

Election resource 2018



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

During an election season, it is tempting to go to either of two extremes.

Many people identify strongly with one particular party or candidate, feeling that only that person will govern in ways that are consistent with our values and beliefs. In those moments, we should remind ourselves not to put our trust in princes (Psalm 146) and remember that our ultimate allegiance is to God alone.

The other extreme is to withdraw from the political process altogether. This is an understandable impulse, but equally unhelpful. Whether we like to admit it or not, government policies affect all of our lives. Those who are on the margins of society are often affected the most. If we avoid politics completely, by default we are supporting the status quo.

Rather than going to either extreme, strive during this election season to have respectful, thoughtful engagement in politics. As Christians, if we take loving our neighbor seriously, we must learn about candidates' stances on issues and try to discern who we think will make the best decisions for the common good, not just for us personally.

We hope that this resource will be helpful for you. Visit us at washington.mcc.org to learn more about our work on these issues and many others.

This resource contains suggested questions for candidates on the following issues:

- Criminal justice
- Diplomacy vs. military action
- Foreign assistance
- Gun violence
- Welcoming immigrants



Register to vote

For U.S. citizens, voting is a privilege and a responsibility that should not be taken for granted. If you or others in your community are not yet registered to vote, please visit washingtonmemo.org/register-to-vote. Much more information is available from the Our Faith, Our Vote initiative at ucc.org/ourfaithourvote.

Participate in town hall events

Many who reside in the U.S. still struggle for the right to vote. Even those who are not registered voters, however, can find opportunities to engage candidates, such as at public events. Asking questions of candidates lets them know that people in their district and state care about issues of peace and justice.

Here are some practical steps to take:

1. Find out when and where local, state and national candidates are going to be.
2. Attend some of these events, particularly if they are in a town hall format that allows for questions from the audience.
3. Before you attend, research issues that you care about. Come up with one or two clear, well-worded questions to ask the candidate(s), such as the ones listed here.
4. Ask the question(s) politely but firmly. Ask open questions that invite more than a “yes” or “no” answer.
5. If possible, speak directly with a candidate before or after a public speaking engagement.

The following questions are intended as a guide for your interactions with candidates, as well as your own reflection as you evaluate candidates' stances.

Criminal justice

The United States incarcerates 2.2 million people, more than any other country in the world. Mandatory minimums restrict judges' ability to use discretion when sentencing. Our incarceration rates reflect large racial disparities, with African Americans being incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white people. Upon release, many returning citizens end up back in prison because of strict policies and lack of support.

- What types of reforms to sentencing, corrections and prison conditions do you support?
- What is your stance on developing more alternatives to prison, such as mental health facilities, rehabilitation and restorative justice measures?

Foreign assistance

Increased violent conflicts, natural disasters and economic injustices have caused 65.6 million people to be forcefully displaced globally. Women and children are the most affected. Many people also experience hunger; around the globe, 815 million people do not have enough food to eat on a regular basis.

- Less than 1 percent of the federal budget goes to addressing poverty internationally. How would you work to increase this amount?
- What principles do you think should guide the U.S. government's response to needs overseas, including food, health care, education and clean water?

Diplomacy vs. military action

The large increase of \$61 billion for the Department of Defense (for a total of \$660 billion dollars) in Fiscal Year 2018 indicates the outsized role the military plays in our foreign policy. But as recent events between the U.S., South Korea and North Korea indicate, militarization serves to stir hostilities, while genuine efforts toward diplomacy yield more fruitful results. Support for experienced diplomats is a key component of effective diplomacy.

- How will you work to ensure that positions at the State Department are filled in a timely manner?
- What is your position on Pentagon spending, given that the U.S. spends more on the military than the next seven countries combined?

Welcoming immigrants

A culture of racism and xenophobia in the U.S. often leads to the exploitation and demonization of immigrants. Prospective political leaders should be able to reframe the issue and propose smarter, more humane solutions.

- Did your family or your ancestors immigrate to the U.S.? Why did they come here?
- Both the Obama and Trump administrations have deported thousands of immigrants who had been here for many years. I'm concerned that this is an extremely harsh punishment that leaves children without mothers and fathers, and leaves our economy without needed workers. How would you work to give immigrants a reasonable path to citizenship?

Gun violence

Each year, 30,000 people are killed by firearms in the United States due to homicides, suicides and accidents. Closing loopholes in the current background check system could prevent many avoidable deaths. Assault weapons are used in a majority of mass shootings.

- What is your stance on implementing universal background checks for gun purchasers?
- Do you think banning assault weapons would decrease mass shootings? Why or why not?

