Candidates: Focus On Real Issues

Lipstick on a pig or on a pit bull? Is this what Americans want Election 2008 to be about?

Today, Public Agenda, the nonpartisan civic engagement organization, called on both of the presidential campaigns – in these last, most crucial 50 days of the election – to focus the major issues that that Americans say they care about most, issues like the economy, foreign policy, health care, immigration, taxes and climate change.

With that throw-down, Public Agenda also launched a resource for citizens and journalists to clarify positions on those same issues. The "Voter’s Survival Kit" at PublicAgenda.org examines six big issues and sorts through the campaign rhetoric. It aims to "Protect Voters from Political Spin."

The Voter’s Survival Kit is written by Jean Johnson and Scott Bittle, the authors of the best-selling book “Where Does the Money Go?” (2008, HarperCollins) that The New York Times said managed to be “entertaining and irreverent while serving as an informative primer on a subject that is crucial to the future of all Americans.”

Candidates like to make big promises and often avoid talking about the serious trade-offs that come with any of the tough choices that have to be made. The Voter’s Survival Kit provides a nonpartisan crib sheet to help voters get the facts straight and protect themselves from political spin. The issue guides highlight fundamental facts voters – and journalists, too – need to know and explains more about the choices the country faces in down-to-earth, easily understandable terms.

Jean Johnson, one of the authors of the Voter’s Survival Kit, says of the current state of the election campaign, “It doesn’t matter whether it’s the Republicans or the Democrats, liberals or conservatives, most of the promises they make on the campaign trail sound pretty good on the face of it. But just how realistic are they? Do they really hold when you take a closer look at them? Our goal is just to give voters a little help in sorting through the spin – and maybe to help them think about some of the longer-term issues in addition to the headlines of the day.”

Public Agenda has presented citizen issue guides focused on key election topics in every Presidential campaign season since 1996. Its 2004 election guides were downloaded by hundreds of thousands of users.

In the coming weeks, especially as the debates approach, Public Agenda will be helping citizens clarify their thinking on these core issues so that they can keep the candidates honest and on-target.

Can this Election 2008 really be about the big issues? Only if citizens and journalists force it to be.

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By Public Agenda