



Advocacy Associates, LLC Advocacy and YOU Report

**McCain? Obama? Who Cares?
Five Reasons Why the Elections Matter (No Matter WHO Wins)...
...and How to Get Involved**

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Overview / Executive Summary

"We must not bail out the management and speculators who created this mess."

"[We] must not bail out the shareholders or the management of AIG that were making big profits when times were good."

Who do you think uttered these words in response to recent economic turmoil on Wall Street? Believe it or not, these two almost identical positions were taken on the same day in response to the same questions by two diametrically opposed individuals: Senators Barak Obama and John McCain.

Comments like these feed in to the conventional wisdom that since all Presidential candidates essentially express the same views, it doesn't really matter who wins.

Unfortunately, the rhetoric in the political campaigns fuels the fire of apathy in our political system. But elections and, more important, the advocacy efforts we undertake with our policymakers after elections, do matter -- and matter deeply -- to every individual, family and business in America, regardless of who wins the McCain / Obama matchup.



This new report outlines why the elections matter, no matter who wins and the top of the ticket, and how to most effectively get involved.

Why the Elections Matter

There are at least five reasons why it's absolutely critical that all eligible voters make their views known on November 4th, 2008.

Congress Matters

The office of President is not the only issue being decided at the national level this year. All 435 members of the U.S. House must stand for reelection, as well as 35 members of the U.S. Senate. Decisions about the balance of power in these institutions rest in your hands.

Your Neighborhood Matters

Every city, town and borough in the country will likely have important day-to-day policy matters on the ballot. From questions about the confinement of farm animals to investing in transportation to whether your garbage should be picked up once or twice weekly, in many areas of the country citizens will have an opportunity to vote on issues that will impact them every day.

Your Pocketbook Matters

Policymakers from city hall to Washington, DC (and beyond) will be making decisions that will impact your bottom line for years to come. Whether it's your pension, the insurance protections on your mutual funds or how long unemployment benefits will last, don't you want to be sure that people you trust are making those decisions (or, at least, people you don't loathe?)

The Advocacy Environment Matters

Both the U.S. Congress and U.S. President are "enjoying" (and that term is used loosely) the lowest approval ratings of modern and, perhaps, ancient times. Whoever is elected in November will be assuming a huge mantle of change. The catch is they won't know what change is beneficial versus harmful if citizens don't tell them. Get in the practice of making your voice heard by getting out to vote.

The Health of our Democracy Matters

Our democratic process depends on the vigorous involvement of the people being governed. Good decisions are made only when the views of all segments of the society, whether rich or poor, urban or rural, male or female, are considered. Further, when we don't participate, we give up our right to whine about the outcome.



One Dozen Ways to Get Involved

Convinced? Whether you're considering getting involved in the local 2007 elections, or gearing up for 2008, there are a dozen effective and fun ways to get involved in the political process.

But before we get to those dozen ways, if you are a non-profit, be sure you understand the rules around non-profit electioneering. Overall, the hard and fast rule at the national level is that your organization is not allowed to support or endorse a particular candidate for office. Rules for state and local elections will vary, so be sure to become familiar with the restrictions in your area. One of my favorite resources for this type of information is the [Charities Lobbying in the Public Interest](#) site.

Properly armed with the legalize, let's plunge in!

1. **Registering People to Vote:** At work, home, school and everywhere in between, your grassroots activists can help get people registered to vote. Print up business cards, flyers or buttons that they can either download off your site or pick up at a local Kinkos or other distribution point (you can upload your documents online and have them printed out at most locations). The message? Go to www.beavoter.org or www.rockthevote.org to register in your state – that's it!
2. **Candidate surveys:** Use a service like Zoomerang or Survey Monkey to put together a survey of candidates asking for their views on your issues. Then, work with your grassroots advocates to get responses. Candidates are always more likely to respond to requests from people in the districts they are seeking to represent. You may not use this information to endorse a particular candidate – but you can sure use it to raise the profile of your issues in the election.
3. **Media response teams:** Whether it's talk radio, local newscasts, letters to the editor or online outlets, there's generally a great deal of talk in the news about election matters. Spend some time identifying advocates who can respond quickly to media stories in their community. You can help them by providing short talking points and referring them to [Congress.org's media guide](#)
4. **House Parties:** The Humane Society Legislative Fund encourages advocates to take action around issues and elections through their "[Party Animals](#)" house party program. Activists arrange small parties in their community and are connected to the larger effort through a call with national HSUS reps and supporters. Consider a similar approach for your issues to generate enthusiasm over specific candidates and issues.
5. **Bloggers Unite:** Set up a "blog for [insert name of your cause here] day" near the elections and ask any of your advocates who run a blog, read blogs or even know what blogs are to comment online about the importance of [insert



your cause here] on that day. Again, you'll want to avoid the appearance of supporting specific candidates, but your members can certainly talk about the issues as much as they like.

6. ***The Election will be YouTubed:*** [You Tube](#) has become the ultimate democratic medium. Tap the creativity of your advocates by seeking their videos highlighting the importance of your issues. The videos might be interviews with business leaders, concerned residents or whoever is most affected (hint: puppies and children are ALWAYS well received.)
7. ***GOTV (the old-fashioned way):*** For the uninitiated, GOTV stands for "Get Out The Vote" and it's an important component of any election effort. The "old-fashioned" (and still viable) means of getting the vote out include handing out flyers, making calls to registered voters (lists are available from local party organizations and/or the local board of elections) and partnering with popular gathering places like malls and churches to help spread the word. Even simple techniques like changing one's voice mail to remind people to go vote can be effective.
8. ***GOTV (the new-fashioned way):*** At the same time, Web 2.0 has provided additional tools for GOTV, including texting, twitter, IM, e-mail taglines and autoresponders. If that all sounds like a bunch of mumbo-jumbo, recall that most people under 30 use text and IM to communicate with one another – if you want to get them to the polls, sending a text message is probably the best way to do so! Go ahead, ask your teenager how to do it.
9. ***Take a friend to vote:*** OK, not much explanation needed here. But if every one of your grassroots members encouraged one of their friends to go with them, turn out would likely increase, right? And although one can't assume that ALL the extra votes would go your way, if your advocates are bringing their friends (possibly likeminded people), there's a more than 50-50 chance it will turn out positively for you.
10. ***Have some fun!*** Numerous national groups are raising the profile of their issues and having some fun through efforts like www.Edin08.com and www.electsusie.com. These efforts to, respectively, raise the profile of education issues and children's health issues engages advocates in a whole new way.
11. ***Online petitions:*** At a minimum, getting people to sign on to online petitions gives you a ready list of people willing and able to be active on your issue. In addition these petitions can, if popular enough, capture the attention of candidates. Start your own at <http://think.mtv.com>, www.petitiononline.com or www.ipetitions.com. You can also start a larger online campaign effort at www.citizenspeak.org or www.care2.com



12. **Encourage Election Day Workers:** Although some might not count this as truly supporting the cause (after all, as a worker, your advocates won't be able to promote your issue), I do believe that encouraging people to serve as election day workers will enhance not only your cause but the whole democratic process. I've done it and it's NOT easy – but anyone who does it learns a great deal about the election process -- knowledge that will serve them well in other advocacy efforts.

Isn't it time to stop being governed at and start being an active participant in the process? Even if you can't get on board with the idea that the main presidential candidates are vastly (or even minutely) different in their opinions, you still might want to perk up and follow what's going on this November. Your future and the future of our democracy may depend on it.