

Get out the Vote 2008

*Prepared by the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism
and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism for:*

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America
Jewish Council on Public Affairs
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

www.rac.org/vote

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: WHY AMERICAN JEWS MUST VOTE	3
PROGRAMMING RESOURCES	4
TIMELINE.....	4
PROGRAM IDEAS & TIPS	5
<i>Voter Registration Drive</i>	5
<i>Issue Nights</i>	5
<i>Candidate Forums</i>	6
RESOURCES FOR ASSISTING DISABLED VOTERS	6
FOCUS ON ISSUES	7
JEWISH RESOURCES	8
<i>Jewish Texts</i>	8
<i>Talking Points</i>	10
<i>Article: Thou Shalt Vote! By Deena Fox</i>	11
SAMPLES	12
<i>Sample Bulletin or Newsletter Article</i>	12
<i>Sample Postcard Voting Reminder</i>	13
<i>Sample Letter to Announce Voter Registration Campaign</i>	13
<i>Sample Letter to College Students</i>	14
<i>Sample Flyer</i>	16
THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF PULPIT POLITICS: RULES FOR NONPROFITS	16
VOTER REGISTRATION	17
ENDORSEMENTS	17
CANDIDATE FORUMS.....	17
CANDIDATE APPEARANCES AT EVENTS OTHER THAN FORUMS OR DEBATES	18
CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES	19
OTHER ELECTION YEAR RESOURCES FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS	19
NATIONAL MAIL-IN VOTER REGISTRATION MATERIALS.....	20
NATIONAL MAIL-IN VOTER REGISTRATION RULES & FORM	20
NATIONAL MAIL-IN VOTER REGISTRATION FORM.....	21

Introduction: Why American Jews Must Vote

A crucial election day is only months away. At stake are vital political, economic and moral issues of concern to all Americans, in addition to issues of special concern to American Jews.

During the next four years, there will be important debates about the way our government does business. Legislation on significant issues such as health care, foreign aid, civil rights and support for Israel is likely to be considered by the next Congress and Administration. In addition, over the next four years, the President and Senate will confirm judges who will make crucial decisions affecting our lives. With the stakes so high, we must work to reverse the trend toward declining percentages of voters.

As Jews and American citizens we have an obligation to participate in the elections to ensure that our country's policies at the local, state and national levels reflect our commitment to social justice. Every vote counts and plays a defining role in setting policy agendas. It is our civic duty to register promptly, educate ourselves about the critical issues and **VOTE!**

The **Get Out the Vote 2008 Guide** provides you with tools, resources and information to help your congregation or community plan a successful voter engagement effort in advance of Election Day.

This guide was designed for use by Jewish congregations and communal organizations wishing to conduct their own voter registration drives. We also encourage participation in voter registration drives in the general community. The same procedures and materials that are suggested here for use in the Jewish community can be adapted for voter registration use in the broader community.

Rabbi Yitzhak taught, "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted" – Talmud, B'rachot 55a

Programming Resources

Timeline

Use this timeline to help guide your congregation's or organization's engagement with the upcoming election and issues. Suggested activities, program tips and sample materials for all the items listed below can be found within this guide.

June/July

- Form a voter registration or voter education taskforce.
- Begin planning a candidate forum. Extend invitations to all legally qualified candidates as soon as possible.
- Begin planning "issue nights" to educate members in a non-partisan fashion about important policy issues.
- Include a Voter Registration Drive in your congregation or community's end-of-the-school-year programming; encourage recent high school graduates who are 18 to register.
- Check out your state's rules and deadlines for registration, absentee voting, etc. on our online "State-by-State Guide."

August/September

- Contact your congregation and community's college students to remind them to register at their new address or obtain absentee ballots.
- Plan a date to help your community members who are homebound or in nursing homes register to vote and/or complete their absentee ballots.
- Hold a voter registration drive. Set up a table during special community events, the first day of Religious School, and other "high traffic" times.
- Encourage congregants to volunteer as poll workers.

October

- Place an ad/article in your synagogue, community or organizational bulletin or newsletter reminding people to vote.
- Coordinate transportation to the polls.
- Plan a date to help your members who are homebound or in nursing homes complete their absentee ballots.
- Ask your rabbi to give a non-partisan sermon on the importance of civic participation & voting.
- Send out postcards and/or coordinate a phone drive reminding people to vote.

November

- Call college students on November 3 to remind them of the election.
- **Vote on November 4!**
- Host a post-election party to watch the results come in.

Post-Election

- Invite speakers to discuss policy implications of the elections.
- Plan a “Meet-and-Greet” with newly elected officials.

Program Ideas & Tips

Voter Registration Drive

By hosting a registration drive, you can demystify the registration process, focus communal energy on the privilege and responsibility of voting, and provide information to plan a successful voter engagement effort in advance of Election Day. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Send copies of the local voter registration form or the national Mail-In Voter Registration Form (<http://www.eac.gov/voter>) to all members of your congregation or organization, focusing particular attention on new members, high school seniors, college students and elderly and disabled citizens.
- Work with the local Board of Elections to train volunteers to register voters.
- Set up a voter registration table in a high-traffic, prominent location in the synagogue or community center. Be sure to have plenty of registration forms, knowledgeable volunteers and pens!
- Work with local civic engagement organizations to register voters in underrepresented neighborhoods.
- Decorate with red, white and blue streamers, balloons and handmade posters asking people to register to vote. (Great way to get kids involved!)

Issue Nights

It is our civic duty to educate ourselves about critical issues. Help voters make informed decisions based upon the issues that speak most strongly to them. Host “Issue Nights” on diverse topics of interest to your community.

- Invite people to speak on both sides of the issue. Presenters may be local, state or federal advocates, non-profit professionals, academics or others with expertise in the policy area under discussion.
- Pick an issue that is important to your community. Think about issues of importance to the community and congregation: climate change, education, stem cell research, equal rights, health care, Darfur, Iran, Iraq, or immigration. *Be sure to present the issue objectively, fully and in a non-partisan manner.*
- Include an introduction by a rabbi or Jewish communal leader to provide content and explain why the issue is important to the Jewish community, without endorsing one policy position or candidate over another.

Candidate Forums

Become informed about the policy positions of the candidates running for office in order to make intelligent choices in the voting booths. Candidate forums allow community members to learn about the positions of the candidates on a range of topics from the candidates themselves. Here are some tips for planning your own candidate forum:

- Invite candidates well in advance to ensure they can add it to their campaign schedules.
- Invite all candidates who are running for a particular office; don't neglect county or municipal elections. Special care must be taken regarding minor party candidates.
- When introducing the event, be sure to state that the congregation or organization does not endorse candidates, whose views are their own and do not represent the sponsoring organization.
- Choose a non-partisan, knowledgeable moderator. Give all candidates equal time during introductions, Q & A, and concluding remarks.
- Publicize in the local community.
- In advance, prepare questions on a wide variety of issues.
- **See The Do's and Don'ts of Pulpit Politics: Rules for Nonprofits "Candidate Forums" section for more information.**

Resources for Assisting Disabled Voters

Both the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 and the Help America Vote Act of 2002 require polling places across the United States to be physically accessible to people with disabilities. Unfortunately, due to a lack of enforcement of the law, many polling places are still located in church basements and upstairs meeting halls that lack ramps and elevators. As a result, the National Organization on Disability (NOD) reports that people with disabilities register to vote at a rate of 16 to 20 percent less than the rest of the population.

Because more than 35 million voting-age people (one fifth of the population) have disabilities, this discrepancy in voter turnout makes it clear that if people with disabilities were to turn out to the polls in higher numbers, their votes could greatly influence election results. In fact, NOD reports that if people with disabilities voted at the same rate as the rest of America, there would have been at least 5 million more votes cast in the 1996 presidential election.

Leviticus 19:14 states, "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind." Jewish tradition teaches us of our obligation to ensure equal access for all people and to help facilitate the full participation of individuals with disabilities in our communities. There are a number of ways you can help ensure that congregants with disabilities are able to cast their ballots and make their voices heard on Election Day.

- Create a comprehensive list of known voting-age congregants with disabilities, including those who are elderly.
 - Make calls or visits to discuss voting options. Bring a copy of voter registration forms; assist individuals with disabilities in filling out and mailing in the forms.
 - Supply individuals with information they need about upcoming elections. For example, supply large-print copies of informational materials or provide rides to and from community forums.
 - The *Help America Vote Act* requires all polling places to have at least one accessible voting machine for voters with vision impairments however, not all voters may be comfortable using these machines. Federal law mandates that blind voters be permitted accompaniment by an aide of their choice to help them vote. Offer to accompany a blind community member to the polls, taking care to assure the person that you will fill out the ballot according to his or her preference.
- Check (in advance) to make sure your local polling places are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. Check for elevators, lifts, ramps, disability-accessible parking spots, etc. Where such accessibility aids do not exist, contact your local Board of Elections to address these issues.
- In some jurisdictions, pre-Election Day voting orientations are conducted for voters with mental disabilities. Find out if such orientations exist in your area.
- Poll workers sometimes challenge the voting rights of individuals with disabilities when they arrive on Election Day. Contact your chief local election official in advance to establish a system under which such challenges can be immediately rectified should they occur. In some communities, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (www.naacp.org) and the American Civil Liberties Union (www.aclu.org) provide on-call lawyers on Election Day to ensure that every registered voter is permitted to cast a ballot.

Helpful Links:

- Is your polling place fully accessible? Find out using this ADA Checklist www.ada.gov/votingck.htm.
- For more comprehensive information about accessibility, absentee voting and more, visit the American Association of People with Disabilities Voter Registration: <http://www.aapd-dc.org/dvpmain/voterreg/indexvotereg.php> and the National Organization on Disability's Voter Guide: <http://nod.org/resources/PDFs/voteguidebook.pdf>.

Focus on Issues

Your congregation or organization can play a role in helping voters make informed decisions based on issues that speak most strongly to them. From climate change to judicial nominations, inform your congregants about issues such as:

- Darfur
- Education
- Environment/Energy

- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues
- Health Care
- Immigration
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel & the Peace Process
- Judicial Nominations
- Reproductive Rights
- Stem Cell Research

Visit www.rac.org/issues, www.jewishpublicaffairs.org, www.hadassah.org, www.ou.org/public_affairs, www.uscj.org, www.therra.org/resolutions

Jewish Resources

Jewish Texts

“This is the generation and those who seek its welfare” (Psalms 24:6). Rabbi Judah the Patriarch and the sages differed in this matter. One opinion was that the character of the generation is determined by its leader. According to the other opinion, the character of the leader is determined by the generation. –Talmud, Arachin 17a

Commentary: A community with the opportunity to choose its own leadership makes a statement about its own character by virtue of the choice it makes. We are therefore responsible for creating a community that fosters the growth of good leadership and choosing wisely among the candidates who wish to govern. Both of the opinions in the passage from the Talmud quoted above express the belief that a leader’s character is causally related to that of his or her generation. What we do, or don’t do, on election day will define the character of our nation.

“The heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers” (Deuteronomy 29:9). Even though I appointed over you heads, elders, and officers, all of you are equal before Me, for the verse concludes, “All are the people of Israel.” –Tanchuma Nitzavim 2

Commentary: The beauty of democracy is that each citizen has an equal voice in the election process; we are able to make decisions for the future of our country based on the principle of equality. The Tanchuma teaches that each of the children of Israel has equal worth in the eyes of the Almighty. Though some may take on leadership roles and rise in visibility, our creator values each person’s voice. We express that voice by voting.

“Shemiah said: Shun authority.” Just what does this mean? That a man should not on his own place a crown upon his head. But others may do so. –Avot D’Rabbi Natan 11

Commentary: Humility is valued in the Jewish tradition. Self-confidence is also encouraged, but all people, even those individuals who have experienced successes, are warned to maintain a sense of fallibility. How then can any leader feel confident and empowered to make decisions in the interests of the community? He or she must be chosen by the members of the community themselves. This is the essence of democracy.

“Dina d’malchuta dina” (The law of the land is the law.)
–*Talmud, N’darim 28a, Gittin 10b, Bava Kama 113a-b, Bava Batra 54b-55a*

Commentary: Already in the period of the compilation of the Talmud, the rabbinic principle that civil laws must be recognized and honored had been developed. What an uncommon pleasure it is to comply with this mandate in a land whose legal code offers its citizens the opportunity to go to the polls and elect the officials who rule the land. This is a nation that in its founding documents prohibited religious tests for office and laws respecting establishment of religion, while guaranteeing free exercise of religion, which not only secured our freedoms, but ensured that our rights as citizens would not depend upon our religious identity or practices. In the United States, we have known unprecedented freedoms and opportunities. Exercising the right to vote is indispensable to ensuring our children also enjoy such freedom.

Rabbi Yitzhak taught, “A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted.” –*Talmud, B’rachot 55a*

Thus said the Eternal One, the God of Israel, to the whole community that I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon... “Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Eternal in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper.” –*Jeremiah 29: 4-7.*

Rabbi Chanina, the Deputy of Priests, would often say, “Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, people would swallow each other alive.”
–*Pirke Avot 3:2*

Commentary: Wherever we live, it is probably Egypt. There is, there really is, a better place, a promised land. And there is, there really is, a promised time. And there is no way to get from here to there, from now to then, except by joining together and marching—and sometimes stumbling—through the wilderness, watching this time not for signs and wonders, but for an opportunity to act. –*Michael Walzer, Exodus and Revolution, adapted*

Talking Points

- In America the people appoint both those who make the laws and those who execute them; the people form the jury which punishes breaches of the law. The institutions are democratic not only in principle but also in their developments...It is clear that the opinions, prejudices, interests and even passions of the people can find no lasting obstacles preventing them from being manifest in the daily conduct of society. – *Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1837*
- And while we are demanding and ought to demand, and will continue to demand the rights enumerated above, God forbid that we should ever forget to urge corresponding duties upon our people: The duty to vote; The duty to respect the rights of others; The duty to work; The duty to obey the laws; The duty to be clean and orderly; The duty to send our children to school; the duty to respect ourselves, even as we respect others. -*The Niagara Movement Declaration of Principles, 1908*
- If you're not on the bus, you're off the bus. -*Ken Kesey, 1967*
- “The effects of present [campaign finance] practices are pernicious, for they reduce voter access to elected officials, erode moral standards in government agencies and institutions, and breed distrust and alienation. No wonder public skepticism is so rampant. How can we ever expect a fair result if the very rules of the game are unfair? How can we expect morally sound public policy when the system itself ensures disproportionate influence for the most powerful? How can we—whose religious calling includes the imperative to speak for the widow and the orphan, the poor and the children—accept an electoral process that structurally and systematically favors the richest among us?” - *Rabbi David Saperstein, 1997*
- While “Motor Voter” laws have increased the percentage of registered voters, individuals still fall through the cracks (including senior citizens, college students and under-represented communities).
- Registering to vote is now easier than ever before. With the advent of the National Mail-In Voter Registration form (see Appendix G) the registration process has been simplified. It is now possible to register over the internet at a number of different websites including www.beavoter.org.
- As in most election years, there has been talk about the effect of the “Jewish vote.” While Jews comprise less than 3% of the population, the Jewish community’s influence in the political realm stems in large part from the traditional high voter participation rates and from our concentration in key states.
- There are many issues of concern to the Jewish community, including education, health care, the environment, the conflict in the Middle East, civil rights and religious freedom, that will form the core of the debate in this election year. By exercising the

right to vote, individuals can have a say in charting the future course for our great nation.

- While more and more people are registered to vote, unfortunately voter turnout has steadily dropped in recent elections. Almost 50% of eligible voters do not vote for president and the numbers drop significantly in less prominent elections.

Article: Thou Shalt Vote! *By Deena Fox*

This is the generation and those who seek its welfare" (Psalms 24:6). Rabbi Judah the Patriarch and the sages differed in this matter. One opinion was that the character of the generation is determined by its leader. According to the other opinion, the character of the leader is determined by the generation. --Talmud, Arachin 17a

Both of the opinions in the passage from the Talmud quoted above express the belief that a leader's character is causally related to that of his or her generation. The assumption of a relationship between the moral fiber of a leader and the community poses a challenge to us and to each generation. As we look to our leaders we must be able to say with pride, "You are a reflection of me and the values of my era."

We can explore this lesson by studying the biblical characters who were chosen as leaders. Of Noah, the text famously states, "Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age" (Genesis 6:9). This is taken by many commentators to mean that he was righteous in comparison with those of his generation, but in comparison with leaders in other eras he would have paled; a prime example of the leader reflecting the character of the generation. Moses, on the other hand, helped to determine the character of his generation. When the people of Israel were fleeing Egypt and they reached the Red Sea, the Israelites felt trapped and despaired. Moses was able to reassure the people and under his leadership they marched through the sea to freedom. "Have no fear! Stand by and witness the deliverance which God will work for you today," (Exodus 14:13) Moses proclaims. Again and again in the Torah we see that the people are lifted above their natural inclinations by their able leader.

The message that our leadership mirrors our generation is especially poignant for us today, living in a democracy. We are directly accountable for choosing leaders who reflect morality and good conscience, creating a community that fosters good leadership, and choosing wisely among the candidates who wish to govern.

Consider the leaders of your city, your work place, and your congregation or organization. Why were these individuals chosen for their roles? Do they determine the character of your community, or did the nature of your community shape them?

What we do, or don't do, on Election Day will define the character of our nation.

As in most election years, there has been talk about the effect of the "Jewish vote." While Jews comprise less than 3% of the population, Jews represent the swing vote in many large states such as New York, New Jersey, Florida, Pennsylvania and California, giving our community a level of influence that belies our small numbers. Our clout has also been magnified historically because the Jewish community traditionally voted in high numbers. However, recent studies indicate that many Jews do not vote, and many are not even registered. We must ensure that our entire community is registered and encourage individuals to exercise their right to vote.

There are many issues of concern to the Jewish community including education, health care, the environment, the conflict in the Middle East, civil rights, international affairs, and religious freedom that will form the core of the debate in this election year. By exercising the right to vote, individuals can have a say in charting the future course for our great nation.

In 2000, the election of the president came down to 537 votes in a single county in Florida. Every vote does indeed count; 100% participation should be our rallying cry.

Samples

Sample Bulletin or Newsletter Article

Are you registered to vote? Are all members of your family registered? They should be! Although it has often been assumed that all Jews always vote, this is no longer true. In the past, Jews have been devoted participants in the electoral process and have influenced elections and the passage of important legislation favoring the Jewish domestic and foreign policy agenda, including support for Israel. This influence may be eroded if the present declining trend in voting by Jews continues.

We can... we must... restore our voting clout at the ballot box. We can make a difference! Here's what we all must do.

1. Be sure that we and all eligible members of our families are registered.
2. Remind students attending college that they should be registered either in their primary residence or at home and vote by absentee ballot if necessary.
3. Inform senior citizens who relocate of how, when, and where to register in their new locations.
4. Advise snowbirds and others who may be away from their legal residences on the use of absentee ballots.
5. Urge everyone you know (friends, relatives, neighbors, business associates) to register.
6. Be informed about candidates and election issues.
7. [OPTIONAL] [NAME OF CONGREGATION OR ORGANIZATION] has a get-out-the-vote committee chaired by [NAME]. If you want to volunteer, please contact [NAME].

VOTE IN *ALL* NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS!!!

Sample Postcard Voting Reminder

Dear Friend,

Federal elections will be held Tuesday, November 4, 2008. At stake are numerous local, state, and federal elections. Issues of concern to American Jews will be decided in the coming years by those we elect. Please be sure to cast your ballot. [IF YOUR SYNAGOGUE OR ORGANIZATION IS PROVIDING TRANSPORTATION, ADD: If you need a ride to the polls, please contact our office at (PHONE NUMBER) to make arrangements.]

The polls will be open from [HOURS].

As a Jew and American, it is your civic responsibility to vote. Every vote can make a difference. Enclosed is a special blessing you can recite while casting your ballot.

Thank you,

Sample Letter to Announce Voter Registration Campaign

Dear Member,

One of the most important rights that we have as Americans is the right to vote. It is a right that we must not take for granted; a right that is doubly precious because it has been ours so rarely in Jewish history.

For more than eighty years, American Jews voted in overwhelming numbers. Historically, around 90% of all eligible Jews actually voted. This magnified our role in American political life. We were able to assert our values, protect our interests, and defend the rights of all Americans because we cared enough to participate in the democratic process.

Ensuring our voice remains heard in the political arena is essential. Our [CONGREGATION/ORGANIZATION] is part of a nationwide voter registration drive. Our main goal is to provide you with information on where, when and how to register and vote. [TOWARD THAT END WE HAVE ESTABLISHED A SPECIAL VOTER REGISTRATION COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY XXX.] We are confident that members are politically aware and will act on the information provided. We are available to be of assistance to you in whatever way we can.

We are enclosing four voter registration forms for your household. You can complete the forms at home and mail them to the registrar of voters in the pre-addressed envelope provided [OR GIVE ADDRESS IF NECESSARY]. If you are not registered, or in doubt

as to whether you are registered, please take the time today to register. Additional forms are available in our office, and we will be pleased to mail extra forms to you. You must register by [DATE] to be eligible to vote in the upcoming election.

If you have moved or changed your name since you last voted or if you have not voted in the last four years, your name has been removed from the voter rolls. If you aren't sure whether or not you are registered, please contact [LIST THE GOVERNMENT OFFICE THEY CAN CALL TO DETERMINE THEIR STATUS] to determine your status.

Additionally, experts agree that a disproportionate number of unregistered Jews are of college age. Therefore, it is important to encourage your children age 18 and above to register and vote. We are planning to send a letter about voter registration to members' children who are away at college or graduate school. Please supply the office with the addresses of your college age children, if we do not already have them. We hope that you will follow up by phone on Election Day to encourage them to go to the polls or complete and mail their absentee ballots.

Finally, if you plan to be out of town on Election Day, you may request an absentee ballot in advance from your local Board of Elections [ADDRESS AND HOURS]. The deadline for filing absentee ballot applications is [DEADLINE DATE]. Again, the registration deadline is [DATE], so please register as soon as you can. Participating in the democratic process is a privilege and responsibility we all share. Please be sure to register and vote on **Election Day, Tuesday November 4.**

Thank you.
B'Shalom,
Voter Registration Committee
Rabbi/President/Leader

Sample Letter to College Students

Dear Student,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to urge you to register and vote in the upcoming election and to provide you with some information on voting procedures and options.

The right to vote is a new one for you. It is also, in the scheme of things, a new and unusual right for us as a people; doubly precious to us as American Jews since in other lands we have been disenfranchised and disempowered. For a variety of reasons, including a high level of education, civic pride, belief in democracy, and gratitude for the right of full participation in American national life, American Jews have exercised their right to vote enthusiastically and in percentages far greater than the national average. Yet in general, voter registration and turnout among those of college age is notoriously low. Being new to the habit of voting plays a role in this, as does the fact that college students tend not to be permanently rooted in the communities where they live. And of course,

people of all ages fail to vote out of indifference or a vague belief that one vote does not make a difference.

But voting does make a difference. Politicians and the social policies they create decide life-and-death issues: Who goes hungry and who is fed? Who is homeless and who has shelter?

Who guards our planet and subjects it to risk? Who makes war and who makes peace and who fights those wars? Elected officials will develop policies helpful or hurtful to Israel; they can be influential in abandoning endangered Jews around the globe or in saving them. Our elected officials shape policy that affects us and should affect our Jewish sensibility. Your vote shapes and affects government.

The process of registering and voting is fairly simple. Enclosed you will find a mail-in voter registration form. All you need to do is fill it out and mail it to the Board of Elections in the state in which you wish to vote. You may use your college or home address, but please note that registration rules vary from state to state.

If you are registered to vote using your home address, but will be out of town on Election Day, you will need to apply for an absentee ballot. An absentee ballot application is enclosed. Please fill it out and mail it today. The deadline for filing the application is [DATE]. The ballot you will receive in the mail is due on [DATE]. If you want to register and vote using your college address, we can help you find out where and how to register in that state.

Participating in the democratic process is a privilege and a responsibility we all share. Enclosed is a special blessing you can recite while casting your ballot.

Please be sure to register and vote.

With all good wishes,
Rabbi/President/Leader

“Is silence the answer? It never was.” –*Elie Wiesel*

VOTE

Nov. 4, 2008

Did you know...

1,000,000 American Jews Don't Vote Because They Are Not Registered. American Jews have played, and must continue to play, a pivotal role in our democracy. American Jews who are not registered and do not vote are abandoning their right to let their voices be heard. **Make a difference. VOTE.**

**Your grandparents might have given the world for it.
They may have known what life can be like without it.
*Don't take your rights for granted.***

Register to Vote!

Voter Registration

Non-profit organizations are permitted to engage in voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts. The targets of such initiatives must be chosen for reasons other than that they are likely to vote for particular candidates. These efforts cannot be a subterfuge for aiding a candidate, but must be a genuine non-partisan voter registration effort.

Endorsements

Among many other restrictions, Section 501(c)(3) prohibits tax-exempt non-profits from explicitly or implicitly endorsing or opposing any candidate or political party. This means neither the synagogue/organization nor someone in a capacity of representing the synagogue/organization may do so. Examples of implicit endorsements might include training volunteers to work on a particular, or select group of, campaigns, and accepting financing from campaigns or political parties to defray costs associated with 501(c)(3)-sponsored events. Allowing your facility to be used for a campaign event, even if a rental fee is paid, may be construed as implicit endorsement.

Candidate Forums

The Internal Revenue Service has held that a 501(c)(3) organization may invite candidates to a public forum for the purpose of public education, so long as the organization takes appropriate steps to ensure fair and impartial treatment of candidates. The IRS, in assessing a forum, will look at the total picture. No one factor is determinative, but the following criteria may serve as guidelines:

- Choose a location for the forum that does not reflect political considerations.
- Assemble a non-partisan and independent panel of knowledgeable persons to prepare and present unbiased questions for forum participants.
- Design procedures for raising questions that would show no bias or preference for or against a particular candidate.
- Allow each candidate an equal opportunity to present his or her views.
- Select a moderator who acts not as a spokesperson for the sponsoring organization's views, but serves solely to ensure that the rules of the event are observed.
- State clearly that the views expressed are those of the candidates and not those of the synagogue or organization, that sponsorship of the event is not intended as an endorsement of any candidate, and that all of the candidates who met objective, reasonable criteria were invited to participate.
- Prepare a forum agenda that covers a broad range of issues.

Again, the IRS has said (in a 1986 ruling) that "all legally-qualified candidates" must be invited to participate in candidate forums and debates. However, such all-inclusive participation is not an absolute requirement. Under certain circumstances, a 501(c)(3) may exclude particular candidates from a forum, if they fail to meet reasonable, objective

criteria established by the 501(c)(3) organization for participation in the event.

The crucial factor in this regard is that 501(c)(3) organizations must develop reasonable, objective criteria for participation in candidate forums. Such criteria must be designed to further the educational purposes of the event and may not reflect any bias for or against particular views, beliefs, or candidates. These criteria, such as excluding candidates who have not garnered a specific target percentage in a recognized independent poll, must be established prior to planning the event. Such criteria may call for the exclusion of candidates deemed to lack viability, on the grounds that including such “fringe” candidates would hinder, rather than enhance, the educational value of the event. A candidate may only be excluded from a forum if he/she fails to meet such pre-determined objective criteria. In every case, the sponsoring organization must demonstrate that the candidate is not being excluded because of his/her beliefs or party affiliation.

Exclusions must be carefully considered, in order to avoid any appearance of viewpoint-based bias, which could lead to the conclusion that a 501(c)(3) is impermissibly intervening with or attempting to influence the outcome of a campaign. Selective representation, particularly during the heat of a campaign, might present a risk that would justify re-examining the advisability of the congregation or organization holding such a forum. In addition to the legal issues, there are public relations concerns to consider as well. Inviting all the candidates running for a particular office avoids these difficulties.

For example, Jewish community relations agencies, as instrumentalities of the Jewish community, have a right and an obligation to expose individuals or groups that foster anti-Semitism. With respect to invitations to participate in candidate forums, no Jewish agency has an obligation to provide a platform to an anti-Semite or extremist advocating violence. However, if the person in question otherwise meets the criteria for inclusion in the forum, the organization will have to choose between either inviting the candidate, as noxious as his/her beliefs may be, or not holding the forum.

A final caution: forums should cover a wide range of issues. Focusing in on a limited number of issues, particularly where the views of the sponsoring 501(c)(3) are well-known (e.g. Jewish forums on Israel or anti-Semitism) would convey approval or disapproval of candidates and would likely run afoul of the IRS guidelines.

Candidate Appearances at Events Other Than Forums or Debates

In general, during election season, it would be improper for 501(c)(3) organizations to sponsor non-forum events that feature a single candidate, or merely a select group of candidates. While there could be exceptions made for candidates who have particular expertise and are currently serving as elected officials and who are invited to speak solely in the capacity other than as a candidate, such invitations should be avoided, particularly as an election nears. Should you wish to involve a candidate in an event other

than a candidate forum conducted according to appropriate guidelines, please consult with your national organization's staff and your synagogue/organization's counsel.

Candidate Questionnaires

Among the more difficult issues Jewish professionals face during the election season are those concerning the distribution of questionnaires to candidates and the dissemination of the data gleaned from the responses to the questionnaires. Please consult your national organization's staff and local counsel prior to sending such questionnaires to candidates. In evaluating a questionnaire, its content is of paramount importance. Three factors are of greatest significance: **neutrality, breadth of focus, and distribution**. It would be permissible to circulate an **entirely neutral** compilation of candidates' positions on a **broad variety of issues**, developed from a questionnaire mailed to all candidates. Any questionnaire evincing a bias on certain issues or in favor of certain candidate(s) would be highly problematic.

Other Election Year Resources for Nonprofit Organizations

National Mail-In Voter Registration Form. <http://www.eac.gov/voter>

Charities, Churches and Educational Organizations – Political Campaign Intervention by the Internal Revenue Service.

<http://www.irs.gov/charities/charitable/article/0,,id=155030,00.html>

Politics and the Pulpit 2008: A Guide to the Internal Revenue Code Restrictions on the Political Activity of Religious Organizations. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=280>

The Rules of the Game: An Election Year Guide for Nonprofit Organizations. By Gregory L. Colvin and Lowell Finley. The Alliance for Justice. www.afj.org

National Mail-In Voter Registration Materials

National Mail-in Voter Registration Rules & Form

If your state accepts the National Mail-In Voter Registration Form, you may photocopy the form and distribute it. You may also download the form from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission website (http://www.eac.gov/index_html1). Filling out the National Mail-In Voter Registration Form is relatively simple. There are, however, a few items that vary from state to state (note that these regulations change often, so you should check your state Board of Elections website or consult your local elected officials for the most current information):

1. ***Item 6- ID Number:*** Almost every state requires an identification number of some kind, but the specific requirement varies. Some require a full social security number, some require only the last four digits, and some require a driver's license or state ID number. For those states that require a driver's license or state ID number, citizens without a license or state ID must use the last four digits of their social security numbers.
 - a. States that require a full social security number: AL, GA, HI, KY, NM, OH, SC, TN, VA.
 - b. States that require the last four digits of the social security number: KS, MO.
 - c. States that require the last four digits of the social security number and a driver's license: OK.
 - d. States that require a driver's license number or state ID: CA, CT, District of Columbia, FL, ID, IN, IA, LA, MD, MS, NE, NC, SD, WA, WI.

2. ***Item 7—Choice of Party:*** In some states, you must register with a party in order to vote in that party's primary election, caucus or convention. However, in the following states, you do not need to register with a party in advance in order to vote in that party's primary election, caucus, or convention: AL, AK, AZ, AR, CA, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NJ, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WI.

3. ***Item 8—Race or Ethnic Group:*** Few states require this information. It can never be used to deny registration! Some states require it to comply with the Voting Right's Act. Where it is required, use one of the following categories which best describes you: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian Pacific Islander (for those not Native Hawaiian); Black (for those who are not of Hispanic Origin); Hispanic; Multi-racial; Native Hawaiian; White (for those not of Hispanic Origin); Other. The following states require or request this information: AL, FL, GA, LA, NC, PA, SC, TN.

4. **Item 9—Signature:** The information to which you swear/affirm varies widely from state to state. In general, it includes being: a citizen of the United States and a resident of the state; over the age of 18; mentally competent; and never having been convicted of a felony. You must contact your state or local officials to find out the rules in your state. They will also be able to give you the mailing address for this form.

5. **Proof of Identification:** If you are registering to vote for the first time in your jurisdiction and are mailing this registration application, you may be required to provide proof of identification the first time you vote. Depending on the specific requirements of your state, you may avoid providing identification at the polls when you vote for the first time by mailing a copy of an identification document together with this application. The list of acceptable documentation includes:
 - a. A COPY of a current and valid photo identification **OR**
 - b. A COPY of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows your name and address in the jurisdiction.

National Mail-In Voter Registration Form

Registration forms may be downloaded from:

http://www.eac.gov/index_html1