

Election 2008: New Voices Heard



dear members

This spring and early summer at NETWORK have been a time of great joy. We have been deeply touched by so many of you who participated in dialogues about the needs of our country and the role that government and individuals can play to meet those needs. We were excited to hear from representatives of 40 states and more than 175 groups! It was an amazing undertaking created on short notice.

Your outpouring of concern has come together in the Platform for the Common Good that will be affirmed at the Convention in Philadelphia. But even more important, it will become the working document as we define our work in the 111th Congress, which begins in 2009. It will be our accountability measure for our own work and the work of the new administration and Congress. You have created a great Platform!

We also will be urging different groups and organizations around the country to take the Platform and make it their own. Choose a piece of it to work on, or apply its principles to work that you already do. As you do, we invite you to share the results with us. We know that only by engaging together in the process will we even begin to make a difference.

Thank you for giving such life to this step. We look forward to many more.

Simone Campbell SSS

In the statement *Forming Consciences for Citizenship*, the U.S. Bishops remind us that, "In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation" (No. 5). The decisions we make as citizens about

who leads us and what policies are enacted have important moral and ethical dimensions.

The values of our faith should be our guide to public life.

—from the "Faithful Citizenship" website: www.faithfulcitizenship.org

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Comments on this issue? Ideas for future issues of *Connection*? Let us hear from you!
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Beyond Campaign Mode

By SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

I was at a meeting a few weeks ago where the presenter mentioned that one of the challenges of the current political system in the United States is that we are in “permanent campaign mode.” This got me thinking. Why is that so bad—other than the incessant commercials, media pundits and instant polling data? But the presenter went on to say in a more or less throwaway line that the Bush Administration had never changed from campaign mode. Then I had a flash of insight that campaigning is not the same as governance. In fact, it might be the antithesis of governance.

the *raison d'être* for the work of those elected. Those who govern take seriously the charge to find ways through difficult times. Governing requires talking with people who disagree, understanding complex issues, and finding common ground. The focus of governing is the long haul, not the snapshot of Election Day. Governing calls for bridge-building to a future that is not known but is created through broad partnerships.

As I reflect on my experience of our current government—the executive and legislative branches—I realize that

stances” make great campaign theater, but they stop our elected officials from governing this nation.

This election cycle we need to do things differently. We need to engage in the fine art of campaigning and turning out new voters, but we must also elect candidates who will commit to engaging the problems of our nation and finding solutions. We need to ask all candidates if they are willing to work with all sides to effectively address the issues of healthcare, immigration, corporate regulation and growing economic inequality, to name just a few. In short, we need to



JAMI BRYSON

Campaigning is about wining and losing. It is drawing clear distinctions so that voters can make a choice. More often than not, candidates and issues get drawn in caricature rather than in real life complexities. Candidates care only about the short term relationship with voters on Election Day. It is only this snapshot in time that determines the result. Campaigning is all focused on that moment and there is rarely ambiguity—someone wins and someone loses. But this is very different from governing.

Governing is about problem-solving for the benefit of the people. As the word suggests, constituents make up

too often our elected officials are indeed in campaign mode. President Bush will not negotiate with Congress to meet the domestic needs of those people who are suffering in this economy. Rather, he draws caricatures of the issues and won't engage.

Democrats in Congress will not “give in” to the administration because the Republicans might gain political points that can impact the November election. Senate Republicans are refusing over and over again to allow the discussion of many key issues because they would rather resist than resolve issues facing our country. All of these “principled

elect those who are willing to do the difficult (and sometimes ugly) task of governing for the common good.

“We the People” must insist that the challenging issues of our time are engaged and resolved for the common good. Once candidates are elected, they must leave the photo op campaign adulation behind and get down to the hard work of governing. Our country needs it. Our world needs it. And “We the People,” after we vote, must insist on it.

Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director.

Idealistic young voters have turned out in record numbers this year—and their political power is increasing. What motivates these new voters? Here are four responses.

Why I Will Be Counted

BY CODY FISCHER

MMy optimism about this election is not about a particular ideology, party or candidate. I'm interested and involved because I'm tired. Tired of failing public schools and prohibitive student debt; tired of consumerism, privilege and ignorance; tired of war, economic insecurity, hunger, climate change, injustice and inequality; tired of the same old song and dance; and tired of government inaction. My experiences over the past year and the sensitivity of both presidential candidates to the groundswell of discontent throughout the country make this the first election in which I sense a real opportunity to turn the page.

My resolve to be counted flourished in the academic and faith community at St. John's University in Collegeville, MN. This is where I discovered the complex beauty of Catholic social teaching, and where I took my first leap of faith. A year and a half ago, as graduation approached, this leap was far from a certainty. In considering my options, I faced a privileged dilemma. Should I follow my heart into social justice work and almost certain economic insecurity, or take the corporate job and pay down more than \$17,000 in student loans? These loans weighed heavily on my mind as they do for one-third of our nation's graduates. But after much reflection, I decided to hitch my wagon to something bigger than my student debt.

Though uncertain of my own rationality, I committed to a year of fighting hunger with the Emerson National Hunger Fellowship. With some free time before starting, I headed to the Twin Cities to stay with friends. This adventure, though brief and freely chosen, turned out to be an experiment in homelessness, unemployment and hunger.

During my month in St. Paul, I had every advantage at my disposal: a willingness to work for minimum wage, a car, no responsibilities, and a network of friends to rely on. Despite all this, my efforts to find temporary work were

unsuccessful. With my bank account approaching zero, I could only afford one meal a day. I slept on couches, floors, and occasionally in my car, often feeling strained and powerless. Dependant on others' generosity, I lacked a sense of stability and control over my life. My situation was temporary, but it helped me empathize with the intense anxiety and strain felt by those who have no choice.

As I headed to Pittsburgh for the first half of my fellowship, I found affirmation in my work at the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. My encounter with unemployment and homelessness made the dehumanizing desperation felt by hungry and jobless people I met all the more vivid.

The food bank, despite its vast resources, constantly struggled to meet the rising demand for emergency food—a resource dilemma faced by charitable organizations serving every area of human need. This struggle helped me understand the important supporting role of charity, as well as the gross inadequacy of current government programs to meet basic human needs.

Discouragement or indifference to politics makes many folks cynical, which seems easier than risking being let

down. The logic is appealing: Why invest time, money and emotion into the same political promises disguised in new packaging? Wouldn't I be better off investing in myself than gambling on a party maverick or a political newcomer?

Having witnessed the effects of inadequate government programs, I believe that fear of disappointment and frustration are not reasons to accept the unacceptable. The certain human cost of inaction or apathy is far greater than the uncertain cost of imperfection.

Just as a recent graduate anxiously confronts a new beginning, so our nation stands on the doorstep of a new direction. There is a sense of both opportunity and anxiety that comes with this challenge of creating something new, of taking those first uncertain steps towards a better place for the nation, the world, and generations to come. Knowing those struggling families in Pittsburgh, how could I do anything less than go "all-in" this time around?

Cody Fischer is a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow currently working at NETWORK Education Program. After the election in November, he will be heading to Senegal for six months as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar.

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My First “I Voted” Sticker

BY SHENG YANG

On the first Tuesdays in November, my parents and brother return from voting with their red “I Voted” stickers displayed proudly. I have always wondered what it would feel like to know that I have been part of the electoral process. Now that the 2008 presidential election and my first opportunity to vote are finally here, what will wearing my “I Voted” sticker mean to me?

I am excited about participating in this presidential election, yet nervous about the impact of my vote. This election is particularly important because many Americans, dissatisfied with the status quo, are looking for someone new and different. My ideal president is someone who can provide healthcare for each and every citizen and who can improve the quality of education.

Universal healthcare means caring for those who cannot afford the right medical treatment for themselves or their families. I know that my parents do not make enough money to pay for an expensive medical emergency. If one out of the six of us becomes seriously injured or ill, I don't know what we will do. There are many other families like mine. I do not see how universal healthcare can be a debatable topic, because it is a basic human right.

Education is also a human right. We must improve the quality of education so that every student has the opportunity to learn. To do so, we could make teaching more rewarding. Teachers educate the kids who become the great doctors, dentists, engineers and teachers who enrich and strengthen our country. They see the potential in students and help them believe in themselves. These educators work long hours, make les-

son plans, and bridge differences in race and background. They are the water that nurtures the seeds, helping them sprout and grow. Yet their salaries are comparatively low. My parents came to the United States from Laos with very little education, but with big hopes of their children excelling in school. Without our teachers, my parents' dream of a higher and richer education for their children would not have come true.

With these important issues at stake, young voters like me have become active in this election. I volunteer with Take Action Minnesota, which works to advance grassroots democracy to build social, racial and economic justice in Minnesota. I joined because I wanted to connect with people who share a common interest in reaching out to the Hmong community. Through Take Action Minnesota, I realized I am not too young to work for what I believe in.

On Election Day 2007, I phone-banked, contacting Hmong citizens in St. Paul to remind them to vote and arrange rides for those without transportation. Older Hmong citizens expressed appreciation for my work, saying that they rely on my generation to assimilate but keep Hmong culture alive. It lit a spark in me. Now I want to do more for my people and community. I want to be knowledgeable about my own culture—who I am and where I come from—so I can help preserve Hmong culture and educate others to create a world of racial equality. I realized the impact I had on the lives of my people in St. Paul, which has the second biggest Hmong population in the United States, restoring hope just by reaching out to them.

Through this experience, I became a politically active person. I think that this year, the percentage of young people voting will increase because we want



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change. We are campaigning for the best candidate and raising important issues so we can be a part of the transformation of our nation.

Though people may think one vote cannot make a difference, all of these single votes make up the popular vote which, through the Electoral College, elects our president. After I vote, I will apply my red “I Voted” sticker with the knowledge that I voted not only for the candidate I thought best, but for a new direction in healthcare and education. The time has come for our country to take a new path.

Sheng Yang is a Bill and Melinda Gates Scholar. She graduated from Robbinsdale Armstrong High School in Plymouth, MN, in June and will be majoring in chemistry and minoring in Spanish at the College of St. Scholastica starting this fall.

Photo at left: Author with Karen McDonald, Coordinator for Hill House Senior Services, at the Hill House Farm Stand in Pittsburgh.

My Vote This November

By MICHAEL JONES



COURTESY NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

insight, but does not allow one to truly experience homelessness because participants can always go back to their privileges.

Through the Coalition, I speak to high school and college students across the country about my experiences to dispel the myths and stereotypes about homelessness. Their jaws drop when Michael introduces me, a 21-year-old white male. I hope that my speeches breed compassion so people take action. People have individual responsibility, but government has a role to play and everyone should be willing to help through taxes and private charity. This affects all of us because anyone could end up homeless. We are all humans, and should be treated like it. We urge audiences to acknowledge people's humanity when they meet them on the street, to write letters, and most importantly to vote.

This election is having a tremendous effect on me because I never thought I would actually vote. I believed that one voice would never make a difference. But working at the National Coalition for the Homeless made me realize that we can make our voices heard together. It makes a difference who is in office. I don't know much about politics, but I know that we need more people voting to ensure that our government is truly of, by, and for the people. We need politicians who empathize with and relate to the experience of poverty. So I encourage everyone to vote and to write to their public officials and ask them to take the NCH's Homeless Challenge so they stop pushing homeless people out of sight and out of mind.

Michael Jones is an intern at the National Coalition for the Homeless for the Homeless Challenge Project and Speakers' Bureau. He will be a senior this fall at Franklin College in Franklin, Indiana, where he is double-majoring in sociology and psychology. If you want to coordinate a Homeless Challenge in your area or have him to speak at your school, you can give him a call at (202) 462-4822 x228.

This election year is special because this will be my first time voting. It has also been exciting because we had the first African-American man running against the first woman for the Democratic presidential nomination. It was such a tough campaign that I could not decide whom I wanted to vote for, so I did not vote in the primary.

I became homeless at age 11 when my parents divorced. After the divorce, my mom couldn't afford to keep the house. From 13 to 16, I lived with my dad and started using pot, acid and finally meth-amphetamines. Bouncing in and out of school in Columbus, Indiana, I joined a gang and made many black friends. I wanted to get away from the drugs so I left my dad's and began living in my car. I still took pills and dropped out of school. Finally, I enrolled in adult education classes and finished school on time. I feel like my experience is neither white middle class nor traditional. I've always related more to marginalized people like

many in the black community.

After graduating, I started working in a factory and didn't plan on going to college until an old friend convinced me to apply. Throughout college, I've slept in dorms, lounges and in the library after hours. Once, the school found out I was staying in the dorm and tried to charge me for a month's rent.

This spring break, I came on a mission trip to Washington D.C. where I visited CCNV, the nation's largest homeless shelter. There I saw the hypothermia room where they put sick people pulled off the street. I thought I had it bad, but these people were worse off than me.

I met Michael Stoops who asked me to intern with the National Coalition for the Homeless, and I took the Student Homeless Challenge, which asks students and public officials to sleep on the streets for 48 hours. I think the experience helps people appreciate the things they take for granted like a bathroom and privacy, and provides much

Election 2008 Is Different

BY JACKIE CLARK

What makes this election different? It is hard for me to separate how much of my own excitement and engagement has to do with this election and these candidates—and how much of it comes from working for the past nine months as an advocate in Washington D.C. In this time, the importance of the makeup of Congress and the positions of the president has become clear. I watched with deep frustration and outrage as President Bush vetoed healthcare for low-income children and funding for food and child care for low-income families. I watched again as Congress failed to get the votes to override these vetoes. If only we had a more sympathetic president. If only we had a supermajority of elected officials concerned with ensuring access to the most basic necessities. This election holds the possibility of both, and, with it, the hope for a country that will support the human dignity of all people.

The perspective I bring to this election is also different. What drew me to DC was my postgraduate service experience as a foster care caseworker in New York City. I was deeply immersed in the struggles of families experiencing poverty, homelessness, mental illness and addiction. The assigned responsibility of

guiding these people through our social services systems revealed how these systems profoundly fail. I watched parents lose the rights to their children, and wondered if trained caseworkers, lower caseloads, and better mental health care services might have made the difference. And I played with beautiful young children, wondering if their futures would be marred by the unfinished educations, ill-adjustment, poverty and homelessness that plague so many former foster care children. These failures weigh deeply on my conscience as a person who has witnessed this injustice and as a citizen with responsibility for the actions of my government. Feeling frustrated and powerless, I came to DC to learn how to work for policy change.

Here, policymaking seems so detached from the lived experiences of my clients. Some call programs like nutrition assistance and housing and child care vouchers “wasteful spending,” totally ignorant of their importance in meeting families’ basic needs, and of the connection between the wellbeing of their children and the future of our nation. I, too, despite living on a small stipend, am blissfully unaware of what it feels like to go without a meal, or worse,

to be unable to feed my children. The only people who truly understand our nation’s injustices are those who experience them, and their voices are crucial in determining how to move forward.

Yet, all too often, these voices are not heard. We, the faith advocates, try to speak in solidarity with them. But we are like David up against the Goliath of wealthy industry and corporate special interests. Their influence often has more influence than our professed moral authority. The recent bailout of Bear Sterns while people with the lowest incomes and laid-off workers unable to find jobs receive no relief is a striking example. So is Congress’s decision to side with the powerful lending industry rather than homeowners by refusing to allow bankruptcy judges to rewrite the terms of subprime loans.

But, as the Industrial Areas Foundation preaches, there are two kinds of power: organized money and organized people. This, I think, is what makes this election more exciting than any other in recent memory: people organizing en masse to engage in government for the common good. These organized people are the only entity that stands a chance against organized money.

And this is precisely what makes the Convention for the Common Good so exciting—it brings the authentic voices of people across the country to share from their own lived experience about what they believe is the common good and what must be done to achieve it. We are listening to the voices of people across the country, and telling politicians to listen up, too. This moment of hope, excitement and possibility is a thrilling moment to be in Washington D.C.

Jackie Clark is a Lobby Associate at NETWORK and works on domestic human needs issues. She will begin a dual master’s program in Divinity and Social Services Administration this fall at the University of Chicago.

Author (right) helps lead living wage rally at the University of Notre Dame.



COURTESY OF AUTHOR

Farm Bill, Budget and Housing Trust Fund Move Forward, However Imperfectly

BY MARGE CLARK, BVM, CATHERINE PINKERTON, CSJ, SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS, AND JEAN SAMMON

The pace on Capitol Hill is slow. Many legislative objectives Congress hoped to accomplish by the Memorial Day recess are still being negotiated. There is increasing doubt about whether any appropriations bills will be passed and sent to the president this year. Floor speeches are filled with political posturing for the election, which makes compromise and governance more difficult. But there is still time left, and much to be done. Tell Congress to stay focused and do its job!

Farm Bill

Back in 2007, the House voted to pass the farm bill in July, and then the Senate passed its version in December. The House and Senate finally passed a compromise conference version of the bills in mid-May of this year. But the Bush Administration quickly vetoed it, noting that it lacked program reform and fiscal discipline. Just as quickly, both the House and Senate voted to override the veto. We finally had a farm bill written into law.

Well, almost. Someone discovered that the bill the president vetoed was actually missing a section, apparently due to a clerical error. What to do? No one knew for sure, but to be safe, the House and Senate voted for the same bill again and sent it back to President Bush with all the sections intact. The president vetoed that bill and later that same day (June 18), the House and Senate overrode that veto. The new farm bill, now called the "Food, Conservation and Energy Act," is law until it expires in 2012.

NETWORK is very disappointed that all these negotiations and votes produced no significant reform of bloated farm subsidies, but we are pleased that the nutrition section of the bill has much needed improvements in rules and funding for food stamps.

Our work on the farm bill was part of an unprecedented movement for reform that resulted from collaborative efforts of religious, environmental, food and family farm groups. We are well-positioned for better farm and food policies in the future.

long-term unemployed workers is rising and more than one million people have exhausted their unemployment benefits while remaining jobless.

At press time, House leadership and the president had reached a compromise for extending Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits through the Emergency Supplemental. Benefits would be extended for 13 weeks, without the additional 13 weeks for high unemployment states, for workers who have worked at least 20 weeks. This compromise passed in the House on June 19 and awaits a vote in the Senate. As Connection went to press, a vote was expected soon in the House, followed by the Senate. NETWORK continues to advocate for passage of this compromise to provide much-needed relief to people who are unemployed and struggling in this economic downturn.

Even if, as expected, the Emergency Supplemental passes with the UI extension, many of the Senate's domestic priorities were left out of the legislation. A second economic stimulus bill may still be introduced later this summer.

Unemployment Insurance

In May, unemployment rates increased for the fifth consecutive month. In addition, the number of

Budget

The House and Senate passed the FY 2009 budget, setting spending limits for discretionary programs. Appropriations subcommittees have their allocations for

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and enter your zip code in the "Key Votes" field.**

the new fiscal year. Now they will work in earnest to distribute funding across programs. There is speculation, however, that few appropriations bills will be sent to the president before January 2009. Allowance for \$24.5 billion in spending beyond the president's request provides room for modest increases in some human needs areas. This is particularly critical given the state of the economy.

NETWORK members and other advocates have had a positive influence on Congress's passage of a budget that allows for later increases in non-military discretionary spending, maintenance of pay-as-you-go rules, and tax policies that help lower- and middle-income households. These tax provisions include adjustment of the Alternative Minimum Tax, extension of the Child Tax Credit, correction of the marriage penalty, and maintenance of the 10% income tax bracket.

Housing

Many provisions of the National Housing Trust Fund were included in the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2007 (H.R. 1427), which has been passed by the House and by the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee. It will proceed to the full Senate for a vote. This helps move parts of the trust fund closer to reality. Meanwhile, work continues on the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act (S.2523).

As we approach the third anniversary of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, major housing problems continue to plague the Gulf Coast. The Emergency Supplemental bill, as passed by the Senate, contains a number of provisions to provide

affordable housing in the area. Hurricane recovery housing was not in the House version, and the president demanded removal of all domestic assistance if he is to sign an Emergency Supplemental into law. NETWORK continues to advocate for affordable housing for people in need, including the hurricane victims.

Iraq

As this *Connection* went to press, congressional leadership had finally determined how to proceed with the Emergency Supplemental Bill that includes money for veterans, flood victims and unemployed people, as well as for Iraqi economic development and the Iraqi refugee crisis. The largest portion of the Supplemental is for the military operation in Iraq and Afghanistan. What is still unknown is what President Bush will do with it. He had threatened a veto earlier when the bill had more domestic spending in it. NETWORK worked successfully to create bipartisan support for the Iraqi economic development and humanitarian aid to refugees and internally displaced persons, and regional peace building efforts. We will continue to advocate for increases in funding in the days ahead.

Immigration

Since the collapse of comprehensive immigration reform a year ago, a variety of specialized bills have been introduced, including reform of the farm worker program and enforcement-only provisions. NETWORK has followed the lead of a broad faith coalition to prevent enactment of draconian enforcement-only measures. So far, we have been successful and will continue to keep up the pressure for a comprehensive approach.

Trade Policy

At a Capitol Hill press conference on June 3, Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Byron Dorgan (D-ND) and Representatives Michael Michaud (D-ME) and Linda Chavez (D-CA) introduced the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment Act. Sen. Brown and Rep. Michaud, together with numerous labor, environmental, consumer, faith and family farm organizations, had developed this long-awaited legislation. Among its provisions are those that would: require a review of existing trade pacts, including NAFTA and the WTO; set forth what must and must not be included in future trade pacts; provide for the renegotiation of existing trade agreements; describe a new trade negotiating and approval mechanism to enhance the congressional role in forming trade agreements; and promote future deals that could enjoy broad support among the U.S. public.

The Trade Act will not be entered into the legislative process until the next Congress, providing time for a thorough examination of its provisions and their implications. However, NETWORK welcomes its introduction as a significant contribution to the search for a just trade policy that, unlike NAFTA and the agreements that flowed from it, encourages development. Further, it restores the Constitutional authority of Congress over commerce, which fast track has lessened.

Marge Clark, BVM, and Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, are NETWORK lobbyists. Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK Executive Director. Jean Sammon is NETWORK Field Coordinator.

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Europeans Are Watching

By MICHAEL HAGEL AND ASTRID BECKMANN



ULRIKH GUNKA

Katharina Rötters, a young German voter.

It's June 4, 2008, at 8 o'clock in the morning, Central European Time. Germany's TV channels all show the same man: Barack Obama. He's waving. He's shaking hands. He's smiling. Around him, 20,000 people are celebrating in a large arena in St. Paul, Minnesota. All day long, these pictures and stories about the successful Democratic candidate are big news on German TV. He made it and all of Germany—no, the whole of Europe—seems happy with him. It's as if a kind of messiah is talking into the cameras.

Traditionally, Europeans pay close attention to U.S. presidential elections, mostly because of our relationship to the big ally. The United States of America is somehow a big brother for Europe—although we are so different in many areas. Europe's elites and equally the whole population should, no, must be interested in the man or woman who will lead the U.S. for the next four or eight years.

The recently completed U.S. primary season was different from most. Normally, people in Germany, France, Italy or Spain pay little attention when Democrats and Republicans spend months on their primary campaign journeys through the states. (But the moment that both parties proclaim their candidates, interest in Europe grows rapidly.)

This time, Europeans paid much more attention than usual to the U.S. primary campaigns. Of course, that has something to do with the lengthy and dramatic duel between two special public figures like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. But the most important motivation for most Europeans was something else: After eight years of President George W. Bush, the European people are longing for a change in American politics.

After 9-11 and even during the war in Afghanistan, people here were full of sympathy for the United States. But the Bush Administration, with its aggres-

sive politics of strength, caused a radical change in just a few years in the way Europe looked at the country we used to admire so much. When the U.S. started the war in Iraq, Germany and France and many other countries were against it, and the public view of the United States came to an absolute low. Most people here, in contrast to some of our government officials, had absolutely no understanding of a war that was based on lies about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. If George W. Bush had been running for election in Germany in 2003, he would certainly not have won more than ten percent of the votes.

And now there is the charismatic Barack Obama. Maybe the next President of the United States of America. An African American, a liberal politician, somebody who wants to reconcile the U.S. with the world. At least, that's what people in Europe think about him. He carries the hopes of many people, in part

because of his slogan, “Yes we can.” He is, to many of us, the new John F. Kennedy. People in Germany look at him with a mixture of wonder and fascination, partly because the dynamic 46-year-old stands in big contrast to politicians in Germany, whom many see as failures with small minds.

Voter participation in Germany declines from year to year and from election to election because people don't believe that these politicians can solve the problems of our country. We see, however, a spirit of political optimism in the United States that we haven't observed since the 1960s. As a consequence, people are looking in amazement at this “pop star” of politics.

Despite all this, many Europeans would have liked Hillary Clinton to be the next President of the United States. This is because Europe and the U.S. enjoyed a harmonious relationship during the presidency of her husband, Bill Clinton. However, Obama's star outshines everything. In fact, people here don't talk much about his older Republican rival, Senator John McCain. We see a longing to leave the difficult Bush years behind in the faces of even many conservative politicians here.

Europeans can't point a finger at just the United States, however. In some European countries, rather dubious figures have also come into power. Only a few months ago, Silvio Berlusconi, the media mogul who was suspected of being corrupt, became Italy's leader for the fourth time in 14 years. Amazing. In France, a man leads the country who is more famous for his marriage to singer and actress Carla Bruni than for his politics. His name: Nicolas Sarkozy. Despite their elections, however, most Europeans think President Bush is a bigger problem because he has much more power.

Since 2005, a coalition made up of Christian and Social Democrats has

ruled Germany, which, with 80 million people, has the most inhabitants in the European Union (EU). Although their policies are not too bad, many people look at their government with indifference or even distrust.

At the same time, many laws affecting us are made in Brussels, the capital of the European Union. That leads to even more anger and disappointment. Many in Germany and other EU countries fully

calls a friend, only moderates politics instead of governing actively. A spirit of real political optimism would look far different. Especially for the younger generation in Europe, this spirit seems to be embodied by Barack Obama.

Many Germans, French and Dutch citizens don't understand why his pre-election battle in the United States took almost a year and a half, however. And the complicated U.S. election system with delegates and electors isn't at all popular in Europe. That a candidate could possibly have more voters, but fewer delegates or electors, confuses a lot of people in Germany and other European countries where there is proportional representation. There is little understanding of the 2000 U.S. presidential election, when George W. Bush finally became president despite the fact that his Democratic rival Al Gore had tens of thousands more votes.

Hardly anyone in Europe believes something like that could happen between John McCain und Barack Obama. Obama will make it, they think. And they hope that after eight years of stagnancy and backward steps, a new young president will lead the world into a better future. That's precisely why millions of Europeans will be glued to their television sets on November 4 and 5 of this year.

Michael Hagel is a reporter at the Münstersche Zeitung [Newspaper] in Münster, Germany.

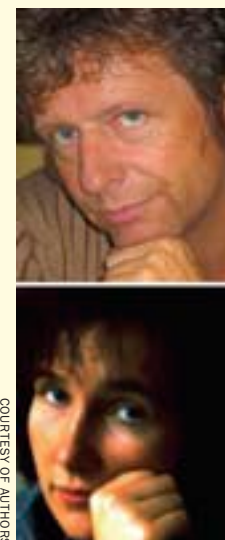
Astrid Beckmann is a freelance journalist in Münster.



German election officials.

expected the recent Irish no-vote on the Treaty of Lisbon. [If enacted, the treaty would have reshaped EU institutions to deal with the EU's near-doubling in size over the past four years from 15 to 27 nations. Among other provisions, it would have given the EU its first full-time president.] In fact, many Europeans would have voted in the same way if given the chance. Most Europeans are sick and tired of all the regulations coming out of Brussels. They prefer a more national focus on their affairs.

Voter participation is rapidly declining in the elections of the European Parliament and even the German Bundestag. The experiment of a German government made up of Social Democrats and Greens failed in 2005 although many people had put all their hopes in that coalition. Visionary people like Willy Brandt, who in the 1960s impressed a whole generation with his speeches, are nowhere to be seen. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, whom George W. Bush always



COURTESY OF AUTHORS

COURTESY OF AUTHORS

A Wellstone Legacy

By JENNIFER HAUT

As a college student, I spent my spring breaks living among people who are homeless, serving meals in soup kitchens, and tutoring young people from low-income families. These experiences were, and continue to be, invaluable since they gave me the chance to experience real world lessons outside the classroom. I met people at the margins of society struggling to stay alive and fighting for a chance to participate.

On one such trip, I spent a week in Washington living in the world's largest homeless shelter. Our group's service work was combined with congressional lobby visits. This model moved the trip past "charity" as it introduced the concept of working for systemic change. The voices of people who are homeless are not welcome at the U.S. Capitol,

Students from Florida Atlantic University participate in Camp Wellstone.



WELLSTONE ACTION

Wellstone Action

Wellstone Action and Wellstone Action Fund form a national center for training and leadership development. Wellstone Action was founded in January 2003 in honor of Senator Paul Wellstone, his wife Sheila Wellstone, and their daughter Marcia, who died in a Minnesota plane crash on October 25, 2002. Its mission is to continue their work through training, educating, mobilizing and organizing a network of progressive individuals and organizations. For more information, see www.wellstone.org.

even though the homeless shelter where I stayed is a mere few blocks away. I and my college peers were privileged to advocate in solidarity with people who are homeless and impoverished.

New Voices

I am not different from my peers who make up the "Millennial Generation" (those born between the early 1980s and late 1990s) who would rather spend time in a soup kitchen than vacationing on the beach. Trends have emerged from our age group showing we're civically engaged and ready for change. The world we are inheriting is much different than that of our parents' generation. And we are dealing with our own obstacles: enormous student debt, a fair-weather economy, and a world in peril. Yet, like generations before us, we aren't willing to admit defeat.

This election year has already brought out thousands of new voters, especially young people. But how will our society truly seek out and listen to so many new voices? Are we sure that "a place for everyone at the table" is not simply rhetoric?

Today, I engage in the work of addressing these questions. At Wellstone Action, where I work as Training Manager, the legacy of the late Senator Paul Wellstone and his wife Sheila lives on through thousands of people trained across the country in the Wellstone model of organizing, determined that their voices will be heard.

The Wellstone Model

Paul Wellstone often said, "We all do better when we all do better." I am particularly struck by this statement, knowing Paul's background as a community organizer and college professor turned politician. There was something about Paul that invited the participation of all, as is evident in his notion of being "for the little 'fellers and not the Rockefellerers."

At Wellstone Action, we, like so many others, are busy preparing for the 2008 election. But our work doesn't look a



COURTESY OF AUTHOR

Author working at an after-school program at St. Joseph's School during a service trip in Camden, NJ.

whole lot different than that during non-election years—we're just working at a quicker pace.

Our nine different training programs do outreach to college students, unregistered voters, labor unions, domestic violence survivors, and others. The work is strategic. We know we cannot go into communities or begin working with underrepresented groups without long-term plans to stay connected and do follow-up.

I believe that the legacy of the Wellstones is present at every training we do. Whenever progressive candidates are elected, when members of marginalized communities become engaged voters, and when college students organize on campus, we know that Paul and Sheila would be extremely proud.

My personal journey from college organizing and service trips to Wellstone Action is not unlike that of many of my peers and activists from previous generations. I think we're all fighting to be heard and counted. And we hold in common the strong belief that we really will "all do better when we all do better."

Jennifer Haut is Wellstone Action's Training Manager, a former NETWORK intern, and a member of the NETWORK Education Program Board.

Presidential Candidate Chart

The work of NETWORK is rooted in the Catholic social justice tradition—encompassing Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and the lived experience of Jesus and followers of the Gospel call for justice.

This chart is a tool for placing the presidential candidates' positions within this framework.

Preference for Those Who Are Vulnerable

Caring especially for those who are vulnerable is essential to the common good. A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those on the margins of society. The moral measure of our society is how we treat our most vulnerable people; this test is fundamental to all policy evaluation.

Solidarity and Stewardship

Solidarity requires that individual and social decisions be made with loving concern for the common good and the dignity of each person. Sustainability and distributive justice must be central to how we organize our economy and development. Pollution and depletion of resources beyond regeneration or repair harm future generations and God's Creation.

Human Dignity & Life

A consistent ethic of life requires us to address war, abortion and capital punishment; to challenge affronts to dignity such as inhumane living conditions, mistreatment of workers, and unfair immigration policies; and to rectify material conditions that undermine the dignity and humanity of all people, especially those who are most vulnerable.

	Senator John McCain	Senator Barack Obama
ECOLOGY	Coauthored the Climate Stewardship Act of 2007 to reduce carbon emission levels to 60% below 1990 levels by 2050. Supported raising fuel economy standards to 35 mpg but opposed 40 mpg. Voted against standards requiring that 10% of electricity come from renewable sources by 2020.	Cosponsored Senator McCain's Climate Stewardship Act but supports stiffer 80% reduction of carbon emissions. Coauthored Fuel Economy Reform Act of 2007, calling for a 40 mpg fuel standard. Supports requiring that 25% of energy come from renewable sources by 2025.
EDUCATION	Believes school competition and parent choice are the best way to guarantee quality education for all. Supports vouchers allowing parents to choose their children's school and tax-deferred savings accounts for higher education.	Supports increasing Head Start funding, quadrupling Early Start to include a quarter of a million at-risk children, increasing teacher pay, charter schools, and a \$4,000 annual tax credit for higher education.
FEDERAL BUDGET PRIORITIES	Believes 3/5 majority vote in Congress should be required to raise taxes. Will veto pork-barrel spending & seek line-item veto. Supports one-year spending freeze to evaluate federal programs outside of essential military & veterans programs.	Supports balancing the budget; Pay As You Go rules; investing more in pre-K through higher education, foreign aid, healthcare, social services and the military; and reducing corporate tax breaks.
HEALTHCARE	Believes cost containment is the best way to expand access to healthcare. Supports tax credits encouraging individual-rather than employer-purchased insurance. Will help states create insurance pools for those rejected by insurance companies.	Believes ensuring quality coverage for all is the most pressing healthcare issue. Will expand coverage with tax credits for low- and middle-income households and market reforms guaranteeing insurability.
HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS	Supports federally backed mortgages for subprime borrowers in danger of foreclosure. Supported bills providing at-risk veterans with housing and support services. Voted against a fund expanding affordable housing in 2000, but has taken no position on current legislation doing the same.	Cosponsored legislation to expand affordable housing and to allow those facing foreclosure to refinance with federally guaranteed mortgages. Authored legislation pairing housing for at-risk veterans with support services. Will expand supportive housing to prevent homelessness.

continued



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Presidential Candidate Chart, *continued*

	Senator John McCain	Senator Barack Obama
HUNGER	Will end policies like ethanol subsidies, tariff barriers and sugar quotas that contribute to higher food costs.	Will increase food stamp and nutrition program funding, and improve food access in urban and rural areas by supporting local food systems, funding farm-to-school projects, and allowing schools to give priority to local producers.
IMMIGRATION & REFUGEES	Supports a path to citizenship that includes learning English and paying fines, and a guest worker program that issues visas when jobs cannot be filled by U.S. citizens.	Supports a path to citizenship that includes learning English and paying fines, and provides legal protections against exploitation. Would simplify immigration system to reunite families and meet demand for workers. Will increase assistance for Iraqi refugees by \$2 billion, and expedite the process allowing their passage to the U.S.
LIVING WAGE	Holds no stated position on a living wage. Voted for the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, but has historically voted against minimum wage increases, arguing that they can hurt small businesses.	Supports raising the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation. Believes this will help workers earn enough to raise their families and pay for basic needs.
PEACE BUILDING & DEVELOPMENT	Committed to continuing AIDS relief, but not to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. Supports developing a missile defense system and expanding the military.	Will double foreign aid and expand diplomacy. Introduced the Global Poverty Act, which makes cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015 an official U.S. policy goal. Opposes missile defense spending.
PROTECTING LIFE	Will withdraw troops when Iraqi forces can safeguard their country. Supports an abortion ban with exceptions for rape, incest and risk to the mother's life. In 2005, voted against expanding health services and education to reduce unintended pregnancy. Supports the death penalty.	Pledges to withdraw all combat brigades from Iraq within 16 months. Opposes an abortion ban. In 2005, voted to expand health services and education to reduce unintended pregnancy. Wants to guarantee paid maternity leave. Supports the death penalty.
SOCIAL SAFETY NET	Supports Social Security reform that reduces guaranteed benefits and supplements them with private accounts. Supports investing some of the Unemployment Insurance tax into private accounts, providing traditional Unemployment Insurance only if accounts are exhausted before 26 weeks.	Supports Social Security reform extending payroll taxes to wages above \$97,500 to protect future benefits. Cosponsored legislation extending Unemployment Insurance to jobs lost for family reasons, and for those who can only seek part time employment.
TAXATION	Supports repealing the Alternative Minimum Tax; doubling the exemption for dependents; extending tax cuts for earners making more than \$250,000; keeping the capital gains tax at 15%; cutting the corporate tax from 35% to 25%; and a tax exemption for estates up to \$10 million.	Supports creating a \$1,000/family tax credit to offset payroll taxes; increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit; creating a mortgage credit for those who do not itemize deductions; increasing the capital gains tax; and eliminating corporate tax havens. Opposes extending tax cuts for earners making over \$250,000.
TRADE & INVESTMENT	Supports reducing U.S. agricultural subsidies and aggressively promoting trade barrier reductions to level the global playing field. Supports the Oman, Colombia, South Korea, Peru, Central, and North American Free Trade Agreements.	Supports agricultural subsidies and opening foreign markets to U.S. products. Will not sign trade agreements unless they have labor and environmental protections. Supported the Peru, but opposed the Colombian, South Korean, and Central American Free Trade Agreements. Supports amending NAFTA.

Sources: Candidate positions, proposals, and voting records based on contact with presidential campaigns and information from campaign websites, candidate speeches, NETWORK voting records and the Library of Congress. Go to www.networklobby.org for additional information on candidate positions, speeches, votes, and a list of other references.



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Faithful Citizenship

An Evangelical Response

By PATRICIA SANTIAGO

The urge to foster consciousness in a country that at times appears to have lost its ethical conscience resonates deeply within me.

I am an evangelical studying in a liberal seminary, and I recently began an internship at NETWORK. After I arrived, I was asked to read for the first time the U.S. Catholic Bishops' call of *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (commonly called *Faithful Citizenship*). Not knowing what to expect, I took it with some trepidation and was surprised when I found myself agreeing with most of its foundational teachings and concepts. I was fully engaged with its call for social justice grounded in Catholic social teachings and the common good.



Author participates in a service project rebuilding hurricane-damaged homes in Mississippi.

Personally, as a Latina, I find this call of particular importance because it provides me the opportunity to speak in solidarity with people like my father who took risks and came to this country. I respond to their sacrifices as a daughter, a wife, a sister, a friend, a Christian, and a citizen. As I take on all these roles, it is important to understand my responsibility to make sure their voices and mine are heard in the creation of public policies.

Other aspects of the common good and conscience-formation also pulled me in as I read. I was able to hear the voice and influence of Augustine, especially his references to conscience as the seat that serves to help us decipher good and evil. I found my own theological Protestant evangelical voice resounding through this concept of the common good. I envisaged it as a clarion call to speak truth and bring our Christian witness of Christ to the halls of government.

Moreover, John's Gospel tells us to do "greater works," and it is my opinion that these "greater works" are to speak up and awaken the conscience of a somewhat disengaged and dormant America so that we can begin to work in solidarity with those who are most wounded, marginalized and disenfranchised within and outside our borders.

Patricia Santiago, a Beatitude Society Fellow interning at NETWORK, is a Masters student in Christian Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

To Learn and To Act

By SARA DWYER, ASC

This election year has stirred energy and passion not felt for many years, and NETWORK members, as always, are engaging in many forms of citizen activism. Your activism is strongly supported by U.S. Catholic Bishops, whose *Faithful Citizenship* instructs us that "responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation."

Faithful Citizenship, in the context of our rich Catholic social tradition, also provides solid foundation for forming consciences and engaging in principled decision-making. "Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are defended."

A challenge will be to continue your citizen engagement while utilizing foundational documents like *Faithful Citizenship* in order to bring the Bishops' entire moral perspectives to light. Catholic are not single issue voters. The Bishops have told us that there is a critical need to "form consciences" and to vote for candidates who will advance public policies that address injustices impacting the common good.

As you read this, many of you have already participated in the Convention for the Common Good—both in the preparation of the Platform for the Common Good and in the actual event.

We must all continue to study the issues, to read, to pray and to act. Use *Faithful Citizenship* and the Platform for the Common Good as you engage in legislative advocacy, write letters to the editor, and engage in conversations with other voters. Plan also to attend candidate forums and host voter registration and education opportunities so that others may become engaged.

Together, we can work to create a new vision for our country so that we will represent moral credibility in our eyes and in the eyes of the world community.

During the months leading up to the presidential election, do all that you can do to learn more and to participate in the political process. In short, **MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**



Sara Dwyer, ASC, is the NETWORK Education Program Coordinator.

July 11-13, Philadelphia, PA

Join us at the Convention for the Common Good, convened by NETWORK and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and sponsored by many Catholic and social justice groups. www.commongoodconvention.org.

July 20, Evansville, IN

Simone Campbell, SSS will present "The Poor, Advocacy and Prophecy" to the Daughters of Charity.

July 22, Milwaukee, WI

Simone Campbell, SSS will present "God Shows No Partiality: Strategies for Inclusion of Difference" to the School Sisters of St Francis and Associates.

July 24, Monroe, MI

Simone Campbell, SSS will speak to the Immaculate Heart Sisters.

August 5, Denver, CO

Simone Campbell, SSS will present "Iraqi Refugee Crisis: Heartbreak and Heroism" to the USIG (Union of Superiors International General).



Making a Difference Throughout the Year

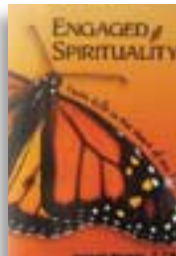
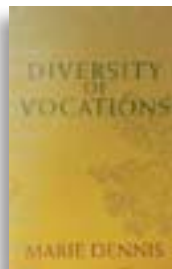
Supporting just policies is one of the good works we are called to do during this election season. Why not extend your generosity throughout the year by pledging a monthly donation to NETWORK?

You can instruct NETWORK to make pre-authorized withdrawals from your bank account or pre-authorized charges to your credit card each month. It's easy to sign up—just fill out and return the envelope in the center of this magazine, or go to www.networklobby.org.

NETWORK recommends

Diversity of Vocations

by Marie Dennis, Orbis Books. www.maryknollmall.org/description.cfm?ISBN=978-1-57075-716-7



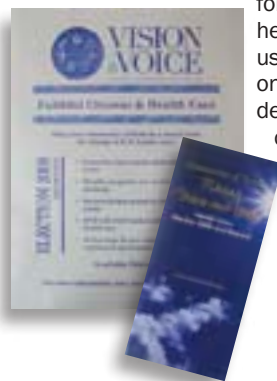
Engaged Spirituality; Faith Life in the Heart of the Empire by Joseph Nangle, O.F.M. www.maryknollmall.org/description.cfm?ISBN=978-1-57075-763-1



The Other Game; Lessons from How Life Is Played in Mexican Villages by Philip Dahl-Bredine and Stephen Hicken, Orbis Books. www.maryknollmall.org/description.cfm?ISBN=978-1-57075-780-8

Vision and Voice: Faithful Citizens and Health Care—Election 2008 and Beyond

Help your faith community be a moral voice for change in U.S. health care by using these flexible, on-line materials developed in collaboration with NEP. Visit www.VisionandVoice.org



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