

SPECIAL ELECTION EDITION

VOX | POP

# VOICE

OCTOBER • NOVEMBER 2008

FREE!

*Media is the Message*

*Following The Money • America Blogs 2008 • The Patriot Express  
Politically Active Campus • Town & Gown • Mr. Stone Goes to Richmond*



vote  
november 4th

– A MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLICATIONS OF STUDENT MEDIA –



VOX | POP

BROADSIDE

University Life



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**Staff****Jason B. Hartsel**Editor-in-Chief  
Creative Director**Kathryn Mangus**

Faculty Advisor

**Special Thanks to:**

Aaron Webb  
 Adam Toobin  
 Alan G. Merten  
 Allison Hayward  
 Amy Snyder  
*Broadside*  
 Bryan Caplan  
 Christian Yingling  
 Courtney Erland  
 Connect Mason  
 Dan Walsch  
 Emily Culley  
 Erick Ford  
 Erin Medicott  
 Eugene M. Scheel  
 James Pfiffner  
 Janette Kenner Muir  
 Jenn Labbe  
 Jeremy Mayer  
 John Mason  
 Kiel Stone  
 Leah Donnelly  
 Mason Gazette  
 Mason Votes  
 Michael Fauntroy  
 Michael McDonald  
 Michael Shank  
 Nashim Jewish Women's Group  
 Neomi Rao  
 Nicholas Beaudrot  
 Oral History Program  
 Richard Norton-Smith  
 Rob Raffety  
 Sandy Hubler  
 Sara Morrisroe  
 Solon J. Simmons  
 Special Collections & Archives  
 Studies for Liberty  
 Tierney Kain  
 Toni-Michelle Travis  
 Young Republicans

# Letter from the editor

**J**ohn F. Kennedy said, “The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all.”

And today, when we find ourselves in the midst of one of the most historic and meaningful presidential elections of recent memory, it is clear that voter ignorance is not an option. As citizens of democracy, it is our honor and responsibility to determine the direction of our own government, and casting an informed, well-reasoned vote for our president is a critical aspect of fulfilling that sacred duty.

The road to the White House in 2008 has proved a long and meandering trail for the American voter, complete with moments of exhilaration and frustration alike—from the protracted primary season that resulted in victory for two candidates who once seemed longshots at best, to a grueling general election that has tested the character and substance of two men with fundamentally different approaches to the challenges facing America. Both seem genuine in their desire to see our nation thrive, but their opposing platforms clearly indicate that America is struggling to unite under a common definition of mutual success.

With so much at stake—both at home and abroad—it is vital that our national conversation this November include a multitude of voices in order to take a positive and effective first step away from the abject failures of the recent past.

Despite the polarizing disagreements of both candidates and their respective supporters, at least one idea is universal: A

change in America’s trajectory is essential to her survival. And affecting that transformation by exercising your right to vote is the single best opportunity for your individual voice to project its loudest and clearest. Which brings me to *VoxPop Voice*...

Last spring, President Merten suggested to me that the upcoming election was a perfect opportunity to explore Mason’s unique political diversity in all its vim and vigor, and I wholeheartedly agreed.

Over the past three years, *VoxPop* has shown how diversity and difference of opinion shapes our campus, but *Voice* became the ideal forum for showcasing that level of engagement in action. I am amazed

at how passionate and invested the Mason community is in the issues that surround this election, and in the process of putting this magazine together I have gained a new respect for our ability to disagree without sacrificing a sense of common identity.

In the words of another American president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, “The future of this republic is in the hands of the American voter.”

So as you step into the booth on November 4th, take a sober look past all the bunting and stumping and raise your voice for our future. For as your vote goes, so goes the nation.

Sincerely,



Jason B. Hartsel  
*VoxPop* Editor-in-Chief & Creative Director



# Sound Off

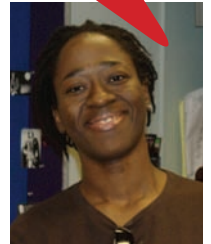
VoxPop asked members of the Mason community to let us know what is most important to them during this 2008 election season.

**Haywood Watkins**  
Junior



"Legacy. This election is much bigger than myself and I would love to be a part of it."

"Out damn spot!"



**Rhandi Martin**  
Graduate Student

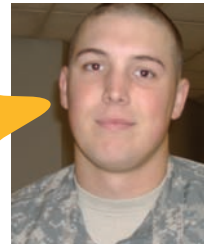
"Hope."

"College tuition."



**Samayyah Ghariani**  
Sophomore

"Funding for troops & withdrawal timetables."



**Eric Bauer**  
Senior

**Kathy McCaddin**  
Sophomore



**Rachna Soun**  
Sophomore

"The war."



**Andrew Lee**  
PhD Librarian,  
Johnson Center



**Tizoc Perez-Casillas**  
"Change."

**Philomene Bien-Aime**  
Jazzman's Cafe, SUB I



"Who will lead our country the best?"

"Economy."



Photos | McCain: Teddy Meyer; Obama: Courtney Etland



# State *of the* Race

**Lars Garvey Laing-Peterson**

*VoxPop Voice Staff Writer*

**L**ike some Kafka-esque nightmare or the bloody feud that divided the Montagues and the Capulets, it's hard to remember how this whole mess even got started. Our only solace now, after more than a year of political maneuvering, is that the end is in sight.

There were abundant rumblings in 2006 after the Democrats took over Congress, but it wasn't until 2007 that any clear picture of the political landscape emerged. Once the political machinery was forced on its way much earlier than is customary, there were seven Democrats and nine Republicans. By the end of January, the herd had been thinned to Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, and John McCain on the Republican side, with Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama left standing for the Democrats. Neither of the present nominees were thought to have much chance early in the Primary Season. All eyes were on Hillary Clinton. The Republican frontrunner would change every few days, and it took some time before it became apparent that McCain would secure the 1,191 delegates to win the Republican nomination.

After Super Tuesday, John McCain continued his surprising rise in popularity and would clinch his party's nomination in early March. The fight for the Democratic nomination was much less clear. The close, hard-fought, and occasionally malicious contest between Clinton and Obama damaged the Democratic Party

considerably, and it wasn't until June that Obama secured enough delegates to win the nomination, three months after the Republican primaries had ended. Because of the long, emotional conflict, many worried that the Democrats' chances of having one of their own in the Oval Office were severely affected, especially since McCain was given three months without a clear opponent to shore up support. Numerous Clinton supporters vowed in print and on camera that they would vote McCain. Anyone watching the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado must have noticed how many times journalists were commenting on how the conference's foremost objective was to reunify the party. Joe Biden, Obama's choice for vice presidential candidate, was well received, though there were still many who expressed their disappointment that Obama had not chosen Hillary Clinton for the job.

The Republican Convention was anything but a suturing of wounds—instead it was the grand entrance of Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin. After having the first day of the gathering overshadowed by Hurricane Gustav, focus quickly returned to St. Paul, Minnesota, and most Republicans and Conservatives were not disappointed by the show. McCain's numbers, boosted by the "Palin bump," overtook Obama's in what had been a very close contest since the primary season came to an end. However, since then the numbers have evened out, and once again (for the third straight Presidential Election), it appears that the vote count is going to be agonizingly close.

The three debates so far, with the final debate before Election Day scheduled for October 15, have received mixed reviews. The first was too calm; the Vice-Presidential debate was too friendly; and the most recent presidential debate, a town hall forum event, was again not considered to be unpleasant enough.

# Debate Watch

The gloves have come off at rallies, though, with McCain and Palin emphasizing Obama's middle name—Hussein—and once again dredging up his relationship with former '60s radical William Ayers. As this article is being written, McCain has been forced to defend Obama against the very accusations his camp seemingly wanted people to make: that Obama is an "Arab" that "pals around" with domestic terrorists, that he is a frightening figure.

Obama's recent remarks have mostly been attacks against McCain's policies and political history, but even limiting oneself to this arena does not remove the potential for viciousness and half-truths. While no retractions have been made by the Obama camp, numerous media sources and fact-checkers have publicly pointed out the deceptive nature of many of Biden and Obama's interpretations.

The recent and disastrous economic meltdown has benefited the Obama camp and has shifted the angry eye of citizens away from the near-useless Democratic Congress under Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid's control. As McCain tries to distance himself from the unpopular president, the trailers and posters for Oliver Stone's new biopic *W.* are stark reminders of which president the American public blames for our fiscal anguish. It is not just John McCain, but the entire Republican Party that has taken a sharp blow in recent weeks.

Despite the degeneration on Wall Street, McCain has still polled well nationally against Obama, often trailing by only the margin of error. The media has also begun asking how much the Bradley Effect—named after Tom Bradley, an African-American politician who lost the race to be California's governor in 1982 after polling ahead of his opponents—will come into play as days fall away before November 4th.

All that is certain is that this race isn't over yet. Not by a long shot. ■



Photos | Top: Ruby Lyon, Bottom: Rachael Dickson

▲ **FACE/OFF** Students filled the Johnson Center atrium on Tuesday, October 7th to watch presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama go toe-to-toe at Belmont University in Nashville, TN. Similar watch parties were held for the first presidential debate on September 26th, as well as the October 2nd Biden/Palin standoff, drawing crowds of up to 100 people at each event.



◀ **IN THE MOMENT** Mason students (and *VoxPop* writers) Tierney Kain and Aram Zucker-Scharff participate in a LiveBlog hosted by Mason Votes. Over 30 students in total contributed to the instantaneous debate analysis where bloggers voiced their opinions and discussed their reaction to the candidates' exchanges. During the blog, moderators conducted several polls including this question that asked participants to vote on which issues were most important to them:

## WHICH ELECTION ISSUE IS YOUR TOP PRIORITY?

23% ENERGY

8% IRAQ

31% FOREIGN POLICY

8% TECHNOLOGY

15% ECONOMY

15% EDUCATION

Poll | Courtesy of Mason Votes



Photo | Courtesy of Mason Archival Repository Service

**"O**ur world, it seems to me, is uncertain and our future unpredictable in a way not experienced or even expected by future generations. Our parents and grandparents were subject to the vagaries of disease and war, but as a society, they shared a common perception of what it meant to be an American and what defined the American dream. Today, our society struggles to find consensus amid myriad alternative possibilities.

But uncertainty, while discomforting, is in itself neither good nor bad. If we no longer have guarantees, we do have extraordinary options...

In the 1950s, as a young boy watching the McCarthy hearings on television, I saw basic civility abused in a way I had never imagined. Grown men interrupting and sometimes shouting down others, not allowing their voices to be heard or their ideas expressed...I could not understand why I was not allowed to hear both sides of the argument...

As a nation, we cannot afford to silence the voices that shake us—we lose too much. And of all society's institutions, it is the university that must advocate the expression of alternative views, and teach and encourage all—students, faculty, and staff—to listen to what others are saying."

— *Mason President Alan G. Merten in his inaugural address, April 4, 1997.*

# Mason Votes

## Christian Yingling

*VoxPop Voice Staff Writer*

**N**estled next to the most important city in the country, George Mason University has a unique perspective on the political process, a perspective shared only by a small number of other institutions. It should come as no surprise, then, that Mason is one of the few universities in the nation to sponsor a website and committee devoted solely to covering and promoting the electoral process, recently winning a 2008 Virginia Campus Vote Initiative Mini-Grant

Mason Votes is updated daily with podcasts, videocasts, opinion blogs and articles all from the perspective of the Mason community. As the Content Editor for the website, it is an exciting opportunity to cover events such as Republican Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates John McCain and Sarah Palin's Fairfax campaign stop, the largest rally the campaign had seen until that point; a press conference with Michelle Obama; Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate Joe Biden's women's rally; and Libertarian Presidential Candidate Bob Barr's Mason town hall.

My job has also given me wonderful opportunities to meet courageous and astounding members of our community, people like Adam Toobin, a 25 year old alumni with cerebral palsy who works with

Democratic Presidential Candidate Barack Obama in an effort to bring to the forefront issues that affect people with disabilities. And at Mason there are countless numbers of other students who have actively participated in the political process in order to have their voice heard this election season

The Mason Votes Committee, comprised of students, staff and faculty members from almost every facet of the university, has also sponsored watch parties for the Republican and Democratic National Conventions and the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates

This election year, it has been my distinct honor to cover news through the Mason lens.

For more, visit [masonvotes.gmu.edu](http://masonvotes.gmu.edu). ■



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### NOVEMBER 3RD

- Concert in the Bistro in conjunction with Program Board.

### NOVEMBER 4TH

- Election night watch party in the Johnson Center Atrium.

- "Mason Vote Van," provided in conjunction with Student Government which will take students to and from the local polling location on election day.

- Get your "I Voted" MasonVotes button after you've cast your ballot.





Photo | Christian Yingling

# On the Job Training

**Christian Yingling**  
*VoxPop Voice Staff Writer*

**A**dam Toobin wants to make an impact on his community, and is not about to let anyone stop him. In his case though, community is not a physical location, but rather a collection of individuals spread throughout the world.

Toobin has cerebral palsy. His disability affects every aspect of his life; from transportation to making a simple phone call, Toobin needs assistance. This, though, only spurs him forward. After realizing that his own needs are shared by every member of his community, he decided a change had to be made.

Last year, he graduated from Mason's Learning Into Future Environments Program (LIFE), a highly selective, four-year curriculum that allows students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to gain a full college experience through courses like Astronomy, Employment Opportunities, Horticulture, and Exploratory Mathematics, Time

Management, and Measurement.

This year, Toobin is participating in LIFE's newly launched internship program, which is available to students who have graduated with a certificate of completion. The internships are designed to give hands-on experience in the students' desired fields of occupation.

Adam began his internship year by working for Rep. Jim Moran's reelection campaign. Soon, Toobin was discovered by the campaign of Democratic Presidential nominee Barack Obama and has been working for both campaigns ever since.

There is no question that after this November's election, Toobin will continue to work towards broadening opportunities for his community. "This job improves the quality of my life...I think that disabled people don't get enough work experience so I feel that this will be very important to the world." ■

# It's Albright Now

**David Pierce**  
*VoxPop Voice Staff Writer*

**F**ormer United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, spoke at a foreign policy town hall meeting Saturday, Sept. 20, in Dewberry Hall on the bottom floor of the Johnson Center. She was part of a three-person panel that included terrorism expert Richard Clarke and Rep. Jane Harman (D.-Calif.).

Albright, 71, introduced herself as a life-long scholar of national security policy, before discussing the challenges America faces in the current global scene.

"I don't think I have ever seen the world in such a mess, and that is a diplomatic term," said Albright.

Albright outlined major foreign policy issues that she felt the next president has to face once elected. She also expressed concern regarding the negative aspects of globalization, especially the expanding gap between the rich and the poor. She warned that the recent financial crisis affecting the global stock market was of major concern to the next president, as well as the importance of talking to our enemies as a diplomatic tool. ■



Photo | Courtesy of Broadside

# Minneapolis or Bust...

## Reflections on the Patriot Express:

A Q&A session with Rob Raffety and Aaron Webb

Photos by Aaron Webb

**O**n the afternoon of Wednesday, August 27, two Masonites—Rob Raffety and Aaron Webb—embarked on an eleven-day journey across the American midwest to attend the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota. *VoxPop* sat down with these budding video journalists to see what they learned from the experience...

### Q: FIRST OF ALL, HOW ON EARTH DID THE PATRIOT EXPRESS COME TOGETHER?

**RAFFETY:** It was a mix of talent, hard work, and luck. Ok, mostly luck. It all started back in April when I won an online video journalism contest to attend the Republican National Convention as a political pundit. The grand prize was round trip airfare and accommodations, but given the proximity of St. Paul to Washington, DC (chuckling) I thought it would be more fun to drive. Actually, the whole road trip concept was Aaron's idea. I think he just wanted a free trip to St. Paul. He's a bit of a mooch like that.

**WEBB:** Well, someone had to be the brains behind the operation, right? Seriously, it just seemed to make sense. Rob and I have worked together on film projects in the past, and this struck me as a unique opportunity. Plus, it was a free trip.

### Q: HOW DID GEORGE MASON GET INVOLVED IN THE PATRIOT EXPRESS?

**RAFFETY:** About the time I was putting the road trip itinerary together, the Office of the Provost and University Life announced a grant program for projects aimed at raising political awareness on campus. I sent my application to University Life that very day. Given my and Aaron's mutual affiliation with Mason, and in light of the content we would be providing, it seemed like a "no-brainer." University Life must have agreed because we received their full backing. From there, other parts of the Mason community started to get behind us—the STAR lab was really helpful, and even the film department was supportive.

**WEBB:** Yeah, it was a team effort from the get-go. Rob put the itinerary together, arranging stops at various college campuses along the way. I was more of a technical "behind the scenes" guy—working to procure equipment and support and interest from various school entities and organizations.

**ROB RAFFETY** is an Adjunct Professor of Law and Public Administration at Mason.

**AARON WEBB** is an undergraduate student majoring in political science.

You can learn more about their project at: [robaffety.com](http://robaffety.com).



**TRAVELOGUE ABOVE:** Rob's 'Minneapolis or Bust!' sign sets goals for the journey; All aboard the Patriot Express!; Wrigley Field looks stately in the Chicago sunlight; An aerial view of a 'Vote '08' hedge maze taken during a helicopter ride from St. Paul... some people have a lot of time on their hands. **RIGHT:** Rob surveys the convention floor...Mission Accomplished!



**RAFFETY:** The whole idea was to get students engaged in our trip and to use technology to make it as interactive as possible. With help from some incoming Mason students, we set up a blog with links to MasonVotes, and sent out emails to the leaders of student political organizations, inviting them to post comments and feedback during the journey.

**Q: WHERE ALL DID YOU GO DURING THE TRIP?**

**RAFFETY:** I intentionally scheduled the agenda to include overnight stops in numerous college towns. This way, we could capture video footage and audio interviews with students and faculty across the country, post it on the blog, and share it with the Patriots back in Fairfax. We hit the campuses of Duquesne, Ohio State, Notre Dame, and Northwestern. It was awesome!

**WEBB:** Along the way, we also talked with a bunch of other Americans from all political stripes. We were willing to engage anybody who was willing to talk with us about their political views, not with the intention of persuading them to a particular viewpoint, but simply to pose questions about why they believe what they believe. It was an experiment in gonzo journalism, and I think it was a success.

**Q: SO HOW WAS THE CONVENTION?**

**RAFFETY:** The convention was...

**WEBB:** ...Unconventional!

**RAFFETY:** Hey, that's my line! (laughter) Anyway, his [Aaron's] description is dead on. Given the pending hurricane,

we weren't even sure whether or not Sen. McCain would show up. So it started out with a thud. But once things cranked up, they really cranked up. Palin's acceptance speech was clearly the highlight - a highly anticipated and historic moment for the Republican Party. McCain was McCain, as everybody expected.

**WEBB:** To me, the most interesting stuff took place outside the convention hall—the protests and what not—it was something to be at ground zero of American democracy, that's for sure.

**Q: SO WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE PATRIOT EXPRESS?**

**RAFFETY:** The site is still up and running! In fact, we're getting loads of hits and comments and discussion about ongoing activities. The A/V content isn't as strong since both Aaron and I have lots of other priorities on our schedule. But hopefully we can keep up the momentum and continue generating enthusiasm and interest from the campus. I encourage my students to visit the site, and I hope other professors will join in.

**WEBB:** The site is really an open forum for enlightened discussion of the political issues of the day. The more people that participate, the better the conversations. I think we all have a lot to learn from each other, and it's essential for Americans to engage one another in civil discourse like this. Regardless of our political views, we're all Americans in the end, right?

**VISIT [THEPATRIOTEXPRESS.COM](http://THEPATRIOTEXPRESS.COM) FOR MORE.**





# PAC

Politically. Active. Campus.

A politically-minded student body has always been a source of Mason pride, so it's no wonder that our diversely opinionated campus is climbing the list of politically active schools.

**Josh Miller**  
*VoxPop Voice Staff Writer*

In the upcoming 2009 Edition of the Princeton Review's "Twenty Most Politically Active College Campuses," George Mason University sits at number eight. According to the list, we're more active than Georgetown, Wesleyan, Berkeley, and the Air Force Academy.

The student side of politics has always been something that Mason is proud of, and with such a large and diverse campus that is continually growing, it's no wonder that we're climbing the list of politically active schools. In the past few months, we've even had the honor of being visited by political juggernauts like presidential hopeful Barack Obama, Independent Ralph Nader, Libertarian Bob Barr, and President William Jefferson Clinton. Mason is on the map as a political powerhouse when it comes to both student population and on-campus activism. There are two main reasons for this, both of which reinforce the surplus of political gait within our campus community.

The first may come as no surprise if you've ever tried to find a parking space on a Tuesday or Thursday afternoon. We're one of the largest schools out there. In fact, Mason is the largest university in the Commonwealth of Virginia by population. This year at Mason, the total student enrollment was over 30,000 students—that's about 1,000 more students than Virginia Tech's total enrollment.



▲ **BARACK OBAMA** signs autographs for a packed Johnson Center crowd of approximately 3,000 students, faculty, and staff at a rally sponsored by Students for Barack Obama on February 2, 2007. In his first candidacy speech, Obama was evocative of Martin Luther King, Jr. when he told students, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." Obama went on to say that "it bends because you make a decision that we don't want to just be feared in the world, but we want to be respected."

▼ **JOHN MCCAIN**, alongside wife Cindy, former opponent Fred Thompson, and Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin, addresses a crowd of some 23,000 supporters at a rally in Fairfax's Van Dyke Park on September 10, 2008. Rob Lederer, Mayor of Fairfax City said that, "[this is] the largest turnout for Senator McCain so far on the campaign route." After an introduction by running mate Palin, McCain roared, "Let me offer an advance warning to the old, big spending, do nothing - me first, country second, Washington crowd: change is coming, change is coming and it's coming to our nation's capital."





Photo | Mark Strandquist



Photo | Aram Zucker-Scharff

▲ **RALPH NADER**, longtime consumer advocate and Independent presidential candidate addressed voters alongside running mate Matt Gonzalez in Mason’s SUB II Ballroom on October 12, 2008. Nader’s event, entitled “Jail Time, Not Bail Time: an End to Corporate and Two-Party Rule,” highlighted the flaws of America’s political system, going so far as to say, “we’ve allowed a two-party elected dictatorship to hand our country over to commercial corporate supremacists.”



Photo | Teddy Meyer

However, despite the giant numbers in enrollment, Mason is incredibly concentrated. Again using Virginia Tech as a point of comparison, Mason’s main campus in Fairfax is about a quarter of the size of Tech’s main campus in Blacksburg. Only 677 acres serve more than 30,000 Mason students, while Tech has a whopping 2,600 acres to house their students. It may stand to reason that so many people from diverse backgrounds in such a concentrated area can lead to fierce political dialogue.

The second factor in explaining Mason’s political influence is the University’s rich diversity. An article on *MSN.com* has named Mason as the most politically diverse campus in the entire country—a ranking which came from the 2008 edition of the Princeton Review’s list of best colleges. Our campus is a breeding ground for political activism, and contains a virtual cornucopia of voices from all corners of the globe.

In response to such a wide cross-section of political and social opinions, as well as our close proximity to Washington, D.C., Mason has created an environment that is designed to stimulate conversation and encourage voters to exercise their rights. This semester, the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates have all been televised in the Johnson Center Atrium on giant projector screens, complete with live-blogging commentary and large student crowds. Student Media has also created the MasonVotes website, in addition to ramping up *Broadside* and Connect Mason’s regular output with politically charged stories and editorials. Both the Obama campaign and the McCain campaign have maintained a noticeable presence on campus, handing out literature and inviting students to register to vote. Groups, clubs, and various other student-led organizations have turned up the heat in and around campus with demonstrations and rallies.

Any visitor to the campus would be able to tell that November 4th is fast approaching.

The voters at Mason hold a tremendous amount of weight during this political season—especially in such a crucial state as Virginia. For the first time in decades Virginia has the potential to turn blue, and what Mason students decide to do with their right to vote could potentially change the face of American politics forever this Election Day. The issues this time around are crucial, and more immediately felt than in previous election years. Hard economic and social times call for universities like Mason to voice our opinions to make a difference in this country’s future.

## An Independent Perspective

In the political game where it seems like everyone is trying to explain why you’re wrong, pull you their way, or convince you that your party is being led by Satan himself, one Mason student named Susanna refuses to play.

“First of all, are you registered to vote?” I ask. “Yes,” she replies.

“So, are you going to vote this November?” “Absolutely,” she tells me.

“Would you like to tell me who you’re planning on voting for, then?” “Actually,” she replies, “I would prefer not to say. I don’t care to get involved much.”

Intrigued, I try to dig a bit deeper. I adjust my interview questions as necessary and begin again by asking her, “If you don’t mind my asking, what are your reasons for staying uninvolved? Are they political, personal, or otherwise?”

“Well, it’s not a matter of being uninvolved. I do pay enough attention to the political scene to be able to vote responsibly. Involvement in politics is a part of living in a democratic society. I think that as citizens of any society, it is our responsibility to take part in the



important political and social growth within it. I just choose not to get overly involved because, well, politics irritate me.”

“People get polarized,” she explains. “They treat each other with disrespect. And they even do it over petty little things that don’t necessarily make the other candidate less of a person. Then entire parties go on to insult one another. In my opinion, writing off entire groups of people based solely on a political viewpoint is just wrong.”

She was clearly passionate about the subject and was making some strong arguments, so I let her continue.

“Leadership is important, I know,” she tells me. “But at the same time, it’s not nearly as important as people make it out to be. I mean, I hear people talking about candidates and using this apocalyptic language—that is just ridiculous. Everything is uncertain, and we can’t predict the future.”

“For me, I would definitely like for us to be doing what is right as a nation,” Susanna says. “But if you place all of your hope for happiness and wellbeing on a political candidate, you’re going to be disappointed.”

I was beginning to be curious as to whether or not she was even concerned about who would win the upcoming election...“I’m not overly concerned about who wins. I’m not one of those people who think that if so and so wins, we’re all doomed.”

Susanna, like many others, has tired of the in-your-face aspect of American politics, and despite the current emphasis on political participation, she might be on to something big: Perspective. Sure, we should try to be involved as best we can, and we need to vote responsibly and pay attention to what’s going on around us. That is our responsibility as citizens of this great nation.

But, perhaps we can steer clear of the name calling, mud slinging, and smear-tactics that are becoming all too familiar as November 4th draws closer. ■



▲ **BOB BARR**, Libertarian Party presidential candidate, speaks to an intimate group of about 40 Mason students in Patriot’s Lounge in SUB I on Friday, Sept. 12. Barr spoke about how his party, “is trying to get our message of maximized individual liberty and minimized government power to the American people.”

► **JOE BIDEN** shares a story with audience members during an event at Mason’s Verizon Auditorium in Prince William on Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008. After an introduction by Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, Biden addressed a range of issues from education to taxes and pointed out that, “[this is the] single most important election in the lifetime of anyone in this room.”

▼ **PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON** listens to supporters at a rally for Democratic primary hopeful Senator Hillary Clinton on February 11, 2008 in the Johnson Center. After discussing his wife’s historic campaign, Clinton added, “I also think it will be a good thing when we have our first African American president.”





# Town & Gown

*The University's Impact on Local & National Politics*

An exploration of the political and economic relationships between George Mason University and the Northern Virginia region.

**Leah Donnelly**  
Special to *VoxPop Voice*



Illustration | yirsh/sxc.hu

## ON THE RECORD:

### Virginia's Voting History

Follow the ► symbols to find the whole story.

Virginia, as one of the original 13 colonies, has a long history when it comes to presidential elections.

At its peak, 1792, Virginia controlled 15.9 percent of the nation's total electoral votes.

With a count of 25 electoral votes, Virginia had more than any other single state.

From the formation of the modern Democratic Party in 1828 until 1856, Virginia's declining number of electoral votes went blue.

Then in 1860, Virginia voted for John Bell of the Constitutional Union party. That would be the last time the state would vote for a US president until 1872. During that time, the commonwealth was embroiled in the Civil War. ►



Fairfax County and indeed the whole of Northern Virginia have been a major area of focus for both campaigns this election season, and as the area grows by leaps in bounds in terms of our population, we have seen a shift overall to a more “left of center” voting trend affecting the vote in our historically conservative state. Both candidates hope to tap into this shift and affect it in their favor. Northern Virginia has become more diverse, more politically engaged, and more vocal about our marked differences in opinions from the southern counties. Often we hear people remark how we are like two different states living under the title of Virginia. We are at a pivotal moment of growth and change and we need to be recognized as an influential political force that is just as much a part of the Commonwealth as our southern counterparts.

Virginia is actually a battleground state in this election and that should feel pretty exciting. I know it does for me.

Fairfax County, and The City of Fairfax in particular, is perhaps a microcosm or confluence of the major issues at stake in the current election. We have rapid economic growth, a growing job market, and growing education and technological sectors; all of which are being pushed to their fullest extent by our growing populations. And our ever-growing University has a part to play in

this transitional moment, but what exactly?

The much-touted recognitions of late, (and I am not, for once, talking about the Final Four, although that is a factor) have been Mason's consistently high rankings in standards such as diversity, technology, and the recent prestigious recognition of “#1 School to Watch” from *US News and World Report*. These distinctions signal the impact and innovation the University has demonstrated and how we are perceived on the national stage. If we are having an impact there, how are we impacting our immediate surroundings?

New businesses that come into the area are a direct reflection of the demands and desires of a University community, tapping into the ready-made customer base of students and parents. The presence of the University in the County can be seen in economic growth but also elsewhere: The infrastructural demands of new buildings, accommodating increased traffic flow, the creation of new jobs and demand for specialized skill-sets, housing market increases, and an abundance of rental properties. The space around us is indelibly transformed by our presence, but do we really understand what this means and what our roles are?

The answer is not a simple yes or no, and I think it is best if we think about Mason as part of a larger developmental package for the area as a whole; we participate in



Photos | Jason Hartsel

1860 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE  
Northern Virginia &  
Lower Shenandoah Valley ~

	FRANKLIN PIERCE DEMOCRAT	FRANCIS PICKENS DEMOCRAT	ABRAHAM LINCOLN REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT TOTAL	REPUBLICAN TOTAL
ALEXANDRIA	711	519	138	2	
CLARKE	288	335	49	0	
CULPEPER	526	525	19	0	
FAIRFAX	691	685	91	24	
FAUQUIER	789	1027	39	1	
FREDERICK	963	1315	66	0	
FREDERICKSBURG	352	331	177	0	
JEFFERSON	959	458	440	0	
LOUDOUN	2037	778	120	11	
MADISON	74	834	20	0	
ORANGE	427	475	12	0	
PRINCE W'M	293	718	26	55	
RAPPAHANNOCK	491	409	29	0	
SPOTSYLVANIA	599	516	257	0	
STAFFORD	404	402	165	0	
WARREN	276	462	12	0	
WINCHESTER	620	613	48	2	
VIRGINIA	37,400	37,400	1,170	1,170	1,170
UNITED STATES	37,400	37,400	1,170	1,170	1,170

Compiled & Drawn: E.H. Scheel

and represent a important part of the extension of Washington D.C .in the region—an urbanization of the suburbs in a sense.

But in a political context, has Mason affected the region?

As we know, politics are very much a part of the engaged student’s daily life. There is nothing quite like the exuberance and passion of youth that comes alive during a presidential election and that is precisely why so many candidates visit university campuses while on the campaign trail. This politically-charged atmosphere is a rather recent phenomenon of the last ten years as Mason has shifted from a commuter campus to a competitive and viable academic force to be reckoned with on both the local and national stage. Students at Mason focus mostly on social issues that speak to their diverse cultural backgrounds, and political activities on campus tend to focus on raising awareness on issues of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and physical abilities—and how these issues are either neglected or ignored in legislation both campus-wide and nationally. Students on our Fairfax campus have also taken active stances for and against the war in Iraq, on issues such as healthcare, and on the viability of the job market that they face upon graduation. In short, political discourse defines and shapes the college experience for

▲ **MAIN STREET, USA** Retail and dining spaces in Old Town Fairfax reap economic benefits from sitting at the crossroads of a town and gown relationship.

many of Mason’s students. This is one of the greatest values of a college education: to see the political in our personal lives and the desire to affect change in the political structures. But how do we, if at all, impact the greater community of Fairfax County and the City that borders our campus?

It is nearly impossible for us to gauge our influence in terms of social issues and the minds of voters outside of campus, but the mere presence of a major university no doubt alters the political landscape. But to what extent do our campus organizations attempt to engage with those outside the university community? I imagine, however incorrectly, that these political activities are rather insular and are mainly directed towards other students, a population with which they have the most access and interaction. But surely our local neighbors feel Mason’s presence. What do they think about us and how do we affect the politics of their lives?

I recently met with John Mason, the former mayor of the City of Fairfax, to discuss “the town and gown” relationship for an oral history interview on behalf of the University Libraries’ archival unit. Mason

Special thanks to Virginia historian and map maker Eugene M. Scheel for this 1860 election chart adapted with data from *The Washington Post*.

► After the war, the race was between general Ulysses S. Grant and Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*. In 1872, Virginia, now with 11 electoral votes, down from a Pre-Civil War count of 15, fell to Grant, a Republican, who solidly beat out Greeley’s self-formed Liberal Republican Party.

For the next 13 elections, Virginia was once again a Democratic mainstay. However, in 1928, the Republican candidate from California, Herbert Hoover, won Virginia along with 58.2 percent of the popular vote. ►



► The state would fall from 12 to 11 electoral votes, and it would be another 24 years before Virginia voted Republican again.

In 1952, Virginia, now back at 12 electoral votes, hitched itself to a winner, Dwight “Ike” Eisenhower, a Republican. For the next 56 years, except for a flirtation that helped Democrat Lyndon “LBJ” Johnson win the 1964 election, Virginia fell solidly in the corner of the Republicans.

Since 1992, Virginia has had 13 electoral votes, and in 7 out of the last 10 elections Virginia has been on the winning side.

In the 2004 presidential election, 54 percent of Virginia voted for Republican, George W. Bush.

However, in this election it seems that nothing is certain.

This year may mark the end of a trend of almost a half-century of a red Virginia, but at this point, nothing is certain. As the race continues, one thing is sure, Virginia’s status as a battleground ►

was elected Mayor in a bipartisan election in 1990, and remained in office until 2002. ‘Mayor Mason’—what everyone calls him as he walks through Town Hall and the city streets—is of small stature but with the dignified presence of a military man. This retired army colonel’s officer training is still apparent in his gait, his manners, and in the respect he commands. But he is also quite jovial and upbeat, without the slightest bit of pretension or arrogance. Mayor Mason brought many insights to the issues at hand and we talked for a while about the implications of the University on the City of Fairfax. The implications are not always simply articulated or apparent and as far as challenges and advantages, “in a town and gown relationship,” he explains, “there are always both.”

John Mason, being a positive man, likes to focus mostly on the advantages, of which there are many. He began our discussion of this topic by explaining that, “A major university adds intellectual activity and intellectual capacity to the community as a whole.” He continued that the University brings “intellectual vitality” to the entire Northern Virginia area, but “for [the City of Fairfax] it’s particularly beneficial because we’re next door.”

A university has an entire intellectual work force that it brings to live and participate in the geographical area. And while a lot of faculty and staff do not reside specifically in the City of Fairfax, they do live in much of Fairfax County and other parts of Northern Virginia. This is beneficial on a small scale, Mason explains, because you get “the kind of highly educated people participating in your community that enrich our volunteer activities and the other activities that we have.”

“Town and gown” relationships are never simple and Mayor Mason discussed

throughout his oral history interview that it takes a personal relationship among the leaders of both the City and the University to make it successful. He pointed to the direct work of President Merten and former president George Johnson and their willingness to work with City leaders for making the relationship so successful for both sides. He also

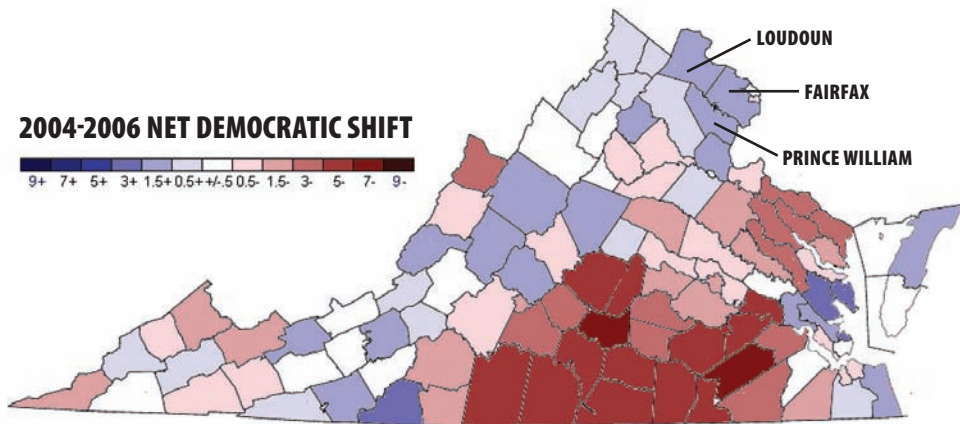
commended both men for the excellent jobs they have done in getting Mason “on the map,” nationally and internationally.

In terms of economics, a current area of national focus, a University does have a direct impact on its town. Mayor Mason spelled it out as such: “The University generates hundreds of millions of dollars a year in spending in Northern Virginia, we’re not the direct beneficiaries of the bulk of that spending because obviously we’re a small part of Northern Virginia and obviously expenditures are spread

across Northern Virginia. But stop and think about the number of people who eat in our restaurants or shop in our stores.” He also added that, “There’s clearly a plus for us in having a major University next door to us.”

Mayor Mason also mentioned the opportunity for collaboration between the City and the University; through the arts, through business, academics. Specifically, Mayor Mason highlighted the cooperation of the University with the small business community of the City. The Small Business Enterprise Center is one such collaboration that seeks to use the intellectual resources of the University to foster small business leaders who will build and hopefully sustain their projects within the City of Fairfax. Mayor Mason has also contributed significantly to the development of George Mason’s Fall for the Book Festival and the Fairfax Spotlight on the Arts.

*“Mayor Mason points out that the University does bring intellectual engagement and vitality to the City. In a political context this could mean more engaged and mindful voters.”*



Special thanks to Nicholas Beaudrot at [www.electoral-math.com](http://www.electoral-math.com) for this political map.

▶ state in this election makes it a valuable prize for either side, be sure to expect plenty of courting. ■

Story by Aram Zucker-Scharff, courtesy of MasonVotes.

The City of Fairfax is not your typical college town and does not depend on Mason to sustain itself economically, however it is a nice addition and Mayor Mason is certainly glad that it is here. And after all, it was the leaders of the City of Fairfax in the late 1950s that had the foresight to purchase 150 acres of farmland and build and support a college that has become quite prestigious and beneficial overall to the City, county, and region.

So while the University does not sustain the economic viability of the City of Fairfax, it certainly doesn't hurt it. But more importantly, what Mayor Mason points out is that the University does bring intellectual engagement, and vitality to the City. In a political context this could mean more engaged and mindful voters. However, Mayor Mason stressed when asked in an email if the presence of the University has a direct effect on voting trends that "There are not a significant number of GMU faculty and staff living in the City of Fairfax to have significant impact on voting demographics," and added that "demographic shifts are driven more by the general trends in immigration than a single factor such as GMU."

Yet, overall Northern Virginia has seen a significant move away from conservative trends and is largely considered the more liberal section of the state. Mayor Mason commented on this fact: "The City of Fairfax, like the county surrounding it, has shifted politically to the left (perhaps center left), over the last few elections [Fairfax County] has consistently supported Democrats, with the exception of Congressman Tom Davis."

Mayor Mason stressed the point though that, "this is less about the presence of GMU

than it is the general trends in Northern Virginia and state Republican leadership having moved further to the right than many moderate Republicans in Northern Virginia."

No matter what the impetus, there is a sense that Northern Virginia is separating itself out and has a distinct political point of view from that is significantly different from the rest of the state. This is a crucial matter in the current election and for the first time Virginia has not been taken as 'read' (pardon the pun). We can trace this change and uncertainty directly to the size and impact of the Northern Virginia electorate.

We, as a University, are at a unique moment in our history in that we are so young. Our youth is our advantage. We can remember where we've been and that informs what direction in which we seek to guide the University. It feels as if we are in a constant state of transition and that is something we can embrace. We haven't been fully realized. We are still changing and we can impact the course of Mason's history. More importantly, we can readily recognize our place in our local community because we were borne of that community and perhaps we can recognize the intersubjective nature of our relationships with the towns that support us and can take steps to connect in more meaningful ways. ■

*Leah Donnelly, former VoxPop editor, is a graduate student in the Philosophy Department and is also the coordinator of the Oral History Program in Special Collections & Archives. To hear Mayor John Mason's entire oral history and many others, please visit Special Collections & Archives in Fenwick Library, Room 204C.*



**MICHAEL FAUNTROY**

Professor,  
School of Public Policy

"Virginia has 13 electoral votes and Obama has a slim lead of about two points in most polls. The race will be decided in the northern Washington, D.C. suburbs, where growth in the immigrant population, coupled with large numbers of hyper-educated government contractors and technology workers have changed the demography of the region and made the state "bluer" in recent years."

Oct. 7, *The Huffington Post*

# No Longer

**JANETTE  
KENNER  
MUIR**

*“This campaign year, with all its history-making moments, technological changes, and monumental costs, is going to make a difference in future campaigns to follow.”*

No longer can it be said that young people don't care about politics. No longer can it be argued that the youth of today care more about designer jeans and fast cars than abject poverty and the environmental crisis. In over two decades of studying presidential campaigns, never before have I seen anything like the energy I see surrounding our choices for the next leader of our nation. This truly is a different year. Maybe it is the Obama fever that sweeps the country or the emotional thrill possible should a woman finally break the glass ceiling and become vice president. Or perhaps it is simply due to the fact that society is suffering through bad economic times and a terrible, lingering war, each seemingly with no end?

Presidential election years usually draw interest and enthusiasm, particularly when candidates are able to generate dynamic qualities perceived to be important to strong leadership. But, some years are frankly, pretty boring, bringing us to Election Day when many, if they show up at all to vote, are just ready to get it over with. This year is different. Beyond the fact that we have minorities represented in significant ways, it is also different because of the access to information that sits at our finger tips. No longer can mainstream media shape the public debate on candidates. The impact of the Internet, as seen through blogging, political websites and specific calls for voter interaction has changed the political landscape in ways that will be transformative for years to come. Technology advances in campaigning are dramatically changing when and how fast we get our news and how much detail we want to know about it. Not only can I find everything I need to know on the Internet now, I also receive personal



Photo | Courtesy of Mason Gazette

▲ **JANETTE KENNER MUIR** Associate Professor, New Century College

emails, text messages, and Facebook invitations to get to know my candidate even better.

As we make our choices, it is important to consider several things. First, we must wonder what's missing. Who is silenced in this process? What groups are privileged due to the fact that they have faster machines and savvier consultants? For example, how much do we know about third party candidates? Who is running for the Green Party? Who runs as a Libertarian? What makes Nader run again? When do we get to learn about these candidates as well? Common wisdom suggests that they are not "viable," that they may only serve to "muck" up the debate rather than move us forward in the campaign process. True, on a number of levels, but still not right.

This campaign year, with all its history-making moments, technological changes, and



monumental costs, is going to make a difference in future campaigns to follow. It promises to be a campaign that will rewrite the landscape for American political engagement in ways that will demand that we no longer act with complacency on the political spectrum – that we become engaged consumers of public information, inquisitive of diverse voices, capable of discerning the important issues and cutting through the negativity and false expectations that are a premium of most campaigns. No longer can we claim ignorance, media manipulation and voter disinterest. Politics is alive and well in 2008, thanks to an environment that thrives with 24/7 information, immediate fact checking and direct messages from the candidate to the public. In many ways, voters are empowered this year to actively engage in the election. The enthusiasm is evident throughout the country. Now, we only need to remember to harness this political energy to actually show up on Election Day, and to continue engagement on political issues beyond this historical campaign. I have confidence that we can. ■



Photo | Christian Yingling

▲ **GET OUT THE VOTE** Reaction to Mason's voter registration efforts was positive, and volunteers for Presidential Nominee Barack Obama's campaign report registering 50-60 students to vote per day.

"Being a recent college graduate myself, I know a lot of students forget to register or forget to register in the right place. I want to make sure everyone gets a chance to register to vote in what's going to be a very important election," said Ben Leiotta who coordinates the registration efforts.

Even though the registration deadline has passed, the Virginia State Board of Elections is accepting absentee applications for previously registered voters until Tuesday October 28, 2008, and the last day for in-person absentee voting is Saturday, November 1.

For more information, visit [sbe.virginia.gov/cms](http://sbe.virginia.gov/cms) or [masonvotes.gmu.edu](http://masonvotes.gmu.edu).



Photo | Christian Yingling

▲ **ELECTION CONNECTION** Professor Muir teaches a class on presidential elections through New Century College. She asks her students to sharply examine past and present presidential elections and campaigns, a task that results in heated debates and intelligent discussions, engaging students of different backgrounds, ages and interest levels.

*The*

*Media*

*is the*

*Message*

An exploration of how  
campaign media shapes the  
democratic propensities of  
America's youth.

**Alyssa Ross**

VoxPop Voice Staff Writer

**A**s you turn on your television to watch the news you are bombarded with phrases like “Change!” and “Country First!” As you line up to pay for your groceries you cannot help but notice the faces of McCain, Obama, Palin, and Biden on the magazine stand. Driving from school, you scan the radio for an interesting talk show or a hit song, but all you hear is “McCain this” or “Obama that.” The media has made this year’s election process unavoidable by turning the candidates into a group of celebrities. It has gone so far that I expect Palin to bump Britney Spears out of the tabloids any day now. But, no matter how annoyed we may be with this election’s extensive media coverage, there is no denying that the publicity also has a plus side.

Media coverage has been widely used by both the Republican and Democratic parties during this election in an attempt to spark campaign involvement. In 1998, a study done by Nicholas A. Valentino and David O. Sears discussed the ways in which adolescents receive socialization of partisanship. Put simply, socialization of partisanship is the youth’s identification with a group, individual, or viewpoint such as a political party, candidate, or specific political issue. The study found that this socialization is done through a variety of sources, including direct messages from the mass media. These messages, specifically in relation political communication, cause an increase in political knowledge, the development of party support, and an enhanced sense of public duty. Another study, in 1995, by Martinelli and Chaffee looked at the channels through which new voters receive their knowledge. The study found that

campaign media was one of the most influential ways that new voters received their information on the democratic process.

This is particularly important for college students because many of them have just reached voting age (18-19yr olds), or were not old enough to vote in the last elections (20-

21yr olds). These age groups comprise a large portion of the University population. George Mason University, recognizing the need to educate young voters, developed an Election Committee, which consists of both students and employees.

The Election Committee planned five events around the election season. Two of the events were for the presidential nominees’ acceptance speeches and the three other events were to watch the debates. These events not only acted as informative agents for students, they also fostered a dialogue about the candidates and the issues. Events like these have helped to energize Mason students and prompt their involvement in get out the vote drives.

In this sense, the media’s involvement in this year’s election is a positive influence. It gives students access to the issues, the candidates, the party system, and the overall democratic process.

However, according to Diana Owen’s “Media and Political Education: Election Communication and the Socialization of Native-born and New Americans,” some studies argue that media exposure alone is not an adequate means for political socialization. They argue that media should be used in combination with educational methods, such as Kids Voting USA (see sidebar for URL). This curriculum is useful for K-12 students, but what about

## COMMUNICATION OUTLETS IMPORTANT FOR REACHING YOUNG VOTERS IN 2008

### TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Television	46%
Newspapers	20%
Radio	14%
TV Newsmagazines	9%
Print Magazines	8%

### DIGITAL MEDIA

Online News Sites of Established Media	80%
Independent Online News Sites	77%
Candidate Web Sites	51%
Blogs	53%
Podcasts	13%
MySpace	46%
YouTube	44%

*Table: Diana Owen, Director of American Studies, Georgetown University, “Media and Political Education: Election Communication and the Socialization of Native-born and New Americans,” September 2007.*



college-age students who have never had exposure to such a program?

One web site that can help college students is called “Young Voter Strategies” (see sidebar for URL). The site is partnered with the Student Empowerment Training Project, which helps students register to vote and understand how important they are to the democratic process. George Mason students are even more fortunate to have “Mason Votes,” a popular political blog run by students. On the site, student writers blog about some of the many problematic issues facing this election. Websites like these not only inspire students to act, they also educate students so that they can act intelligently. Young voters are often discouraged against participating in the election process because they feel that their vote does not matter. These media venues are aimed at helping students understand what a large roll they can play in this election and that they can make an impact. In this way, media is helping to educate students, rather than simply cramming publicity shots and stump speeches down their throats.

Although there are positives to the media coverage, there may also be negatives that have yet to manifest themselves. Throughout this election in particular, the media has been used as a tool for smear campaigns. Smear tactics are attempts to damage the candidates’ reputation. Whether the information in these tactics is true or not, they force attention away from the real issues by making citizens angry, which may cause people to vote based on emotion rather than reason. I specifically mention this issue because younger generations are often criticized for making decisions based on emotional response. Smear campaigns appeal to the emotional sides of citizens, making them hard for anyone to ignore, regardless of age. As students, our best bet is to educate ourselves to avoid falling into this stereotype. By taking advantage of educational venues, such as Mason Votes, students can decide for

themselves how true or untrue the claims of smear campaigns really are. Then when you sit down to watch your favorite TV show, you can laugh at your friends who start to get angry over negative ad campaigns, and explain to them what is really going on.

But smear tactics are not the only thing on TV getting citizens riled up. The media has chosen a few hot-button issues surrounding each candidate which they over-report—issues like the war on Iraq, the economy, and the environment. These issues are known for eliciting a more emotional, rather than reasonable, response. The media (vis-à-vis talking head pundits) has consciously kept certain significant political issues in the background, choosing only to focus on the most heated topics which draw the largest ratings. Large corporate media venues, such as Fox News and CNN, do not present citizens with completely objective information because, whether they claim to or not, they each have party ties. Because of these biases, corporate-run media cannot present citizens with a full, unbiased understanding of our candidates. Less-discussed topics like the war on Iraq may be something that gets citizens fired up, but the issues that citizens are most impassioned by are not the only ones to focus on. Educational policies and domestic issues are also crucial factors in who we choose to elect our next Presidential of the United States.

Only using commercial media sources to make our political decisions opens our government up to the influence of propaganda and smear tactics. Do not let your vote be influenced by the whims of the media, but instead make your choice on a well-explored understanding of the candidates.

Taking advantage of the wealth of media options available in 2008, most of which have never played a role in deciding a president, allows voters to stay informed and dial down the rhetoric and white noise that is dominating the media blitz this election cycle by weighing all the options. ■

## INTERNET VOTER RESOURCES

### • YOUNG VOTER STRATEGIES

[www.jade.orchidsuites.net/eangel/clients/youngvoterstrategies-org](http://www.jade.orchidsuites.net/eangel/clients/youngvoterstrategies-org)

### • INSTITUTE FOR INTERACTIVE JOURNALISM

[www.j-lab.org/kb08notables.shtml](http://www.j-lab.org/kb08notables.shtml)

### • POLITIFACT.COM'S TRUTH-O-METER

[www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter](http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter)

### • KIDS VOTING USA

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

### • MASON VOTES

[www.masonvotes.gmu.edu](http://www.masonvotes.gmu.edu)

### • UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

[www.upiu.com](http://www.upiu.com)

### • VIRGINIA 21

[www.virginia21.org](http://www.virginia21.org)

### • ROCK THE VOTE

[www.rockthevote.com](http://www.rockthevote.com)

### • UWIRE

[www.uwire.com](http://www.uwire.com)

### • THE CIVIL RIGHTS COALITION

[www.civilrights.org/issues/voting](http://www.civilrights.org/issues/voting)



# America Blogs 2008

As political blogs evolve in visibility and number, the road to the White House is looking more and more like the Information Superhighway known as the Internet.

**Rachael Dickson** | VoxPop Voice Staff Writer

This semester, I have been working as a political news reporter for UWire's Youth Vote '08 Blog, hosted by *CBSnews.com* and *Washingtonpost.com*. Many college students from across the country contribute to this blog through news reporting, opinion writing, satire, editorial cartoons, videos and photography. We come from a range of schools from Berkeley to Vanderbilt, each with unique viewpoints that span the spectrum of political thought.

I write as a news reporter—covering events, trends, and issues in Virginia and at George Mason University in particular. As the only Youth Vote '08 blog correspondent in Virginia this semester, I've had the opportunity to cover rallies held by senators John McCain and Barack Obama. Both events turned out thousands of dedicated, active supporters of all ages who were willing to brave intense heat or pouring rain to see their candidates. That dedication was moving to watch, and indicative of the greater battle over votes this election season.

During the presidential primaries, more than six million people between the ages of 18-29 voted, a record number more than double that of both the 2004 and 2000 primaries. That's a number that could seriously

*"Whether candidates like it or not, college students and young professionals could decide which person makes it to the White House. Because of that, new technology plays a bigger role in this election than ever before."*

affect the election result, particularly when you look at the fact that 4.9 million of those voters cast their ballot en masse for one party in particular—the Democrats.

Whether candidates like it or not, college students and young professionals could seriously decide which person makes it to the White House. Because of that, new technology plays


a bigger role in this election than ever before.

There is a huge audience for political blogging among youth voters. The Pew Research Center found in a research survey that young people are much more likely to rely primarily on the Internet for news than newspapers. Nearly twice as many regularly watch news clips online than regularly watch network news broadcasts.

Blogs are an interesting breed of reporting, often times written with a definite bias, but that's what makes them so interesting. Most bloggers have a distinct point of view that keeps an audience interested and coming back for more.

Youth Vote '08, of course, represents the youth point of view. Though it's an edited blog with many writers who don't reveal their personal opinions, the content is a good barometer of the issues that are important to youth across the country. We care about the economy, the war, health care, education—each in our own way. And we're going to change the world with our opinions, one vote at a time. ■

*Rachael Dickson writes for [www.youthvoteblog.com](http://www.youthvoteblog.com) as a news correspondent. She is currently a junior at George Mason University.*



# *Mr. Stone Goes to Richmond*

*Recent Mason graduate Kiel Stone hopes to bring some new blood to the Virginia House of Delegates as part of the new generation of politics.*

## **David Pierce**

*VoxPop Voice Staff Writer*

**A**t 23, Kiel Stone is the exception. While most recent college grads are focused on their careers, the economy, paying students loans, and voting in the upcoming presidential election, Stone, a 2007 Mason graduate, is focused on running. Running, that is, for Virginia state office.

Stone is set to begin his quest for a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates and is preparing to declare his candidacy for the Republican nomination for the 35th district, an area that covers Fairfax County near the Vienna Metro and parts of the City of Vienna.

*VoxPop* could not confirm through either the Virginia House of Delegates staff or the Virginia State Board of Elections if Stone would be the youngest candidate to run for a state-wide office, but as a newcomer to the political scene his candidacy is certainly atypical. And, Stone understands the challenges of running for office less than two years out of college.

“I’m building things from scratch. I don’t have an established donor base or support from the party establishment,” Stone said. “Instead, I’m running on the idea to address the problems Northern Vir-



ginians are currently facing.” Stone is confident he can persuade citizens to vote for him despite his young age.

“I believe that over the course of the campaign, I will prove my worth as someone who cares about and is knowledgeable about the issues affecting Virginia,” Stone said. “Further, I believe that they will be drawn to my ideas, my passion and my determination to move things forward

Stone promises to bring change and a different set of ideas to Richmond, and if elected in November 2009, his number one priority would be to reform the transportation system and ensure Northern Virginians are able to meet their transportation needs.

“I think the [elected officials in the] general assembly are currently spending too much time arguing,” Stone said. “There’s nobody acting on good faith.” He also cited examples of what he believes to be failures of the state legislature, such as not offering solutions for Virginia’s transportation problems and balancing the budget. He said that he thinks the state legislature is not effectively doing its job.

“I think [the legislature] needs new blood,” Stone said. “A little purging every now and then makes everything healthier.”

So what prompted Stone to enter the political fray? It turns out that his urge to run for office started a long time ago.

“I’ve always been interested in public policy and public service...you could describe my decision to run as a gradual process,” Stone said. “I got involved in my first campaign in 8th grade when my English teacher, Peg Ferraro, was running for Northampton County Council...things just snowballed from there.”

Stone has worked on local, state and federal races and interned for Senator Arlen Specter (R-Penn) on Capitol Hill. Recently, he was asked to join the Citizen’s Budget Review Com-



Photos | Teddy Meyer

▲ **MASONITE** Stone, a 2007 Mason graduate, earned his degree in Economics. During his last semester at Mason, he served as Editor-in-Chief of *Broadside*, the student newspaper, and continues to remain involved with *Broadside* providing his services as a marketing analyst.

*“I think the legislature needs new blood... a little purging every now and then makes everything healthier.”*

mittee led by Springfield Supervisor Pat Herrity, and he also serves on an education and youth committee under the Fairfax Federation of Homeowners and Civic Associations.

“I’m well-informed, serious, and I’m not just coming out of the blue here,” Stone said of his campaign. “I’m not running for the sake of running.”

Two of Stone’s friends from his

Mason days have signed on as his top aides, including campaign manager, Stephen Spiker, a 2008 graduate who who majored in government and international politics and chief adviser, Jeremy Beales, a 2007 Winter graduate who majored in government and international politics.

Spiker, who focuses on financial and polling issues in Stone’s campaign, commended Stone. “I’ve seen first-hand the commitment and steadfastness Kiel possesses towards serving Northern Virginia.” “Everybody we’ve met [has] unanimously agreed: Kiel Stone has what it takes [to represent his constituents].”

Stone grew up in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. He enjoys the outdoors, especially camping, hunting and fishing. He used to work at two Nazareth area farms when he was younger, and considered himself to be a “farm hand.” “Anything you can think someone might do on a farm, I probably did it,” Stone said. “I drove a tractor, planted and maintained fields, [and] picked produce.”

Stone had some advice for Mason students interested in running for public office:

“You [have] to get involved, you don’t necessarily have to get involved by working on [political campaigns],” he said, adding it could be civic groups instead. Stone also said that it was imperative to follow and understand the current issues affecting the community, and to network with others.

“You’ve got to have something to hang your hat on,” Stone said. “You need a tie to the community.”

When asked what advice he would give to Mason students as they head to the polls this November, Stone said, “Vote your informed conscience, wherever that leads you.”

For Stone, his primary for the House of Delegates will be held next June, and if successful, his name will be on the ballot in November 2009. ■

# The Lifestyle Gap

**SOLON J. SIMMONS**

*“Obama suffers more as a representative of an elite lifestyle than a denigrated race and more from how he seems than from what he supports.”*

If Barack Obama takes the oath of office next January, it will be because he avoided two potentially devastating threats. The first was the political emergence in the democratic primary of the demographic we called the white working class, and the second was the discovery of the fantastic appeal of Alaska’s governor Sarah Palin. It is tempting to label both of these threats populism, but this explains the question away with a word. Both threats to Obama in what should be the best year for the Democrats since 1932 derive from what I’ll call the lifestyle gap. Less a culture war founded on divergences in foundational habits and beliefs or even in policy, this lifestyle gap is at times little more than a product of superficial distastes among the well placed for a normative if nostalgic American lifestyle and for its primal symbols, including enlightenment universalism, individual liberty, American exceptionalism, and the middling cultural style. Because the Democratic base is uncomfortable with these images, the American people are uncomfortable with it. The lifestyle gap helps Republican candidates to remain popular while peddling less popular programs.

There is nothing complicated about this, and those who picked Sarah Palin clearly understand that the lifestyle gap can translate in the identity era. In a speech to members of her former church, she praised the crowd for being a “bunch of cool looking Christians” and recognized like the Christian rock stars that “people are going to be interested in Jesus Christ through you because of the way you look.” What should be troubling to liber-



Photo | Courtesy of Michael Shank

▲ **SOLON J. SIMMONS** Assistant Professor,  
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

als in Sarah Palin is the message, not the messenger. Palin pushes her reality by simply changing her appearance. It may be that many Democrats can’t recognize this separation.

Republicans are accused of waging a culture war (Pat Buchanan bragged about it in 1992), but they are better thought of as deploying lifestyle leverage. The lifestyle gap plagues the Democrats to the advantage of the Republicans because the near insiders who set the agenda of the Democratic Party—let’s call them the selectorate—tend to exaggerate the substance of the compromises that are necessary to bring their agenda in line with their potential constituents, while the Republican selectorate and the Republican electorate more neatly coincide. Americans do not expect the Democratic base to compromise on hard won positions on civil rights, abortion, limiting gun violence or sexual and gender equality or their legitimating principles. What is demanded instead

is a leadership cadre that the people believe likes them. No candidate understands this better than Barack Obama, but his trim, suave and sophisticated bearing is indelibly marked as professional class, while the median voter is still a generation away from attaining this goal. Therefore, to the vacillating Democratic electorate, Obama suffers more as a representative of an elite lifestyle than a denigrated race and more from how he seems than from what he supports. Worse yet, he often has to convince his base that his belief in the promise of America is not a sham to delude the bitter in backwaters. Natural or no, Obama's selectorate cramps his style.

The Republican Party has a much easier job. Being compelled to promote candidates with whom the people can identify, Republicans open a space to portray themselves as populists who fight for the people against powerful Democratic elites, and for this reason the word elite has replaced class in our discussions of what populism means. To understand why, we can just meditate on the family resemblance among Adlai Stevenson, John Kennedy, Michael Dukakis, Al Gore, and John Kerry. The result is that today Americans seem to resent the egghead more than the fat cat.

This revisionist populism is a dramatic historical turn. From Thomas Jefferson to Andrew Jackson to William Jennings Bryan to Harry Truman, the Democratic Party has portrayed itself as the party of the common man (suggestively, no substitute gender neutral term seems to carry the full array of connotations), and in one respect the Democrats remain so to this day. For example, in our first systematic recorded data on popular likes and dislikes of the parties and candidates from the 1952 National Election Studies, respondents volunteered that they liked the Democratic Party because of its support for the little guy and its opposition to big business. The latest numbers from 2004 reveal this same pattern as do all the other years. Americans are waiting for the return of the party of the common man, but the Democrats are afraid to give it to them.

With an Obama victory, the election of 2008 may represent a sea change in the political culture of this country, in which the professionalization of the Democratic Party's electorate begins to catch up with that of its insider selectorate. Alternatively it may simply point to the good luck of Obama progressives to draw an election cycle in

which the Republican incumbent was incompetent enough to affirm the sardonic, 2001 predictions by the comedy newspaper *The Onion* that "our long national nightmare of peace and prosperity is finally over." Senator Obama could still become president despite the white working class and Sarah Palin, but governing in this context will not be an easy hand for him to play. ■

## Sound Bites



*"There is a way to spin the change message that you can weave Biden into that narrative, but that will be the challenge for the campaign, frankly."*

Aug. 27, *Newsday*

**MICHAEL MCDONALD**, Associate Professor, Department of Public and International Affairs



*"[McCain] is someone who knows an awful lot about foreign policy... but the star of this show is clearly Governor Palin."*

Oct. 1, *Agence France Presse*

**JAMES PIFFNER**, Professor, School of Public Policy



*"Elections are often decided by responses to immediate and pressing concerns, but perhaps one of the longest legacies will be felt by judicial appointments to the Supreme Court and to the lower federal courts."*

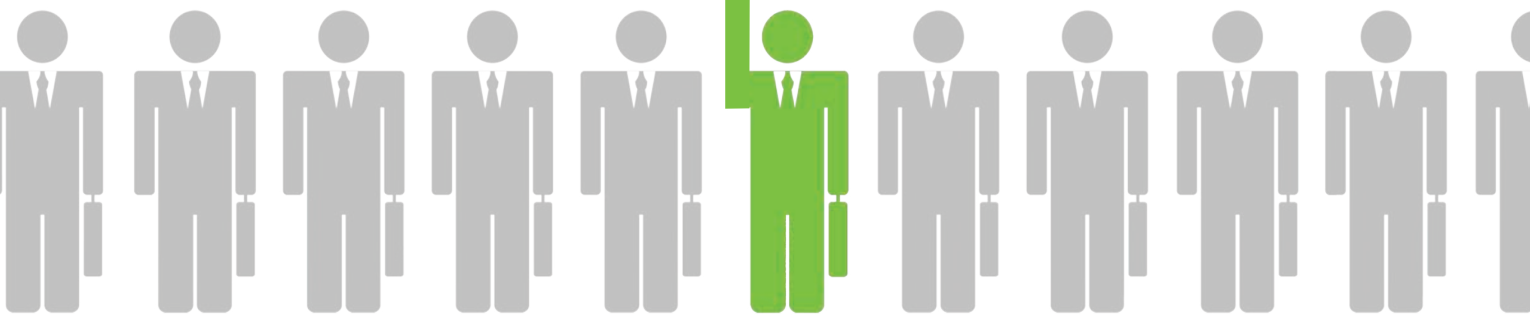
Oct. 7, *Richmond Times Dispatch*

**NEOMI RAO**, Assistant Professor, George Mason School of Law



WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? & HOW MUCH?

# FOLLOWING THE MONEY



## Noah Martin

*VoxPop Voice Correspondent*

Campaign finance contributions for the 2008 presidential election have now exceeded campaign fundraising for any election anywhere, ever—over \$1 billion in all, according to the Center for Responsive Politics—signaling that people’s focus on issues, experience, and sly political maneuverings may need readjustment when considering a presidential candidate. Any journalist will tell you about the power of truth and their mission to uncover it. But any economist will tell you that enough money can buy as many newspapers, TV advertising slots, and writers as you need to write you into whatever truth you want. With all this money floating around people need to start asking not whether this message has been approved by Senators John McCain Barack Obama, but who paid for it and who is going to want something in return?



According to the Federal Election Commission, as of July 31, 2008 Barack Obama had raised over \$426 million from individuals' contributions. More than \$222 million came from donations under \$200. John McCain had raised over \$184 million from individuals' contributions, with more than \$73 million coming from donations under \$200.

These figures are staggering when compared with the mere \$95.5 million total receipts from the Bush campaign in 2000 and the \$48.1 million in total receipts from the Gore Campaign the same year. John Kerry's campaign raised a grand total of \$234 million in the 2004 election, compared to the \$259 million raised by George W. Bush's reelection campaign. In less than a decade the amount of campaign dollars raised by Democrats in the presidential race increased more than eight-fold.

The remainder of McCain and Obama's campaign totals were made up of larger individual contributions, \$2,300 being the legal limit that one person can give to one candidate and political action committee funds. By law these larger contributions must be attributed accurately and filed with the FEC. Only cash donations of less than \$50 can be made to either candidate anonymously. (To view itemized campaign finance reports for all the candidates, visit [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).)

PACs (Political Action Committees) are considered tax-exempt organizations under the United States tax code, 26 U.S.C. § 527, and regulated by the FEC. Also known as 527s, these organizations are filed under the same tax code but are not restricted in their donations by FEC regulations because they do not disperse funds for the explicit election of any single candidate for federal office. These groups can fund specific issue advocacy, a particular message, or voter mobilization but cannot act in coordination with a campaign.

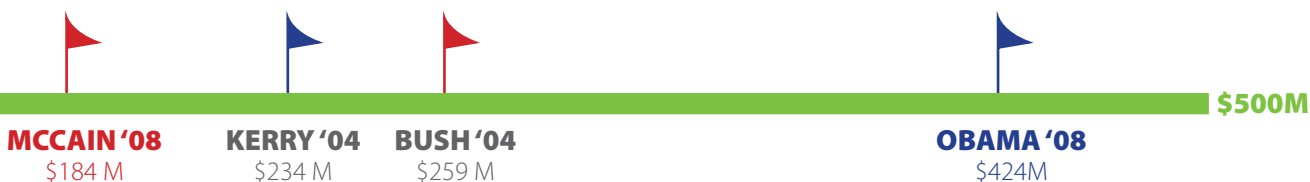
This fine line becomes particularly murky in an election cycle when negative advertising for one candidate becomes beneficial advertising for another. One 527 has advertised a hypothetical scenario where, after

the untimely death of Senator McCain, an inexperienced and unqualified Governor Palin, according to their view, must take command of the United States. Another 527 ad has painted Senator Obama as a power-hungry, inexperienced politician with ties to liberal radicals they claim to be domestic terrorists. Though neither of the advertisements are endorsed by either of the candidates, the commercials directly contribute to the propaganda engines of the McCain and Obama campaigns.

In the 2004 election, both John Kerry's campaign and the Republican National Committee brought charges of illegal coordination with a political campaign against 527s to the FEC. The Kerry campaign accused Swift Boat Veterans for Truth of coordinating with the Bush campaign. The Republican National Committee accused MoveOn.org, The Media Fund and others of coordinating with Kerry's campaign. Needless to say, 527s have become a powerful nontransparent player in major political campaigns today.

In 1976, after the Watergate scandal, a fund was created to pool public financial resources for political campaigns, its aim being to supply direct tax payer money and avoid the influences of special interests on politics. Every year, individuals can check a box on their tax returns and donate an additional three dollars to the fund. John McCain has announced that he will accept tax payer money from this fund, while Barack Obama has become the first major party candidate to decline public financing for the general election.

Some McCain supporters are suspicious about the Obama campaign's historic move. By bypassing public funding, Obama is relinquished from an unspoken contract with the American people, but they claim that he is still bound by special interest campaign contributions he receives. However, the Obama campaign claims that it has simply been successful enough at fundraising—according to the FEC the Obama campaign has received 1,430,415 individual contributions, as opposed to the McCain campaign's 349,946 personal donors—that it



doesn't need to tap into the public funding system, a system that Obama has repeatedly called broken.

Total campaign funding is important on the way to the White House since it determines TV face time, the size of a campaign's staff, advertising strategies, transportation allowances, and flexibility to mobilize around the vicissitudes of politics. But who the next president elect is going to have to pay back in kind, once in office, may be more important for citizens because it has the potential to influence the legislation proposed and supported by the administration and the demographics catered to in order to secure any first-term president's end goal: re-election.

For example, the retired population split their contributions almost evenly between the two major party candidate in this election: \$23.5 million for McCain and \$23.1 million for Obama. Either candidate, if elected, will have to pay significant attention to retired American citizens. This will most probably mean legislation effecting healthcare, including prescription drug costs, and possibly the rate at which social security is taxed. Joe Biden has indicated repeatedly in his campaign speeches the need to exempt retired Americans collecting social security whose income totals less than \$50,000 a year.

Finance, insurance and real estate was another sector of the economy nearly evenly divided between the two major party candidates: \$22 million going towards McCain and \$24.8 going towards the Obama campaign. It is impossible to

tell in the current financial tumult but either candidate will have to stabilize the tremulous financial markets, remedy the real estate downturn, and restore consumer confidence.

The defense sector donated approximately half a million dollars to each candidate, leaving them the freedom to determine defense policy according to explicit platform promises without repayment obligations lurking behind the scenes.

The Health sector donated nearly twice as much in contributions to Obama as it did to McCain: \$9.5 million to \$5.1 million. Obama could have received a higher level of donations from this sector because of his platform, as stated in his plan for America, to institute a universally accessible, cheap and efficient healthcare plan, governmentally run, but inevitably sub-contracted through private Health Maintenance Organizations with the necessary infrastructure to achieve the monumental task. If Obama sticks to his campaign platform, the health sector is looking at a giant, government backed growth in their clientele. The only question will be what companies get what contracts.

So whether it is the platform or voting record of a candidate that rallies you to his or her team, remember to always follow the money before casting your vote. Sound bites, a well selected soundtrack, and a wholesome montage of photographs can all evoke moving crescendos of patriotism, but just remember that a candidate's past struggles are not going to shape policy in the same way that campaign contributions can. ■



### ▲ STUDENTS FOR LIBERTY

"Everything we as Americans care about rests on the shoulders of a financial system with profound and chronic problems that are becoming increasingly apparent. The economic policies put into practice by congress in recent weeks, and those proposed by Senators Obama and McCain, amount to temporary stop-gaps and empty politics. Americans are ready for an economic policy that serves their needs, and if the current political system cannot give it to us, we must look elsewhere."



### ▲ NASHIM JEWISH WOMEN'S GROUP

"I took a trip to Israel this summer and absolutely fell in love. So in this election, I'm not just looking for the usual answers to the usual questions. The economy, the war, and other "hot-button issues" are important, but not the most important topics from where I stand. I want to know that America will always stand by and protect the people and country of Israel. It is more than just a country on a map. Israel is a home [land] that we cannot afford to lose. I need to know that we will stand and fight until there is nothing left to give." —Em Thrasher



# What's To Be Done?

**ALLISON HAYWARD**

**Campaign Finance in 2008**

*“Fixing the system won’t work if the repair manual is based on the same bad premises.”*

When reform interests call the campaign finance system “broken,” they usually mean that some political activity is insufficiently regulated, allowing people to give or spend money to influence elections. Like leaks in the plumbing, the remedy is usually a patch. The new law restricts the offending conduct, with no expectation that a new opportunity won’t arise elsewhere. But our country’s campaign finance laws are not so much in need of repair as in need of reassessment.

“Fixing the system” won’t work if the repair manual is based on the same bad premises.

Yet corruption remains a problem. The first step would be to find ways to open the system to more donors. Already the success of Internet fundraising for national elections shows a way to reach numbers of modest donors. Yet the law at present makes it difficult, confusing, and potentially embarrassing to donate to campaigns. It discourages the marginal donor who is less likely to have a personal stake in an election. To paraphrase Alexander Heard, the law discourages the good donors, and when the good do not give, the bad will.

There is no policy justification for any but the most generous contribution limits on donors’ personal funds. It is tough to make the argument that in the day when Stewart Mott (a General Motors heir and McCarthy supporter) or Nelson Rockefeller spent what they chose on candidates and parties, the “system” was less competitive, less relevant or more corrupt. If abandoning individual contribution limits is



Photo | Courtesy of George Mason School of Law

▲ **ALLISON HAYWARD** Assistant Professor, George Mason School of Law

out of the question, then perhaps Congress could take the \$5,000 limit enacted in the 1940 Hatch Act Amendments and set the individual donor limit at what would be its inflation-adjusted value today—over \$70,000.

Our disclosure laws already require accurate and timely reporting, but the law also demands reporting a donor’s address, occupation, and employer once they give just \$200. In many cities, \$200 will barely cover the cost for a hotel dinner or a basket of groceries. That itemization on reports—and by extension on the Web—should commence at \$2,000, which is roughly the inflation-adjusted threshold from the original disclosure law.

Modest donors, especially those who might support fringe or unpopular causes, would feel freer to give, and less concerned about harassment and identity theft. Similarly, the \$250 threshold for reporting independent expenditures is too low. It should be set at a level where the expenditure might matter in a race,

perhaps at the least \$20,000 per communication. That works out to three cents per resident of a Congressional district on average.

In truth, our system appears not to do a very good job of disciplining this core corrupt relationship, even as it intrudes into other political activities. The perennial campaign finance scandal involves a public official, some kind of supplicant, and official acts done in return for money or something of value. In late 2005, Congressman “Duke” Cunningham resigned after a criminal investigation revealed a staggering array of bribes he took in return for assisting a government contractor in obtaining taxpayer-funded business. Meanwhile, Cunningham’s 2004 Democratic opponent, Francine Busby, raised \$236,000 to Cunningham’s \$832,173. Few (if any) of her donors gave with the intention of securing earmarks or other government largess. But the identical restrictions, rules and requirements applied to both.

If campaign contribution laws are loosened, it still may make sense to apply special restrictions that do better at regulating officeholder corruption. A grab bag of reform ideas may deserve study. Should political giving – or solicitations – be limited during sessions of Congress? Should donors be ineligible for no-bid government contracts? Excluded from earmarks?

Deregulating political giving can help. How much influence will a venal contractor have if the Member he seeks to influence is already securely financed by a kitchen cabinet of friends, family and community leaders?

The undue attention elected officials give to those who speak “officially” – insiders, lobbyists, establishment journalists and the like, would be reduced by the volume of competition. That kind of politics is messy, decentralized and unpredictable. It is also vital, supple, imaginative and flexible.

On balance, the answer has to be in deregulation, and broadening the donor pool. ■

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*For more information on campaign financing for the 2008 election, visit [www.fec.gov/](http://www.fec.gov/) where you can find itemized contribution breakdowns and maps by candidate, and view donorship by state or zip code.*

## Sound Bites



*“Lincoln’s story is the stuff of legend. Barack Obama’s presidential campaign has consciously sought to cultivate and connect with this most hallowed Illinoisan.”*

*Sept. 22 Chicago Sun-Times*

**RICHARD NORTON SMITH,**  
Scholar-in-Residence



*“[Obama] has to become more concrete in his platform. People think he’s a wonderful speaker, but they want to know specifically what he’s going to do.”*

*Oct. 7, US News and World Report*

**TONI-MICHELLE TRAVIS,**  
Associate Professor of  
Government and Politics



*“One key difference between this election is the way in which candidates can simply ignore the mainstream media when a reporter says that a candidate might not be telling the truth on a particular issue”*

*Oct. 2, Mason Gazette*

**JEREMY MAYER,** Associate  
Professor, School of Public Policy



*“I see neither well-functioning democracies nor democracies hijacked by special interests. Instead I see democracies that fall short because voters get the foolish policies they ask for.”*

*The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*

**BRYAN CAPLAN,**  
Associate Professor,  
Department of Economics





