

MAKING SENSE

A PROGRESSIVE GUIDE TO KITCHEN TABLE ISSUES

2008

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INTRODUCTION

The failure is complete. A catastrophic “war of choice” in Iraq. Economic recession at home. As the conservative era—launched with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980—comes to its end, we are left with the ruins: Gilded Age inequality, record foreign debts and trade deficits, worst corporate crime wave since the Robber Barons and crippling public squalor in a country that is literally falling apart. Home values collapsing, wages declining and the cost of health care, tuitions, gas and food soaring. Katrina’s disgrace, Halliburton’s cronyism, Enron’s corruption, toxic toys, poisoned school lunches and casino banking. The list can go on.

Americans now are looking for change. 2008 has the potential to mark the end of this failed conservative experiment—and the beginnings of a new reform movement. Already progressive movements have helped drive fundamental issues—ending the folly in Iraq, launching a concerted drive for new energy, challenging the corporate trade agenda, demanding fairer taxes, championing affordable health care for all and calling for reinvesting in America. Democrats have prospered by making themselves the agents of that change.

This isn’t, however, simply a partisan divide. Conservative ideas and ideology have dominated our politics for three decades. 35,000 corporate lobbyists—more than double the number in 2000—now protect their special interests in the nation’s capitol. The right-wing Wurlitzer spews out vitriol designed to deceive and distract. Money still speaks loudly in Washington.

A new era of progressive reform can occur only if Americans mobilize to counter the influence of entrenched interests. The wealthy continue to torpedo fair taxes. Wall Street resists a trade policy that works for working people. Proponents of new energy must overcome the Big Oil lobby. Health care reform will be fiercely resisted by the insurance companies and the drug lobby.

Progressives will have to mobilize, argue the case and cut through the propaganda, the fear campaigns and the well-funded lies and distortions. *Making Sense: a Progressive Guide to Kitchen Table Issues* is designed to help in that process.

Making Sense provides a common sense progressive argument on basic kitchen table concerns—jobs and the economy, new energy, health care, education and retirement security—and on pressing challenges of this day—Iraq and real security and immigration.

Each chapter is designed to provide progressive activists and candidates with a guide for arguing our case. We summarize what's gone wrong, show how conservative ideas and policies have helped create the mess and describe a progressive way out of the hole. For each issue, we offer hot facts, sample anecdotes and stories, a glimpse of where Americans are and resources for deeper analysis.

Our purpose here is to arm progressives for the coming debate. The failure is now apparent. The question is why and what can be done. Conservatives are intent on reinventing themselves, blaming the failures on Bush's incompetence rather than their ideas and on petty corruptions rather than the corporate cronyism on which they built their power. They have the gall to recycle their old mantra—lower taxes, reduced spending, more deregulation and privatization, more war and greater military spending and more “free” trade—as a remedy to what ails us. But one thing should be perfectly clear. The ideas and leaders who led us into this hole aren't going to get us out. And the last thing we should do is keep digging.

We have focused here on the major, strategic initiatives that progressives are now driving into this debate: a new economic strategy in the global economy, a concerted drive for jobs and new energy, a clear response to the challenge of global warming, a new social contract starting with affordable health care for all, an end to the folly in Iraq and a refocused real security agenda and a new effort to rebuild America by making our economy more competitive while redressing the public squalor that has resulted from decades of neglect.

With Americans mugged by reality, we now have the opportunity to take our country back. It won't be easy or smooth. Merely changing which party controls Washington will not be enough. Progressives have challenged successfully the war in Iraq and the effort to privatize Social Security. We've had increased success in driving bold reforms into the public debate. Now is the time to redouble those efforts—to expose and challenge the failures of conservatism and help chart a new course. Making Sense is designed to help in that effort.



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