



## THE NEXT FOUR YEARS: PROMISES MADE BY THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

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*As the two major presidential candidates criss-cross the country giving speeches about Iraq and the economy, many first-time voters are scrutinizing their words and actions to see how George Bush and John Kerry are addressing issues important to young people.*

Walk into any classroom in America and you will find a wide range of views about what is important and why.

"Many of the social issues, such as same-sex marriage, education costs, health care, are much more important to the younger generation of voters," says 17-year-old Jason Rae, a Democrat from Wisconsin.

"I would say they are: the war against terror, the economy, gay marriage, abortion, and a youthful voice in government," says 18-year-old Joshua Rushton, a Republican from Arizona.

Some teenagers think neither candidate speaks to their concerns.

Mike Dooley, a senior at Needham High School in Massachusetts, says that while both men talk about the war in Iraq, or domestic issues such as gay marriage, "the real divisions in our country are more insidious, and more damaging."

"The economic gulf is widening, between the haves and the have nots -- between those who live comfortably in middle class communities and those who struggle to find work and to get by day to day without health care or higher education," he says.

Of course there are independent candidates such as Ralph Nader and other parties such as the Green, Conservative, Independent, Right to Life, Socialist, and Libertarian Parties, but none have built up enough support to win the election.

So what kinds of promises are President Bush and John Kerry making about the next four years if they are elected? While it is impossible to fully understand the candidates' positions in quick glances, here are brief summaries of their stances with links to the candidates' pages and issue overviews from Public Agenda, a research group that aims to provide citizens with unbiased information.

## **Education**

Have you taken more tests recently? One political issue that directly affects young people is education. Both candidates have offered various plans to help students pay for college, but they differ on how to help students finish high school.

President Bush created the No Child Left Behind Act to force schools to identify and help students who are falling behind. Under the law, public schools are required to set achievement standards, and conduct annual tests of third- through eighth-grade students in reading and math. Schools that fail to improve have to pay for students' private tutoring, and transportation to attend another school. The president also supports vouchers to help parents afford private schools.

John Kerry voted for the No Child Left Behind Act, but argues that the president's regulations are too strict and that there is not enough money available to make the necessary improvements. The senator has also stressed the need to recruit more teachers. On the voucher issue, Kerry says the program would help too few students and transfers money away from the public schools that desperately need it.

## **Environment**

Both candidates have too many environmental initiatives to list here, but basically, President Bush favors a more business-friendly environmental policy, and John Kerry gets high ratings from environmental activist groups.

President Bush has refused to join the Kyoto global warming pact that calls on all countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions, saying it would harm the U.S. economy. He says his policies will be based on sound scientific evidence and wants to spend more on hydrogen fuel technology. The president also backs "environmentally sensitive" oil exploration in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

John Kerry wants to sign up for the Kyoto pact. He also promises to invest in hydrogen-based energy technology and other clean, renewable fuels, including ethanol. The senator opposes oil exploration in the Arctic Refuge because he says it would have a negative impact on the environment and has promised much more aggressive enforcement of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.

## **Abortion**

President Bush opposes abortion except in cases of rape or incest, or when a woman's life is in danger. He also signed into law a ban on late-term "partial-birth" abortion.

John Kerry supports a woman's right to choose, though opposes third-trimester abortions unless for health reasons. The candidate has said he would appoint only pro-choice Supreme Court judges.

## **Gay marriage**

President Bush has asked Congress to amend the Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman only, but says states can pass laws allowing civil unions that give gay partnerships legal benefits similar to those of marriage.

John Kerry opposes a constitutional amendment and supports civil unions for gay couples, but he stops short of backing marriages for gay couples.

## **Health care**

President Bush has proposed tax credits for low income people so that they can buy their own health insurance and has introduced a prescription drug benefit for elderly people.

Sen. John Kerry proposes opening up the existing health care program for federal government employees to all adults, and giving money to states to help them reduce the number of uninsured children.

## **Social security**

Almost everyone agrees that the government program that provides pensions for retired workers is in trouble, and that if changes are not made, it may not be there when today's high school seniors reach retirement age-- currently 67.

President Bush has proposed allowing younger workers to control how part of their Social Security taxes are invested, a policy called privatization because it would move funds to non-government institutions such as the stock market.

John Kerry opposes any privatization of Social Security, saying that workers could lose their retirement funds if they invest in risky stocks or if market goes down. He has not put forth specific proposals for changing the system, but says that he is "open to considering various avenues of reform."

## **Issues links**

President Bush on education

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/education/index.html>

John Kerry on education

<http://www.johnkerry.com/issues/education/>

Public Agenda Education Overview:

[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue\\_type=education](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue_type=education)

President Bush on the Environment

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/environment/>

Kerry on the Environment

<http://www.johnkerry.com/issues/environment/>

Public Agenda Environment Overview:

[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue\\_type=environment](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue_type=environment)

Public Agenda Abortion Overview:

[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue\\_type=abortion](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue_type=abortion)

NewsHour Gay Marriage Issue Guide

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/issues/issue\\_gaymarriage.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/issues/issue_gaymarriage.html)

Public Agenda Gay Marriage overview:

[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue\\_type=gay\\_rights](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue_type=gay_rights)

NewsHour Health Care Issue Guide

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/issues/issue\\_healthcare.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/issues/issue_healthcare.html)

Public Agenda Health Care Overview:

[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue\\_type=healthcare](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue_type=healthcare)

NewsHour Social Security Issue Guide

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/issues/issue\\_socialsecurity.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/issues/issue_socialsecurity.html)

Public Agenda Social Security Overview:

[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue\\_type=ss](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/overview.cfm?issue_type=ss)