

Voting Circle Leaders Talking Points Summary

- ▶ **The country needs strong leadership to direct us out of the current economic crisis**—to bring fiscal sanity back to Washington and make our government an instrument of the public good, not of private plunder.
- ▶ **We need diplomats and peacemakers in office**—to restore America's standing in the world, to end the war in Iraq, bring our troops home and honor their service by caring for our veterans. And to join with our allies to confront our shared challenges, from poverty and genocide to terrorism and global warming.
- ▶ **We need a President who believes in fundamental equal rights**—to fight for an America defined by deep and meaningful equality - from civil rights to labor rights, from women's rights to gay rights, from ending discrimination to promoting unionization.
- ▶ **We need a President who will appoint thoughtful, moderate jurists, instead of extremist ideologues, to the Supreme Court.**
- ▶ **We need an administration that will do something about the health care crisis**—to create a healthcare system that is universal, high-quality and affordable.
- ▶ **We need a President who supports reproductive rights.**
- ▶ **We need an administration that will make reducing violence against women a priority.**
- ▶ **We need a President that will address immigration reform**—to make America once again a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws.
- ▶ **We need an administration that will promote policies that strengthen families**—providing help for the most important job there is: caring for our families.
- ▶ **We need a President who inspires and unifies Americans**—leaders who can tap into that special blend of American confidence and optimism that has enabled generations before us to meet our toughest challenges. Leaders who can help us show ourselves and the world that with our ingenuity, creativity and innovative spirit, there are no limits to what is possible in America.
- ▶ **We need leaders that will stand up to big oil**—to promote a clean energy economy that will create millions of green collar jobs.
- ▶ **We need an administration that will rebuild our schools**—to create a world-class education system and make college affordable again.
- ▶ **We need a government that serves all its citizens**—that will stand up for all those who have been invisible to their government for eight long years. Leaders that will fight poverty, rebuild the middle class, and sustain the American dream.
- ▶ **We need a President that can end the stalemate in Congress, create transparency in government, and lead on federal ethics reform.**

Voting Circle Leaders Talking Points

- ▶ **The country needs strong leadership to direct us out of the current economic crisis—to bring fiscal sanity back to Washington and make our government an instrument of the public good, not of private plunder.**
 - The Bush administration’s lax oversight of the financial and mortgage industries and its “free-market” (i.e., unrestrained greed) philosophy have substantially contributed to the economic crisis.
 - Obama and Biden understand that the country’s economy cannot support tax cuts for the wealthy at the same time it funds the Iraq war at an estimated \$720 million per day.
 - Obama recognizes that the regulatory system has not kept pace with changes in the financial system, noting that “instead of modifying the rules for this new economy” the administration “just eliminated them.”
 - Latinos have been disproportionately affected under the Bush administration. Hispanic household income fell by \$1,256 between 2000 and 2007. Since 2000, an additional 3 million Hispanics have fallen into the ranks of the uninsured and the number of Hispanics in poverty increased by 2.1 million.

Emergency Economic Plan

- Assemble a summit of economic advisors on November 5 to outline a plan for stabilizing the U.S. economy and prevent the recession from deepening into a depression.
- Tax a portion of big oil companies’ windfall profits to fund energy rebate checks of \$1,000 to American families.
- Create a \$25 billion Jobs and Growth Fund that would save 1 million jobs by funding road, bridge, and school construction, maintenance and repair projects.
- Provide immediate, temporary funding of \$25 billion to state and local governments to ensure that vital services such as police, fire, education, and health care are maintained during the economic downturn.

Economic Measures Specifically for Women

- Fight for pay equity.
- Expand paid sick days, particularly in low-paying jobs where less than a quarter of employees receive any paid sick day, requiring that employers provide seven paid sick days per year.
- Invest in women-owned businesses, encouraging investment in women-owned business, providing support to women business owners, and reducing discrimination in lending.
- Expand women’s share of federal contracts, increasing outreach to women-owned businesses and set-aside programs.
- Provide a tax cut for working families.

Support for the Latino Community

- Provide relief for the middle class and support for Latinos.
- Create a small business agenda that will help Latino communities prosper.
- Make a quality education accessible and affordable for every Latino child.
- Pass the Dream Act, giving immigrant children the chance to attend college and earn legal permanent residency.
- Pass comprehensive immigration reform.
- Provide high-quality, affordable health care for all Latinos.
- Protect Latino home ownership.

Other Economic Measures

- Provide a tax cut for working families, restoring fairness to the tax code and creating a new “Making Work Pay” tax credit of up to \$1,000 per working family which will completely eliminate income taxes for 10 million Americans.
- Fight for a fair trade policy, opening up foreign markets and spreading good labor and environmental standards around the world.
- Amend the North American Free Trade Agreement.
- Improve transition assistance to retrain workers when they lose their jobs.
- Support job creation, doubling federal funding for basic research and making long-term investments in education, training, and workforce development.
- Create new job training program for clean technologies.
- Protect the openness of the internet.
- Raise the minimum wage and index it for inflation.
- Increase the Earned Income Credit.
- Create a universal mortgage credit, providing tax relief to homeowners who don’t itemize.
- Ensure more accountability in the subprime mortgage industry, increasing funding for federal and state law enforcement, requiring industry insiders to report suspicious activity and creating new criminal penalties for fraud.
- Create fund to help homeowners avoid foreclosures.
- Close bankruptcy loophole for mortgage companies.
- Address predatory credit card practices, banning unilateral changes, requiring that interest rate increases apply only to future debt and prohibiting “universal defaults.”
- Cap outlandish interest rates on Payday Loans and improve disclosures.
- Reform bankruptcy laws to protect families facing a medical crisis, creating an exemption for individuals who file because of medical expenses.

► **We need diplomats and peacemakers in office**—*to restore America's standing in the world, to end the war in Iraq, bring our troops home and honor their service by caring for our veterans. And to join with our allies to confront our shared challenges, from poverty and genocide to terrorism and global warming.*

- The recent Russia-Georgia crisis, the growing nuclear threat of Iran, and the bombing in Pakistan are just recent illustrations of the fragility of world peace.
- The next President of the United States must be a skilled diplomat and peacemaker and be very cautious about using U.S. military power.
- The Bush administration's refusal to talk to world leaders it doesn't like has strangled U.S. foreign policy. It doesn't make us look tough—it makes us look arrogant.

Renewing American Diplomacy

- Meet with leaders of all nations, friend and foe.
- Signal that America is ready to come to the table and Obama is willing to lead.
- Expand our diplomatic presence and stop shuttering consulates.
- Expand the Foreign Service and develop the capacity of civilian aid workers to work alongside the military.
- Embrace the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of cutting extreme poverty around the world in half by 2015 and double foreign assistance to \$50 billion to achieve that goal.
- Help the world's weakest states to build healthy and educated communities, reduce poverty, develop markets, and generate wealth.
- Strengthen NATO, rallying NATO members to contribute troops to collective security operations, to invest more in reconstruction and stabilization operations.
- Streamline the NATO decision-making process and give NATO commanders in the field more flexibility.
- Seek new partnerships in Asia, maintaining strong ties with allies like Japan, South Korea, and Australia and working to build an infrastructure with countries in East Asia that can promote stability and prosperity.
- Work to ensure that China plays by international rules.

End the War in Iraq

- Being immediately to remove our troops from Iraq, having all combat brigades out of Iraq within 16 months.
- Make clear that the U.S. will not build any permanent bases in Iraq.
- Keep some troops in Iraq to protect our embassy and diplomats and to carry out targeted strikes on al Qaeda.
- Press Iraq's leaders to reconcile, by making clear that we are leaving, and by engaging representation from all levels of Iraqi society to seek a new accord on Iraq's Constitution and governance, with the United Nations playing a central role.
- Confront Iraq's humanitarian crisis, forming an international working group to address the two million Iraqi refugees and the two million more Iraqis displaced inside their own country, and providing \$2 billion to expand services to refugees and displaced persons.

Terrorism

Nearly seven years after 9/11, our country is still unprepared for a terrorist attack. From improving security for our transit systems and chemical plants, to increasing cargo screening in our airports and seaports, the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission have been underfunded and ignored. The 9/11 Commission gave the government five F's and twelve D's on the implementation of its recommendations.

- Finish the fight in Afghanistan.
- Crack down on the al Qaeda safe-haven in Pakistan.
- Develop international partnerships to combat terrorism and dry up support for extremism.
- Introduce comprehensive chemical plant security legislation that would establish a clear set of federal regulations that all plants must follow, requiring chemical facilities to enhance security, including improving barriers, containment, mitigation, and safety training, and, where possible, using safer technology, such as less toxic chemicals.
- Secure loose nuclear materials and lead the world toward the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons.
- Keep some troops in areas of terrorism activity to carry out targeted strikes.
- Expand ground forces, developing new capabilities.

The Middle East

- Tough, direct diplomacy with Iran, requiring Iran to abandon its nuclear program and its support for terrorism.
- Offer incentives such as economic incentives and membership in the World Trade Organization to Iran.
- If necessary, step up economic pressure and political isolation.
- Make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a key diplomatic priority, fighting for the goal of two states, a Jewish state in Israel and a Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security.
- Expand our diplomatic presence in the Middle East.

- **We need a President who believes in fundamental equal rights**—*to fight for an America defined by deep and meaningful equality - from civil rights to labor rights, from women's rights to gay rights, from ending discrimination to promoting unionization.*

Pay Equity

For every \$1.00 earned by a man, the average woman receives only 77 cents.

- Enforce the Equal Pay Act.
- Fight job discrimination.
- Improve child care and medical leave options to give women equal footing in the workplace.
- Pass the Fair Pay Act to ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work.
- Ensure the freedom to unionize.
- Promote digital inclusion.

Civil Rights

- Close Guantanamo and restore habeas corpus rights.
- Strengthen civil rights enforcement, reversing the politicization that occurred in the Bush Administration's Department of Justice and ending the ideological litmus tests used to fill positions within the Civil Rights Division.
- Combat employment discrimination, working to overturn the Supreme Court's ruling that curtails workers' ability to challenge pay discrimination.
- Pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.
- Expand hate crimes statutes.
- End deceptive voting practices, establishing harsh penalties for those engaged in voter fraud, and providing voters with accurate and full information so that they can vote.
- End racial profiling by federal law enforcement officers and encourage state to do the same.
- Reduce crime recidivism by providing ex-offender support.
- Eliminate sentencing disparities for crack and powder-based cocaine.
- Expand use of drug courts, giving first-time, non-violent offenders a chance to serve their sentence, where appropriate, in the type of drug rehabilitation programs that have proven to work better than a prison term in changing bad behavior.

► **We need a President who will appoint thoughtful, moderate jurists, instead of extremist ideologues, to the Supreme Court.**

- The next President will name at least one—probably two new Supreme Court Justices.
- In just two terms, the ultra-right-wing appointments of President Bush have reversed years of precedents that upheld values we believe in:
 - Overturning an earlier decision regarding an identical state law, the Court upheld a federal ban on partial-birth abortions that did not include any exceptions, even for the health of the mother.
 - The Court ruled unconstitutional the public school desegregation plans of Seattle and Louisville, finding that “racial balance” was not a “compelling government interest.”
 - In *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co.*, the Court reversed the long-standing interpretation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that allowed victims of pay discrimination to challenge the discrimination as it continues over time. Lilly Ledbetter, one of the few women supervisors in a Goodyear tire plant, did not know until close to her retirement that she had been paid less than her male co-workers for close to 20 years. The Court, in a 5-4 decision written by Justice Alito, held that even though she proved she was discriminated against, she had no remedy because she did not file her complaint with the EEOC within 180 days after receiving her first discriminatory paycheck.
 - In a series of 5-4 cases, the Court took a very narrow view of the constitutional authority of Congress to pass legislation addressing violence against women, permitting state employees to sue for damages for disability, or age discrimination, or keeping schools free from the dangers of firearms.
 - The Court did uphold the right of state employees to sue for damages for violations of some provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act and, by 5-4, upheld the right of a disabled person to sue a state for damages for denying access to the courthouse. Justices Scalia and Thomas dissented in both those cases. Justice Thomas, in fact, has urged the Court to jettison its past precedents in this area and return to an approach that could even mean invalidating New Deal legislation such as minimum wage laws and restrictions on child labor.

► **We need an administration that will do something about the health care crisis—to create a healthcare system that is universal, high-quality and affordable.**

- Approximately 46 million Americans are uninsured—including 19 million women and 8 million children.
- Health insurance premiums have increased 4 times faster than wages over the past six years.
- Less than 4 cents of every health care dollar is spent on prevention and public health, despite epidemics of obesity and chronic diseases, and threats of pandemic flu and bioterrorism.

The Obama-Biden Health Care Plan

- Builds on the current insurance system and leaves Medicare intact.
- Addresses the large gaps in coverage by establishing a new public insurance program available to Americans who neither qualify for Medicaid or SCHIP nor have access to insurance through their employers, as well as to small businesses that want to offer insurance to their employees.
- Create the National Health Insurance Exchange available to help Americans and businesses that want to purchase private health insurance directly.
- Require all employers to contribute towards health coverage for their employees.
- Mandate all children have health care coverage.
- Expand Medicaid and SCHIP to cover more Americans.
- Allow state flexibility for state health reform plans.

Lower Costs and Improve Quality

- Offer federal reinsurance to employers so that catastrophic illnesses do not make health insurance unaffordable for businesses and their employees.
- Adopt state-of-the-art health information technology system.
- Reform the market structure to ensure fairness and increase competition.
- Support disease management programs.
- Coordinate and integrate care.
- Require full transparency about quality and costs, requiring hospitals and providers to report information such as data on preventable medical errors, nurse staffing ratios, hospital-acquired infections, and disparities in care.
- Reward providers based on quality and effectiveness of care, rather than on the volume of services provided.
- Reform medical malpractice by strengthening antitrust laws to prevent insurers from overcharging for malpractice insurance and by promoting new models for addressing physician errors that improve patient safety and reduce the need for malpractice suits.
- Lower prescription drug costs by allowing Americans to buy medicines from other developed countries if the drugs are safe, by repealing the ban that prevents the government from negotiating with drug companies, and by increasing the use of generic drugs in Medicare, Medicaid, and FEHBP, and by preventing big drug companies from keeping generics out of markets.

Women's Health

- Empower women to prevent HIV/AIDS, accelerating the development of microbicides applied topically to prevent transmission of HIV and other infections.
- Support research into women's health, supporting legislation to encourage research that will examine gender and health disparities.
- Establish community outreach programs in underserved areas to help women access health care and maintain healthy lifestyles.
- Expand access to education regarding ovarian and breast cancer.
- Expand insurance coverage for mammograms.
- Reduce health risks due to mercury pollution for women of childbearing age.
- Support a woman's right to choose.
- Prevent unintended pregnancy, expanding access to contraception, health information and preventive services including emergency contraception.
- End insurance discrimination against contraception.

Promoting Prevention and Strengthening Public Health

- Encourage employers to offer worksite health promotion programs and chose insurance plans that cover preventive services.
- Create more healthful environments for children at school, working to get junk food out of vending machines in schools and improving nutritional content of lunches through financial incentives.
- Increase grant support for physical education in schools, expand federal reimbursement for school-based health services, and provide grants for health educational programs for students.
- Require coverage of essential clinical preventive services such as cancer screenings and smoking cessation programs in all federally supported health plans, including Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP, and the new public plan.
- Increase funding to expand community-based preventive interventions.
- Develop a national and regional strategy for public health.
- Examine government policies, including agricultural, educational, environmental, and health policies, to assess and improve their effect on public health.

► **We need a President who supports reproductive rights.**

Obama has pledged to:

- Make safeguarding women's rights under *Roe v. Wade* a priority.
- Oppose any constitutional amendment to overturn that decision.
- Reduce unintended pregnancy by guaranteeing equity in contraceptive coverage, providing sex education, and offering rape victims accurate information about emergency contraception.
- Support the enactment and enforcement of laws that help prevent violence, intimidation, and harassment directed at reproductive health providers and their patients.

► **We need an administration that will make reducing violence against women a priority.**

- One in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.
- Family violence accounted for 11 percent of all violence between 1998 and 2002.
- Approximately 1,400 women a year die in the United States as a result of domestic violence.
- Every year 132,000 women report that they have been victims of rape or attempted rape, and it is estimated that an even greater number have been raped, but do not report it.

Obama cosponsored the Violence Against Women Act that was signed into law in January, 2006.

- Ensure that the administration's agenda for eradicating this major public health problem is coordinated across all federal agencies including health, education, justice, and housing.
- Issue a joint report on "best practices" across agencies and disseminate that information to the states.
- Strengthen domestic violence laws.
- Expand FMLA to cover leave for employees to address domestic violence and sexual assault against themselves, their children, or their parents.
- Fight gender violence abroad, raising international awareness and providing funding for intervention.

► **We need a President that will address immigration reform**—*to make America once again a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws.*

- The number of undocumented immigrants in the country has increased more than 40 percent since 2000. Every year, more than a half-million people come illegally or illegally overstay their visas.
- The immigration bureaucracy is broken and overwhelmed, forcing legal immigrants to wait years for applications.
- Immigration raids are ineffective and place all the burdens of a broken system onto immigrant families.
 - Create secure borders, providing additional personnel, infrastructure and technology on the border and at our ports of entry.
 - Fix the dysfunctional immigration bureaucracy, increasing the number of legal immigrants to keep families together and meet the demand for jobs that employers cannot fill.
 - Remove incentives to enter the country illegally by cracking down on employers who hire undocumented immigrants.

► **We need an administration that will promote policies that strengthen families**—*providing help for the most important job there is: caring for our families.*

- Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to cover more employees and to allow workers to take leave for elder care needs, children’s academic activities, and to address domestic violence.
- Encourage states to adopt paid leave systems, providing a fund to assist states with start-up costs and offset costs for employees and employers.
- Expand high-quality afterschool opportunities, doubling funding for federal support of afterschool programs to serve a million more children.
- Expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, making it refundable and allowing low-income families to receive up to a 50 percent credit for their child care expenses.
- Protect against caregiver discrimination, enforcing the recently-enacted EEOC guidelines.
- Expand flexible work arrangements, informing businesses about the benefits, helping businesses create flexible work opportunities, increasing federal incentives for telecommuting, and making the federal government a model employer permitting flexible arrangements.
- Protect Social Security, protecting benefits for current and future beneficiaries, and opposing privatization.
- Eliminate income taxes for seniors making less than \$50,000.
- Create automatic workplace pensions, addressing the problem of 75 million working Americans that lack employer-based retirement plans.
- Expand retirement savings incentives for working families, creating a generous savings match for low and middle-income Americans and expanding the existing Savers Credit and making it refundable.
- Improve child support collection, restoring federal funding and requiring that states pass through 100 percent of collected child support payments to families.

- Bring people out of the shadows, supporting a system that allows undocumented immigrants who are in good standing to pay a fine, learn English, and have an opportunity to become citizens.
- Promote economic development in Mexico to decrease illegal immigration.

- **We need a President who inspires and unifies Americans**—*leaders who can tap into that special blend of American confidence and optimism that has enabled generations before us to meet our toughest challenges. Leaders who can help us show ourselves and the world that with our ingenuity, creativity and innovative spirit, there are no limits to what is possible in America.*

From the September 22nd 60 Minutes Interview:

The story for me is of being born into pretty humble circumstances. Not having a dad in the house. But having a mother and grandparents who loved me. Who instilled in me some pretty, you know, Midwestern Kansas values of hard work and stick-to-it-ness, and honesty and looking out for other people. And what's shaped me most powerfully, maybe because I'm half black and half white—that a big chunk of my childhood, I was sort of an outsider, didn't quite fit anywhere. Part of what shapes me is being able to find a connection with all kinds of different people, and want to bring them together and bridge misunderstandings, and bridge conflict, so that we can actually get things done. And that, I think is something that led me into public service. And in some ways, that's something very profoundly American about me. Because when I think about America, at its core, we've got these common values. But we come from all kinds of different places. And if we can unify around those values, that are quintessentially American values, then I don't think there's any problem that we can't solve in this country. And that's the kind of leadership that I want to provide for the White House.

The Obama-Biden Plan

- Expand AmeriCorps from 75,000 to 250,000 slots, focusing the expansion on addressing the great challenges facing the nation.
 - Establish a Classroom Corps to help teachers and students.
 - Establish a Health Corps to improve public health outreach.
 - Establish a Clean Energy Corps to conduct weatherization and renewable energy projects.
 - Establish a Veterans Corps to assist veterans at hospitals, nursing homes, and homeless shelters.
 - Establish a Homeland Security Corps to help communities plan, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.
- Engage retiring Americans in service on a large scale, expanding and improving programs that connect individuals to quality volunteer opportunities.
- Expand the Peace Corps, doubling it by 2011, working with leaders of other countries to build an international network of overseas volunteers so that Americans work side-by-side with volunteers from other countries.
- Set up an America's Voice Initiative to send Americans who are fluent speakers of local languages to expand our public diplomacy and extend opportunities for older individuals such as teachers, engineers, and doctors to serve overseas.
- Integrate service into learning.
 - Set a goal that all middle and high school students do 50 hours of community service a year.
 - Develop national guidelines for service learning, giving schools better tools both to develop programs and document student experience.

- Expand the YouthBuild program, giving more disadvantaged young people the chance to complete their high school education, learn valuable skills, and build affordable housing in their communities.
- Require 100 hours of service in college for recipients of the American Opportunity Tax Credit.
- Create a Social Investment Fund Network, using federal seed money to level private sector funding to improve local innovation.
- Create an agency within the Corporation for National and Community Service dedicated to building the capacity and effectiveness of the nonprofit sector.

► **We need leaders that will stand up to big oil**—to promote a clean energy economy that will create millions of green collar jobs.

- Every hour, America spends \$41 million on foreign oil.
- As a result of climate change, glaciers are melting faster, the polar ice caps are shrinking, more people are dying in heat waves, species are migrating, and eventually many will become extinct.

Obama-Biden Plan

- Reduce carbon emissions 80 percent by 2050, implementing a market-based cap-and-trade system requiring all pollution credits to be auctioned.
- Use the revenue generated by auctioning allowances to support the development of clean energy, to invest in energy efficiency improvements, and to address transition costs including helping American workers affected by this economic transition.
- Invest \$150 billion over 10 years in clean energy, investing to advance the next generation of biofuels and fuel infrastructure, plug-in hybrids, development of commercial-scale renewable energy, low-emissions coal plants, and transition to a new digital electricity grid.
- Double science and research funding for clean energy projects including those that make use of our biomass, solar, and wind resources.
- Invest in skilled clean technologies leaders, investing in job training and transition programs.
- Create a Green Jobs Corps to connect disadvantaged youth with job skills for a high-growth industry.
- Create a Clean Technologies Venture Capital Fund, partnering with existing investment funds and our National Laboratories to ensure that promising technologies move beyond the lab and are commercialized in the U.S.
- Require 25 percent of renewable electricity by 2025.
- Improve energy efficiency by 50 percent by 2030.
- Establish a grant program for early adopters, to award states and localities that take the first steps to implement new building codes that prioritize energy efficiency.
- Increase fuel efficiency standards.
- Re-engage with the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.

► **We need an administration that will rebuild our schools**—to create a world-class education system and make college affordable again.

- No Child Left Behind left the money behind—unfilled promises, inadequate implementation by the Education Department and shortcomings in the design of the law itself have limited its effectiveness and undercut its support.
- Thirty percent of new teachers leave within their first five years in the profession.
- College costs have grown nearly 40 percent in the past five years. The average graduate leaves college with over \$19,000 in debt.
- Between 2001 and 2010, 2 million academically qualified students will not go to college because they cannot afford it.
- Our complicated maze of tax credits and applications leaves too many students unaware of financial aid available to them.

The Obama-Biden Plan

- Protect Title IX, working to eliminate gender discrimination in American schools.
- Expand early childhood education, providing critical supports to young children and their parents and quadrupling the number of eligible children for Early Head Start.
- Create a new \$4,000 American Opportunity Tax Credit and eliminate the confusing federal financial aid application process to make college affordable and accessible for all Americans, requiring all recipients to complete 100 hours of community service each year.
- Support advanced placement, dual enrollment, and college credit initiatives.
- “Make College a Reality” initiative, increasing the number of high-school students taking advanced placement or college-level classes.
- Support efforts to allow students to take advantage of virtual learning opportunities for college credit, particularly in rural areas.
- Increase investment in innovation and technology, creating a \$500 million matching fund to ensure technology is fully integrated throughout schools.
- Create new technology-based curriculum with leaders in the technology industry.
- Use technology to allow teachers to work collaboratively with their peers across the country.
- Create the Career Ladder Initiative that will offer federal dollars to states and school districts that design innovative recruitment and compensation systems that provide:
 - More pay for expert veteran teachers who serve as mentors and coaches.
 - More incentives and opportunities for teachers to improve knowledge and skills.
 - More pay for excellent classroom teaching that supports student learning and achievement.
 - More pay for highly-qualified teachers who teach in underserved schools and underserved subjects like math, science, and special education.
- Every school receiving funding under the plan must:
 - Lay out clear and high expectations for student behavior and shared values.
 - Establish a school-family contract laying out expectations for student attendance, behavior, and homework.
 - Engage students in community service.
- Focus federal funding in primary and secondary schools on the most effective programs.

- Create an Innovative Schools Fund to provide funds to states and school districts to implement plans to create a “portfolio” of successful public school types, including charters, nonprofit schools, Montessori schools, career academies, and theme-focused schools.
- Double funding for the Federal Charter School Program.

► **We need a government that serves all its citizens**—*that will stand up for all those who have been invisible to their government for eight long years. Leaders that will fight poverty, rebuild the middle class, and sustain the American dream.*

- There are 37 million poor Americans—most of whom work, but still cannot afford to make ends meet.
- Even when a parent works full-time earning minimum wage, and EITC and foods stamps are factored into their income, families are still \$1,550 below the federal poverty line.
 - Expand access to jobs, investing \$1 billion over five years in transitional jobs and career pathway programs that implement proven methods of helping low-income Americans succeed in the workforce.
 - Create a Green Jobs Corps.
 - Improve transportation access to jobs.
 - Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit.
 - Create a living wage, raising the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation to make sure that full-time workers can earn a living wage that allows them to raise their families and pay for basic needs.
 - Provide all low and middle-income workers a \$500 Making Work Pay tax credit to offset a portion of payroll taxes paid.
 - Eliminate taxes for seniors making under \$50,000 per year.
 - Pass the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act, removing some of the government penalties on married families, cracking down on parents avoiding child support payments, and ensuring that payments go to families instead of state bureaucracies.
 - Support parents with young children, expanding the highly-successful Nurse-Family partnership to all 570,000 low-income, first-time mothers each year.
 - Expand paid sick days.
 - Create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, developing affordable housing in mixed-income neighborhoods.
 - Fully fund the Community Development Block Grant.
 - Create 20 Promise Neighborhoods, providing a full network of services, including early childhood education, youth violence prevention efforts and after-school activities, to an entire neighborhood from birth to college.
 - Ensure community-based investment resources in every urban community, identifying and addressing the unique economic development barriers of every major metropolitan area.
 - Provide additional resources to the federal Community Development Financial Institution Fund, the Small Business Administration and other federal agencies to address community needs.
 - Invest in rural areas, improving rural schools, attracting more doctors to rural areas, and fighting to expand high-speed Internet access.

► **We need a President that can end the stalemate in Congress, create transparency in government, and lead on federal ethics reform.**

- In the Bush administration, lobbyists wrote national policies. As an example, Vice President Dick Cheney’s Energy Task Force of oil and gas lobbyists met secretly to develop national energy policy.
- The Bush administration has ignored public disclosure rules and has invoked a legal tool known as the “state secrets” privilege more than any other previous administration to get cases thrown out of court.
- The Bush administration has handed out billions of dollars of government contracts, without competition, to its politically connected friends and supporters.

Transparency in Government

- Centralize ethics and lobbying information for voters, creating a centralized Internet database of lobbying reports, ethics records, and campaign finance filings in a searchable, sortable and downloadable format.
- Fight for an independent watchdog agency to oversee the investigation of congressional ethics violations so that the public can be assured that ethics complaints will be investigated, providing independent monitoring of lobbying laws and ethics rules.
- Create a public “Contracts and Influence” database that will disclose how much federal contractors spend on lobbying, and what contracts they are getting and how well they complete them.
- Expose special interest tax breaks to public scrutiny, ensuring that any tax breaks for corporate recipients — or tax earmarks — are also publicly available on the Internet in an easily searchable format.
- End the abuse of No-Bid Contracts, requiring that nearly all contract orders over \$25,000 be competitively awarded.
- Give the American public an opportunity to review and comment on any non-emergency bill on the White House website for five days before it is signed.
- Pass the Transparency and Integrity in Earmarks Act, shedding light on all earmarks by disclosing the name of the legislator who asked for each earmark, along with a written justification, 72 hours before they can be approved by the full Senate.
- Make White House communications public, ensuring that communications about regulatory policymaking between persons outside government and all White House staff are disclosed to the public.
- Conduct regulatory agency business in public, requiring executive branch departments and rulemaking agencies to conduct the significant business of the agency in public, so that any citizen can see in person or watch on the Internet these debates.
- Nullify the Bush attempts to make the timely release of presidential records more difficult.
- Issue an executive order asking all new hires at the agencies to sign a form affirming that no political appointee offered them the job solely on the basis of political affiliation or contribution.
- Reform the political appointee process, ensuring every official will have to rise to the standard of proven excellence in the agency's mission.