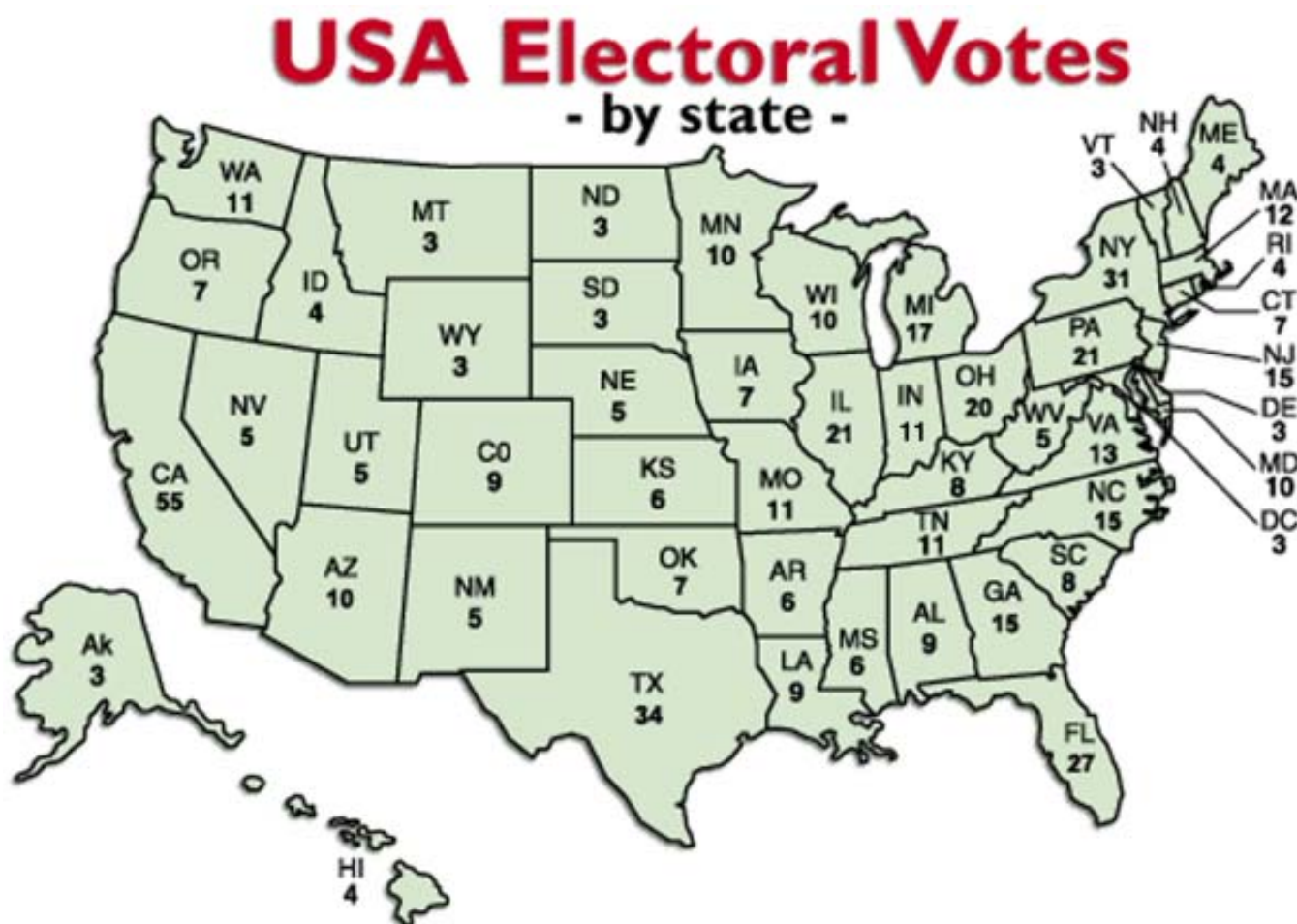
### Those in favor of it argue:

- ◆ It contributes to the cohesiveness of the country by requiring that popular support for a presidential candidate be found throughout the entire country.
- ◆ It gives power to smaller states.
- ◆ It contributes to political stability by encouraging a two-party system.

### Opponents argue that:

- ◆ It makes it possible to elect a president who doesn’t get a popular majority.
- ◆ It creates a risk that an elector may not vote according to the will of the voters who elected him.
- ◆ It makes it very difficult for support for a third-party candidate to get recognized thus keeping out new ideas.

Cara Anaam is the co-editor of The Change Agent.



## Activity:

Read the information provided in the box on the next page. Then, organize your class in two debate groups. One group should argue for the Electoral College system and one against it. Invite another class to listen and vote on which side makes the most persuasive argument.



# What to Expect at the Polls

Understanding the Help America Vote Act

by Carol Reimers

## What is the Help America Vote Act?

On October 29, 2002 President Bush signed the *Help America Vote Act* (HAVA). This major piece of legislation provides funds for each state to improve the operation of elections. It also requires states to make many changes, but gives them much flexibility in how they comply. Depending on how each state implements HAVA requirements, access to voting may become more or less restrictive.

## How will HAVA affect me when I go to vote?

- 1) You may encounter new voting machines that replace the old punch card and lever machines.
- 2) You must be provided with information on how to vote, what your voting rights are, who to contact if your rights are violated, and laws that prohibit fraud and misrepresentation.

## What if I make a mistake on the ballot?

If you make a mistake while voting, you can try again up to two more times.

## What if the polls close while I am still in line to vote?

If you're standing in line when the polls close you cannot be turned away; you must be allowed to cast your vote.

## What if I need help to fill out my ballot?

- 1) You can ask for and receive assistance from polling place officials.
- 2) If you're disabled, including the blind and visually impaired, you must have access to an accessible voting system.

## What if I don't speak English well?

In most states, you can bring anyone you want with you to vote. This isn't true in all states, though, so find out before you go to vote by calling your local Election Commission.

## Does HAVA change how a person registers to vote?

If you are a citizen and will be 18 years of age by Election Day and you registered to vote for the first time by mail, you will have to provide the following information when you go to vote:

- 1) a current and valid photo identification; or
- 2) a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter.

Voters who do not present ID must be permitted to cast a provisional ballot (but whether the vote will count is determined by the provisional ballot system). If a first-time voter casts her vote by mail, she must submit a copy of one of the documents with the ballot.

If you are registering to vote in person, the state usually requires proof of

residency such as a driver's license number or, if the registrant doesn't have a current and valid driver's license, the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security number.

For voters who do not have either of the above numbers, the state must assign a unique number to identify the voter for registration purposes. To find out what you need to bring with you when you register, call the local Election Commission in your state or your local town or city hall.

## Do I have to bring identification with me to the polling place if I registered by mail?

If you haven't voted before in an election in your state, you must present the following information when you go to the polling station:

- 1) a current and valid photo identification; OR
- 2) a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter. If you do not have either form of ID you must be permitted to cast a provisional ballot.

A first-time voter who casts a vote by mail, must submit a copy of one of the documents with the ballot.

## What if my name is not on the voter list but I know I have registered?

If you arrive at the polling place and find that your name is not on the voter list, the state must give you a chance to vote anyway. This is called a provisional ballot. A provisional ballot will be counted IF the voter's registration is verified (see below).

## If I am given a provisional ballot will my vote be counted?

Each state must set up its own system "in accordance with state law" to determine whether to count each provisional ballot that is cast. Election officials must establish a way to let voters who cast a provisional ballot know whether it was counted, and if not, why not. At a minimum, there must be "a free access system" (such as a toll-free telephone number or an Internet Web site) that anyone can access to find out the status of his or her provisional ballot. The voter must be given written instructions on how to obtain that information after casting the provisional ballot at the polling place.

With state legislation pending and preparations for implementing HAVA still underway, the process is still developing. It should be in place and clear by Election Day 2004. If you have any other questions, please contact your local League of Women Voters or you can go to [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) for more information.

Carol Reimers is the citizen education vice president at the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.

## The Process of Electing a President in 2004

Before the November election, political parties in each state create lists of potential electors (generally active members of the party).

1. A state's number of electoral votes equals the number of the state's Congressional delegation [the number of U.S. Senators (always 2) PLUS the number of U.S. Representatives.] The District of Columbia receives three electoral votes, as determined by the 23rd Amendment to the Constitution. Look at the map to see your state's number of electoral votes.
2. On November 2, 2004, voters cast their ballots for a block of electors who, in turn, will vote for a certain presidential candidate. The winner of the popular vote in each state receives the state's entire number of Electoral College votes except in Maine and Nebraska where votes are based on the proportion of the popular vote each candidate receives. For example, if a Republican presidential candidate receives the most votes in New

York, the 31 Republican electors become the voting block representing the state. Therefore, the Republican presidential candidate receives 31 of the 538 total votes in the Electoral College. The winner of the 2004 presidential election is the candidate who collects at least 270 votes.

3. Each state's block of electors (members of the winning candidate's party) assemble in their respective state capitol on December 13, 2004. At this meeting, the electors sign the 'Certificate of Vote,' which is sealed and delivered to the Office of the President of the United States Senate.
4. A special joint session of the U.S. Congress convenes on January 6, 2005. At this meeting, the President of the Senate reads the Certificates of Votes and declares the official winner.

For more information go to [www.vote-smart.org/election\\_president\\_what\\_is\\_electoral\\_college.php](http://www.vote-smart.org/election_president_what_is_electoral_college.php).

# Educating Hub Youth on Voting

by Maria Padilla

On November 4, 2003, I left my home in Jamaica Plain during the mid-afternoon after getting home from another hectic day of high school. A slight drizzle was falling as I walked toward the local JFK School, the voting place in my neighborhood. All day, I had been feeling anxious, so much that I hadn't eaten lunch. Having just celebrated my 18th birthday, I was going to vote in a City of Boston election for the first time in my life. My nerves continued to act up as I entered the voting area, terrified that I wouldn't know what to do. However, a poll worker approached me, explained in my native Spanish language the voting process, and I was able to cast my votes for City Council candidates without a problem.

I knew exactly which candidates I would vote for. I had been part of a youth community organizing team that had helped organize a candidates' forum several weeks before the election. I had studied each candidate carefully. I noticed who answered questions and who avoided them. I focused on those who were truthful and spoke about the issues that I cared about, particularly issues related to children and teens.

Growing up in the Hyde/Jackson Square area of Jamaica Plain, I feel I lost a part of my childhood. Instead of having a carefree life and playing outside, like all children deserve, I was often full of fear. I was scared of the drug dealer who tried to give me a zip-lock bag full of drugs when I was 9. I was scared at age 10 when I watched the news one night with my aunt and we learned that my 18-year-old cousin had been shot to death in a random drive-by shooting. And I was terrified at the age of 11 when I was constantly sexually harassed by thugs as I walked to the corner variety store.

Because of the dangerous streets, I was forced to always be indoors, feeling like I was trapped in a cage. I was cheated out of my freedom throughout my childhood. When I did leave the house, my mind was often occupied with thoughts of whether I would survive or not.

I don't want my younger cousins growing up in fear and caged like I was. In fact, I don't want any children in Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, or any neighborhood in Boston growing up scared. This is why I got involved in politics, voting, and

community organizing.

As an elected member of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, and as a community organizer with the Hyde Square Task Force, I now spend my time learning organizing skills, fighting for a new youth center in Jackson Square and more funding for after-school programs. I also do phone-banking and door-knocking around election time to get people out to vote so politicians take people in my neighborhood seriously.

But not enough people are voting. Only about 25 percent of Boston voters came out in the recent city election. Once I found out how easy it is to vote, I don't understand why more people don't go to the polls. Our city has to take a careful look at how to get more people involved in voting. One idea we should consider is lowering the voting age to 17. Imagine if the Election Department and the School Department in Boston worked together. All Boston Public Schools students could register to vote at their high schools when they turn 17 and begin to develop the habit of voting.

Important city policy issues could be incorporated into the high school curriculum, and candidates' forums could take place in every Boston high school auditorium. Maybe politicians would pay more attention to youth in the public schools if thousands of us were voting. If Boston leaders are sincere about wanting to increase the participation in voting, they will work to explore this idea and any other creative ideas that will bring more of us to the polls.

For me, voting was a very powerful event. I felt privileged to have such a great responsibility and I intend on making it a lifelong habit. I hope that thousands of other young people in Boston will also develop this habit soon.

*Maria Padilla is a senior at Boston Community Leadership Academy, an elected member of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, and a youth community organizer with the Hyde Square Task Force Inc., a nonprofit partner of the Boston Globe Foundation.*

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# Involving Your Family in Voting

by Ledona Hentley

I belong to one of those groups that society believes don't vote. I'm a young, urban, person of color. But I've always voted in every election in my city, state, and country since I was six years old! Voting has been a part of my life since pre-school. My grandmother, who kept me while my Mom worked, had to take me along on all of her daytime errands, which meant that if she voted, I voted. (Well, not really—she would let me pretend to pull the lever.) On our way home she would always tell me how important it was to vote because if you didn't speak up, no one would listen. As I got older and learned that Blacks in America weren't allowed to vote in earlier times and were actually jailed or killed in the fight to do so, it made me really appreciate those trips to the polls with my grandmother. Voting is a part of my life now because it has always been a part of my family.

If we want to make voting a generational habit in our families, we need to talk about politics at home and take our kids with us to vote. Though some of us may be non-citizens of this country, we live and work here and certain policies do affect us, which is why we should discuss politics and voting with our families even if we can't vote. It can be as simple as watching the debates together and then discussing each candidate's views afterwards. One person can choose an article on a particular candidate or issue and read it out loud to the others. Reading daily newspaper articles about candidates helps the family to stay informed and keeps everyone reading. The more we talk about voting and politics to our children, the better their chances for becoming informed and equipped to use their voting power to bring about change.

*Ledona Hentley currently resides in Dorchester, MA. She has been a resident of Boston for thirty years, and a registered voter for twelve.*

## Family Political Discussion

### You Need

- ✓ To agree with your family on when to meet together
- ✓ 20 minutes together as a family
- ✓ A comfortable place to sit, such as the kitchen table or the living room

### Preparation

- ✓ Talk to each member of your family and explain the purpose and the theme of the discussion.
- ✓ Select a convenient location and time for holding the discussion.

### For the Discussion

- ✓ Start the discussion by stating the purpose. (For example, "We are going to discuss the upcoming elections.")
- ✓ Review the *Rules for Participants*.

### Rules for Participants

Listen to Others • No Put-Downs • Respect for All

### Discussion Questions

Ask a question (see the list below or make up one of your own) and allow participants a chance to respond. Encourage everyone to get involved and to ask questions of one another. Use at least three questions from the list below.

1. Why do you think voting is important?
2. Why do you think some people don't vote?
3. What characteristics do you think a candidate should have?
4. How can we find information about the candidates?
5. Which candidates do you support? Why?
6. What are some problems in our community?
7. What can we do as a family to help our community?

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# Why People Don't Vote

by Angela Orlando

There are lots of reasons people give for not voting. The chart to the right shows some of the reasons people said they didn't vote in the 2000 presidential election.

Those might not be all of the reasons though. Can you think of others?

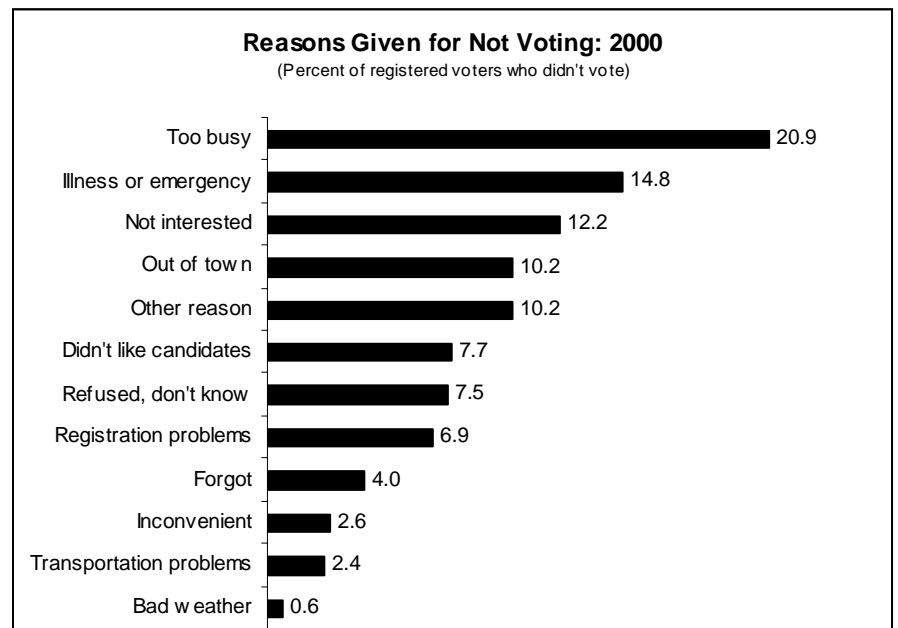
The Kettering Foundation did some research to find out why people don't vote and here's what they found out:

- People are turned off by negative campaigning.
- When candidates promise too much people stop believing in them.
- People who believe candidates will say almost anything to get elected vote less.
- Some people think the campaign is too long and decide to tune out.

### Questions to Think About

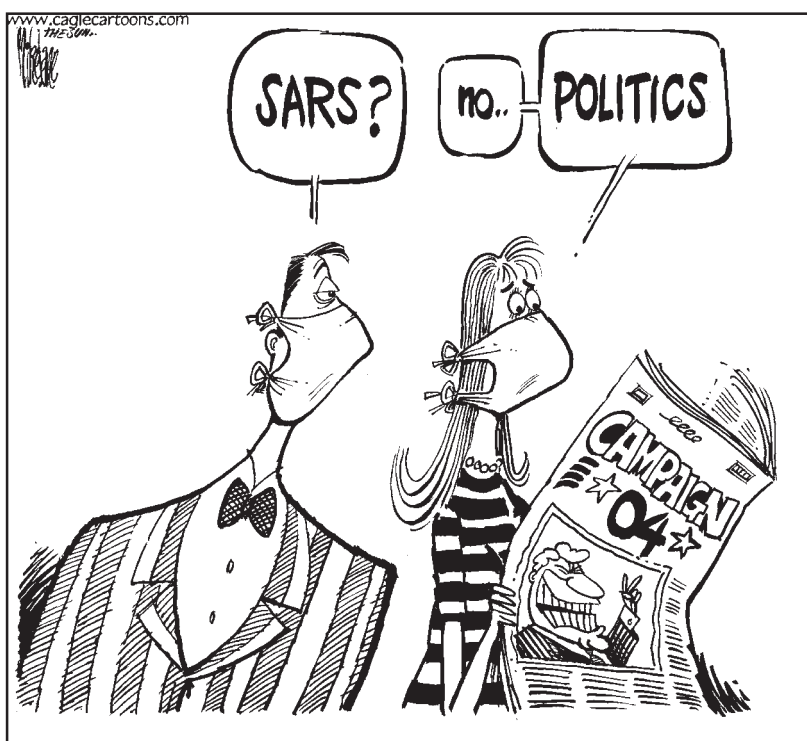
1. Compare the reasons people gave for not voting that are listed in the chart at the right to the reasons above. What differences do you notice? Do you think some reasons are more true than others?
2. Are there people you know who don't vote? What reasons do they give for not voting?
3. Look at the cartoons on this page. Have you ever felt like that? If you don't vote, can you explain why?
4. What do you think could be done so more people will vote?

Angela Orlando is the editor of The Change Agent.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2000.

## Do Campaigns Make You Feel Like This?



### EDITORIAL CARTOON ANALYSIS

1. What is the event or issue that inspired the cartoon?
2. Are there any real people in the cartoon? Who is portrayed in the cartoon?
3. Are there symbols in the cartoon? What are they and what do they represent?
4. What is the cartoonist's opinion about the topic portrayed in the cartoon?
5. Do you agree or disagree with the cartoonist's opinion? Why?

Reprinted with permission from Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonist Index. For more ideas on how to use cartoons in the classroom see his *Teacher Guide* at [cagle.slate.msn.com/teacher](http://cagle.slate.msn.com/teacher).

# History of Voting

Many of us take our right to vote for granted. Our state and federal governments, however, have been instrumental in the past in denying different groups of people—including women, African-Americans, young people, people who didn't own land and who couldn't pay poll taxes, and people who couldn't read and write—the right to vote. And throughout history these groups of people have organized, struggled, and fought for their right to vote. This activity presents a brief history of voting rights in this country.

Begin with a general discussion of what a democracy is and how it is different from other types of governments. Ask learners, "What does it mean to vote?" After helping students read *What if the Government Said You Couldn't Vote?* (on this page), use these questions to discuss each section. Insert the name of each group:

- How do you think this group felt when they were not allowed to participate in the voting process?
- Who do you think denied this group the right to vote? Why would they want to do that?
- Who might have helped this group fight for the vote? Who would have fought against it?
- Do you think this group could ever have its right to vote banned again? Why or why not?

### General Discussion

- How might our country be different today if only White male property owners could vote?
- Some say that taking the right to vote from criminals is a racist policy. Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you think it is fair that released felons cannot vote? Why or why not?
- Do you think foreign-born people who are permanent residents of the U.S. should be allowed to vote? Why or why not?

## What If the Government Said You Couldn't Vote?

In modern America, almost everyone can vote who wants to. But it wasn't always that way! Here are some of the groups that have been blocked from voting over the past two hundred years.

**1. Women.** For many years only men were allowed to vote. Women were considered too emotional to make wise choices. It took 75 years of protesting before women won the right to vote through the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in 1920.

**2. Poor People.** When this country was first founded, only White men who owned land were allowed to vote. Lawmakers believed that only property owners had enough at stake in the country to vote responsibly. By the early 1800s, the property requirement was replaced with a poll tax, which required citizens to pay a special fee in order to vote. Poll taxes were made illegal by the 24th amendment to the Constitution in 1964.

**3. Young People.** For many years, voting was restricted to adults 21 years and older in some states. During the Vietnam War era, many people argued that if you were old enough to fight and die for your country, you were old enough to vote. The 26th Amendment, passed in 1971, granted the right to vote to everyone 18 or older.

**4. People Who Could Not Read and Write.** Early in America's history, some states only allowed people who could read or write to vote. State lawmakers believed that only people who could read and write could get the information they needed to make smart choices. Nowadays, there are many ways to get information that do not involve reading and writing. The 1965 Voting Rights Act banned literacy tests.

**5. African-Americans.** The Constitution did not specifically restrict voting to White people. But it stated that only freemen or people who were not slaves could vote. This made it illegal for most African-Americans to vote until after the Civil War. The 15th Amendment, passed in 1870, allowed Black men (not women) to vote. After that, many states passed new laws to restrict Black voting. Literacy tests, poll taxes, and intimidation were methods used to limit Black voting. Southern states imposed a "grandfather" clause, which said that voters whose grandfathers had voted didn't have to take a literacy test. This benefited White men who could not read, because their grandfathers might have been able to vote. This did not help Black men, however, because their grandfathers would have been slaves and would not have been able to vote anyway. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 did away with all these restrictions on who could vote. It also set up a system to make sure that the new law would be followed.

### Are There Still People in the United States Who Can't Vote?

Yes. Convicted felons in most states can't vote. States vary as to whether they restore this right when people get out of jail. In some states, a felon is allowed to vote again once the sentence is served. Mississippi requires a pardon by the governor before a released felon can vote. Also, people who live in the U.S. but are not citizens of this country cannot vote even though they may work and pay taxes here.

*History of Voting and What if the Government Said You Couldn't Vote* reprinted with permission from the *Civic Participation and Community Action Sourcebook*, Second edition. Edited by Andy Nash. Boston, MA: New England Literacy Resource Center, 2001. Originally adapted from *Beyond Basic Skills*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Summer 1998 by Tom Valentine and Jenny Sandlin. Published by the Department of Adult Education. The University of Georgia. [www.coe.uga.edu/adulted/staffdev/bbs.html](http://www.coe.uga.edu/adulted/staffdev/bbs.html).

## A Game of Cards

### Objective

Students will recognize the progressive empowerment of groups in the United States.

### Get Ready

Prepare an index card for every student, marking the backs of the cards with one of the following symbols. Make an equal number of cards with each symbol.

- |                                 |                               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| □ = White male with property    | ★ = immigrant non-citizen     |
| ◆ = White male without property | ✓ = non-voting citizen        |
| ■ = African-American male       | # = citizen too young to vote |
| ○ = female                      | ● = convicted felon           |
| ▲ = Native American             |                               |

At this point, do not indicate in any way what the symbols stand for.

### Role Play the Vote

Choose a ballot issue which students will actually decide, for example, a choice of guest speaker or a field trip site.

Randomly distribute the cards you have prepared; deflect attention away from what is on the backs of the cards, even if asked about it. Ask students to write their names on the front of the card. Below their names, ask them to write their vote (for example "Legislature" or "Court" as possible field trip site).

Collect all the cards with □ on them.

Count the results and announce that the decision has been made. Report the outcome.

Students whose cards were not collected may demand that their cards be counted as well. Think about this, and then collect the ballots marked ◆. Again, excluded students will complain; respond by collecting cards marked ■. The final time, collect ballots marked ○ and ▲, but add this time that there will be no more votes included. Tally those you collected and announce the decision.

Explain to the students what the symbols on their cards represent and that their ballots have been accepted in the order in which the vote was extended to each group in the United States.

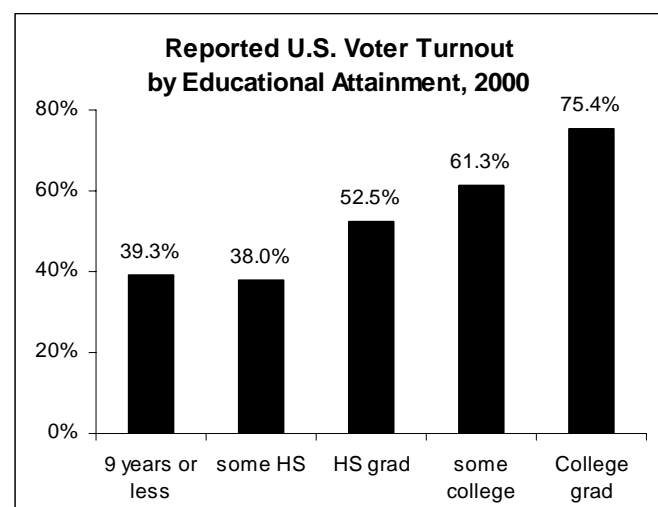
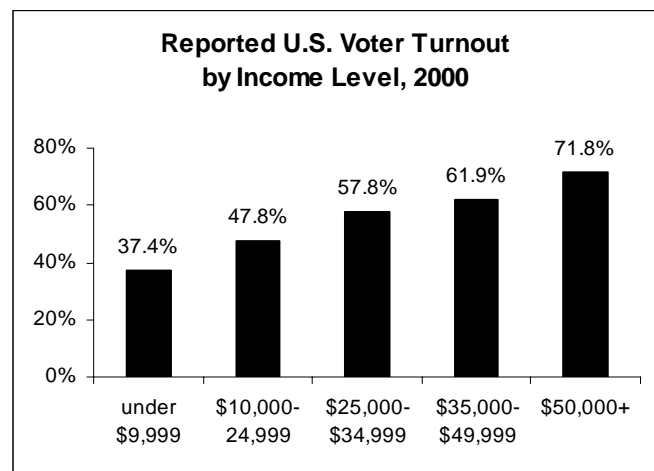
Ask the students who couldn't vote what that felt like. Do they think the groups they represented should have the right to vote? Why or why not?

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# Who Votes?

1. Have your students study the first graph. Then have them form a human bar graph of each graph by assigning individuals or small groups (depending on class size) a variable.
2. Ask for one or more volunteers to explain how to read a graph. Help out as necessary.
3. Work with students to extract facts from the graph in the form of simple sentences. (For example, "Most people in the lowest income category don't vote" or "The highest voter turnout is among those who make \$50,000 or more a year.") Have individuals share their sentences and write them on the board.
4. Go through the other two graphs in the same way. For example, a sentence gleaned from the middle chart could be: "College graduates are twice as likely to vote as those who have less than a high school education." Try to get everyone to participate in determining the facts that the graphs illustrate. When students share the sentences they created, ask them to explain why they thought those particular facts were important.
5. When students have finished this process, engage them in a general discussion of the graphs using the discussion questions.
6. Have students walk around the room and share important points they learned from this activity with three to four other class members.



## Discussion Questions:

1. What are the graphs about? What does this data tell you?
2. How are the graphs consistent or inconsistent?
3. Are the graphs surprising to you? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think some groups are so unlikely to vote?
5. Which of these groups have the least power in the political process?
6. What story do these graphs tell?

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Source for all graphs: U.S. Bureau of the Census

## WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS?

Number of Black and Latino United States Senators in 1776, 2003:  
**0, 0**

Number of Black and Latino youth who "do not believe they can make a difference in their communities":  
**6 in 10**

Number of Americans who cast a vote via telephone on the final night of the Fox Television airing of "American Idol":  
**15.5 million**

Number of 18-25 year old American citizens who voted in the 2000 presidential election:  
**9.9 million**

Percentage of United States Senators with assets in the millions of dollars:  
**40**

Percentage of United States families with assets in the millions of dollars:  
**4**

Statistics excerpted from the Drum Major Institute 2003 Injustice Index. [www.drummajorinstitute.org](http://www.drummajorinstitute.org).

# Losing the Right to Vote

by Andy Nash

## Pre-reading:

Read the quote below from U.S. Representative John Conyers, Jr.. Who do you think he is talking about? Who is “blocked out of the voting process” in the United States?

*“Our democracy is weakened when one sector of the population is blocked out of the voting process.”*

Since the founding of this country, most states in the U.S. have passed laws that take away the right to vote from felons and ex-felons (a felon is a person who has been convicted of a serious crime). These are called *felony disenfranchisement* laws.

Laws are different from state to state. However, in most places, felons cannot vote while they are in prison. In several other states, people who are on **parole** or have already served their sentence are still barred from voting, sometimes permanently. The United States is the only democracy in which convicted offenders who have served their sentences may be disenfranchised for life. Only two states, Maine and Vermont, do not have disenfranchisement laws at all.

People who support felony disenfranchisement claim that convicted felons are bad people who should not vote, and that disenfranchisement should be part of their punishment. People who disagree with these laws say that voting is every citizen’s right and has nothing to do with the sentence for a crime. In fact, voting helps ex-offenders become part of a stable community again—it can be part of the rehabilitation process.

In 2000, Florida’s felony disenfranchisement laws received a lot of attention because over 600,000 ex-felons were not allowed to vote in the presidential election. President Bush won in Florida by only 537 votes. This state strips citizens who are convicted felons of their voting rights for life—even after they’ve completed their punishment—unless they go through a very complicated application process that many ex-felons don’t know about.

In 1890, Mississippi was the first state to use felony disenfranchisement laws against African-Americans. Until then, the Mississippi law disenfranchised those guilty of any crime. In 1890, the law was changed to focus on crimes such as **bigamy** and **vagrancy**. These crimes were more common among African-Americans because slavery had separated them from their families and/or left them homeless. Felony disenfranchisement laws, combined with other laws like **poll taxes** and **literacy tests** disempowered, African-American communities and excluded them from the political process.

## A Shifting Terrain

Since each state makes and changes its own laws, it can be difficult to see a national trend on this issue. However, most of the changes in the last five years have been toward loosening the restrictions on voting rights. This past summer, a judge in Florida ruled that the state’s process for restoring voting rights to prisoners was too difficult, a decision that will give voting privileges to 30,000 ex-felons. To find out about the laws in your own state, see [www.sentencingproject.org/pdfs/UggenManzaSummary.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/pdfs/UggenManzaSummary.pdf)

For information for how to restore individual voting rights, see: [www.advancementproject.org/Re-En.pdf](http://www.advancementproject.org/Re-En.pdf). Most of the information in this article comes from articles that can be found at [www.demos-usa.org](http://www.demos-usa.org) and [www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org).

Andy Nash is the EFF coordinator and the civic participation coordinator at NELRC/World Education in Boston, MA.

## Definitions

**Bigamy:** marrying one person when you’re already married to another.

**Disenfranchisement:** to deprive someone of a right of citizenship, especially the right to vote.

**Literacy Tests:** very difficult reading tests given to people registering to vote.

**Parole:** a conditional release of a prisoner before his or her sentence is finished.

**Poll Taxes:** a fee African-Americans had to pay to vote.

**Vagrancy:** wandering from place to place; having no permanent home or income.

## The impact of felony disenfranchisement laws

Today, felony disenfranchisement laws continue to punish people who have served their sentences and discriminate against people of color.

- ⊙ 33 states prohibit felons from voting while they are on parole.
- ⊙ Six states deny the right to vote to all ex-offenders who have completed their sentences.
- ⊙ 13% of Black men (1.4 million citizens) are disenfranchised, a rate seven times the national average.
- ⊙ More than 2 million White Americans (Hispanic and non-Hispanic) are disenfranchised.
- ⊙ Given current rates of incarceration, three in ten of the next generation of Black men can expect to be disenfranchised at some point in their lifetime. In states that disenfranchise ex-offenders, as many as 40% of Black men may permanently lose their right to vote.
- ⊙ Nationally, about 7.5% of Black adults (men and women) are disenfranchised, compared to 1.5% of Whites.

*Another way the criminal justice system disempowers people of color is through redistricting. Every ten years, states redraw their electoral maps based on population changes. During this process, states count prisoners where they “reside” (where the prisons are, in mostly rural areas) rather than where they come from (poor areas of cities). This increases the “official” population in rural areas, so they get a bigger share of government funds for roads, schools and social services. They also get to elect more representatives, even though many of their phantom “residents” in prison cannot vote.*

## Post reading:

1. What about this article do you think is worth discussing?
2. What is something you learned that you didn’t know before?
3. Go to the suggested Web site to find out about the laws in your state. What do you hope they are?
4. How has the article influenced your views one way or the other? What points do you think are the strongest?
5. Return to the quote of Representative John Conyers, Jr. you read before the article. Do you think these laws weaken or strengthen our democracy?
6. Here’s another quote from Representative John Conyers, Jr. What do you think about what he is saying?

*“If we want former felons to become good citizens, we must give them rights as well as responsibilities, and there is no greater responsibility than voting.”*



# Voting Rights

Today, most citizens register to vote without regard to race or color by signing their name and address on something like a postcard when, for example, they get a driver's license. But it was not always so.

Prior to the passage of the federal Voting Rights Act in 1965, some states maintained elaborate voter registration procedures which were part of an entire system whose primary purpose was to deny the vote to those who were not White.

Blacks who tried to register, along with their families, were routinely intimidated and harassed by various state, county, and local police forces—all White of course. Sometimes they were even arrested on false charges.

Throughout the deep South, White businesses, employers, banks, and landlords were organized into White Citizens Councils who imposed economic retaliation against non-Whites who tried to vote. And if economic pressure proved insufficient, the Ku Klux Klan was ready with violence and mayhem.

## A Typical Alabama Registration Process

In the rural counties where most folk lived, you had to go down to the courthouse to register. The Registrar's Office was only open two or three days each month for a couple of hours, usually in the morning or afternoon. You had to take off work—with or without your employer's permission—to register. And if a White employer gave such permission, or failed to fire an African-American who tried to vote, he could be driven out of business by economic retaliation from the Citizens Council.

On the occasional registration day, the county Sheriff and his deputies made it their business to hang around the courthouse to discourage "undesirables" from trying to register. This meant that Black women and men had to run a gauntlet of intimidation, insults, and threats just to get to the registration office. Once in the Registrar's Office they faced hatred, humiliation, and harassment from clerks and officials.

The Alabama Application Form and oaths you had to take were four pages long. You had to swear that your answers to every single question were true under penalty of perjury. And you knew that the information you entered on the form would be passed on to the Citizens Council and KKK.

Many counties used what they called the "voucher system." You had to have someone who was already a registered voter "vouch" for you—under oath and penalty of perjury—that you met the residency qualification to vote. In some counties this "supporting witness" had to accompany you to the Registrar's Office, in others they were interviewed elsewhere. Some counties limited the number of new applicants a registered voter could vouch for in a given year to two or three. Since no White voter would dare vouch for a Black applicant, in counties where only a handful of African-Americans were already registered only a few more each year could be added to the rolls. And in counties where no African-Americans were registered, none ever could be added because they had no one to vouch for them.

In addition to completing the application and swearing the oaths, you had to pass the actual "Literacy Test" itself. This was usually a three-part oral and written quiz:

- In "Part A" you were given a section of the Constitution to read. The Registrar could choose any section, an easy one containing only one or two sentences or a long, hard, complicated one. You then had to interpret it orally to his satisfaction.
- In "Parts B" and "C," you had to answer two different sets of written questions.

Your application was then reviewed by the three-member Board of Registrars—often in secret at a later date. They voted on whether or not you passed. It was entirely up to the judgment of the Board whether you passed or failed. If you were White and missed every single question they could still pass you if—in their sole judgment—you were "qualified." If you were Black and got every one correct, they could still flunk you if they considered you "unqualified."

Your name was published in the local newspaper listing of those who had applied to register. That was to make sure that all of your employers, landlords, mortgage-holders, bank loan officers, business-suppliers, etc., were kept informed of this important event. And, of course, all of the information on your application was quietly passed under the table to the White Citizens Council and KKK for appropriate action. Their job was to encourage you

to withdraw your application—or withdraw yourself out of the county—by whatever means they deemed necessary.

Some people ask how anyone, White or Black, ever got through this mess to actually register? A good question. As a matter of public record, White registration in Alabama was very high, while Black registration was minuscule. In the counties where African-Americans were the majority of the population, White registration was close to, or over, 100% (in some cases as high as 115%), while Black registration was zero or close to it.

White registration could be over 100% because when White voters died or moved out of the area their names were kept on the voting list. Oddly enough, many of them (even the dead ones), still somehow managed to actually vote (usually for the incumbent) every election day. This was commonly referred to as the "tombstone vote" and to the local politicians it was a miracle of Southern democracy.

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## Sample Alabama Literacy Test

"B"

1. What body can try impeachments of the president of the United States?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Check the applicable definition for responsibility:  
\_\_\_\_\_ a duty  
\_\_\_\_\_ a speech  
\_\_\_\_\_ failure (acting)
3. Name the attorney general of the United States. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Women may now serve on juries in Alabama state courts. \_\_\_\_\_

"C"

1. If a person charged with treason denies his guilt, how many persons must testify against him before he can be convicted? \_\_\_\_\_
2. At what time of day on January 20 each four years does the term of the president of the United States end? \_\_\_\_\_
3. If the president does not wish to sign a bill, how many days is he allowed in which to return it to Congress for reconsideration? \_\_\_\_\_
4. If a bill is passed by Congress and the president refuses to sign it and does not send it back to Congress in session within the specified period of time, is the bill defeated or does it become law? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Look at the sample "literacy" test above. What do you think about it?
- 2) Can you answer any of the questions on the test? Try and then check the answers below.
- 3) Do you think it was fair to have people take this test in order to register to vote? Why or why not?
- 4) Do you think this test can show if someone can read or write? What makes you think so?
- 5) Does this test look like anything else you have seen?

### ANSWERS:

For test "B": (1) Senate (2) a duty (3) currently the attorney general of the U.S. is John Ashcroft. At the time this test was used the attorney general was Nicholas Katzenbach. (4) True  
For test "C": (1) Two (2) 12 noon (3) Ten (4) It becomes law unless Congress adjourns before the expiration of 10 days.

## Getting the Most from the Articles

Here are some suggested activities you can use with your students to get more out of each article you read:

### Create a graphic organizer

These often help students organize the information in the article. For example, you can create a note-taking sheet that asks students to record the pros and cons of an issue they are reading about.

### Write questions in the margins

Ask students to write down the questions that they have as they read the article. They can write them down in the margins of the article or on a separate piece of paper. Help students think about ways they can get their questions answered.

### Form an opinion

Have students write down things they agree with and disagree with in the article. Then have students share their opinions in pairs, groups, or in the larger class.

### Encourage further research

Split up your class into several small groups. Ask each group to focus on one of the election issues discussed in this paper. Have each group read the collection of articles on their topic in *The Change Agent* and think together about what other questions they have about the issue. Help each group make a plan for getting more information on their topic. Students might first want to get more information about the issue. Later they may want to look at the Web sites of different candidates to find out what their positions are on the issue. Have students summarize this information and present it to the rest of the class. (*For tips on helping students manage Web searches see below.*)

## Creating Charts and Graphs

Using their own data to create charts and graphs helps students see that each format has its own purpose. Line graphs are used to illustrate change, bar graphs to compare items, pie charts to show how a set of pieces make up a whole, etc. We make choices about which format to use based on what message or information we're trying to convey.

Experimenting with those choices teaches students how form and content relate—that looking at the graphic format tells you something right away about what the author is trying to explain.

**For some clear lessons on constructing charts and graphs, take a look at: [www.fodoweb.com/erfora/readtext.asp?txtfile=communications/charts.toc](http://www.fodoweb.com/erfora/readtext.asp?txtfile=communications/charts.toc)**

Constructing charts also allows students to see how data can be manipulated to give different impressions of the same information. This understanding helps them become more critical readers of charts and graphs, asking questions about how the data is being organized and presented.

**For an example of how charts can be constructed to convey different impressions with the same data, see: [www.mste.uiuc.edu/courses/ci330ms/youtsey/lineinfo.html](http://www.mste.uiuc.edu/courses/ci330ms/youtsey/lineinfo.html)**

(After looking at the site above, consider, for example, how your impression of the data would change if the second Federal Minimum Hourly Wage chart used five-year intervals on the x-axis instead of ten-year intervals.)

Reprinted with permission from the Equipped For the Future Teaching/Learning Toolkit. This online resource provides teaching tools to support EFF instruction and assessment and examples of what it looks like to implement EFF in a variety of teaching contexts. You can find the Toolkit at [cls.coe.utk.edu/efftlc](http://cls.coe.utk.edu/efftlc). EFF is an initiative of the National Institute for Literacy.

## Eight Quick Tips for Helping Learners Read Online

by Steve Quann

### ❶ Problem: Not enough preparation before reading online

**Tip:** First, ensure students are comfortable with using a mouse to navigate and know at least one way to scroll down the page. Make sure to review pre-reading strategies with learners. This is particularly important since Web pages are often presented differently than printed text. See [www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm).

### ❷ Problem: Lack of experience with the Web

**Tip:** Go over layout, format, and navigation features of various sites as a class. Ask them to scan for buttons or links that lead to specific information. For example, on a presidential candidate's Web site, ask which button will lead to his views on the issues. If you expect students to use a search engine, try having them do a simple online scavenger hunt, asking them to find tidbits of information such as where a candidate was born. Have students work in pairs so they can help each other navigate and work with the information.

### ❸ Problem: Getting lost

**Tip:** Help students develop strategies for getting the information they want and returning to the page of entry. As one would do when walking in the woods, ask them to visualize the "path" they went down in relation to the "main trail." Suggest they start this by using the "one-step forward, one-step back" method and rely on the back button at first.

### ❹ Problem: Too many options

**Tip:** Talk about the pitfalls of links. Discuss the kinds of information that can be gathered, and help students understand that it is not necessary to click on every link. Work with them on how to make decisions about whether to follow a link or not.

### ❺ Problem: Too much information

**Tip:** Model the gathering and selection of information. In terms of gathering information on the Web, talk about the need to take

particular advantage of reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. Share your wisdom such as "more is not necessarily better." Ask students to focus on getting the main idea and answering the five w's before clicking more than a couple links deep. See [www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm).

### ❻ Problem: Evaluating content

**Tip:** Compare and contrast two Web sites that have very different views on a topic. For example, cut and paste information from a White supremacist Web site on civil rights into a *Word* document. Then do the same for the NAACP. Without identifying the sources, ask students to read each. Then show them the sites and later ask them to identify the sites from which they came. Teachers should discuss challenges of evaluating Internet sources. Suggested teacher reading: [www.uwec.edu/library/Guides/tencs.html](http://www.uwec.edu/library/Guides/tencs.html).

### ❼ Problem: Relating the varied links to the main idea or the problem that needs to be solved

**Tip:** For students who might not benefit from outlining, notetaking or mind maps, suggest making brief notes on stickies and placing them around the edge of the monitor with the major idea for the main page at the top. Linked pages with supporting details, placed down the sides of the monitor, may simply be a word or two.

### ❽ Problem: Synthesizing the information

**Tip:** Provide students with scaffolding activities to help them organize their ideas so they can better comprehend what they read. Organizing the stickies or creating a mind map may be an important step before presenting what they learned or applying it to a project. See [www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm).

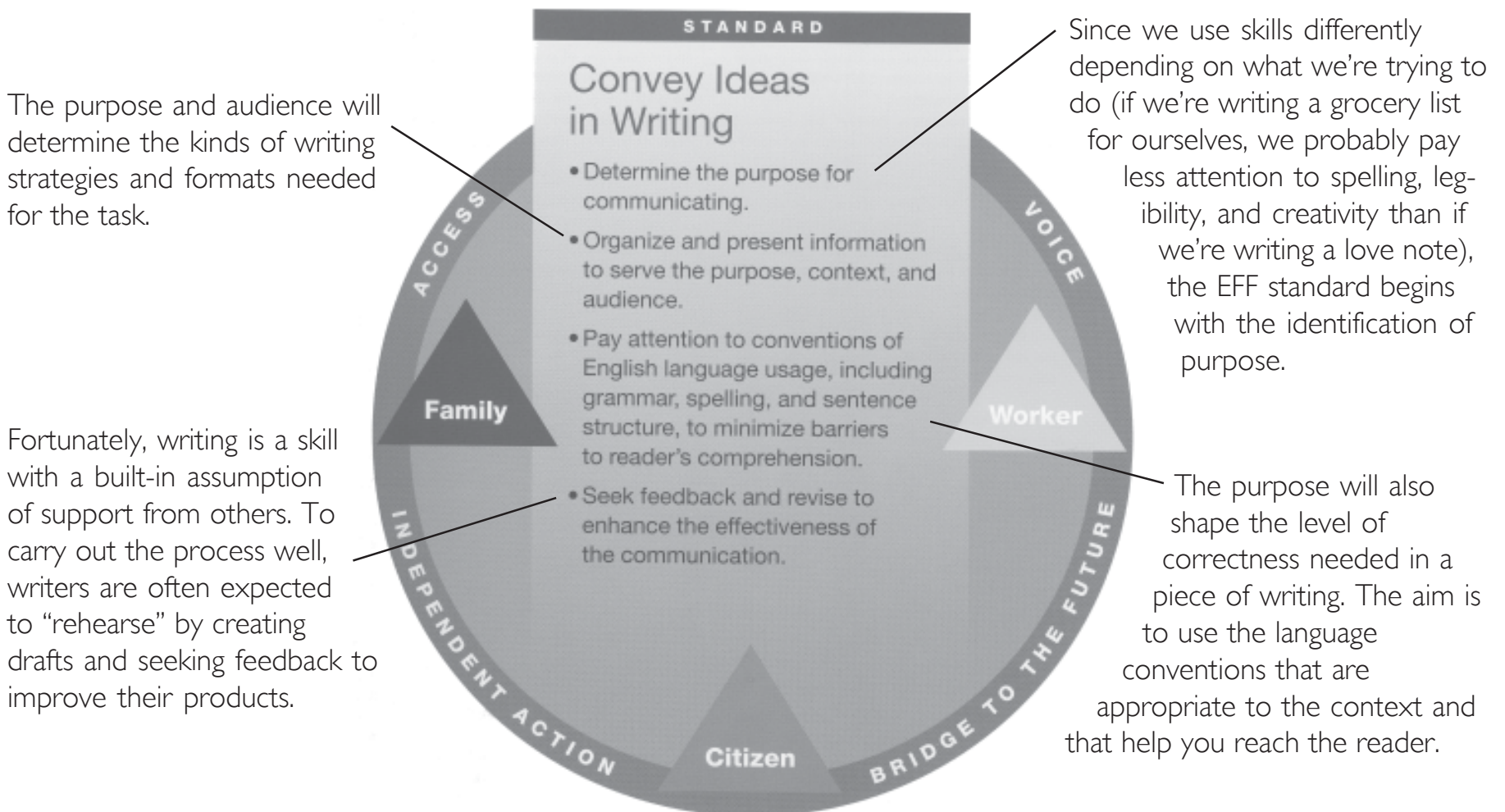
Steve Quann works as a Web design and curriculum specialist for many World Education projects. He also is an adjunct professor of ESL at Massasoit Community College and has collaborated on books dealing with the integration of technology into the classroom. He can be reached at [squann@worlded.org](mailto:squann@worlded.org).



# Convey Ideas in Writing

by Andy Nash

Equipped for the Future's writing standard, *Convey Ideas in Writing* describes the process that proficient writers use to communicate effectively. It includes four components:



What purposes might adults have for writing related to the upcoming election issues and how might the EFF standard help teachers and students guide the process? Here are three examples.

### **Purpose 1. Understand the election issues and/or the candidates' views**

This purpose might lead to first taking some notes about the issues or the candidates' positions. Weighing the pros and cons of an issue or comparing the candidates could be easier if the information is graphically organized in a chart. The care with which it's organized—clear headings, etc.—and the amount/clarity of information would depend on whether the chart is for oneself or for presentation to others. Based on this, writers would have to decide how carefully they need to attend to grammar and other writing conventions. It would be helpful to get feedback to answer the questions: Is this information presented clearly? Have I included enough information so that you can make the comparison?

### **Purpose 2. Write a persuasive letter to the editor**

To generate a persuasive letter, writers might want to first freewrite their thoughts, feelings, or experiences of an issue/candidate and then, perhaps in consultation with others, prioritize their most compelling points. When they've settled on the content of their message, they would have to organize the text so that it flowed well from beginning to end. Since a letter to the editor should be written as a formal letter, writers need to make sure that it's properly formatted and carefully checked for errors. Feedback would be helpful for determining if their letter is persuasive and to help proofread for errors.

### **Purpose 3. Write to sort out reactions to one of the articles**

Reflective writing allows us to spend more time with our thoughts about a topic, considering it from multiple angles or pondering why we care about it. It is a useful way to clarify our thoughts before entering a group discussion or to figure out what else we want to know about the topic. This journal-like writing is not done for external readers, and therefore the writer doesn't need to attend to the conventions of writing that make it easier for readers to understand the text. Writers may seek feedback/dialogue about their ideas, but this is for the purpose of helping the writer "revise" their thinking, not the writing.

*Andy Nash is the EFF coordinator and the civic participation coordinator at NELRC/World Education in Boston, MA.*

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**For more strategies on engaging students with  
Change Agent articles go to  
[www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/classroom.htm).**

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Talking about some of the issues in the upcoming elections might be challenging. It might bring up strong feelings among those participating in a discussion. One organization, the Public Conversations Project, has been facilitating “difficult” conversations for years. They provide some important suggestions for setting guidelines for a discussion:

Regarding the *spirit* of our speaking and listening:

- We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.
- We will not criticize the view of other participants or attempt to persuade them.
- We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when what is said is hard to hear.

Regarding the *form* of our speaking and listening:

- We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.
- We will not interrupt, except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
- We will “pass” if we do not wish to speak.

The above suggestions are taken from *Constructive Conversations about Challenging Times: A Guide to Community Dialogue*. This 46-page guide, published by the Public Conversations Project, provides wonderful suggestions on how to help people talk openly about what they think and feel. You can download it for free at: [www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/CommunityGuide3.0.pdf](http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/CommunityGuide3.0.pdf).

## Clean Elections

by Janet Groat

Have you ever thought about how things might be different in this country if our elected officials knew what it was like to vie for a green card, to haggle with authorities over a driver’s license, or to raise a child while earning just \$7.50 an hour? But the lives of many elected leaders are removed from such day-to-day concerns and few are of Latino, Asian or African-American heritage.

A big reason for that is the money it costs to run a campaign for elected office. People with wealth are those most likely to run. If candidates don’t have money themselves, they have to know people with money. Or they have to ask for donations from organizations and corporations, which often want something in return when the candidate takes office.

In the year 2000, according to the National Institute of Money and Politics, which tracks campaign giving and spending, the average candidate for a seat in a State House of Representatives spent \$46,123. The average contestant for a State Senate seat spent \$100,976.<sup>1</sup>

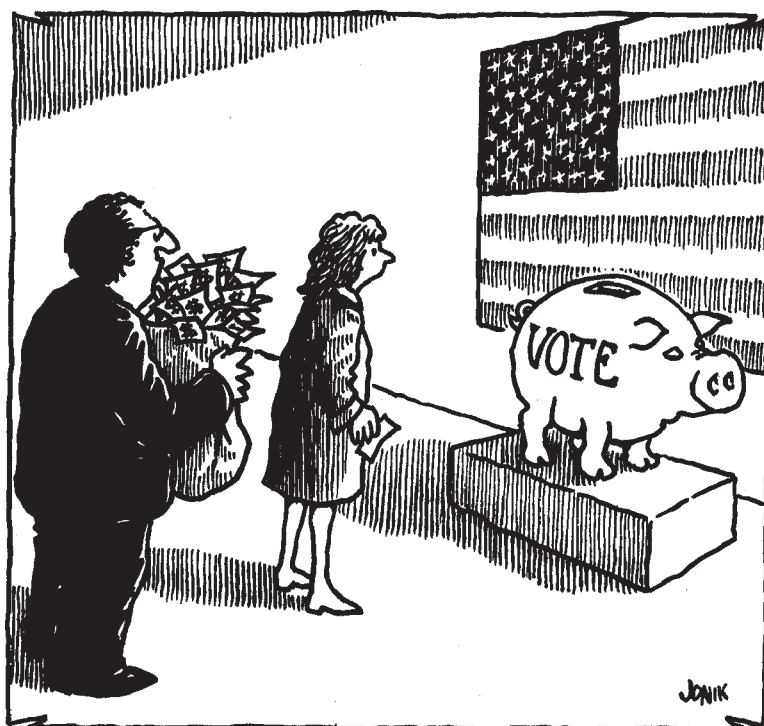
To be a serious contender, a state Senate candidate must raise almost \$2,000 a week, every week, throughout the election year. That’s \$285 a day, every day, including Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.

No wonder so few immigrants or working class people end up in the halls of power. Our elections don’t have to be this way.

While attempts to reform federal campaign finance laws have faltered, states are leading the way in reducing the influence of money in politics. Significant experiments are occurring in Maine, Vermont, and Arizona, where a new kind of politics is beginning to take root. Those states have adopted “Clean Money/ Clean Elections” laws that enable low- and moderate-income people to run for office by providing public campaign funds. The laws also reduce the influence that wealthy people, organizations, and corporations have over public policy.

It’s a bold, new experiment in democracy, seeking to restore the principle of one person, one vote. These programs generally work this way:

- ♦ To participate in the public funding system, candidates must collect a large number of small donations from registered voters in their districts.
- ♦ The candidates must also agree to strict fund raising and spending limits.
- ♦ But once they meet these requirements, the public fund covers the entire cost of their campaigns. Even if a candidate is running against a well-financed opponent, he or she receives enough money to compete.



In Maine and Arizona, the laws took effect in 2000. We are now seeing some exciting results. In both states, more candidates are running for office, especially more people of color. In Arizona, with its sizable Latino and Native American populations, the availability of Clean Election funding appears to be having an impact.

In 2002, 37 people of color ran for office in Arizona, a big increase from the previous election, when Clean Elections was new and there were only 13 candidates of color. The biggest increase was among the number of Latinos running for office. Among the 37 candidates of color, 21 took part in the public funding system.

Candidates report that the process of collecting small contributions forces them to interact face-to-face with regular voters, rather than spend time with wealthy donors and lobbyists.

“Working with lobbyists now is fascinating,” said Jim Sedillo, a Latino who was elected to the Arizona State House of Representatives in 2000. “Their approach is, ‘May we talk to you and share some information?’ It’s not, ‘I did something for you, now you owe me.’”

While there are active reform efforts under way across the country, in many states they face opposition from lawmakers and special interests who don’t want to let go of power.

Some critics are concerned about spending taxpayers’ money on campaigns, when there are so many other pressing needs to attend to. They fear that spending money on elections would take away

from other needs, such as education or road maintenance.

But Clean Election supporters point out the small cost of the laws and say the spending is worth it to improve U.S. democracy. The laws have cost between \$1 and \$2 per person, per year, in Maine and Arizona, according to the most recent estimates.

“That’s less than a ‘Happy Meal’ at McDonalds,” said Joe O’Brien, executive director of Mass Voters for Clean Elections. That’s a small price for a working democracy.

<sup>1</sup> Averages are for general election candidates only.

Janet Groat is the money and politics director of Northeast Action, a regional center for organizing and progressive action. If you want to get involved in bringing Clean Elections to your state, or if you want more information, call 617-541-0500 or e-mail to [jgroat@neaction.org](mailto:jgroat@neaction.org).

## Discussing “Hot” Issues



Did you know that television networks like NBC, ABC, FOX and CBS do not pay to use the airwaves while cable television networks like CNN do pay? These broadcast television networks were given the free use of the airwaves on one condition: that they serve the public interest. Technically, the airwaves are public property and belong to all of the citizens of the United States.

Yet, during an election season, these television networks charge political candidates triple the regular price of television advertisements. These ads have become the single largest expense for election campaigns at all levels. Exorbitant advertising costs often force candidates to resort to ten-second sound bites and attack-style advertising. These kinds of advertisements do not serve the public interest because they do not really help to inform voters about candidates and issues.

The Alliance for Better Campaigns is a nonprofit organization that sponsors the *Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Campaign*. Honorary Chairs include broadcast legend Walter Cronkite as well as former U.S. presidents Ford and Carter. It hopes to change the standard for political advertisements to encourage candidates to focus on the issues and truly inform voters.

The Alliance for Better Campaigns, with the cooperation of three senators, introduced the *Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Act* (S1947) into the United States Senate on July 31, 2003. This bill would provide vouchers (financed by a fee collected from broadcasters) to federal candidates or national parties to be used to place television or radio advertising. Broadcasters would be required to air, at a minimum, two hours per week of candidate-centered or issue-centered programs for the six weeks preceding an election. Finally, the bill closes loopholes that allow broadcasters to charge candidates more than other advertisers. These three provisions would help people with limited resources to get involved in politics and enable the American people to hear about a wider array of political candidates and issues.

The *Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Campaign's* objective is to finally make broadcast television serve the public interest. If the bill passes, American citizens will have the opportunity of becoming more informed voters. To find out more about the Alliance for Better Campaigns and the *Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Campaign*, visit [www.bettercampaigns.org](http://www.bettercampaigns.org).

*Melissa Mae Williams is a project assistant at the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.*

## Our Democracy, Our Airwaves

*by Melissa Mae Williams*

## Run for Office? Who Me?

*by Janet Groat*

Deborah Simpson was waiting on tables and trying to put herself through college when a customer suggested that she run for office.

“Me? I’m a single mother!” she responded quizzically. “Then I thought about it for a moment and I thought, ‘Well, maybe that’s the reason I should.’”

Simpson, 41, seeks to be a voice for people without a lot of money or privilege—people who are going through the same day-to-day challenges she faces while raising her son Isaiah.

Her ascendance into the Maine Legislature in 2000 was made possible by the state’s “Clean Elections” law—plus a lot of hard work and door-to-door contact on her part. The Clean Elections law allows candidates who demonstrate support in their districts to receive full public funding for their campaigns. It’s designed to give good people a fair chance to win elective office and to reduce the influence of money in politics.

The law first took effect in 2000, making Maine a pioneer in campaign finance reform. There are now 112 Maine legislators (60 percent of the total) who were elected without private funds.

“I grew up in a Democratic household. The first campaign I remember ‘lit dropping’ for was George McGovern’s. I was 10,” said Simpson. She recalls going door to door for McGovern and others throughout her youth, but she did not see herself as a contender until that day she was prodded by a customer in TJ’s restaurant, where she works.

Now, she’s in her second term and serves on the Taxation and the Judiciary Committees. She’s slowly making a name for herself as an advocate of the working class.

In her first term, Simpson took leadership in building support for a measure that helps working parents obtain state subsidies for childcare costs. Now, parents can receive subsidies up front, in the beginning of the month, rather than paying the bills and waiting for reimbursement.

She has also helped in the effort to collect child support from absent parents. As a single mother, Simpson knew that some parents escape paying child support by asking employers to hire them as “independent contractors” rather than regular employees. This makes it harder for the state to find them and deduct payments from their wages. Under a bill she authored, employers will now have to submit records of everyone they hire—including independent contractors—if they do business with the state. Once this law is up and running, Simpson hopes to expand it to include all employers.

“It helps the parents and it may save money for the state,” she said.

Simpson said the impact of being a Clean Elections candidate is hard to measure. Special interest lobbyists tend to ignore her. That could be because she’s still relatively new in Augusta, or it could be because she never sought their help or donations during her campaigns, she said.

“I’m ignored by the lobby,” she said. “They think I’m reasonable, but they know they have nothing over me. They know they won’t win me over.”

One accomplishment she is especially proud of was the defeat of a measure sponsored by real estate developers who have a powerful presence in the State Capitol. The bill would have reduced citizen power over land use decisions in their towns. She and others worked hard to defeat it, an achievement that might not have been possible when real estate interests played a major role in legislative campaigns.

“It was an attempt by the real estate industry to take away people’s rights to democracy,” she said. “We put a stop to that.”

*Janet Groat is the money and politics director of Northeast Action, a regional center for organizing and progressive action. If you want to get involved in bringing Clean Elections to your state, or if you want more information, call 617-541-0500 or e-mail to [jgroat@neaction.org](mailto:jgroat@neaction.org).*

# Iraq After War

## The Challenge of Securing the Peace

An important debate is taking place in the United States and abroad about how the post-war period in Iraq should be handled, who should be in charge, and what the goals should be. You will probably hear the presidential candidates talking a lot about this during their campaign. What follows are four policy “options” that frame the current debate. They are designed to help you think about a range of possible choices and the consequences of each.

The four options provided are not intended as a menu of choices. Rather, they are framed in stark terms to highlight very different policy approaches. Each option includes a set of criticisms against it. These are designed to help you think carefully about the trade-offs of each choice.

### Option 1

#### **The U.S. should take advantage of the opportunity to rebuild Iraq in a way that protects our interests.**

Saddam Hussein is no longer a threat to the Iraqi people or to the world. Though some other countries helped in the war, we took the lead and paid for almost the entire operation. We have earned the right to rebuild Iraq in a way that reflects our national security and economic interests. Today, disorder and uncertainty characterize post-war Iraq. Only U.S. leadership and guidance can create a stable Iraq that is not a threat to our interests. We must continue to look for Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction and destroy them so they can’t get in the hands of terrorists or other states. We also want to keep looking for criminals from the former Iraqi government. We need Iraqis’ help in getting the country running again. We must find the Iraqis we trust to be in public office and in the police and security forces. However, the U.S. should remain in control of these forces to make sure they are stable. We must also decide quickly what the country needs in the rebuilding effort and bring in predominantly American companies to carry it out. It is critical to restart Iraq’s oil industry in order to pay for the reconstruction and make sure there is a steady flow of oil to the rest of the world. As things progress in post-war Iraq, we must always keep our national security in mind. It’s important that the U.S. has control over how this happens, not the United Nations.

#### **Arguments Against**

- ◆ If the U.S. controls the rebuilding process in Iraq, people will see Americans as continuing to act alone. This will also fuel anti-Americanism in Iraq, in the region, and around the world.
- ◆ The U.S. is already seen as occupying Iraq. Maintaining control of and profiting from the rebuilding process will only make this worse. People may accuse us of imperialism in the region.
- ◆ When the U.S. went to war against Iraq without UN support, we created a rift that will only get worse if we do not cooperate now.
- ◆ If we are not team players in the rebuilding of Iraq, we will be straining relationships that are needed for the war on terrorism.

### Option 2

#### **The U.S. should rebuild Iraq and establish a democracy there to build lasting peace in the Middle East.**

The war with Iraq is over and Saddam Hussein is no longer a threat to the Iraqi people or to the world. Now that the Iraqi people are free, we must follow through with our promise to help bring democracy to Iraq. Right now there is a lot of uncertainty and chaos in Iraq. It is a country without any history of democracy. Building democracy there won’t be easy, but with enough determination and support it can happen. We must focus on bringing order to the country and putting control of the country in the hands of Iraqis who are clearly working to rebuild the country. First we must help Iraqis rebuild their oil industry so that money from this can pay for the reconstruction efforts. We must also work with Iraqi leaders to get rid of all of Saddam Hussein’s biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons programs. Then we can focus on helping Iraqis develop the systems and institutions they need to create a stable democracy. As soon as possible, we should support free and fair elections. Americans will probably have to stay in Iraq for many years because only our leadership can create a stable, prosperous, and democratic Iraq. The price will be high but the goal is worth the cost. A democratic and prosperous Iraq will be a model for the rest of the Middle East and ultimately a trusted partner of the United States.

#### **Arguments Against**

- ◆ If the U.S. instead of Iraqis decides what kind of government Iraq should have, people will think we’re trying to control them and impose our own values. This will make lots of Iraqis and others angry with the U.S.
- ◆ Replacing longstanding Iraqi authority structures with democratic structures could provoke violence against U.S. troops or turn Iraqis against other Iraqis.
- ◆ Rebuilding Iraq and establishing a democracy there will take a long time, cost a lot of money, and might not even work. We can’t afford it. We should be spending our money on economic and security needs at home and addressing poverty and despair in other countries. By doing this we will reduce the root causes of terrorism.
- ◆ By going to war against Iraq without the support of the UN, we have hurt our relationships with our European allies. To repair this we need to work with the UN to help Iraqis rebuild their society and establish the form of government that they choose.
- ◆ By taking the lead in post-war Iraq we will be straining relationships with countries whose cooperation we need for the war on terrorism.



## Option 3

### The U.S. should fully support the UN as the legitimate international body to oversee the rebuilding of Iraq.

Saddam Hussein has been captured and is no longer in power. Yet most Iraqis, even those who hated Saddam Hussein, do not trust the motives of the United States. Many in Iraq and throughout the region are fearful of a U.S. occupation force in Iraq. The United Nations must take the lead in rebuilding Iraq so that people believe the U.S. is not trying to control Iraq for our own purposes. The United States should collaborate with the UN to replace U.S. troops with UN peacekeepers as quickly as possible. As the nation that led the way to war with Iraq, we have a responsibility to invest resources in the rebuilding effort. And, we are the only nation that has enough economic and military strength to make a UN-led effort effective. Working with the UN will also mean that others will share the costs and consequences of stabilizing and rebuilding Iraq. The more we work with other countries to help rebuild Iraq, the more people will trust the United States' motivations to truly help Iraqis. If we keep trying to do things our way we will be even more alienated from other countries. This could make us less secure in the long run since we need their help to continue to fight terrorism. The UN should be in charge of things until an Iraqi government can take over. The UN must also take charge of efforts to find and dismantle Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We should support the return of UN weapons inspectors to lead this effort. By following this strategy, the world will see that the U.S. wants to cooperate with other nations and that we are truly committed to helping Iraqis create their own society.

#### Arguments Against

- ◆ The UN is slow and ineffective and cannot act quickly enough to lessen the suffering in Iraq. The U.S. is there and has the ability to act quickly.
- ◆ We do not need UN weapons inspectors getting in the way of our efforts to find and dismantle Saddam Hussein's weapons programs. The politics and bureaucracy of the UN will only slow the process down.
- ◆ If the UN is in charge and we are contributing, we could find ourselves paying for policies and programs that are not in our interests.
- ◆ If the UN is in charge there are no guarantees that democracy will be built since the UN doesn't have this as one of its goals.
- ◆ Other UN members (such as France and Russia) want the UN involved in the rebuilding of Iraq in order to ensure that they realize some of the economic gain from the effort. They were unwilling to take the risks associated with the war; why should they reap the benefits?

## Option 4

### The U.S. should step back from any leadership in the region and encourage others to help Iraq rebuild.

Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. We can stop worrying about weapons of mass destruction in his hands. Now it's time to encourage others in the international community to take over the leadership role in Iraq while we bring our troops home safely. We have so many needs here at home that we cannot afford to use all our resources in other areas of the world.

Our policies in the Middle East have caused many to resent and even hate the United States. This makes us more at risk to acts of terrorism. We should reduce our visibility and military presence in the region to avoid becoming a target of further terrorism and violence. The longer we keep our troops in Iraq the more soldiers we could lose since individual terrorists, regime loyalists, and angry Iraqis continue to fight against us. We must step back from any leadership role in Iraq—whether on our own or through the UN. Let others take responsibility for maintaining stability in this troubled region. The huge quantity of resources needed to rebuild Iraq could be better used here at home, particularly for homeland security and our faltering economy. We should bring our troops home and turn our attention to our own needs.

#### Arguments Against

- ◆ Leaving Iraq at this moment, without a civil authority in control, will allow Iran and Syria—two nations that sponsor terrorism—to step in and create a regime that is hostile to the United States.
- ◆ Poverty and disorder, left unaddressed, will be a breeding ground for further terrorism. As the ones who led the war on Iraq, the United States will be the focus of this.
- ◆ We have risked American lives and gone to tremendous expense to rid the world of Saddam Hussein and make room for democracy to take root in Iraq. If we leave now the opportunity to establish democracy in the heart of the Middle East will be lost.
- ◆ Having damaged Iraq's infrastructure and thrown out its government, we have a moral obligation to rebuild the country. The international community does not have the resources or desire to rebuild Iraq in the absence of U.S. involvement.
- ◆ Oil is a security concern. If we abandon Iraq now and leave the reconstruction to others, our access to oil from this region will be at the mercy of the international community.

## Option 5: What Do You Think?

After you have had a chance to consider each of the options presented, we encourage you to develop your own ideas on this issue. You may want to borrow heavily from one of the options presented, combine ideas from several, or take a new approach altogether. As you frame your "Option 5," think about the following questions:

- 1) What U.S. interests are at stake in this issue?
- 2) How do different groups in Iraq see the rebuilding process? Groups in the Arab world? Our western allies? Those in other parts of the world?
- 3) How important should the welfare of the Iraqi population be in determining U.S. policy?
- 4) What should our long-term goals be?
- 5) What values are important to you?
- 6) What are the pros and cons of this option?

You will want to see how the candidates answer these questions too. Whose ideas match your own?

# Freedom and Security

**Editorial Note:** When researching material that outlined the choices that our government is making between freedom and security, we found a speech delivered by Al Gore on November 9, 2003, which we felt did a good job of laying out the issues involved. We have tried to be informative rather than partisan in the articles we've chosen for this issue and acknowledge Gore's position in the Democratic Party, yet felt these excerpted remarks of his had a clarity lacking in many other resources.

I want to talk today [about] the true relationship between Freedom and Security.

So it seems to me that the logical place to start the discussion is with an accounting of exactly what has happened to civil liberties and security since the vicious attacks against America of September 11, 2001—and it's important to note at the outset that the Administration and the Congress have brought about many beneficial and needed improvements to make law enforcement and intelligence community efforts more effective against potential terrorists.

But a lot of other changes have taken place that a lot of people don't know about and that come as unwelcome surprises. For example, for the first time in our history, American citizens have been seized by the executive branch of government and put in prison without being charged with a crime, without having the right to a trial, without being able to see a lawyer, and without even being able to contact their families.

... "Enemy combatant." Those are the magic words. If the president alone decides that those two words accurately describe someone, then that person can be immediately locked up and held incommunicado for as long as the president wants, with no court having the right to determine whether the facts actually justify his imprisonment.

Now if the president makes a mistake, or is given faulty information by somebody working for him, and locks up the wrong person, then it's almost impossible for that person to prove his innocence—because he can't talk to a lawyer or his family or anyone else and he doesn't even have the right to know what specific crime he is accused of committing. So a constitutional right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness that we used to think of in an old-fashioned way as "inalienable" can now be instantly stripped from any American by the president with no meaningful review by any other branch of government.

How do we feel about that? Is that OK?

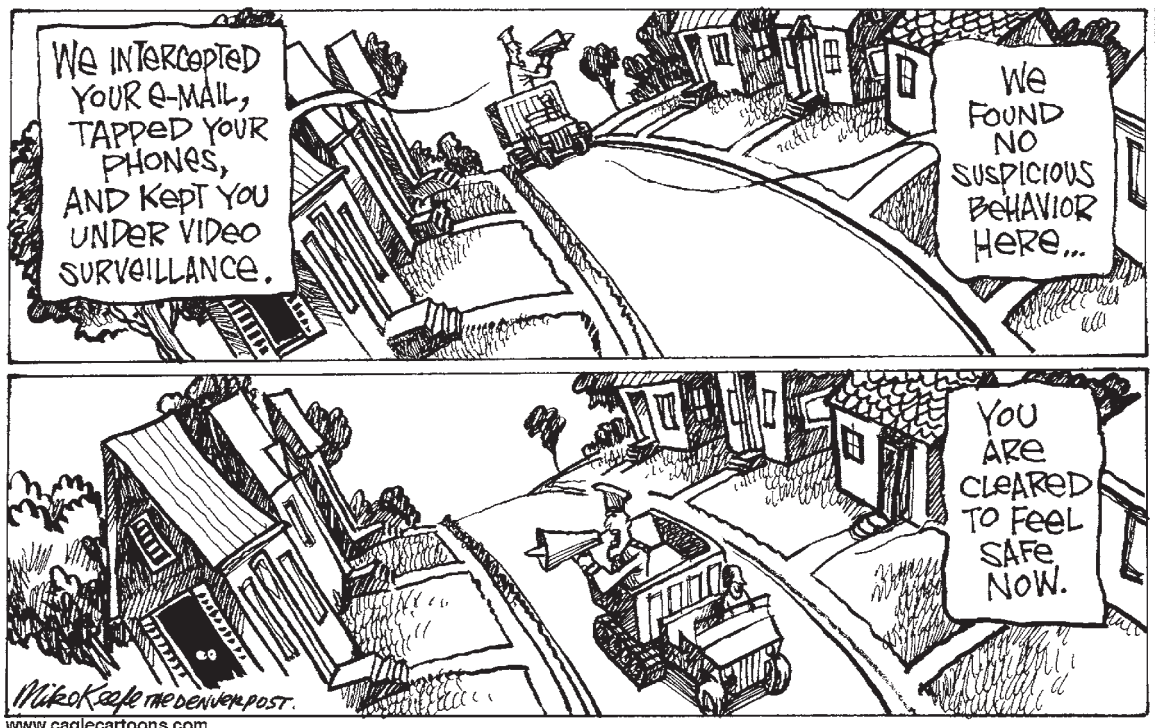
Here's another recent change in our civil liberties: Now, if it wants to, the federal government has the right to monitor every Web site you go to on the Internet, keep a list of everyone you send email to or receive email from and everyone who you call on the telephone or who calls you—and they don't even have to show probable cause that you've done anything wrong. Nor do they ever have to report to any court on what they're doing with the information. Moreover, there are precious few safeguards to keep them from reading the content of all your email.

Everybody fine with that?

If so, what about this next change?

For America's first 212 years, it used to be that if the police wanted to search your house, they had to be able to convince an independent judge to give them a search warrant and then (with rare exceptions) they had to go bang on your door and yell, "Open up!" Then, if you didn't quickly open up, they could knock the door down. Also, if they seized anything, they had to leave a list explaining what they had taken. That way, if it was all a terrible mistake (as it sometimes is) you could go and get your stuff back.

But that's all changed now. Starting two years ago, federal agents were given broad new statutory authority by the Patriot Act to "sneak and peak" in non-terrorism cases. They can secretly enter your home with no warning—whether you are there or not—and they can wait for months before telling you they were there. And it doesn't have to have any relationship to terrorism whatsoever. It applies to any garden-variety crime. And the new law makes it very easy to get around the need for a traditional warrant simply



by saying that searching your house might have some connection (even a remote one) to the investigation of some agent of a foreign power. Then they can go to another court, a secret court, that more or less has to give them a warrant whenever they ask.

What about the right to consult a lawyer if you're arrested? Is that important?

[There are now] regulations authorizing the secret monitoring of attorney-client conversations. . . . Now, whoever is in custody has to assume that the government [can listen] to consultations between them and their lawyers.

Does it matter if the government listens in on everything you say to your lawyer? Is that OK?

Or, to take another change—and thanks to the librarians, more people know about this one—the FBI now has the right to go into any library and ask for the records of everybody who has used the library and get a list of who is reading what. Similarly, the FBI can demand all the records of banks, colleges, hotels, hospitals, credit-card companies, and many more kinds of companies. And these changes are only the beginning. Just last week, Attorney General Ashcroft issued brand new guidelines permitting FBI agents to run credit checks and background checks and gather other information about anyone who is "of investigatory interest,"—meaning anyone the agent thinks is suspicious—without any evidence of criminal behavior.

So, is that fine with everyone? . . .

The question before us could be of no greater moment: will we continue to live as a people under the rule of law as embodied in our Constitution? Or will we fail future generations, by leaving them a Constitution far diminished from the charter of liberty we have inherited from our forebears? Our choice is clear.

Excerpted remarks from a speech given by Al Gore on November 9, 2003.

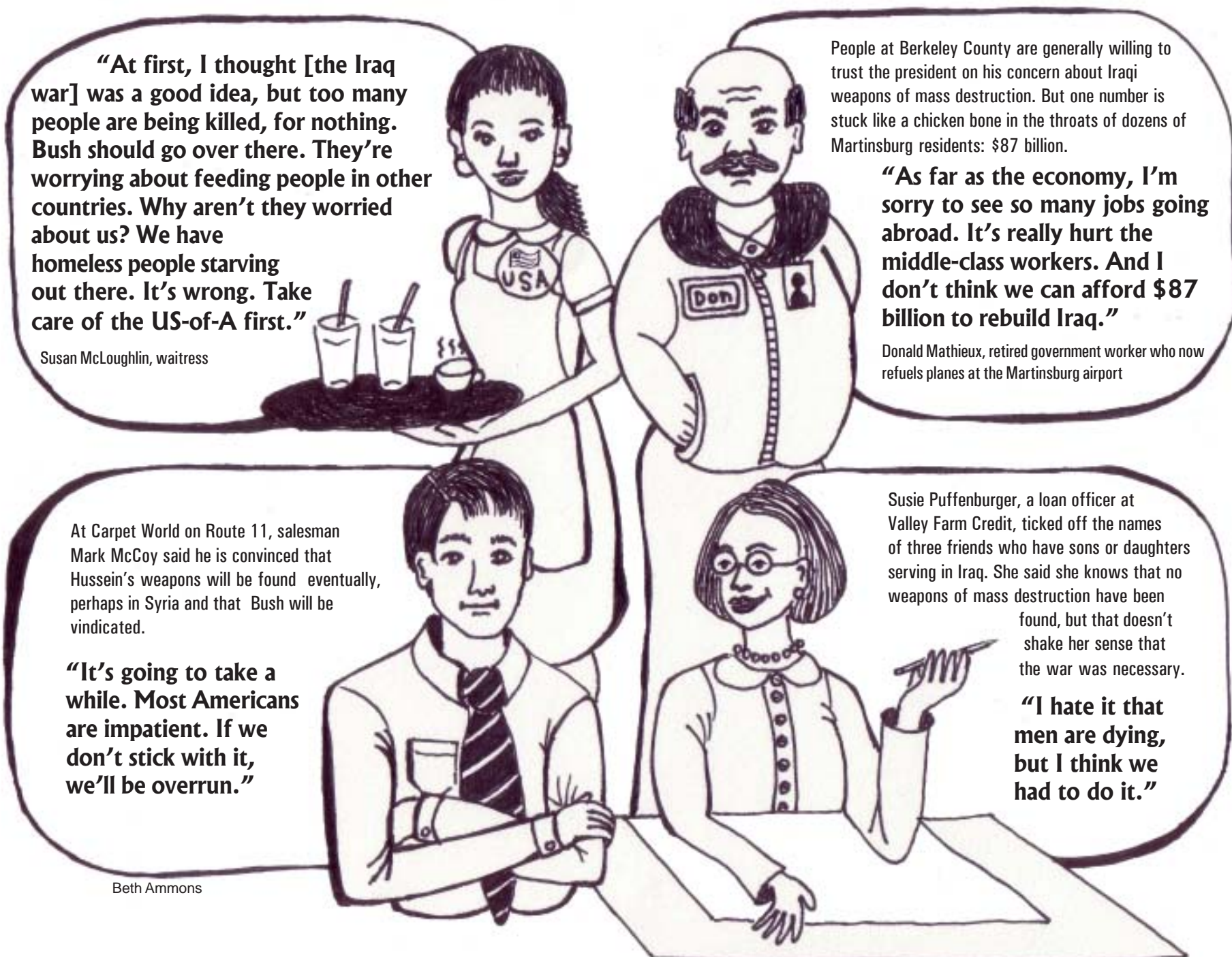
## For Further Discussion

- 1) What do you agree with and what do you disagree with in this speech?
- 2) What are some arguments a person in favor of the Patriot Act might make?
- 3) How much privacy are you willing to give up for the sake of security? Do you think one has to be traded for the other?



# Price Tag for the War

In a Boston Globe article from September 30, 2003, several residents from Martinsburg, West Virginia were asked what they thought about the war with Iraq and the amount of money needed to keep it going. Though now approved by Congress, the \$87 billion that Bush requested to rebuild Iraq was an issue Martinsburg residents had strong opinions about. For many, this new price tag caused them to reflect on their overall feelings about the war as well.

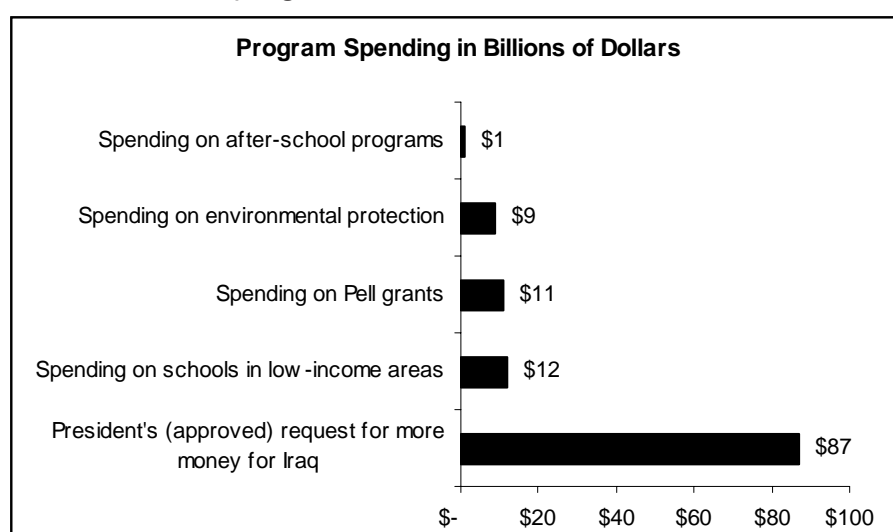


## What Do You Think?

- So far, the current administration has spent \$79 billion on the war in Iraq and Congress approved another \$87 billion. What is the total amount that will be spent on the war in Iraq so far?
- How do you feel about the cost of the war? Do you think this is what we should be spending taxpayers’ money on?
- What are your opinions about the war? Do you think it is a good idea? Why or why not? Do you agree or disagree with anything that the Martinsburg residents said?
- Have you changed your mind about the war since it started? Why or why not?
- In a debate in the fall of 2003, one Democratic candidate said, “It is an insult to keep telling Americans to send our children to war is an honor, to risk their lives to die for the country, but it’s a burden for the rich to pay their taxes to the country.” What do you think of this quote?
- Where do you think all the money used to pay for the war is coming from?

## How Much is 87 Billion Dollars?

- 87 billion dollars is seven times what the federal government spends on schools in low-income areas.
- It’s eight times what the nation spends on Pell grants for college aid.
- Eighty-seven billion dollars is ten times what the federal government spends on environmental protection.
- And, it’s 87 times what the federal government spends on after-school programs.



# Tax Cuts Who do they help?

by Silja Kallenbach

How many potholes could the government have fixed with the money it returned to you as your share of the 2003 tax cut? The answer depends on your income. The more you earned in 2003 the more you'll receive as your share of the cut. If your income was below \$45,000 and you have children under 17, the average tax refund was around \$500. If your income was below \$28,000 and you have children under 17, it was only \$105 per year. You would have to have made over \$104,000 a year to reap over \$1,000.

When you put it all together, though, that's a lot of potholes that could have been fixed, highway bridges that could have been repaired, teachers who could have been hired, firemen who could have been paid. The question is: are you willing to pay for all the services you expect to receive from your local, state, and federal governments or do you think the tax money is better off back in your pocket?

Many people want to pay less in taxes but they also expect to receive all the same services that tax dollars pay for. They want better schools and Medicare coverage, longer unemployment benefits, streets paved and the snow plowed, and protection from crime, bacteria and natural disasters. (Take a look at the list of what your taxes pay for on this page.) Americans actually pay some of the lowest taxes of any industrialized nation. On the average, middle-income people pay 26 % of their income in taxes whereas in Canada they pay 38.2 %, and in Sweden 52.2 %. In these other countries, people have chosen to pay more taxes so that they have more benefits such as a universal medical plan, year-long maternity leave, higher education that is much less expensive to the individual than is the case here. In the U.S., most people's federal taxes have not gone up in the past decade; in fact, the wealthy have had their taxes cut 56 % in the last 40 years. Yet there are 46 million of us without health insurance and a crisis in the rising costs of a college education.

## Taxes on corporations and on the wealthy

Corporate taxes are at an all-time low. The percentage of their profits that corporations have to pay in taxes has been cut in half from almost 50% in the 1950's to an average 25%. Tax breaks that were put into place in 2002 and 2003 reduced tax revenues from businesses by over \$50 billion. Less than 10% of the federal taxes collected comes from corporations. This means that most of the rest of the money that the federal government has to spend must come from individuals. Some of the recent tax breaks given to corporations are supposed to expire in the next few years. Naturally, corporations are pressuring politicians to extend them.

The argument goes that if you cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy, the money will eventually 'trickle down' to the average worker. It says that tax breaks help corporations save money that they will then invest in expansion and new jobs. In the same way, this argument assumes that if the rich pay fewer taxes, they will spend more money, say by buying a new car, and that money then goes into the pockets of the company and its workers. As it turns out, the rich are more likely to save money they receive as part of a tax cut, not spend it, while lower income people are the ones more likely to spend it since they have greater immediate needs. According to economist Mehrun Etebari, "Overall, data from the past 50 years strongly refutes any arguments that cutting taxes for the richest Americans will improve the economic standing of the lower and middles classes or the nation as a whole." What "trickles down" is not wealth for all.

One problem with tax breaks for individuals and corporations is that the costs, in terms of lost public revenue, are much higher than the benefits to the economy. Tax breaks to corporations may lead to some new jobs being created, but at a very high price. Because the government is taking in less money than it needs to pay for present needs, it has to borrow large amounts that will have to be paid off by future generations of taxpayers.

A close look at patterns of growth in people's wages and in new jobs shows that there is no relationship between these and lower taxes. In fact, the statistics from the past two decades show that people's incomes and hourly wages increased more in years with higher tax rates! The \$200 billion in tax cuts in 2003 is equivalent to the average salaries of four million workers. Instead of trying to stimulate the economy with tax cuts, another approach would have been to create jobs for people with the money the government gave away in tax cuts. By choosing to cut taxes, the government is pursuing a strategy that favors the wealthy rather than the average worker.

## A matter of policy

So, you might ask, why do we keep trying to solve our economic problems with solutions that have been shown not to work to the benefit of the majority of Americans? One explanation is that there is a strong and well-financed campaign to make Americans think they will benefit from these policies. It is led by an organization called Americans for Tax Reform. Their goal is to reduce the size and scope of government, and to cut taxes, especially on the wealthy.

As taxpayers and voters, we need to understand better the economic policies that are touted as beneficial to average Americans. We need to ask whose interests are being served by these economic policies. Is it OK with you that low and middle-income people pay a bigger percentage of their income in taxes than the wealthy? Do you want to end or continue the tax breaks for corporations? Who will foot the bill for the war in Iraq, for education, Medicare, highways and so on? Do you want your children to have to pay for the debt we are creating today?

As taxpayers and voters, we not only need to question how tax revenue is generated but also how our tax dollars are spent. What should we spend more on, college loans or prisons? Reconstruction in Iraq or health care at home? The list goes on. These are not easy decisions, and many people would rather leave it up to the politicians. However, it is in our self-interest to understand these issues and to decide for ourselves whether we agree with the spending priorities set by elected officials. And if we don't agree, we need to make our opinions heard in the voting booth and through more direct communication with legislators once they are elected. Otherwise, if current trends continue, we may well need to pay to fix the potholes with our own money.

*Silja Kallenbach is the coordinator of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA.*

## If You Don't Like Paying Taxes . . .

- Don't drive on paved streets or highways.
- Don't call 911 or make use of police services.
- Don't bring your garbage to the curb.
- Don't fly in an airplane that uses air-traffic controllers.
- Don't use the court system.
- Don't use the U.S. Post Office; send all your letters via FedEx or UPS.
- Don't ask for a taxpayer subsidy to do business in a city or state.
- Don't buy a sports franchise and ask the taxpayers to build your stadium.
- Don't send your children to public schools.
- Don't attend a state university.
- Don't expect a Social Security payment.
- Don't let Medicare pay your bills if you are over 65 or disabled.
- Don't run for political office where your salary is paid for by the taxpayers.
- Don't accept government research findings that subsidize research for your industry.
- Don't be rescued by fire department paramedic team.
- Don't call the fire department.
- Don't expect federal assistance if a natural disaster destroys your home or business.
- Don't expect the military to defend your country.
- Don't visit national parks or hike in national forests.
- Don't eat USDA inspected meat, cheese, eggs, or produce.
- Don't drink, bathe, or otherwise use the water from municipal water systems.
- Don't use the public library.
- Don't use currency printed by the U.S. Treasury.
- Don't get married, have children, or die and expect the government to keep track of all the certificates.
- Don't use public transportation.

Excerpted by permission of BuzzFlash. To view the extended list go to [www.buzzflash.com/perspectives/2002/Taxes.html](http://www.buzzflash.com/perspectives/2002/Taxes.html).



# The State of Our Jobs

by David Stearns

Officially, the American recession ended in November 2001 and we are now entering our third year of recovery. One striking aspect of this so-called recovery from the recession is that the numbers of unemployed people continued to increase until September of 2003. We have been in a period of “jobless recovery.” The very concept seems contradictory. Aren’t recessions about people losing their jobs? What does it mean to speak about the end of a recession without jobs increasing?

How could the economy grow for two years without increasing the total number of employed U.S. workers? Perhaps the most “benign” explanation for the two-year gap between the end of the recession and rise in employment is called “increased productivity.” That is, improvements in technology and management make it possible for companies to use less labor to produce more goods. Because labor represents the highest cost in the process of producing goods or supplying services, companies try to reduce their labor costs. Lower labor costs can mean lower prices when the companies sell their goods or services. Americans as consumers benefit from lower prices. (Of course, if you aren’t employed, you won’t enjoy this benefit because you won’t be buying much.)

A more sinister explanation for the jobless recovery is that American businesses ship jobs to poor countries in Asia or Latin America. Why pay American workers \$12 an hour for assembly work when you can hire Mexican workers to do the same thing for much less per day?

While both reasons explain the jobless recovery, it doesn’t explain why so many unemployed workers aren’t getting the benefits they need. In March 2002, Congress passed a program called Temporary Emergency Unemployment Compensation (TEUC). This gave unemployed workers an additional 13 weeks of paid unemployment to help them through tough times. This program was in effect for nine months, but expired this past December 2003, when Congress went on vacation without extending this program. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December there was instant termination of the program, regardless of how many weeks of compensation a worker had already received. This

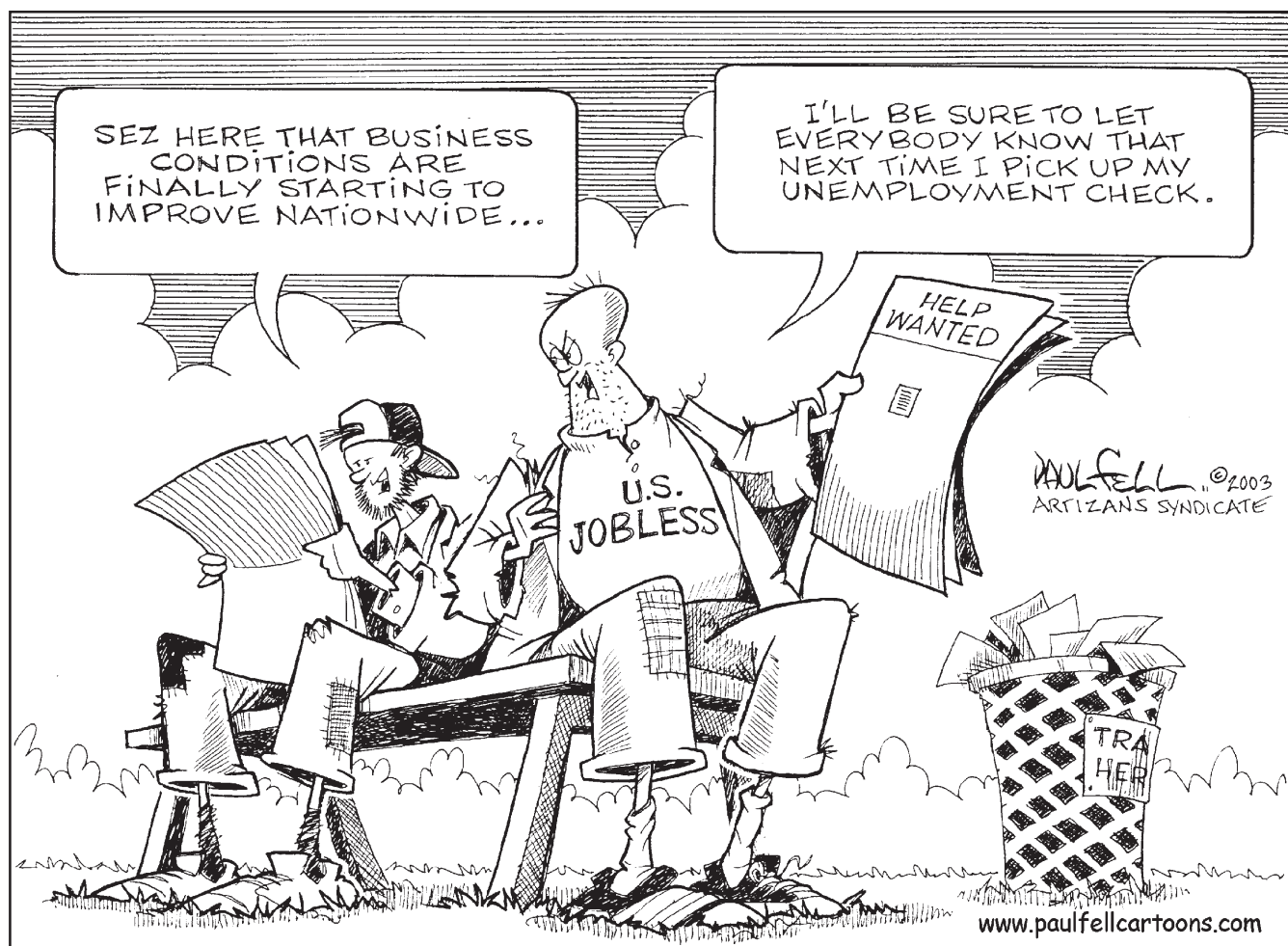
means that if you became eligible for the extended benefits in early December and had only collected three weeks of checks under the program you wouldn’t get the next 10 because of instant termination. Thousands of unemployed workers started losing benefits right away and so far, Congress hasn’t tried to fix the problem since they’ve come back from their holidays.

And, while there are jobs being created, it’s important to look at the *number* and *quality* of those jobs. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) reported in December 2003, that jobs continue to be lost in 30 states. Moreover, there are only three states in which the number of jobs is adequate to employ all those entering the work force. Unemployment is also higher in half the states since the recession ended.

The Economic Policy Institute also reports that the majority of the jobs that have been lost were in industries that paid higher wages compared to those that are now hiring. Many of the new jobs don’t come with the same benefits that workers had before, either. So, in addition to making less money, some re-employed workers have also lost their health coverage and other benefits.

When the presidential candidates talk about the economy you will probably hear different versions of the story. Some might say the economy is recovering and growing while others might say that the economy still isn’t very strong. If the economy is one of the issues you’re concerned about, you might pay close attention to what the candidates say about it. Here are some questions you might see if you can find the answers to. What other questions do you have about the economy?

1. How do candidates explain that, while the economy is improving, there still aren’t enough jobs for all the people who are looking for one?
2. Do candidates talk about whether the jobs that do exist pay enough for families to survive and thrive?
3. Do candidates talk about how to help those people get by who can’t find work?
4. Are candidates concerned about the numbers of jobs going overseas?
5. What do candidates propose for creating more jobs?



David Stearns works at the Jamaica Plain Community Centers Adult Learning Program as a GED teacher, EDP assessor, and ABE coordinator. Since 2000, he has also been an Advisor for the City of Boston External Diploma Program.

# The Politics of Education

## No Child Left Behind

by Erik Jacobson

During each election cycle, almost every candidate makes claims to be the “education candidate,” and promises that they will correct all of the current problems in the nation’s schools. For example, politicians of all political parties say that they believe achievement gaps (where one group does better than another) between poor and rich students, or Black and White students, are serious problems that the nation needs to address. This presidential campaign season most of the talk about education has focused on a law passed a few years ago called “No Child Left Behind,” and candidates are hoping that making their position clear on this law will help voters to understand where they stand on education issues. While President Bush claims that “No Child Left Behind” will close the kinds of education gaps noted above, others are not so sure.

“No Child Left Behind” is legislation that covers how federal money will be spent on local school systems. Currently the federal government provides 7% of state education budgets. “No Child Left Behind” was passed in 2001 by votes of 381-41 in the House of Representatives, and 87-10 in the Senate. This means that it had the support of both Democrats and Republicans, and in fact, President Bush (a Republican) and Senator Kennedy (a Democrat) worked together to get this bill passed. At the time, President Bush criticized the “soft bigotry of low expectations,” and suggested that many students do not succeed because not enough is asked of them. President Bush and other critics of American schools claimed that schools were not being held accountable for providing inferior education to some populations of students (such as minorities living in large cities). “No Child Left Behind” promised to raise the standards, and push schools and students to do better.

### What the law says

The law itself is over 1,000 pages long, and we cannot go over all of the details here, but three important parts of the legislation are listed below:

- 1) All students in grades three through eight must now be tested every year in reading and math. Other annual tests for science will be given starting in 2007. The law requires that 100% of students (even those with disabilities or who are learning English as a Second Language) pass the tests by 2014.
- 2) An increasing number of students must pass the reading and math tests each year for that school to make “adequate yearly progress.” Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress for three years will be punished by having federal money taken away. Schools that do well can receive extra money from the federal government. The same is true for states as a whole. They will either lose or receive federal money based on the results of the tests.
- 3) Parents of a child who is in a school that does not make adequate yearly progress are allowed to move their child to another school that is making adequate yearly progress, including a private school. The law does not guarantee that parents will receive enough money to pay for the school, only that a certain amount will be made available. The law also does not require any other schools to take the child. Money for the transfer and the tuition would come out of the underperforming school’s budget, or in the form of a tax credit for the parent.

Those in favor of the law believe that giving students annual tests is the best way to make sure they are learning what they are supposed to know. They also believe that linking student academic performance to payment will provide schools with the incentive to do better. Most of the Democratic candidates for president have complained that President Bush has not provided states with the amount of money they need to conduct the testing, or money to help schools help students pass the tests. For this reason they claim that the federal government is requiring the states to do something without providing the money to do it.

While the Democrats are right to ask questions about money needed for testing and school support, there are other issues that people need to consider when it comes to “No Child Left Behind.” Having questions about how children, teachers, and schools are being held accountable as part of “No Child Left Behind” does not mean that you are against accountability (as some supporters of the law suggest), only that you wonder what kind of accountability is appropriate.

Finally, as voters we need to hear what the candidates have to say about “No Child Left Behind,” because it is the most influential federal education

policy. However, we need to ask questions beyond whether or not it is getting enough funds. The debate should not just be about if the law does what it says it will, but if you agree with the law in the first place.

*Erik Jacobson is the director of the Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations at the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants. He is also an ESOL teacher and teacher trainer. He is the co-author of the NCSALL publication, Creating Authentic Materials for the Adult Literacy Classroom, available from NCSALL at World Education.*

## What do you think?

1. What do you think of a student being judged on the basis of one test?
  - ⇒ This is called “high-stakes” testing, meaning that the consequences of failing the test are very severe. For example, in Massachusetts you do not get a diploma if you don’t pass the MCAS. Do you think having a high-stakes test helps students to learn? What questions would you ask a candidate about high-stakes tests? Is this the best way to hold students accountable?
2. What do you think of parents being able to send their child to another public school that isn’t failing, or receiving a tax break to send their child to a private school?
  - ⇒ Look at the arguments in the article titled *The Voucher Argument* (on the next page). Which positions make sense to you? What would you want to hear from the candidates about vouchers and tax credits for transferring to a private school? Is this a good way to hold schools accountable?
3. Can focusing on raising test scores without addressing other societal problems be enough to close the gaps between the poor and the rich, or Blacks and Whites? Is it the federal government’s job to make sure every student has enough to eat, has clothes on their back, has access to libraries and museums, and lives in a neighborhood free of pollution and crime? What questions would you ask the candidates about the links between federal support for these other things and educational success?
4. What do you hear the candidates saying about the “No Child Left Behind” law? Do the things they say address your concerns about it?

## What About Adult Education?

**We were wondering if anyone in our field knew whether any of the presidential candidates had proposals for adult education.**

Archie Willard, a learner from Iowa wrote back:

*I live in Iowa and I have been bombarded with phone calls for the last four to five months about who I support in the presidential caucuses. The people that are calling are probably paid workers for the various campaigns. I have had a call from someone for every Democratic candidate that is running in the Iowa caucuses. They usually ask about any concerns that I have or if I have any questions. I always ask about their candidate’s position on adult education or adult literacy. I don’t think any of them have heard of Adult Basic Education (ABE). They all say they don’t know, but they will get back to me. None of them has gotten back to me as of yet. I have gone to hear some of the candidates speak at different functions and tried to ask a question from the floor about ABE and have never been successful in getting recognized to ask a question. This is something we should really know about: How do the candidates look at ABE and do they even understand anything about it?*

**What advice would you give to the president about how to support or improve ABE? Why?**



# The High Cost of Higher Education

By Silja Kallenbach

College education generally pays off. People with an Associate's degree earn, on the average, almost twice as much as high school graduates: \$33,000 versus \$18,900. Yet, every low-income person planning to go to college has to balance the possibility of a greater salary in the future with the present cost of a college education. This cost includes lost earnings when people reduce their work hours from full-time to part-time as well as tuition, fees, and books—all of which have been rising at an alarming rate. Access to higher education is an issue in the 2004 elections.

The cost of going to college is taking an increasingly bigger chunk of adults' income. When the choice comes down to rent and food for the family versus books and tuition for education, college takes the back seat. A Boston Globe article reports that, "Large numbers of lower-income students are being priced out of college. Those who do attend often take on major student loan debt or work long hours, compromising their academic performance." Only 42 percent of adults who enroll in two-year colleges complete their Associate's degrees. Although money is not the only reason, the cost of college is part of the problem that causes people to drop out. Many working adults go to school part-time. If they take less than six credits worth of courses they are ineligible for most types of financial aid.

In 2003, the national annual average tuition and fees at community colleges was \$1,560 and \$4,694 at four-year public colleges and universities. Tuition and fees in four-year colleges have increased 202 percent since 1981. That's three times as much as the increase in the median family income.

At an average of \$19,710 a year for tuition and fees, private higher education is hardly within most low-income people's reach without huge loans and scholarships. Many students graduating from college, especially private ones, face decades of debt after graduation. This cuts into their ability to buy a home or save for their own children's higher education.

Voters concerned about the rising cost of college education should find out what, if any, solutions the presidential candidates are proposing to this situation. A January 2004 review of the major presidential candidates' Web sites turned up a range of plans for making college more affordable. On the Republican side, President Bush's plan for strengthening access to post-secondary education includes a \$33 million increase in Pell Grants (federal student aid) to low-income students "who complete rigorous coursework in high school." On the Democratic side, one proposal, based on family income, would guarantee

\$10,000 per year for college or high skills training for any student who completes high school. Another candidate's proposal is to give \$6,000 per year for the first two years of full-time college to anyone whose family income is below \$100,000. Yet another candidate wants to give more money to the states to help reduce the cost of public higher education, and to pay for tuition in exchange for two years of community service. (To see what the candidates propose, visit their Web sites.)

Ultimately, the question comes down to how public higher education should be funded. How much should be paid by state and federal governments with taxpayers' dollars versus by individual taxpayers directly? The first choice can level the playing field since state and federal governments can tax people with higher incomes more than people with lower incomes. The second choice places a greater burden on people with lower incomes and favors people who have more money. What do you think?

*Silja Kallenbach is the coordinator of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA.*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should all high school graduates be entitled to free or low cost college education regardless of the ability to pay? Why?
2. What are the pros and cons of each candidate's proposals for funding higher education?
3. What is your proposal for how public higher education should be financed?

## MATH QUESTIONS

1. How much more do people with Associate's degree earn, on the average, than high school graduates? How would you spend the money if you earned that much more?
2. Sally brings home \$20,000 a year. Her yearly tuition is \$4,000. What percentage of her take-home income is the tuition?
3. The University of Massachusetts tuition and fees were \$5,750 for in-state students in 2003. They increased 30 percent from 2002 to 2003. What were this university's tuition and fees in 2002?

## The Voucher Argument by Erik Jacobson

The federal "No Child Left Behind" law and the school voucher program are two separate things. But, they do work together. Since under "No Child Left Behind," parents have the option to move their kids out of a low-performing school, they could take advantage of the voucher program in order to send their kids to a private school. Some worry that these two policies take steps toward privatizing all of education in the United States.

### What is a voucher?

A voucher is credit that is given to parents who want to move their child from a public school to a private school of their choice. Sometimes this credit comes from a private source (like a charitable foundation), but many voucher programs involve moving taxpayers' money from public schools to private schools. The voucher is for a fixed amount (for example, \$2,000 a year) that parents can put towards the tuition of the private school (including religious schools). If the school tuition is higher than the amount of the voucher, the parents have to make up the difference. Parents who can afford to send their children to private schools and do so can get a tax-credit. They get money back from the government that subsidizes their child's private schooling.

### How is a voucher program different from school choice?

School choice programs allow parents to choose which public school they want their child to attend, usually within one school district. Voucher programs involve transferring money from one school to another, usually from a public school to a private school.

### What is the purpose of vouchers?

Supporters of voucher programs believe that parents should have the right to choose where to send their children. They also believe that, if students move from public to private schools, the money that would have been spent on those students should move with them. Supporters of vouchers say that the government should support children, not

schools. If schools are not providing good service, why should they receive money? Critics of vouchers programs believe that voucher programs will damage public schools, and not provide the kind of education they promise.

### Claims of those who are in favor of vouchers:

- Public education in the United States is in crisis.
- Voucher programs will help reform education in the United States.
- Voucher programs help children escape bad schools.
- Voucher programs give parents flexibility.
- Voucher programs hold public schools accountable.
- Voucher programs produce productive competition between schools.
- A majority of parents from minority communities support voucher programs.

### Claims of those who are against vouchers:

- Public education in the United States is in crisis and voucher programs will only make the situation worse.
- Voucher programs take needed money away from poorly performing schools creating a downward spiral. The less money a school has the harder it will be for it to make needed improvements.
- Private schools do not have the capacity to handle all students, so only some students could take advantage of the program.
- Private schools do not have to take students with special needs, or those who are learning English, so these students would be left behind in public schools with less money.
- Voucher programs don't fully cover the schooling costs for poor parents.
- Voucher programs are tax-cuts for wealthy families.

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# America's Health Care Crisis

by Steve Bender

In the coming months, as the presidential election heats up, you will be hearing the candidates talk a lot about health care. Many people feel that there is a **health care crisis** in the United States. Though the United States' economy is the biggest in the world, and in many ways we are the richest country in the world, 43.6 million Americans have no health insurance. That is about 15% of those who live here. This number has increased since 2002, when the Census Bureau reported that about 41 million people in the United States were uninsured. Yet, many more people go without insurance during some part of the year. According to a study by Families USA, about 74.7 million people under age 65 (almost one-third of Americans) were without health insurance for all or part of 2001 and 2002.

**How much is 43.6 million?**

- ☆ This is the total number of people living in Canada, Jamaica, and Haiti combined.
- ☆ This is also the total number of people living in the six New England states, plus New York and New Jersey.

Every other industrialized country in the world has some form of health insurance for all their citizens, but not the United States. As the years go by, the situation is getting worse, not better. Though there are certain things that state governments can do to help with this situation, for the most part, this is a national problem that the federal government needs to help solve. Hearing the politicians talk about this issue can be very confusing, and it's hard to know who to believe. This article will give you:

- a) some pre-reading reflection questions,
- b) some facts and figures about the health care crisis in the United States, and
- c) some ideas for activities in the classroom.

## Pre-reading Questions

- Who do you know who is working at a job that doesn't provide health insurance? What do they do when someone in their family is sick or needs to see a doctor?
- Who do you know whose job offers health insurance, but the premiums are so high that they can't afford to pay?
- Who do you know who lost a job, and therefore lost their insurance?
- Do you know a senior citizen who can't afford all of their prescription drugs? What do they do when they can't afford all of their prescriptions? How does this affect their health?

## Health Care Facts

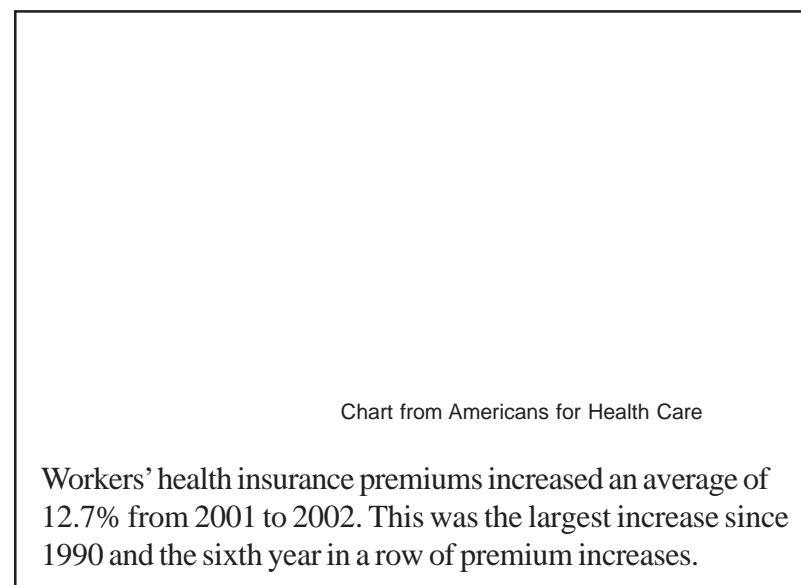
- ◆ Approximately 43.6 million Americans had no health insurance in 2002 and the numbers keep growing. About ¼ of these (over 10 million) are children.
- ◆ In 2001 there were 41.2 million uninsured Americans; in 2000 there were 39.8 million.
- ◆ 8 out of 10 uninsured Americans are in working families with modest incomes. Either their jobs don't provide health benefits or they can't afford the premiums.
- ◆ More than 7 out of 10 people without insurance have at least one full-time worker in the family. This means that over 30 million people have a full-time worker in their family but have no insurance.
- ◆ Workers' health insurance premiums increased an average of 12.7% from 2001 to 2002. This was the largest increase since 1990 and the sixth year in a row of premium increases.
- ◆ Job loss is the primary reason why adults become uninsured at some point during the year. Though laid off workers are eligible to keep their insurance by using the COBRA program, only 20-25% of unemployed workers eligible for COBRA coverage can afford to purchase this coverage.
- ◆ 35% of laid-off workers are ineligible for COBRA because they work for a small firm, or were uninsured before they got laid off.
- ◆ Up to 1.6 million people—including about half a million children—have lost health insurance in the last two years due to cuts in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP). The biggest reasons for these cuts are drops in state tax revenues and deep state budget deficits.
- ◆ These cuts would have been much worse, but the federal government gave \$10 billion in temporary relief to state governments by increasing federal Medicaid rates. However this rate increase expires on July 1, 2004 which could force states to make even deeper cuts.
- ◆ Each one percent increase in unemployment increases the number of Americans who lack health insurance by about 1.2 million.
- ◆ Because of extremely low eligibility levels, more than four out of five low-income, uninsured adults are ineligible for Medicaid or other public health coverage in their state.

## Activities

- With all the numbers provided in the Health Care Facts column, there are lots of possible math problems to give your students using fractions, percents, etc.
- Using these charts and graphs, you could create lessons on how to read them, and/or have students create their own charts and graphs on this or other issues.
- After discussing the questions, students could write about their own experiences or interview someone they know (a classmate, a family member, a neighbor, or a co-worker) about their experiences.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think so many people don't have health insurance?
2. What kinds of people are affected by this problem?
3. Who do you think might be responsible?
4. Who should solve the problem?
5. What do you think should be done?



*Steve Bender is the executive director of the 1199 Training & Upgrading Fund in Connecticut. He administers adult education programs for the 1199 members throughout the state.*



# The Cost of Prescription Drugs

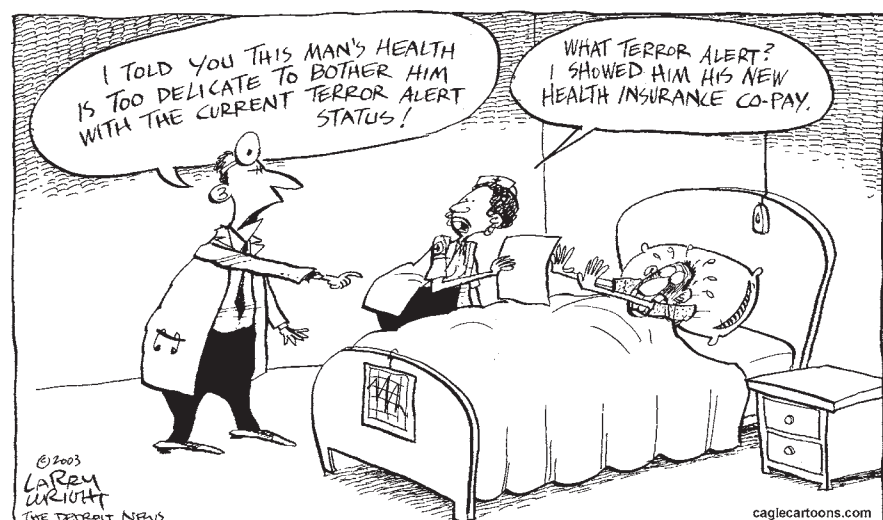
by Steve Bender

Health care costs are rising at such a quick pace that families, small businesses, and state budgets cannot possibly keep up. A big percentage of these increases are due to the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs.

On December 8, 2003 President Bush signed into law a bill that will provide prescription drug benefits for some senior citizens. Bush and the Republicans in Congress say that when this takes effect in 2006, it will be a big help to seniors. However, many Democrats in Congress voted against this plan and the Democratic candidates for president also opposed this plan.

## Questions & Answers About the New Prescription Drug Plan

- How much does it cost?**  
Premiums will cost about \$35 a month (\$420 per year) starting in 2006.
- Will this drug plan be part of Medicare?**  
No. You will purchase the plan from HMOs or private insurance companies.
- Does this new law prevent drug costs from continuing to rise so fast?**  
No. This law prohibits Medicare from using its purchasing power to negotiate lower drug prices (like the Veterans Administration does, which saves billions of dollars per year in drug costs for veterans).
- Will I be allowed to buy cheaper drugs from Canada or other countries?**  
No. Under this law, drugs can only be bought from other countries if the Secretary of Health and Human Services allows it. He has already said that he will refuse.
- What will I get?**  
After you pay the premium and a \$250 deductible, the plan will pay 75% of your drug costs (you pay the other 25%) until your total drug expenses reach \$2250 for that year. At that point, your coverage stops and you have to pay for the next \$2850 entirely by yourself. This is called the "doughnut hole." Insurance coverage doesn't start again until your drug expenses reach \$5100. At that point, you've spent \$4020 of your own money, but you will now qualify for "catastrophic coverage." This means that for the rest of the year, you pay either a co-payment of \$2-5 per prescription, or 5%, whichever is greater.
- Will I end up saving money?**  
Not necessarily. According to Consumers Union, because of how the law is designed, and the continued rise in costs, most people will actually pay more in 2007 (one year after the law takes effect) than they did in 2003.
- If I'm low-income, will I get extra help?**  
Yes. Seniors with incomes below 135% of the federal poverty level and with assets below \$6000 (individual) or \$9000 (couple) will get drugs at \$1-2 for generic drugs and \$3-5 per brand name drug prescription.



## Facts About Prescription Drug Costs

- Since 1995, total national spending by consumers and the government on prescription drugs has grown by over 10% every year, more than double the rate of growth for other health services.
  - Since 1991, average retail prices for prescription drugs have grown twice as fast as average monthly Social Security benefits for elderly couples.
  - Drug companies charge far more in the United States than in other countries for the same drugs.
  - In April 2000, Fortune magazine ranked drug companies as the most profitable industry in the world. The industry had a 39.4% rate of profit on equity, compared to the 13.4% average for the Fortune 500 companies. Under the recently passed prescription drug bill, drug companies will make billions more in profits.
  - Drug companies say that they need high profits to do research and development of new drugs. However, a large portion of the research and development for new drugs is done with federal taxpayer funds. In many cases, the big drug companies spend two to three times more on advertising than research and development.
- After reading these facts, how would you describe the problem?
  - Who do you think might be responsible for the high cost of prescription drugs? Why?

### Web Resources on Health Care Issues

There is a wealth of resources on the Internet that will help you learn more about health care and what various groups are saying. Here are a few:

- Americans for Health Care**  
[www.Americansforhealthcare.com](http://www.Americansforhealthcare.com)
- Families USA**  
[www.Familiesusa.org](http://www.Familiesusa.org)
- Uninsured Americans**  
[www.CoveringTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoveringTheUninsured.org)
- AFL-CIO**  
[www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)

## Evaluating Candidates' Positions on Health Care

- What is the candidate's plan to provide some form of health insurance coverage for some or all of the 43 million uninsured Americans? How many will the plan help and how soon?
- Does the candidate support the prescription drug law that passed in December 2003? If not, what does he propose to help seniors with the costs of prescription drugs?
  - Under his plan, will people be allowed to get drugs at cheaper prices from places outside the US, like Canada?
  - Under the plan, what will be done to slow the rise in drug prices?
- Will the plan be part of Medicare (run by the government) or run by private companies? Why do you think this might matter?
- How does the candidate propose to keep overall health care costs (which include insurance premiums for businesses and individuals as well as prescription drugs) down?
- How does the candidate plan to pay for his proposed programs?

To learn more, check the presidential candidates' Web sites:

- Bush for President**  
[www.georgewbush.com](http://www.georgewbush.com)
- Democratic Candidates**  
[www.democrats.org/whitehouse/candidates.html](http://www.democrats.org/whitehouse/candidates.html)

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# How to Pick a Candidate

## STEP 1: Study the Campaign

Two of the ways candidates can be judged are by:

1. The positions they take on issues, and
2. The leadership qualities and experience they would bring to the office.

Both are important. Your first step is to decide which issues you care about and the qualities you want in a leader.

### Consider issues:

Think about community, state, and national problems that you want people in government to address. (See Step 3 for strategies on understanding issues.)

### Consider leadership qualities:

Think about the characteristics that you believe an effective leader would have. Do you look for intelligence, honesty, an ability to communicate? What else? (For more on this see Step 4.)

## STEP 2: Look at Campaign Information

When looking at information from television ads, debates, the Internet, and other sources, consider these questions:

- What did you learn about the candidate?
- Did you find out about the candidate's stand on issues or his/her qualifications?
- Did the ad or Web site make you feel a certain way about the candidate? How important was the music, the setting, the script, or the graphics?
- Does it tell you more about the candidate's devotion to family than about his or her qualifications or stands on issues?
- Were accusations or other statements made about opponents that can't be answered or denied?
- Is the candidate trying to target your emotions so that you accept certain arguments without question? Or does the candidate try to make you feel sympathy for him or her?

### Recognize Distortion Tactics

**Name-Calling.** A candidate might, for example, call an opponent's behavior "wishy-washy" or "two-faced" when it should more accurately be described as flexible or responsive. Don't be sidetracked, either, by attacks on a candidate based on family, ethnicity, gender, race, or personal characteristics that don't make a difference in performance.

**Rumor-Making.** Have you ever heard a quote like this in a political campaign? "I've heard that Jones is soft on crime." This might be legal to say, but it might not be true. Tricks like this can sway an election. If you aren't sure if it's true, it's better not to pay attention.

**Loaded Statements.** "I oppose wasteful spending" doesn't say much. If a candidate gets away with an empty claim like that, he or she may never have to account for identifying which expenses are necessary and which are not.

**Buzz Words.** Beware of empty phrases such as "law and order" or "The American Way," which are designed to trigger an emotional reaction without saying much. If a term defies definition or leaves out great chunks of real life, be on your guard. Try to translate such "buzzwords" into what the candidate is really trying to say.

### Spot Phony Issues

**Passing the Blame.** When one candidate accuses another candidate or party of being the cause of a major problem such as unemployment or inflation, check it out. The incumbent or the party in power is often accused of causing all the woes of the world. Was the candidate really in a position to solve the problem? What other factors were at work? Has there been time to tackle the problem?

**Promising the Sky.** There are some promises that no one can fulfill, and problems that are beyond the reach of political solutions. Public officials can accomplish realistic goals, but voters shouldn't expect miracles and candidates shouldn't promise them. When you hear nothing but "promises, promises," consider how realistic those promises really are.

## STEP 3: Understand the Issues

- Examine the issues that are important to you.
- What changes do you feel that your community, state and country need most?
- What do you want to keep the same?
- Which of your interests are served by the programs each candidate is proposing?
- Weigh the alternatives.
- Listen to people on both sides of the issue.
- Look at cause and effect.
- Consider what you have to trade off to get what you want.

**Evading Real Issues.** Many candidates work very hard to avoid giving direct answers to direct questions. It's not enough, for instance, for a candidate to say, "I've always been concerned about the high cost of health care," and leave it at that. Beware of the candidate who claims to have a secret, easy plan to solve a tough problem. Watch out for candidates who talk about benefits and never mention costs or how the nuts and bolts of a program will work.

## STEP 4: Evaluate the Candidates

### Evaluate the Candidates' Stand on Issues

As you read materials you collect, record the candidates' stands on your priority issues. Do the materials give you an overall impression of the candidates? What specific conclusions can you draw about their stands on issues?

### Examine the Candidates' Leadership Abilities

Deciding if a candidate will be a good leader is difficult. How can you know if someone will be honest, open, and able to act under pressure if elected to office? Here are some ways to read between the lines:

- Look at the candidates' background and experience. How well prepared are they for the job?
- Watch the candidates in action. Do they answer questions or change the subject? Do they explain their programs in a way that makes sense?
- Read the campaign material carefully to find any insights into the candidates' personalities. Do they emphasize issues or just image? Are they accurate?

### Learn How Other People View the Candidates

The opinions of others can help clarify your own views, but remember you may be the most careful observer of all.

- Seek the opinions of others in your community who keep track of political campaigns. Interview three people (not family members) to find out whom they support and why. Learn what has shaped their opinions. Was it an idea or program proposed by the candidate? A particular issue or party about which they feel strongly?
- Find out who else supports the candidates.

## STEP 5: Rate the Debate

Debates stimulate interest in the election and highlight the issues, as well as the candidates' positions on those issues. They put candidates on the record, so they can be held accountable once in office. They help rally a candidate's supporters to get involved in the campaign and to vote. And finally, they provide information about the character and personalities of the candidates.

It is up to the debate audience to evaluate the candidates—to differentiate between style and substance—and to make informed choices at the polls.

### Rate the Candidates

As you watch, be aware of your reactions both to the substance of the candidates' remarks and to the visual images that are conveyed. They can be powerful. Clearly, the power of images can cause voters to overlook what is being said.

#### Your reactions to the images:

- Are you influenced by the age, gender, clothes, or physical characteristics of the candidates?
- Who appears more relaxed, more sincere, more confident?
- Who uses television better by looking directly at you, for example?



# Candidates' Scorecard

While doing more research, watching and rating the debates, thinking about the issues that are most important to you, and carefully considering the candidates for president you might want a way to keep track of what you think of them. This scorecard is one way you might sort it all out. The categories in the left column reflect the two main ways by which you might judge the candidates, but there may be other ways of judging that you want to include. Make sure the scorecard works for you and reflects the things you care about. You may also need to add more columns to fit all the candidates you are considering.

## Candidates' Names

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### Leadership Ability

Has the background and experience to do a good job.

Is intelligent

Is honest and trustworthy

Communicates well

Can act well under pressure

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Make sure you add other leadership qualities you want the president to have here.

### Issues important to Me

Education

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Economy and jobs

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Health Care

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This list of issues might not include the things that are most important to you. If it doesn't, just make your own list using this as a model. There are lots of issues to consider when electing a president.

If health care is one of the issues you care about, think about the specific things that you would like a candidate to do about health care and list them here. Some of the articles in this paper have a few questions you might ask of the candidates on each issue. Check back and see if those questions help you think about what's most important to you. Follow the same process for the other issues you care about.

*How to Pick A Candidate continued from page 28*

**Judge the substance:**

- Decide who answers or evades the questions.
- Do the candidates tell you their stands on the issues, or do they respond with emotional appeals or slogans?
- If anyone attacks his or her opponent, is it personal or directed at the other candidate's policies?
- Are the candidates respectful of one another?
- Do the candidates seem well informed and give answers consistent with previous positions?
- Are the answers realistic or are they just campaign promises?

**STEP 6: Sort It All Out**

**Pick a Candidate**

Review the information you have collected and ask yourself these final questions:

- Which candidate's views on the issues do I agree with most?
- Who ran the fairest campaign?
- Which candidate demonstrated the most knowledge of the issues?
- Which candidate has the leadership qualities I am looking for?
- Is the choice clear?

Adapted with permission from *8 Steps on How to Pick a Candidate and Vote!* Published by the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts Citizen Education Fund. To learn more about the League in Massachusetts visit [www.ma.lvv.org](http://www.ma.lvv.org). To find a League near you visit [www.lvv.org](http://www.lvv.org).

# Navigating Media A Guide for Instructors

by Mariann Fedele

## Why Media Literacy Now?

The 2004 presidential and general elections call us to once again make choices that impact the quality of our life, the justness of our systems, and the type of members we are in the world community. Informing our decisions will be the information we receive through our media sources. The media sources we have available to us are unprecedented in their pervasiveness, quantity, and mediums. Our job as citizens will be to take the media messages that are delivered to us from candidates, national parties, special interest groups, lobbies, news, and private interests and make sense of them in terms of our own interests. Our jobs as educators will be to insure that our students have the skills they need to make informed choices of their own.

## The Role of Education in the Information Age

Media play a role in nearly every aspect of our personal, workplace, and community lives. To best serve our adult student populations, literacy programs must integrate media literacy and technology into instruction in a way that prepares students to become pro-active, self-advocating participants in the information society. It is no longer acceptable to rationalize the exclusion of media literacy in the adult language and literacy classroom. A common refrain is "that is not what our students came here for." We should ask ourselves why do our students come to our programs? Students often come seeking to improve certain basic skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills). We must also ask ourselves in what contexts are students going to be applying those basic skills? When they go to the voting booths how will they have come to an informed decision about the representatives they choose? When they make personal economic decisions (choos-

ing a name brand over a less expensive generic) what has influenced their decisions? Many of our students may come to us seeking basic skills, but more importantly they seek basic skills to better function in the various roles they play as an adult (family member, worker, community member). Simply, our adult students will need the skill sets to function effectively in the information age, and as adult language and literacy professionals we are in a position to assist them in becoming more powerful agents in our shared world.

## Media Literacy in the Context of Adult Basic Education

Media literacy can serve as a platform for language and literacy instruction in the adult basic education classroom. Like any thematic or project-based approach to instruction, language and literacy are contextualized within a study of critical content, the conceptualization and completion of a product, and participation oriented inquiry. Just as you may have students work collaboratively to develop family histories, reports on their neighborhoods or home countries or write about career goals, so you may have students work on understanding the way news is reported through a comparative study of headlines, compare policy positions of candidates running for office, or critically analyze the target audience of a TV commercial.

Media literacy will simply provide a context within which language and literacy instruction takes place. Below are some examples of how to combine media literacy skills and basic adult language and literacy skill areas (defined in part, by the National Institute for Literacy through the Equipped for the Future project). The examples relate to voting in the 2004 elections.

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### Media Literacy Skill

Toward improving communication skills, media literacy provides a real-life look at the messages that impact our lives (political ads) and provides an opportunity for students to develop the message and medium for self-interested action.

#### EFF Standards Used

- ◆ Read with Understanding
- ◆ Convey Ideas in Writing
- ◆ Speak So Others Can Understand
- ◆ Listen Actively
- ◆ Observe Critically
- ◆ Advocate and Influence
- ◆ Reflect and Evaluate

#### Example of Instructional Practice

##### The Presidential Election:

- Have students develop a list of concerns and issues that are important to them.
- Students collect and compare campaign literature of candidates.
- Students view debates and commercials.
- Hold student debates on candidates' positions.
- Hold classroom election of candidates.
- Analyze why a particular candidate won in the classroom.

### Media Literacy Skill

By improving decision-making skills media literacy instruction puts students in the position to act rather than react to the messages that impact the choices they make.

#### EFF Standards Used

- ◆ Read with Understanding
- ◆ Speak So Others Can Understand
- ◆ Listen Actively
- ◆ Observe Critically
- ◆ Learn Through Research
- ◆ Reflect and Evaluate
- ◆ Use Information and Communication Technology

#### Example of Instructional Practice

##### Campaign Advertising

- Have students collect and compare candidates' campaign literature in various media (direct mail, Web sites, taped commercials).
  - Have students identify and analyze "sound bites" and write them down (for example: "Letting working families keep more of their money.")
  - Have students work in groups to research (Web sites, calling campaign, going to advocacy groups like the League of Women Voters) what action the candidates have taken that meets the claim they make in their sound bites.
- 

Mariann Fedele currently works at the Literacy Assistance Center in New York City as the coordinator of instructional technology. She has taught adults in Poland and the U.S. since 1991.



# VERA Classroom Activity Suggestions

Back in 1996, NELRC conducted the first Voter Education, Registration, and Action Campaign. We got lots of great feedback from teachers who participated in that campaign, including these activities that they did with their classes.

## Register Voters

- ◆ Encourage students to register themselves and others from their families and communities.
- ◆ Hold a workshop for teachers/tutors/volunteers in your program on how to register to vote.
- ◆ Attend a local voter registration drive.
- ◆ Organize a program-wide Voter Awareness Night. Include information about how to register to vote in your state, give out registration forms and provide assistance in filling them out, set up an election booth so people can practice voting, invite guest speakers, and provide information on the candidates and questions to ask in choosing one.

## Learn About the Voting Process

- ◆ Arrange a trip to the board of elections/town clerk to view voting machines and try them out.
- ◆ Hold a mock election (try to get real ballots from your local election committee).
- ◆ Openly discuss students' reluctance to vote, the obstacles they're up against, cynicism, and sense of powerlessness.

## Learn About U.S. Politics

- ◆ Discuss different political parties in the U.S. and review their official Web sites.
- ◆ Invite different speakers to class from groups like the League of Women Voters, the secretary of state, or the elections commission. If you invite different political parties or candidates be sure to invite all who are running. Non-profit organizations can jeopardize their tax-exempt status by appearing to favor a particular political candidate. They can, however, take positions on policies, referenda questions, and issues. (See article on permissible voter education activities for a 501(c)(3) organization on the next page for more details.)
- ◆ Collect and analyze literature and ads from different political campaigns.
- ◆ Compare the U.S. political system to those of other countries. Start with your students' home countries.
- ◆ Make graphs of past voter turnout in your state, region, or local area. See the Web site of the Federal Election Commission [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).

## Study the Issues

- ◆ Watch a video about an issue important to students and discuss it.

## What is VERA 2004?

The Voter Education, Registration, and Action campaign 2004 (VERA 04) is a non-partisan effort aimed at adult literacy learners and program staff in the New England states. Its goal is to educate adult learners about voting and the topical electoral issues, and mobilize them to vote in the 2004 elections. VERA is sponsored by the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education.

Programs that join the campaign agree to teach about representative democracy, voting, and topical election issues and to encourage and help eligible students and staff register to vote, get to the polls, and vote. While this campaign is being supported by NELRC only in New England we are happy to share our strategies with you if you want to replicate it in your state. See our Web site [www.nelrc.org/VERA](http://www.nelrc.org/VERA) for details.

- ◆ Have students or the class write letters to candidates about three issues that are important to them and describe what they'd like to see happen.
- ◆ Have students watch the presidential debates as homework and discuss them in class.
- ◆ Study political cartoons in class (See page 9 for tips on analyzing political cartoons).
- ◆ Create a bulletin board with newspaper clippings and comments about election issues.

## Help Promote VERA/participation in elections

- ◆ Recruit other programs to participate in the VERA campaign.
- ◆ Have your class present information on voting and elections to other classes.
- ◆ Encourage your students to get to the polls on Election Day. Consider offering your Election Day class time as a time when your students can go out and vote.

## Talk About Election Results

- ◆ Make a "Wall of Voters" in your classroom or building where you can put up the photos of all the students who actually voted.
- ◆ Make graphs of election results in your local area.
- ◆ Have students write about their experiences with voting and the elections in general.

## Voter Education in the Family Literacy Classroom

by Kristen McKenna

In our family literacy program (RIFLI), children and adults of all levels will participate in family/group activities that encourage participation in the democratic political process. Our VERA 2004 activity suggestions include:

1. Create a mock election, with candidates and debates. To make it fun, add all the fanfare that goes with an election year.
2. "Register" and then vote on issues from within the class or from outside using an old-fashioned ballot box.
3. Discuss relevant topics from the community or from the news trying to pull the topics from students according to their concerns. The subject and issues will be introduced to adults and children separately and at the appropriate level before the group activity.

*Kristen McKenna is the assistant coordinator at The Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative (RIFLI).*

# Voter Registration in New England

## CONNECTICUT

**Voter registration deadline:** 14 days before the election

**How to register:**

Can register to vote in person or obtain a mail-in application from:

- Any town/city hall in Connecticut (see county elections offices)
- Division of Motor Vehicles
- Public libraries
- Other state agency offices

Obtain an online voter registration application at:  
[www.sots.state.ct.us/ElectionsDivision/electfrms/ed671.pdf](http://www.sots.state.ct.us/ElectionsDivision/electfrms/ed671.pdf) [English]  
[www.sots.state.ct.us/ElectionsDivision/electfrms/ed671sp.pdf](http://www.sots.state.ct.us/ElectionsDivision/electfrms/ed671sp.pdf) [Spanish]  
 -or-  
[www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm](http://www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm)

## MASSACHUSETTS

**Voter registration deadline:** 20 days before the election

**How to register:**

Can register to vote in person in many places:

- Any town clerks' or local election office
- Registry of Motor Vehicles
- Any registration event you encounter anywhere in Massachusetts
- When applying for service at a designated voter registration agency

Citizens may also complete a mail-in form (available at the local post office, library, or school) and take or mail it to the local town clerk or the city election office where they live.

Voter Information Phone: 617-723-1421 or toll-free in Massachusetts: 1-800-882-1649

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

**Voter registration deadline:** 10 days before the election

**How to register:**

Can register to vote in person or obtain a mail-in application from:

- At your town or city clerk's office. You will be required to fill out a standard application form. The town clerk's office can inform voters of what proof of qualification they should bring to register.
- It may be easier for you to register with your community's Supervisors of the Checklist. By law they are required to meet on the Saturday 10 days prior to each election. Check the local newspaper(s) or call your clerk's office for the date and time of such meeting.
- Qualified individuals may also register to vote at the polling place on election day at all elections. You must fill out an election day affidavit and may be asked to show proof of age, citizenship, and/or domicile.

Obtain an online voter registration application at:  
[www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm](http://www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm)

## MAINE

**Voter registration deadline:** 15 days before the election or delivered in-person up to and including election day

May register on election day at the polls.

**How to register:**

Can register to vote in person or obtain a mail-in application from:

- Town election office (see county election office list)
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- State and Federal social service agencies
- Voter registration drives

Obtain an online voter registration application at:  
[www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm](http://www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm)

## RHODE ISLAND

**Voter registration deadline:** 30 days before the election

**How to register:**

Can register to vote in person or obtain a mail-in application from:

- County election office (see county election office list)
- Division of motor vehicles
- State and federal social service agencies
- Agencies that provide services to people with disabilities

Obtain an online voter registration application at:  
[www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm](http://www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm)  
 -or-  
[www.ricampaignfinance.com/RhodeIslandCF/Public/VoterRegistration.aspx](http://www.ricampaignfinance.com/RhodeIslandCF/Public/VoterRegistration.aspx)

## VERMONT

**Voter registration deadline:** Delivered to the town clerk before 12:00 noon on the second Saturday before the election

**How to register:**

Can register to vote in person or obtain a mail-in application from:

- At the town or city clerk's office in the town or city in which you reside
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- Any other voter registration agency

Vermont voters must also take, or have previously taken, the Voter's Oath (formerly called the "Freeman's Oath")

Town and City Clerk addresses are on the Vermont Secretary of State's County Clerk Information for Vermont Web site, or you can call them at (802) 828-2464.

Download voter registration application at:  
[vermont-elections.org/elections1/elections/99/2001voterapp.doc](http://vermont-elections.org/elections1/elections/99/2001voterapp.doc)

Mail completed forms to county clerk's office.

**For detailed voter registration information about any state visit Project Vote Smart at [www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org).**



# Guidelines for Voter Education & Get-Out-the-Vote Activities

## Introduction

A 501 (c)(3) organization is a nonprofit corporation, unincorporated association, or trust that engages in educational, religious, scientific, or other charitable activities and is exempt from federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code (the "IRC") section 501(c)(3).

As a condition of its tax-exempt status, a 501(c)(3) organization is subject to limitations on the amount of lobbying activity it may conduct to influence Congress, or a state or local legislature. A 501(c)(3) organization is also prohibited from engaging in any partisan political campaign activity. These limitations, however, do not preclude a 501(c)(3) organization from conducting some lobbying and voter education activities.

These guidelines on voter education and get-out-the-vote activities address legal issues that apply to 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporations under two federal statutes: the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) and the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA). 501(c)(3)s will confront other laws in conducting particular projects including, for example, state laws that govern activities to influence state and local elections.

## Permissible Voter Education and Registration Activities

Nonpartisan voter education and registration activities are not prohibited and provide valuable contributions to public understanding of and debate about key issues. In planning and implementing these activities, it is essential to stay within the guidelines outlined below in order to avoid straying into the restricted arena of "political" activity. The IRS has taken the position in certain rulings that a program that is largely educational in nature may be deemed impermissible political activity if even one part of the activity is "political." Due to the many uncertainties in the rules governing 501(c)(3) voter education activity, it is quite possible to inadvertently cross the line.

## General Guidelines for Voter Education and Registration Activities

These guidelines apply to the planning and conduct of all voter education and registration activities.

- ◆ *Partisan statements of candidate or political party preference are prohibited.* No support or opposition to a candidate or political party may appear in written or oral statements. This restriction includes not only communications or publications that are distributed or made available as part of the project but also, for example, buttons, bumper stickers, or T-shirts with political preferences worn by staff or volunteers during the implementation of a project.
- ◆ *Voter education projects may not be designed or targeted to influence voter acceptance or rejection of a candidate.* For example, targeting media ads or distributing literature in a particular voting district to directly or indirectly assist or oppose a candidate or influence the outcome of an election is not permitted. Indications of such targeting would include focusing on swing areas in a voting district. This restriction does not prohibit 501(c)(3) organizations from conducting voter education activities during an election year. However, extra precautions should be taken to avoid the appearance of political activity.
- ◆ *Coordination of activity with a candidate's campaign or a political party is prohibited.* Any cooperation that is intended to benefit a candidate or influence voter preference is restricted. However, if an organization is sponsoring a candidate debate or issue briefing, discussions with campaign staff or the candidate about the invitation and logistics are not prohibited.
- ◆ *All materials and publications associated with voter education activities should include a disclaimer stating that the information or activity is in no way intended to reflect an endorsement for, or opposition to, any candidate or political party.* A disclaimer assists in avoiding the appearance that a voter education activity might be a restricted political activity.

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**For more details about regulations related to specific voter registration and get-out-the-vote activities please view: "Voter Registration and GOTV Activities" on our Web site: [www.nelrc.org/vera](http://www.nelrc.org/vera).**

# Voting Resources on the Web

## **Project Vote Smart** **www.vote-smart.org**

Along with general voter information, Project Vote Smart provides information about your candidates and elected officials in five basic categories: biographical information, issue positions, voting records, campaign finances (who funds their campaigns), and interest group ratings. It also links you to their public statements and speeches. If you click on one of these categories in the left menu, it will ask you to choose a candidate (you can also just choose a candidate first). Once you have chosen a candidate, use the menu on the right to stay on that page. If you use the menu on the left, instead, you will get pulled out of that particular candidate's page and have to choose a candidate again. If you want voting information about your state, you can do that by selecting "My State" from the top menu bar or by using the menu on the left. This will give you access to a variety of state-specific information, including all the state officials, how to register to vote, current legislation, etc. You can also register on-line from here! Once you select a state the site keeps giving you information on things specific to that state until you change the state from the drop-down menu on the left side of the page. Another highlight of this site—from the top menu, under "Political Resources," you can find a link to the "Vote Smart Classroom" that offers prepared civics lessons.

## **League of Women Voters** **www.lwv.org**

The League of Women Voters, a national, nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does take positions on certain issues, including civil liberties, reproductive choice, and health care, and you can link to these through the middle menu or through the "Get Involved" link on the right hand menu. The League is best known, however, for its general voter information, which you can find through its "Voter Information" link. If you want more local information, link to "Local Leagues" from the bottom menu.

## **DemocracyNet** **www.dnet.org**

DemocracyNet (DNET) is a project of the League of Women Voters, but worthy of its own mention. DNet is an interactive Web site designed to improve the quality and quantity of voter information and to create a more educated and involved electorate. Once you enter your zip code, DNET takes you to your local government and election information. If you select the link to "President," you will find position statements from the candidates (Democratic and Republican) on 15 issues. Candidates enter their own statements and positions on the issues they choose without any outside editing, and candidates can debate one another on their positions through Dnet.

## **News Hour WBUR—Vote by Issue Quiz** **www.votebyissue.org/primary**

Read the candidates' positions (without knowing whose position you're reading) on 14 issues, select the positions that you most agree with, and then get a "report card" on which candidate best reflects your views. If you'd rather not take the quiz, you can go directly to the positions, clustered by issue or by candidate.

## **Democratic National Committee (DNC)** **www.democrats.org**

The official site for the Democratic Party of the United States lists all the Democratic candidates still in the race and provides easy, one-stop access to their campaign Web sites. You can also learn more about the party and its platforms on this site.

## **George W. Bush Official Site** **www.georgewbush.com**

At this official George W. Bush re-election Web site, you can find his positions on several issues (top menu) as well as promotional materials for the campaign.

## **National Voting Rights Institute** **www.nvri.org**

Founded in 1994, the National Voting Rights Institute works on campaign finance reform, aiming "to redefine the issue of private money in public elections as the nation's newest voting rights barrier, and to vindicate the constitutional right of all citizens, regardless of their economic status, to participate in the electoral process on an equal and meaningful basis." On this site, you can learn about their work to challenge the "wealth primary"—the process by which the person who collects the most money almost always goes on to capture his or her party's nomination and the campaign contributors with the most money choose the candidate who almost invariably goes on to win.

## **Public Agenda** **www.publicagenda.org/issues/issuehome.cfm**

Public Agenda Issue Guides are used by journalists, policy makers, teachers, students, and citizens who want to better understand controversial topics. The guides provide facts and figures, an overview of the competing perspectives, and analysis of public attitudes. Once you select an issue, use the menus on the left (or links on the page) to learn more about the issue or to understand public opinion. Notice, also, the "Behind the Headlines" link on the bottom right, which provides more background information.

### **NEW! A Curriculum on State Taxes**

The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education has a new curriculum resource for adult literacy programs: *Your Government, Your Taxes, Your Choices*, a curriculum for ABE/ESOL/GED students that addresses services the state provides, taxes people pay and issues of tax fairness, and advocacy. Though developed for use in Massachusetts, it can be adapted for use in any state. You can download it for free at [www.mcae.net](http://www.mcae.net).



# What if You Can't Vote?

Even if you can't vote, you can still be involved in the political process. Here are some suggestions:

- ⇒ Think of ways to back candidates you believe in.
- ⇒ Talk to your friends and family about "your" candidate.
- ⇒ Don't be afraid to ask tough questions at candidate meetings, at rallies, and when a campaign worker rings your doorbell.
- ⇒ Call TV and radio stations to praise or criticize campaign spots.
- ⇒ Be a letter writer. Tell candidates, newspapers, and party leaders how you feel about the issues or the campaigns.
- ⇒ Volunteer to work on a campaign.
- ⇒ When you turn 18 or become eligible to vote, register to vote and then on Election Day, VOTE!



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World Education uses education as a gateway for people to transform their lives and improve conditions in their communities. Our programs build reading, writing, math, analytic, and project and financial management skills in individuals, strengthen the effectiveness of local organizations to develop and deliver services, and train people to effectively advocate for policy changes at all levels of government.

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Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues & Ideas

# THE CHANGE AGENT

Published by  
New England Literacy Resource Center

# THE CHANGE AGENT

## CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

### THEME: Women and Literacy

**Educators and Adult Learners:** We are looking for lessons, activities, and student writings, and reflections addressing the theme of women and literacy.

- How does being a woman affect your education?
- What are literacy issues for women? What do you think women's literacy means?
- What important social/political issues affect women adult learners?
- What happens when gender issues come up in class or in a tutoring session? How do you use women-centered materials in your classes?

#### All articles must be received by April 23, 2004.

All articles will be considered. Final decisions are made by *The Change Agent* Editorial Board.

A stipend of \$50 will be paid to each student whose work is accepted for publication in this issue.

Please send material (by email or PC disk) to:  
Cynthia Peters c/o Angela Orlando,  
World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210  
phone: (617) 482-9485 fax: (617) 482-0617  
email: [angela\\_orlando@worlded.org](mailto:angela_orlando@worlded.org)



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*The mission of The Change Agent is to provide, in the form of a low-cost newspaper, news, issues, ideas, and other teaching resources that inspire and enable adult educators and learners to make civic participation and social justice related concerns part of their teaching and learning.*

In New England, *The Change Agent* will continue to be available free of charge in limited quantities through the New England Literacy Resource Center's affiliated State Literacy Resource Centers (SABES, ATDN, CALL, Vermont Adult Education Board, Literacy Resources/Rhode Island, New Hampshire Department of Education). Contact these centers for more information.

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