

Chapter 1



Let's Talk! Bringing the Taboo to the Table

If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

One need not be well-versed in the intricate details of proper etiquette to know some basic truths about the unspoken rules of “polite” conversation. There are two topics that a polite guest never mentions at a dinner party: politics and religion.

Why might etiquette books warn people to steer clear of these subjects? People often have deeply held beliefs about religion and politics, so discussions of such intensely personal topics can quickly become divisive and uncomfortable. Instead of initiating a conversation that could lead to frustration and anger, it may seem wiser to avoid such subjects altogether. But silence or shouting matches are not the only options. If we can find ways to think and talk about religion and politics that won't automatically cause friction, perhaps we can be less afraid to bring these topics to the table.

Although Miss Manners may warn against discussing either of these subjects, the purpose of this book is to defy those rules of etiquette and encourage you to talk about them. This book will

help you find appropriate ways to break from the social convention and talk more, not less, about religion and politics.

As a professor of American politics teaching at a Christian college, I think about the connections between religious and political perspectives every day. Although this task is not always comfortable or easy, it is not only valuable—it is essential. Religious values and beliefs directly and indirectly affect how most Americans think about politics. To contribute productively to contemporary debates about American politics, we need to understand both the role of religion and the purpose and limitations of government.

This book is designed to help you navigate the rocky waters of religion and politics so you can engage in lively and fruitful conversations. The chapters that follow will help you address questions such as: How should my Christian perspective affect my political views? How should I respond when I see Christian leaders disagree about politics? Should Christians just avoid politics altogether? How should my faith affect my voting decisions and political participation? On this journey, you will learn more about the American political system and how your faith can inform your political views and actions.

Religion and Politics, “American Style”

Anytime we begin to talk about a serious topic, it is useful to know where everyone is coming from. We cannot help but bring our own perspectives, life stories, and viewpoints into a discussion. We all have ideas about how the world works and what we think is most important, and these ideas help shape our understanding of those around us. If three people are discussing effective parenting techniques, it is useful to know that one has three teenagers, another has a toddler and a baby, and the third has no children. Each person can contribute important insights to the conversation, but their views will likely, in part, reflect their personal experiences.

Let me begin our conversation together by mentioning three

of my starting points. I will introduce some of my underlying assumptions about the role of religion in the United States to help you better understand the perspective that will guide the rest of my discussion.

The United States Is, and Has Always Been, a Nation of Many Faiths

Any frank discussion of religion in contemporary American politics must begin with the recognition that the United States is not, nor ever has been, exclusively Christian. The Constitution created a democratic government designed to protect individual freedoms. Freedom of religion, one of those cherished liberties, is a foundational principle of American democracy.



Given the religious diversity of the United States, we should not expect everyone to accept nor to embrace political arguments that appeal exclusively to Christian principles and doctrine.



People from a wide diversity of faiths live in the United States and participate in American politics. According to recent survey data, about three of four adult Americans identify themselves within the Christian tradition, but dozens of other religions also have a place here. Consider one example: The number of Americans identifying as Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus has more than doubled in the past decade alone. These three religions combined now represent about the same percentage of the population as Jews. The religious group growing most rapidly is seculars,

those who say they are not religious at all.

This book approaches the subject of religion and politics in the United States with an awareness of and appreciation for our nation's religious diversity. Just as I want the government to protect my freedom to worship as I choose, so must I promote policies that respect the rights of others to practice their religion. Furthermore, given the religious diversity of the United States, we should not expect everyone to accept nor to embrace political arguments that appeal exclusively to Christian principles and doctrine. Religious views and traditions can and should inform our political perspectives; indeed, the purpose of this book is to help you apply your faith to your politics with care and discernment. But even as we approach politics and government as Christians, we should do so aware that we are engaging in conversations with people from a wide range of perspectives.

Religion Affects Everyone's View of Politics

A second underlying assumption builds from the first. Although some people may think that their religious views have little influence on their thoughts on politics, in practice this is rarely, if ever, the case. Views of religion, notions of right and wrong, and beliefs about the existence of a god or gods and life after death all affect politics, either directly or indirectly.

Consider a few examples of religion directly influencing politics. Some pastors, priests, rabbis, and other religious leaders teach their faithful to support particular political issues and candidates. Many people talk informally about politics when they gather for worship or other congregational events. At some houses of worship, interest groups distribute voter guides that "compare" candidates for office on a few select issues, sending a clear directive about which candidate deserves the vote.

Because religious beliefs provide a basis for morality, religion also has an indirect but significant influence over political views.

In much the same way that religious teaching helps us discern right from wrong in everyday life, it also offers a framework for evaluating a legislative proposal, comparing candidates for office, or assessing the latest actions of the local school board. Even those who do not identify with a particular religion still uphold some form of moral code that, much like an explicitly religious world-view, will affect their approach to politics.

The Ultimate Christian Calling Is to Love God and Follow Him

If religion really affects everyone's views of politics but we don't all share the same religious views, how do we reach enough agreement to govern effectively? Although the context of American politics makes it difficult to reach democratic consensus, I believe that Christians can serve important roles in shaping and guiding both politics and the wider culture. These beliefs lead to my third starting point: politics and government are important, but the most important Christian calling is to love God and follow Him.

As participants in a representative democracy, we need to learn about politics and government to help us make positive civic contributions, but influence in government and politics should never be our primary goal. Political power is enticing and potentially very dangerous; the lure of power can quickly turn us away from serving God. In politics as in all endeavors, Christians must not lose sight of their ultimate purpose.

In his classic writing *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine writes to a young church trying to interpret Scripture correctly and avoid heresy. He points to love as the guiding principle of Christianity, reminding his readers of Jesus' explanation when asked what was the greatest commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37–40). Keeping in mind

what Augustine calls the “double love” of God and neighbor will help us discern God’s truth from false teaching and provide a guide for Christian thought and action.

Honoring God in Politics and Government

Where should we look for guidelines for engaging with politics in ways that demonstrate love for God and our neighbors? What biblical principles can guide us as we seek to honor God in politics and government?

A Blueprint for Politics in the Old Testament

The Ten Commandments provide a helpful starting point. The first commandment calls us to worship God alone, and the second follows from it, prohibiting idolatry:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:3–6)

Only the one true God is worthy of worship, yet other gods capture our attention and fight to take His place. Political power is one such potential idol. If Christians lose confidence in God’s sovereign control and instead look primarily to politics to restore society and culture, they can make government into such an idol.

Likewise, the third commandment reminds us of the power and holiness of God and His perfect name: “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name” (Exodus 20:7). Far more than

condemning swearing, this commandment warns against using God's name for anything that does not honor Him.

When defending our political views and actions, we should follow the principles of the third commandment, using God's name with utmost care and reverence. As one pastor explained, "God's answer to a world that blasphemes His name is a community who honors His name. Honoring the Lord's name is our highest calling. Christ will be honored when the world sees a community of people who show awe and affection for Him."¹ In politics as in all spheres of life, we should honor God and serve as light to the world.

A Blueprint for Politics in the New Testament

In much the same way that the first three commandments offer principles to guide Christians who are thinking about politics and government, New Testament passages also provide important insights. Many commentators rightly direct believers to Paul's discussion of civil authority in Romans 13. Although this passage provides a useful description of God's provision for government, when I am asked what biblical text I find most practical for developing a Christian approach to politics, I point first to a different passage, 1 Corinthians 12 and 13.

In this letter, Paul encourages and instructs the church in Corinth, a church struggling with internal division and with a culture fixated on status and power. As one commentator observes, "Paul's purpose is not to correct their theology but to get them to think theologically so they would respond properly to their polytheistic, pluralistic culture."² We, too, can find guidance in this epistle to help us think theologically about interactions with politics and government.

First Corinthians chapters 11 through 14 offer Paul's teaching on worship, life in community, and spiritual gifts. He is concerned that some in the church are too prideful, and he writes to correct them. In a short detour from the specific topic of spiritual gifts,

Paul reminds the Corinthians that love is the central guiding principle for interaction with God and with one another. Toward the end of this famous description of God's unconditional love, Paul writes:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:8–13)

Even as we are reminded of the power and depth of God's love, we are also cautioned of our human limitations. Paul warns against spiritual pride, reminding us that we all “see but a poor reflection as in a mirror” (v. 12). Our own sinfulness and the fallen state of nature cloud our vision. We can look with hope for the day we will “see face to face” and “know fully,” for everything will indeed be clear in God's eternal presence. But, in the meantime, life this side of heaven will be marked by confusion and uncertainty.

A Framework for Thinking about Politics

So how might politics look different if viewed through the prism of the first three commandments and 1 Corinthians 12 and 13? Let me suggest four principles to guide a Christian framework for thinking about politics and government.

- *We all “see but a poor reflection as in a mirror” and therefore should exercise genuine humility when discussing politics.*

When politicians speak, they typically speak with great certainty and clarity. We expect our elected officials to act decisively, and their rhetoric reflects these expectations. But certainty can quickly turn to arrogance, especially when combined with religious language. Critics will often say of someone who holds an opposing view: “Who does she think she is? God?”

Biblical examples such as Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians suggest a very different model for talking about politics. If indeed we only have partial knowledge, it follows that a Christian perspective on politics should begin in a context of humility and love. As limited humans, we don’t have all the answers. Instead of arrogantly proclaiming our political views, we should approach this subject, as all others, with awareness of our limitations and reliance on God’s love and wisdom. We can speak from our religious convictions with love and humility, arguing our views with passion but with respect for others.



Since we all have imperfect knowledge this side of heaven and we are each created to serve different functions in the body of believers, it follows that Christians may disagree on political issues.



THE POWER OF ADMITTING MISTAKES



MANY POLITICIANS SPEAK with certainty because they follow an unwritten rule of politics: never admit you're wrong. When problems arise, deflect the blame. West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin broke this rule. Only a month after assuming office, critics dubbed the new senator "No Show Joe" for his absence during Senate votes on two controversial bills. Manchin apologized in a conference call with the media, explaining he had been back home for a long-planned family Christmas celebration. "Let me apologize to anybody and everybody within our listening and reading areas. I'm very sorry for missing the two votes," he said. "[Constituents] were upset; they were upset over what they had heard or the way it was reported. But I take total blame. It was a mistake."³

- *The diversity of the body of Christ makes room for Christians to disagree on many political matters.*

God creates each man and woman as a unique bearer of His image, giving each person a distinctive set of talents that glorify God. As Paul reminded the church in Corinth: "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body" (1 Corinthians 12:18–20). We are created to live and serve in community, so

it makes sense that Christians work best when they combine their perspectives and gifts to work together for the common good. Each person has a valuable contribution to offer.

Since we all have imperfect knowledge this side of heaven and we are each created to serve different functions in the body of believers, it follows that Christians may disagree on political issues. One person might have a special concern and care about education, while another is a strong advocate for the environment, and yet another has a passion for tax policy. We can celebrate these passionate perspectives as gifts from God. Let's take the argument even further. Perhaps God even impresses on the hearts of two Christian believers political views that seem, from our limited perspective, direct opposites. Through constructive dialogue and honest listening, Christians with opposing political views can sharpen one another and help inform each other's political perspectives. Think of how discussions of politics within our churches would change if we began conversations with the recognition that our own particular view on a political issue is imperfect and that another person who holds a different view might also have insight from God.

- *The label "Christian" belongs to God and His work, not to validate human efforts like politics.*

Responding to the question of whether Christians in Great Britain should start a Christian political party, C. S. Lewis answered an emphatic no. Invoking the third commandment, Lewis argued that labeling a particular political group "Christian" would misuse God's name:

The principle which divides [a "Christian" party] from its brethren and unites it to its political allies will not be theological. It will have no authority to speak for Christianity. . . . It will not simply be a part of Christendom, but a part claiming to be

the whole. By the mere act of calling itself the Christian Party it implicitly accuses all Christians who do not join it of apostasy and betrayal. It will be exposed, in an aggravated degree, to that temptation to which the Devil spares none of us at any time—the temptation of claiming for our favourite opinions that kind and degree of certainty and authority which really belongs only to our Faith.⁴

When we attach the Christian label to things that are not from God, we claim for ourselves an authority that rightfully belongs to God alone.

The Christian label is also dangerous in that it uses God's perfect name as a descriptor for something imperfect. In my work on Capitol Hill, I occasionally encountered activists from "Christian" groups behaving in ways that maligned the name of Christ. In one particularly embarrassing episode, representatives of a Christian interest group came to thank a congresswoman for her sponsorship of legislation important to their agenda. At the start of the meeting, the congresswoman inadvertently offended the organization's leader by asking her to introduce herself. The simple question so wounded the leader's pride that she instructed her assistant to call our office and cut off all further cooperation and communication with the congresswoman and her staff. This encounter with public Christians was a harmful witness; indeed, the incident turned the label Christian into an object of ridicule among some staff members.

- *Politics can and should be a means for demonstrating love in action and building the body of Christ.*

Unfortunately, far too many discussions of Christianity and politics end as shouting matches instead of positive and constructive dialogues. An environment that encourages simplifying

issues into two positions, “us” versus “them,” creates instant enemies, as if anyone expressing an opinion on a political question must be preparing for war. When Christians speak hatefully of another believer, they sin against their Christian brother or sister and harm the unity of the church. When Christians speak with hatred toward someone outside the church or intentionally cause dissension, they damage the reputation of the church and its witness.

Instead of demonizing those who disagree with us, we should approach them in Christian love. In this age of negative campaigning and personal attack politics, it is almost impossible to imagine a political world modeled after the love described in 1 Corinthians 13. How would the tone of politics change if political opponents actually interacted with each other with patience, kindness, trust, and hope? How different would campaign advertisements look if they “did not delight in evil but rejoiced with the truth”? Although Christians are not likely to change the nature of politics overnight, it is indeed possible and praiseworthy to justify political positions in a manner that is not boastful, self-seeking, or rude. If Christians viewed politics as a means for demonstrating love in action as a witness to the world, the way we approach politics could fundamentally change. More importantly, we could live the gospel by demonstrating the transformative power of love in action. Politicians might not be as successful on the campaign trail, but then again, winning office is not the ultimate goal of the Christian life.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Now that I have shared some of my assumptions and suggested some principles to help Christians think about politics, let's briefly look at the journey ahead. The next two chapters bring a few more basics to the table. After explaining how and when compromise might be a good thing, I defend government as an essential part of a strong and vibrant society.

The second part of the book offers a brief overview of the

American political system and how it works. Chapter 4 looks at the different layers and branches of government with which we interact in our daily lives, and chapter 5 explains the role of political parties and ideology. The section ends with a discussion of the role of church and state in theory and in practice.

The third and final section of the book provides tools and resources that will help you connect your faith with politics. Chapter 7 presents different models for relating faith and politics. After offering suggestions for how to handle political disagreements in chapter 8, I then tackle a complicated policy issue: reducing poverty. The section ends with a practical guide for deciding how to vote and a concluding chapter that suggests ways politics can help us accomplish our ultimate goal: demonstrating love for God and neighbor.

Political scientist Harold Lasswell perhaps unintentionally created a new definition of politics with the title of his book: *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How*. At its heart, politics is all about people and meeting their needs, so politics and government offer Christians a way to live out the commandment to love our neighbors. In the pages that follow, you will learn more about politics and ways that you can honor God with your participation in it. By the time you reach the end of this book, my hope is that you will be better equipped to serve God and serve others. So let's begin.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Reflecting

1. Think of times in the past when you have talked about politics with friends, family, or coworkers. What was one of the most satisfying conversations? What made it so positive? What was one of the most uncomfortable discussions? Why was it difficult?

2. What are some of your central assumptions about the role of religion in the United States? Where did you develop these views? Have any of your assumptions changed over time?

Responding

3. What are some practical ways that politics can help us live out our call to love God and neighbor?

Chapter 2



Getting to Yes: The Perils and Promises of Religion and Politics

All government,—indeed, every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act,—is founded on compromise and barter.

—EDMUND BURKE

When I began work as a legislative aide in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Senate was evenly split between fifty Republicans and fifty Democrats. Republicans controlled my side of the Capitol complex, the House of Representatives, by a razor-thin margin. Tensions between the two political parties were high.

One issue of particular concern to my newly elected boss, Representative Melissa Hart, was abortion. Hart had already established a strong pro-life voting record serving in the Pennsylvania senate, and she wanted to continue promoting this agenda on Capitol Hill.

Although pro-life and pro-choice activists fundamentally disagree on issues such as legal access to abortion, the congresswoman knew from experience that people could work together across political fault lines and find areas of common ground. Concerned about incidents of mothers abandoning their babies,

leaving helpless infants to die if not discovered in time, Hart asked me to help her write legislation designed to stop this horrific practice and help parents in crisis.

Hart eventually introduced a bill, the Safe Havens Support Act, which drew support from some of the most conservative and most liberal members of the House of Representatives. Pro-life and pro-choice legislators came together in support of a cause with which they all agreed: saving the lives of newborns. A few interest groups objected to the bill, including one pro-family organization that claimed it would encourage mothers to abandon their babies. But most saw the bill as the congresswoman intended—as a good faith effort from people on both sides of a controversial issue to work together on a problem of mutual concern.



It is possible to stand firm on Christian convictions and still make compromises.



The congresswoman succeeded in shepherding the key provisions of the Safe Havens Support Act through the legislative process; they eventually became law. Although her work on this bill required compromise and willingness to work with legislators who held very different views, the compromise achieved important goals. Hart didn't find a way to end the practice of abortion with this particular bill, but she never compromised her pro-life commitment. By seeking common ground, she found a way that she and her apparent political opponents could work together and save lives.

Black, White, and Shades of Gray

Many observers of the political process argue against political compromise, contending that devotion to a cause requires an unwavering stand. But the case of saving abandoned babies is just one example of seeking common ground and holding firm to principles at the same time. It is possible to stand firm on Christian convictions and still make compromises. But it seems to be an anomaly in today's polarizing political world, and often feels unacceptable to Christians. Let's consider why so many Christians think compromise is bad and discover why they are often wrong.

Religion in Black and White

For many of us, our religious identity is an essential part of who we are and how we view the world. Faith helps us distinguish right from wrong, gives meaning to life and death, and guides our daily lives.

Many people naturally think and talk about religion in black and white terms. Religious worldviews often make truth claims, and some truth claims are by definition exclusive. This is certainly the case with Christianity. Jesus teaches with the strongest of moral clarity, telling His followers, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Not only does He *speak* the truth, Jesus says that He *is* truth. Jesus—and only Jesus—offers salvation and eternal life. Much of Christian belief presents two options: God's way or the wrong way.

Politics in Black and White

Just as religion helps define personal values, so can our identity as politically conservative, moderate, or liberal point to deeply held beliefs about the world and our place in it. Our understanding of the proper role and function of government helps us rank our political priorities and offers guidance for determining what government

should (or should not) do to address problems.

Many Americans adopt the political views of those closest to them. From generation to generation, families provide an important context in which we learn about government, political campaigns, and the role of elected officials. For example, one person's earliest memories may include talking about politics at the dinner table, while another person has no recollection of ever discussing politics with anyone during childhood. Friends and coworkers are another source that may help shape our political values and beliefs.

Especially for those from families who held strong political convictions that they eagerly discussed with others, politics may be part of a person's identity. They know what they believe, they hold strong convictions, and they are often surrounded by people who share similar views. It should be no surprise that many people hold black and white views of politics.

The Political Process in Shades of Gray

Although many people perceive their own religious and political views in black and white terms, the everyday practice of politics is shaded with gray. Fundamentally, democracy is about compromise; it is a rather messy process of give and take. People with extreme political differences can find resolution one of two ways: through force of power or through the political process. The hard and important work of politics is seeking common ground, finding a way for people from a range of perspectives to live peaceably with one another.

Consider the day-to-day work of diplomacy. When tensions flare between countries—a military vessel enters contested waters without permission, an international terrorist is discovered hiding on foreign soil, a national legislature passes new laws that raise the cost of imported goods—diplomats get to work. Through back channels and in face-to-face meetings, representatives of the feud-

ing countries make demands, offer concessions, and search for ways to avert a crisis. Ultimately, political leaders have two options to resolve disputes with other countries. They can seek a political solution, or they can use military force. Although most of the deals happen out of the public view, compromise is the currency of international politics and the best way to avert war.

Compromise is also essential in domestic politics. A modern democracy like the United States requires elected officials to work together to find acceptable solutions to complex problems. Legislators try to balance their personal values and perspective with the needs of the people they represent. At the same time, voters, interest groups, businesses, and others demand elected officials meet their particular needs. All of these different voices raising competing concerns create an intense and high-pressure environment.

Even as outsiders are demanding quick fixes, lawmakers must work within a system that is designed to take time. If you think of how long it can take three or four people to decide what to do for fun on a Saturday afternoon, imagine the complexity of getting 218 or more members of the House of Representatives or even just 60 senators to agree on every single word of complex legislation! If and when policymakers can build majority support for a compromise solution, the resulting policy will likely accomplish only some of the original goals and leave everyone slightly unhappy.

Black and White Ideals in a Gray-Shaded World

Religious and political convictions are usually considered in black and white terms—as absolutes. But it is possible, though not always easy, to connect the two in the world of politics.

God's truth is indeed perfect and unchanging, but human applications of it are not. From New Testament times to the present day, groups of believers have been divided in their interpretations of what it means to follow Christ's teachings. The Word of

God is clear, but human attempts to apply biblical principles to everyday living, such as applying faith to politics, are imperfect.

To complicate matters, many politicians and political activists intentionally use extreme language to try and score political points. Legislators, interest group leaders, and other policy professionals are fully aware that the political process requires bargaining and takes time, but they also know from experience what captures public attention and excites voters. They seek attention and rally supporters with demands for instant results and promises not to back down.



Activists and politicians will try to capture our attention in many different ways. It is our responsibility to test their claims, ask difficult questions when needed, and refuse to respond to distortions or lies.



Political leaders also know that when they argue their case with moral clarity and impassioned speech, citizens are very likely to respond. Conservative activist Paul Weyrich described this phenomenon from his own experience building support for political causes: “. . . one thing I had learned over the years is that if you sound as if you are morally certain, people will tend to believe you. So whether or not I know what I am talking about, I always try to sound morally certain.”¹ Activists and politicians will try to capture our attention in many different ways. It is our responsibility to test their claims, ask difficult questions when needed, and refuse to respond to distortions or lies. Christians can and should apply their faith to politics, but we should do so with great care, seeking ways to engage politics with a spirit of grace and truth.

SO LONG, SESAME STREET?



THIS WEEK, BUSH proposed a new budget with devastating cuts to public broadcasting. ‘Sesame Street’ and other ad-free kids’ shows are under the knife. So is the independent journalism our country needs.” So warned an email message that Moveon.org blasted to its mailing list. In reality, the budget outline proposed cutting government funding for public broadcasting by about 25 percent, a significant cut but hardly a move that would automatically eliminate one of the most popular children’s television shows. The email made some over-the-top claims, but it worked, flooding congressional switchboards with calls. This email is an all-too-common example of interest-group rhetoric that complicates the political process and makes it more difficult for elected officials to seek compromise. Blast messages and fundraising appeals often shade the truth, wildly exaggerate the impending gloom and doom, and find every way possible to scare people enough that they respond. A more honest message would not have caused such outrage.

Holding to Truth, Rethinking Compromise?

As we have seen, many people view religion in black and white terms, yet day-to-day political work necessarily involves shades of gray. It often seems impossible to uphold religious truths in a political arena that requires bargaining and compromise. The path

is not easy, but we can show love for God and neighbor in the complex and messy world of politics.

It is difficult—but not impossible—for Christian believers to navigate the complexities of politics in ways that honor God. Many people confront the tension between religion and politics and give up. But those who choose to engage their faith in politics can serve as positive witnesses for the gospel. If you are up to the challenge, let me suggest two things to keep in mind that may help you avoid the perils and embrace the promises of religion and politics.

- (1) Recognize that religion and politics will often exist in tension.

The first step forward is admitting the problem. As Christians, we should expect that our religious beliefs will provide us with broad principles that inform all aspects of our lives, so our faith will likely have an important influence on how we view political problems. But if we bring black and white views simplistically into a complex process shaded in gray, tension is inevitable.

Religious beliefs are a powerful motivator and can bring great energy to political activity. But even if we do what we think is right, we do so as part of a democratic process that makes room for many participants. If we want the right to express our views in the public square, we must also allow for others to have a voice as well. Not everyone will share the same views, so policymakers will make decisions after listening to many perspectives and weighing a range of concerns, including ours.

Furthermore, elected officials often need to negotiate and bargain in order to get things done. If we enter the political arena expecting lawmakers to translate our specific views directly into public policy, we will almost always leave disappointed. If instead we keep in mind that compromise is likely necessary to accomplish

political goals, we are more likely to accept the tensions inherent in the process.

(2) We can uphold truth and make political compromises.

The need for political compromise frustrates many Christians seeking change. The Bible teaches truth and provides a moral framework for ordering life, so they worry that they will have to abandon their principles in the political arena. They see compromise as a bad thing.

Not all compromise is problematic. Sometimes it's essential for maintaining healthy relationships, as we all can attest from interacting with family, friends, and coworkers. Siblings learn to share and take turns. Coworkers planning an office event weigh many suggestions before incorporating some of them into a final plan. Marriage partners consider their spouse's interests as well as their own when making decisions large and small. Reaching agreements and solving problems is an essential way we demonstrate love for our neighbor.

Political bargaining also serves laudable goals. It is often (but not always) possible to agree to compromises in the process of crafting new laws without abandoning one's principles and core beliefs.

In one very common form of political bargaining, elected officials sometimes make political concessions because they believe that getting part of what they want is better than achieving nothing at all. Evangelical political observers Stephen Monsma and Mark Rodgers call this type of bargaining a "half-a-loaf compromise" and contend that such deals are often necessary in a fallen and imperfect world. Legislators who choose such tactics need not compromise their fundamental beliefs, nor do they necessarily lose sight of God's truth. As Monsma and Rodgers explain:

God's word is truth. Biblical principles are absolute. But our applications of God's truth are often fumbling and shrouded in the fog produced by extremely complex situations, missing facts, and the pressures of limited time. All this means that when one is asked to compromise by accepting only some of what one is seeking to achieve, one is not being asked to compromise absolute principles of right and wrong.²

In many situations, Christians will seek change based on principles grounded in biblical truth. Yet even when we know our principles are right, we still must apply them in the context of an imperfect political system with finite knowledge, seeing "only a poor reflection as in a mirror."

COMPROMISES TO SAVE LIVES: PREVENTING HIV/AIDS



AN ESTIMATED 33 MILLION people currently live with HIV/AIDS. In the coming year another 3 million will likely contract the virus, and more than 2 million people will likely die from complications of AIDS. With no known cure and with many of the world's poor unable to access treatment, contracting the virus is usually a death sentence. Almost all experts agree that the only hope for curtailing the loss of life is preventing infections in the first place.

Consensus quickly erodes when discussing prevention programs. Because AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease, the three most common steps toward prevention are promoting abstinence, encouraging sexual fidelity, and distributing condoms to the most

vulnerable and those likely to engage in risky behavior. The Christian who believes that abstinence outside of marriage is God's plan will likely support the principles behind the first two steps but may disagree in principle with the third, condom distribution. Yet another biblical principle is also at stake, the belief in the sanctity of human life. Since condoms help save lives by reducing the risk of transmission by 80-90 percent, perhaps compromise makes sense.

For some of those most at risk of infection— young girls and women forced into prostitution, spouses of an infected partner, and victims of abuse—abstinence is likely not an option. Access to potentially life-saving protection offers them some defense from further victimization. In such cases, providing condoms is a small compromise in the name of the larger concern for human life and dignity.

Considering condom distribution for others at risk because of their own lifestyle decisions and choices raises more difficult moral questions. Yet even in this case, the compromise of one set of important values for the goal of saving lives seems worth the price.

Not all political compromise is good; some forms can be quite dangerous. Elected officials often find themselves in situations where they are tempted to set aside their moral and ethical principles in order to achieve personal or political gain. If, for example, a legislator trades votes with a colleague, agreeing to support a bill that goes against her beliefs in order to secure a fellow legislator's assurance of his vote in favor of her bill, she has sacrificed her principles for political gain. Instead of upholding the principle

of love for God and neighbor, the legislator is willingly acting against what she believes is right. The political world is full of temptations, and many principled men and women have justified unethical behavior with claims of serving a greater good. But in the end, in politics as in all areas of life, we need to be faithful to our beliefs and hold fast to our principles.

As we have seen, compromise can be a tool for good. Not all compromise is wise or God-affirming, but many forms of day-to-day bargaining are actually opportunities to love our neighbor by seeking common ground and serving others. The compromise and bargaining necessary to maintain a vibrant democracy are hard to achieve, but the benefits are great.

Having considered some of the complexities of mixing religion and politics, we are almost ready to examine how the American system actually works. One more background piece remains: considering the strengths and weaknesses of government.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Reflecting

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “compromise”? What are some ways that you make compromises as part of your daily life?
2. Do you think and talk about religion in black and white terms? Why or why not? Do you think about the everyday practice of politics as shaded with gray? Why or why not?

Responding

3. Suggest some ways that compromise in politics can be a “tool for good.” Think of other ways that compromise might be problematic. How can we determine when it is wise to compromise and when it is unwise?

Chapter 10



Ready, Set, Vote! A Decision-Making Guide

The most important political office is that of the private citizen.

—LOUIS BRANDEIS

The best argument against democracy is a conversation with the average voter.

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

I have been fascinated by American politics most of my life. Early childhood memories include joining my mother in the voting booth, hiding with her behind the curtain, and watching her pull the levers to vote. In first grade, I entertained my friends with political impressions during recess. A few years later, I worked on the first of what would be many campaigns, helping deliver and set up yard signs for a family friend's state senate run. By the time I was in high school, I was volunteering on a phone bank for a presidential race. A photograph of me and a friend watching the returns at a presidential victory party made the front page of the local newspaper. I was fascinated to learn about political campaigns from the inside, and I eagerly awaited the first election when I would be old enough to vote.

I can still recall my excitement as I drove to the polling place

to vote for the first time. My mood quickly dampened, however, when I entered the voting booth and was overcome by the long list of elected offices listed on the ballot. Some names I knew, so those votes were simple. But the list of candidates and offices was much longer than I had expected. I felt paralyzed, unsure of what to do. In the end, I left many of the boxes blank and exited the voting booth feeling like a failure.

Have you ever had a similar experience of feeling overwhelmed by a long and complicated ballot? With so many elections decided at once, it can seem impossible to learn enough about every race to feel prepared to vote. As we will see in this chapter, however, it is indeed possible to learn enough about the candidates to make an informed decision. After looking at some of the different ways that people view representation, we'll consider some questions you can ask and point you to resources that will help you find answers as you evaluate political candidates and get ready to vote.

The Expectations Game: Theories of Representation

In a representative democracy like the United States, citizens vote to elect people to office who they believe will work on our behalf in government. Political theorists often talk about two common models of representation: delegate and trustee. According to the *delegate model*, elected officials represent their constituents by directly reflecting their desires and opinions. As delegates for the people, the primary job of elected officials is to determine what the majority of their constituents want and translate these desires into public policy. An alternative view of representation, the *trustee model*, expects elected officials to draw upon their knowledge and experience to make decisions that they believe are in the best interests of their constituents. Since voters rarely have enough information or expertise to know what is best, they choose to place their trust in someone with specific skills and knowledge to act on their behalf.

Although these two models appear to be opposites, in practice, voters seem to expect their representatives to somehow serve as both delegates and trustees. Most candidates make early appeals to voters following the trustee model: they introduce themselves to voters by stressing their background, expertise, and character. In later campaign ads, candidates focus more on their role as delegates, taking sides on heated issues and showing how they contrast with their opponents. Data from post-election polls suggest that voters base their decisions both on their perception of candidate character and the policy issues they advocate.

Once in office, elected officials seem to serve as delegates on some issues and trustees on others. Recent research on the House of Representatives suggests that members are more likely to think of themselves as delegates on economic and domestic policy but feel more freedom to “vote their conscience” and serve as trustees on so-called moral issues such as abortion and gay rights.¹

When making a voting decision, evaluate candidates with your preferred model of representation in mind. If you generally follow the delegate model, choose the candidate who seems most responsive to voter concerns and most likely to vote with the constituents regardless of the issue. In contrast, if you are most concerned that an officeholder is trustworthy to make decisions on your behalf, you should primarily evaluate candidates based on their background, expertise, and perceived character.

Before You Enter the Voting Booth: Ways to Prepare

Once you have an idea of the type of representative you think would be best, what else should you do to prepare for Election Day? Before choosing among candidates, first decide which political issues matter the most to you and learn more about the different positions on the ballot.

Priorities, Priorities

Given the diversity of issues raised in a political campaign and the even wider range of topics elected officials are likely to consider over the course of a term in office, it seems impossible to find any candidate with whom you will agree completely. With this in mind, which issues should be most important when choosing which person to support?

Some voters answer this question by selecting one issue they believe is most important and evaluating candidates based on it. We call this *single issue voting*. If you are so passionate about a particular issue that you believe it always outweighs other policies an elected official must address while in office, single issue voting makes sense.

In practice, however, single issue voting rarely works. Sometimes political opponents agree. If your single issue is low taxes and both candidates pledge not to increase taxes, you cannot choose between them. In other cases, the role and duties of office may have little or nothing to do with the identified issue. If your single issue is pacifism, for example, you can likely make a wise choice between candidates for Congress, but the issue will be of little use when voting for county clerk.



In practice single issue
voting rarely works.



Most voters decide it is best to evaluate candidates on the basis of several issues at the same time, so they need to find ways

to prioritize what issues matter most to them. One method is to determine *non-negotiable issues*, those policy positions (if any) that are so important that a candidate must share your views on them to earn your vote. If issues are truly non-negotiable, skip voting in those races where neither candidate shares your views. Yet another approach is to create a list of your *priority issues*, those issues that you believe are most important for each elected office, and choose the candidate whose positions on these issues are closest to yours.

Much like the nature of politics itself, weighing the importance of issues and selecting a candidate among imperfect choices requires a delicate balancing act and will likely require compromise. There is no perfect formula for choosing a candidate; even as a professional political scientist, I have found an occasional voting decision so difficult that I have intentionally chosen no one. If you enter the voting booth and don't feel comfortable with your choices for an office, leave it blank and cast your vote in the other races on the ballot.

Evaluating the Roles and Duties of Office

After you are comfortable with how to prioritize issues that matter most to you, it helps to find out what races are on the ballot in a given election. Once you know what offices are contested, learn more about the principal duties and powers of each office. Evaluate candidates much like an employer would screen résumés when filling a job opening, thinking first about the particular qualifications and background that seem most relevant for the job. All things being equal, it makes sense that candidates for district attorney would be lawyers with experience in trial courts, that a prospective sheriff have law enforcement experience, and that a state treasurer have a background in finance or accounting.

Look also at the duties and powers of office to determine the issues the elected official is most likely to influence. As you weigh the

relative merits of competing candidates, consider their positions on issues most related to the particular offices they seek and then determine whose views are closest to yours on those issues. Consider a few examples. A school board member has significant power over budgets and curriculum at local public schools, so pay particular attention to each candidate's views on education and fiscal responsibility. A sheriff has great influence over criminal investigations and law enforcement, so compare the candidates' statements about their priorities for running the sheriff's department.

Getting to Yes: Learning about Candidates and Campaigns

Voter education is at the same time one of the easiest and one of the hardest aspects of making a voting decision. As an election nears, campaign stories dominate news coverage and political appeals flood the airwaves, mailboxes, and phone lines. It often seems impossible to ignore the upcoming election. Is it possible to learn anything useful in the midst of such chaos? Although campaigns can be frustrating and confusing, with a bit of persistence you can learn a lot about the candidates for office to make your voting decisions easier.

Information Overload? Campaign News

In the era of modern campaigning, it is all but impossible to avoid seeing some form of campaign communications during a hotly contested election. The media strategy for almost all political campaigns is the same: maximize coverage in the news while targeting voters with as much paid advertising as your budget will allow.

Candidates and their campaign staff make many efforts to draw attention to their campaigns and encourage news coverage. One common strategy is sending *press releases*, prefabricated news stories that alert the media to events and issues of concern to the campaign and provide ready-made content that journalists

can quote freely. Another common tactic for attracting free media is scheduling events with high-profile guests. When the president of the United States or a well-known rock star campaigns for a candidate, journalists take notice.



An interesting irony of campaigning
is that bad news is almost always
better than no news at all.



Although candidates work hard to receive positive media coverage, an interesting irony of campaigning is that bad news is almost always better than no news at all. Many voters, often unknowingly, determine a candidate's chance of winning in part from the amount of media coverage the campaign receives. If the news media never mention a particular candidate, voters assume he has no chance. If stories about a candidate appear with regularity, voters believe she can win. Since volume of media coverage can signal voters in this way, campaigns typically prefer negative news coverage to none at all. Obviously, a candidate is more likely to lose if journalists only report bad news, but a mixture of negative and positive media coverage typically helps a candidate.

News media reports are an important source of information useful for comparing candidates. Stories about campaign events are often the least informative; candidate profiles and broadcast debates usually offer the most details. The evening network news programs always cover presidential races and occasionally run a short story on a particularly competitive congressional or guber-

natorial race, but, for the most part, local news stations will be the best broadcast sources for regular updates on state and local races. Because newspapers and news websites have much more space to tell a story than traditional television or radio broadcasts, these sources are likely to offer the most frequent and most detailed coverage of state and local elections.

In the weeks and days preceding an election, newspaper editorial boards often offer candidate endorsements. Although the political slant of the editorial page is usually well known (before its 2008 endorsement of Barack Obama, for example, the *Chicago Tribune* had last endorsed a Democratic presidential candidate in 1872), endorsements can provide insights into contested races and help voters make a final decision.

Can You Learn Anything Useful from Campaign Ads?

Even as campaigns work hard to attract media coverage, they allocate most of their budgets for paid media. Candidates want to control the content of their communication as much as possible, and they craft messages to appeal both to broad and narrow groups of voters.

Candidates need to build their name recognition with the voters, so basic advertising is essential. Most campaigns begin with a simple logo, commonly some combination of patriotic red, white, and blue with the name of the candidate and the office sought. This logo will appear in many forms—in signs dotting neighborhood lawns, in banner ads on the side of city buses or pasted across billboards, as stickers affixed to car bumpers and windows, and on T-shirts of college students. Simple logos communicate very little about the candidate, but the combined effect of thousands of stickers, signs, and billboards viewed for many months can create a lasting impression.

Other forms of general campaign communication include brochures and door knockers, tri-fold or single page ads briefly

describing the candidate's background and issue positions. Usually full color and often including a cheerful family photo, brochures are typically printed in mass quantities for general distribution at events and for candidates and campaign workers to leave on doors when walking through neighborhoods. As such, these ads rarely highlight controversial issues but instead list uncontroversial accomplishments and include promises designed to have broad appeal. General campaign literature typically provides very few details to help you make a voting decision.

HOW MUCH DO CAMPAIGNS COST?



HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED how much candidates spend on their campaigns? The 2008 presidential election broke all previous records, as the two major party candidates spent more than \$1 billion. In 2010, candidates for the 435 seats in the House of Representatives raised almost \$1.1 billion. The average House race cost \$570,000. Candidates for the 37 open seats in the United States Senate spent a combined total of \$745 million. The average Senate race cost \$2.4 million. Where does all that money go? The typical campaign devotes about two thirds of its spending to voter contact, with most of that money paying for advertisements.

The most pointed and focused campaign messages appear in targeted communications, those ads designed to connect with a particular segment of the voting public. In direct mail pieces,

campaigns send large postcards or fold-out brochures, often with sinister photographs and dire warnings, to selected groups deemed likely to resonate with the message. A candidate who favors gun control, for example, might target direct mailings to mothers of young children, using pictures of automatic rifles and small children on a playground to warn against his opponent's lax policies on assault weapons. Direct mail pieces often rely on emotional appeals and exaggeration; such ads rarely offer enough information to educate voters but commonly spread rumors and distortions.

Campaigns also target voters in radio ads. Because radio stations offer a wide variety of formats, candidates can tailor ads to the likely concerns of the listeners. A candidate reaching out for the Latino vote might run an ad on a Spanish-language station; a candidate hoping to appeal to younger voters may advertise on a rock station. Although limited to 15, 30, or 60 seconds, these advertisements can provide some useful information about a candidate's background or issue stances.

One of the most visible forms of paid media, television advertisements, is typically a factor in just a small number of political contests. Only the highest profile campaigns—president, governor, Congress, and some statewide offices—are likely to have the budget and geographical reach to make television spots feasible.

Television commercials can help inform voters, but they are also likely to create distorted views of the candidates. Clever media consultants comb through voting records, finding ways to make the most reasoned and careful legislator appear sinister or bizarre. If you think an ad makes a claim that sounds preposterous or exaggerated, in most cases your instincts are probably right. Instead of accepting an ad's message at face value, do further research to make sure the information is truthful.

Although there is no perfect formula for evaluating the content of broadcast commercials, tools such as "ad-watches," media stories that evaluate the truthfulness of campaign advertising

claims, can help voters separate truth from distortion. Watchdog websites like factcheck.org and politifact.com monitor the accuracy of political speeches and advertisements, providing searchable databases for testing the truth of campaign claims.

To add further confusion to the communications blitz common in the campaign season, political parties and outside groups run their own advertisements in high-profile, high-stakes political contests. Groups that have an interest in the outcome of an election can advertise openly as long as they do not coordinate their efforts with any candidate's campaign and they comply with campaign finance laws. The rules, regulations, and terminology affecting outside groups and political campaigns are complex and constantly changing. From the vantage point of a prospective voter, perhaps it is most important to be aware that organizations beyond the individual candidates and their campaigns can and do try to influence election results.

When evaluating information in campaign ads, check to see the source of the material. Because candidates are directly accountable for the claims that they make in their campaign communications, official campaign sources are more likely than those created by outside groups to provide accurate information about a candidate's views.

Researching Candidates on Your Own

All of the resources we've discussed so far can help you learn about candidates for office, but what are ways you can do your own research to prepare for an election? An excellent place to start is at each candidate's campaign website. Using your favorite Internet search engine, locate these websites. If you don't know the names of all of the candidates, most county political parties provide links from their official sites. As you would expect, campaign websites are one-sided and portray candidates as positively as possible, but they can be valuable resources. You can learn a lot

about candidates' priorities by seeing what content they display most prominently and what issues are of such low priority that they receive no mention at all.

Interest group websites are another useful source of information. Many groups design particular tools to educate voters. Some organizations calculate *ratings* that evaluate candidates currently in office, listing the most important votes related to issues they advocate and calculating the percentage of times the legislator votes with the organization. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, for example, compiles ratings based on pro-business votes, ranging from a score of 100 indicating voting with the Chamber on every vote measured, to a score of 0 for those who never voted with the Chamber. Interest group ratings are biased by design; that is, they indicate how closely a legislator votes with the organization's policy agenda. If you are a member of an interest group or simply find yourself supportive of its views, checking to see if it rates voting records may help you evaluate the performance of candidates running for re-election or who currently hold legislative office.

INTEREST GROUPS AND VOTING RECORDS



MANY INTEREST GROUPS keep track of legislators' votes on issues of likely importance to their members. Here are a few examples:

American Association of Retired Persons

(www.aarp.org) — AARP is the largest interest group in the United States. Open to adults age 50 and over, the group monitors issues of likely concern to older

Americans. Check out their summary of key votes of interest and links to state fact sheets:

http://www.aarp.org/politics-society/advocacy/key_vote_summary/.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce (www.uschamber.com)

— This federation of more than 3 million businesses is the most prominent voice representing business interests in Washington. Visit their links to past editions of HowTheyVoted, a list of pro-business votes compiled by the Chamber: <http://www.uschamber.com/issues/legislators/how-they-voted>.

Family Research Council (www.frc.org) — The FRC

is a conservative, faith-based group that highlights “family values” issues. Find their interactive map with links to congressional scorecards at <http://www.frcaction.org/scorecard>.

League of Conservation Voters (www.lcv.org) — The

LCV is a national organization that advocates for environmental conservation. You can access their national environmental scorecard, which includes key votes as well as reports on committee and party leaders, at <http://www.lcv.org/scorecard/>.

National Right to Life Committee (www.nrlc.org)

— The NRLC is a national organization that raises awareness of a range of pro-life issues. Their legislative action center offers commentary on current political issues and links to NRLC scorecards of key votes on right to life issues:

<http://www.capwiz.com/nrlc/home/>.

Before each election some interest groups create *voter guides*, side-by-side comparisons of major party candidates on selected issues. Although groups may say the guides are non-partisan, organizations choose issues that fit with their mission and values. As such, most voter guides favor candidates of the party most closely aligned with the organization's mission. One of the most famous organizations to issue voter guides, the Christian Coalition, offers this typical disclaimer: "This voter guide is provided for educational purposes only and is not to be construed as an endorsement of any candidate or party." On the ten votes listed in their 2010 Senate election guide, however, the Coalition was consistently on the side of Republicans.²



One of the most important (and often overlooked) sources of voter education is conversation with friends and family.



Other resources are available that provide more balanced information on political candidates. Several non-partisan organizations compile information to help voters make side-by-side candidate comparisons on a broader range of issues. One of the oldest and most respected of these groups, the League of Women Voters, provides local voter education through projects such as newspaper inserts with candidate information and sponsoring candidate debates. The organization's website (www.vote411.org) provides information on voter registration, polling times and places, and candidates and ballot issues. The League sends questionnaires to

candidates and compiles the responses. Another reliable voter education group, Project Vote Smart (www.votesmart.org; 1-888-VOTE-SMART), collects and reports candidate responses to surveys about salient political issues. Their website also provides a wealth of data on most candidates including biographical information, campaign finance reports, voting records, interest group ratings, and links to public speeches.

Although outside resources can be quite useful to raise voter awareness, one of the most important (and often overlooked) sources of voter education is conversation with friends and family. From casual conversations about the latest television ads to discussions about how candidates performed in a debate, at least some people you know are likely to talk about upcoming elections. Those who follow politics most closely are apt to initiate conversations about candidates and public policy; those who are less familiar with politics may want to ask family and friends to explain how they are planning to vote and why. Such conversations, particularly with people you trust who follow a wide range of news sources, might offer a low-pressure environment for asking questions and formulating opinions.

Volunteering for Campaigns

As you learn about different candidates and the policies they support, you may decide that you want to help with a campaign. Most political campaigns can only afford to pay a few staff members, so they rely heavily on volunteers to help with a range of tasks such as contacting voters, staffing events, preparing mailings, and, on the day of the election, calling likely supporters to remind them to vote. If you discover a candidate whom you want to help, call or email the campaign office and let them know your availability. In all likelihood, they will put you to work quickly. Those who don't have much time to volunteer can still attend a campaign event to demonstrate support and to learn more about the candidate's issue positions.

You can also show your support by donating to campaigns or to interest groups that raise issues that are important to you. Candidates rely on donations to get their message to voters; it is almost impossible to win without a well-funded campaign.

Ready, Set, Vote!

Although the idea of voting sounds simple enough, the actual practice of deciding how to vote can be quite complicated. With more than half a million elected officials, the United States has far more elections than any other country in the world and, therefore, demands the most from its voters. This chapter has provided tools and suggestions to make you more comfortable and better equipped the next time you vote.

Christians can and should exercise their right to vote; free elections are essential to a vibrant democracy. But voting is just one of many options for participating in government. In the next chapter, we will explore some additional ways your faith can inform politics, offering practical suggestions for how to get involved in the political process. We'll conclude with some final thoughts to keep in mind as you seek to honor God in politics.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Reflecting

1. Would you rather your elected representatives function more as delegates or more as trustees? Why?
2. What political issues are most important to you? How did you reach this conclusion?

Responding

3. What resources will be most helpful to you as you decide if and how to vote? How can you help prepare others for Election Day?