

## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS AND WEBSITES:

- Election Information  
(562) 466-1310
- League of Women Voters of Los Angeles  
(213) 368-1616

[www.smartvoter.org](http://www.smartvoter.org)

League of Women Voters website detailing local and state candidates and ballot measures

[www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)

Project Vote Smart website provides voting records of national and state candidates

[www.debates.org](http://www.debates.org)

The Commission on Presidential Debates

[www.lwvlosangeles.org](http://www.lwvlosangeles.org)

League of Women Voters of Los Angeles

[www.ca.lwv.org](http://www.ca.lwv.org)

League of Women Voters of California

[www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

League of Women Voters of the United States

[www.lavote.net](http://www.lavote.net)

L.A. County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

[www.calvoter.org](http://www.calvoter.org)

Information on candidates, ballot measures and campaign finances

[www.ss.ca.gov](http://www.ss.ca.gov)

Official website for the Secretary of State of California



League of Women Voters  
of Los Angeles  
Education Fund

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September 2004

## RATE THE CANDIDATES ON THE ISSUES

- **The Economy:** How do we reduce the deficit and keep the economy healthy? How can unemployment be reduced? Should we cut government spending? For what? Should we raise taxes? Provide jobs through public service programs, by stimulating the private sector, by encouraging or limiting foreign trade?
- **Social Services:** What role should the government play in meeting the needs of the poor, the elderly and the disabled and the special needs of women? How can we best help the disadvantaged to become self-sufficient? How can adequate housing be assured for all who need it? Should changes be made in Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare programs? Which levels of government can most fairly and effectively provide such services?
- **The Environment:** What needs to be done to preserve our air, water, energy and land resources? How can we solve the problems of hazardous wastes? How should costs be apportioned? Are current regulations adequate? What about enforcement?
- **Foreign Policy:** Should we take more of a leadership role in the world? What does that mean? What specific measures should we take to ease tensions between the U.S. and the Middle East? In Latin America? In Korea? Should we increase defense spending, or cut it back? How should defense dollars be spent? What about arms control? What should be the U.S. role in the United Nations? Should we invest more in economic development aid?
- **Government Spending:** How do we set budget priorities? Are we spending too much on some programs? Too little on others? If cuts are needed, where and how should they be made? Do the effects of cuts fall unfairly on any one group? Is revenue adequate? What are the best revenue sources?
- **Crime/Violence:** What should government do to control crime and violence directly - build more prisons, put more police on the streets or invest in prevention programs such as community and drug treatment centers? Should assault weapons be banned? Should we have more gun control to keep weapons out of the hands of criminals and children?

## BE A SMART POLL WATCHER

Don't support a candidate just because the polls say that a majority in your age group, region, ethnic group, or party does. Before you believe everything you read, ask these questions:

**Who sponsored the poll?** Were all the figures released? When parties and candidates pay for polls, they may not publish unfavorable data.

**Was the poll affected by a key event?** Public opinion can change drastically due to a highly publicized event such as a military crisis or a political scandal.

**What questions were asked?** Were they slanted? You can easily spot blatantly biased questions that couldn't help but produce a resounding Yes or No, but also look for the ones that subtly steer a respondent to a certain answer or leave no room for a . . . Yes, if . . . or a No, but . . .

**Who was interviewed?** How were respondents selected? Randomly, or in such a way to include all segments of the population proportionately? If not, the results may tell you how a small group feels, but nothing about the total population being sampled.

**How many were interviewed?** No matter how well a poll is done, there is always a margin of error. And, the smaller the sample, the wider the margin.

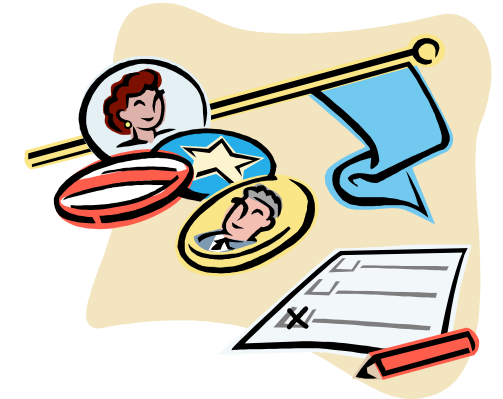
**How many undecideds?** Were the questions clear and did they reflect real choices? Were the questions asked too far ahead of the election? Remember, once the undecideds make up their minds, the results could change drastically.

**How long ago?** Even the best polls are just a snapshot in time. People change their minds frequently, especially in the charged atmosphere of political campaigns. Look for polls that compare current figures and past ones, and try to spot trends.

## USE GROUP RATINGS SHREWDLY

Some organizations representing special interest groups (business, the environment, labor, the elderly, etc.) sift through senators and representatives myriad votes on crucial bills and rate them on how closely they match their groups point of view. Similar ratings are often done for state and even local candidates. These ratings can help you, the voter; they can also be misleading. Use the ratings wisely, as a way to gauge incumbents positions, but never take them as the final word.

# GUIDE TO CHOOSING A CANDIDATE



## DEFINITION - candidate:

**a:** one that aspires to or is nominated or qualified for an office, membership, or award

**b:** one likely or suited to be chosen for something specified



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**As images and sound bites increasingly dominate the political scene, probing for issues takes time and care.**

**Let's review some investigative techniques you can use to help you cast a more informed vote.**

## STUDY CAMPAIGN INFORMATION

**Candidate internet sites.** Take a moment to review candidate websites. You can find these by inserting 'candidate websites' into an internet search window. If applicable, research the candidates' prior record, voting or otherwise, in any public office the candidate has held to determine whether candidates' actions in the prior office are consistent with their current campaign promises. If their stance has changed, is there an appropriate reason?

**Television and radio commercials.** When you see or hear a paid political ad, ask yourself some questions. What did you learn about the candidate from the ad? Did you find out anything about issues or qualifications? Or was the ad designed only to affect feelings or attitudes about the candidate? How important was the music, the setting, the script? Was the ad designed to appeal to women, minorities, older voters, single-issue groups? You can learn about issues, even from a 60-second TV or radio commercial, if the candidate wants you to, or if you can separate the glitter from the substance.

**Direct mail.** More and more candidates are using direct mail to solicit funds or votes. Computerization has made it easy to send personalized appeals to selected groups of voters. Candidates can send members of women's groups one message, for example, and members of veterans organizations another message. However, if you are aware that you must read between the lines to get the full story, the direct mail letter can help you understand the candidate's stands on issues. Recognize that the letter is a campaign tactic and try to see what can be learned from it.

**Pamphlets and flyers.** That leaflet slid under your door or handed to you at the store may contain valid substantive information or it may be full of lies, distortions or evasions. Read it critically. Does it tell you more about the candidate's devotion to family than about qualifications for office or stands on issues? Be on the lookout for accusations or other statements about opponents, especially if such statements are made so close to election that they cannot be answered or denied.

**Emotional appeals.** Listen to a candidate's appeals and arguments. Then decide if they are targeted for your emotions alone. Is the candidate trying to make you angry enough to accept certain arguments without question? Maybe war injuries or a poverty-stricken childhood should get your sympathy, but they shouldn't get your vote. Look for the facts. Don't be swayed or carried away by political bombast. Learn to spot manipulative techniques.

## RECOGNIZE DISTORTION TACTICS

**Name-calling.** Aside from the ignorant and the absurd, inflammatory statements that distort truth can be just as damaging. In a classic case, one politician won an election when he alleged that his opponent "once matriculated" and that his opponent's wife was a "thespian." 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.

**Guilt by association.** Look carefully at criticism of a candidate based on that candidate's supporters — 'We all know Smith is backed by big money interests' or 'The union has Jones in its pocket.' Every candidate needs support from a wide range of people and groups who may not represent the candidate's views on all the issues. Judge the candidate's own words and deeds.

**Rumor-mongering.** Watch for unsubstantiated statements and innuendoes. Have you ever heard quotes like these in a political campaign? 'Although everyone says my opponent is a crook, I have no personal knowledge of any wrongdoing.' 'I've heard that Jones is soft on communism.' Legal, perhaps, but dirty campaigning. Such 'dark hints' can sway an election, if voters are unwary, long before a fair-campaign investigation or a slander suit can put a stop to them.

**Loaded statements.** 'I oppose wasteful spending' doesn't say much-but it implies that the candidates opponent favors it. If a candidate gets away with claims like that, he or she may never be held to account for identifying which expenses are necessary and which are just fat. The loaded question has the same effect. Asking 'Where was my opponent when the chips were down about expanding employment insurance?' without mentioning that the bill never came to the floor for a vote is an easy way to distort the facts.

**Catchwords.** Beware of empty phrases such as 'law and order' . . . 'the American way,' that are designed to trigger a knee-jerk, 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

**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. And the candidate who claims to have a secret, easy plan to solve a tough problem is often just copping out. Watch out for candidates who talk about benefits and never mention costs or how the nuts and bolts of a program will work.

**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 promises that no one in an elective office 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.

**See the reverse side of this brochure for important information on rating candidates, being a smart poll watcher and a list of helpful phone numbers and websites!**