

Op Ed

By Edward J. Heaton

Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it. - *George Bernard Shaw*

Every four years America gets to choose its President. It's that time again. This year, we have two very different men with differing positions on almost every issue. This election has been described as a "change election." No matter whom you vote for, you should be informed about the candidates involved.

With that in mind, this month's Op Ed serves as a short resource guide to where you can find information about the candidates and their stands on disability and other issues.

You can use the websites listed below to help you make a more informed decision about whom you will choose in 2008. Since this is only a short column, this list is not complete, but hopefully, will give you a starting point in your research.

Obama for America: <http://www.barackobama.com/index.php>

Under the issues tab on the front page of Obama's website is a section entitled "Disabilities." <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/disabilities/>. This section contains a nine-page plan that addresses how Obama would handle disability issues if he were President.

John McCain for President – on the issues: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/>

Unlike Obama's website, John McCain's website does not have a specific disability issues section. By going to the issues section of the site, you can find McCain's proposals on everything from the economy to ethics reform.

Since McCain does not have a specific disability issues section, you may find it necessary to do some more research on his positions concerning disability issues. On the 18th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (July 26, 2008), a forum was held in Columbus, Ohio, where John McCain, as well as representatives of Barack Obama, spoke about disability issues. You can find a webcast and a transcript of this event at: <http://www.aapd-dc.org/News/election/080423aapd.htm>

I do not know if the candidates' websites are Section 508 compliant (federal regulation for website accessibility for screen readers and the like). AAPD's website is compliant.

Another resource you can use is Thomas (<http://thomas.loc.gov/>). This website, provided by the Library of Congress, contains the voting records of both McCain and Obama, and also information about what bills in the Senate that were sponsored or co-sponsored by them.

Another non-partisan informational website is the League of Women Voters <http://www.lwv.org/Election2008/index.html>. Not only does it have information about the issues in this year's campaign, but also information about the election process in general.

No matter whom you vote for in 2008, at least the sites listed above will assist you in making an informed decision in this important election year.

A Golden Opportunity

The merger of XM and Sirius Radio has finally been approved by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). In the merger agreement, the combined companies agreed to reserve 24 channels for minority and independent programmers. I posted this information on the listserv "Media Talk." The only response I got was from Greg Smith, previously the host of "On a Roll," saying that he had contacted the company and had been told to contact them after the merger was completed.

One would think that with twenty-four channels available, a channel could be created featuring programming by people with disabilities about disability issues. As motivated as he is, Greg Smith cannot do twenty-four hours of programming on his own. I am surprised at the disability community's lack of interest in this opportunity. AAPD, NOD, and NICL, as well as anyone else who wants to be involved, should form a committee and scope out the programming and formats of a twenty-four hour disability channel. The other fear I have is that it may be easier to XM and Sirius to ignore Greg's request, even though he does have an extensive track record in media.

The disability community should put our collective thoughts together and come up with a media outlet that covers issues the way we think they should be covered. In a 500-channel TV universe, along with internet and satellite radio providers, the voice of the disability community should be heard. This would be one way to break through the clutter and advance our positions on issues that concern the disability community.



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