

Beware the Politics of Distraction

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The presidential election is on November 4, 61 days from today. There will be four candidates for president on the Pennsylvania ballot: former Republican congressman Robert Barr for the Libertarian Party, Republican Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, Ralph Nader for the Independent, Natural Law Party, and Democratic Sen. Barack Obama, D-IL. Some states may also include other candidates.

Since the Democratic and Republican conventions have concluded their business, the campaign swings into full gear. Now it's up to you to vote. If you haven't decided already, you may wonder how to make your choice. Who is best qualified? The US Constitution requires only that the president be at least 35 years of age and a natural born citizen. In that respect, all of the candidates are equally qualified. But Americans have come to demand more of our presidents.

The purpose of the campaign is to convince you to vote for a candidate. For the next two months, we'll be flooded with news stories, commercials, print ads, e-mails, polls, reports, statements, and rumors. In the last 25 years, political campaigns have focused more on scaring you than informing you. That's called terrorism. They've put more effort into absurd topics than into genuine issues. That's called the politics of distraction. Campaign officials often want to distract your attention away from real issues and onto ridiculous claims, irrelevant matters, and outright lies. Yes, you can lie on television and get away with it. It happens all the time. Politicians use television ads for the same reason companies do – TV ads work. If enough people hear something often enough, most of them will believe it.

That's why we all have to keep our eyes on the ball. You know what issues are important to you. You know what matters to your family, and you know what doesn't. If you don't care about someone's jewelry, or their relatives, or their bad temper, *then don't let those ads influence your vote*. If you care about your job, your health care, your home, and our country's education, then find out the candidates' positions on those issues. You can go to the Web sites listed below, or call the campaign offices for information. You can also contact organizations that work on your important issues.

Just be careful with the ads. Campaign ads and materials can come from anywhere. There are ads from the candidates, the political parties, private organizations, and individuals. Congress changed the law since the 2004 election. Now, political advertising must state who paid for it – the candidate, the party, or someone else. So pay attention to that. And once again, *yes, they can tell lies, even on TV*. Television and radio talking heads often work for a particular candidate. Take what you hear with a grain of salt.

Yes, the presidential election does make a difference in your life. The president manages the nation's daily business. The federal government has enormous impact on *your* daily life. The government distributes money to the states, which spend it on roads, schools, parks, and police departments. It controls the federal taxes that we all pay. It sends our sons, brothers, and friends to war.

This election is the most important in our generation. *PLEASE* pay attention. Keep your eye on the ball. Don't let them distract you. Don't let them scare you. Yes, it will take some of your time, but it will be over before you know it. Then we all have to live the next four years with the results. Let's get it right. Isn't your family worth it?

For more information, go to:

Independent political Web Site: www.politico.com Phone: 703-647-7999

Project Vote Smart: www.votesmart.org Phone: 888-868-3762 (Nonpartisan voter education info)

Democratic Party: www.democrats.org Phone: 202-863-8000

Republican Party: www.rnc.org Phone: 202-863-8600

Robert Barr Campaign: bobbarr2008.com Phone: 800 - 262-2277

John McCain Campaign: www.johnmccain.com

Phone: (National) 703- 418-2008 (PA & Ohio office) 614-441-8097

Ralph Nader Campaign: www.votenader.org Phone: 202-471-5833

Barack Obama Campaign: www.barackobama.com

Phone: (National) 866 - 675-2008 (Pittsburgh) 412- 867-6673

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