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This publication is also available in Spanish: *Las Elecciones Son Importantes: Manual para Participar in las Elecciones.*

Bread for the World

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. By changing policies, programs, and conditions that allow hunger to persist, we provide help and opportunity far beyond the communities where we live.



breadfortheworld
& BREAD FOR THE WORLD INSTITUTE

Bread for the World Institute

Bread for the World Institute provides policy analysis on hunger and strategies to end it. The Institute educates opinion leaders, policy makers, and the public about hunger in the United States and abroad.

As nonprofit organizations, Bread for the World Institute and Bread for the World do not endorse particular candidates or a political party.

Introduction

**Have Faith. Register.
Vote. End Hunger.**

“Voting is a sacred obligation. Giving time and money to candidates who have demonstrated their commitment to reducing mass hunger and poverty is an integral part of good stewardship.”

—David Beckmann, *Exodus from Hunger*

As people of faith, it is our moral calling to be politically engaged. Practicing faith-filled citizenship is our right under the U.S. Constitution. Hunger is a profoundly political issue and one that should be a top concern of our government. We are serving God when we raise issues of hunger and poverty with our government. It is our responsibility to engage in the processes that remind all candidates to make relief for hungry and poor people a priority. To convey this message, concerned people of faith can and should be involved in all aspects of electoral campaigns.

One of the best times to raise the issues of hunger and poverty is during election campaigns. It is at these times that our government’s elected officials are listening the most and are making and establishing promises, priorities, and plans. Elections have become times to re-assess how our common resources—our taxpayer dollars—are being used and what the role of our government should be.

In the 2014 election, all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives will be on the ballot, and a third of the U.S. Senate will be chosen.

“Pocketbook issues” are always prominent in national elections. These issues are about jobs, personal income, and the economy, and all of these issues relate to hunger and poverty. It is our duty as people of faith to make sure those who are affected by these issues are considered in these major topics in the national conversation.



Bread for the World Institute, which provides analysis on hunger policy issues, developed this handbook to help Christians and other people of faith concerned about hunger and poverty become involved in elections. We hope that these tools will help shape efforts to educate the candidates. Aspiring leaders must know that U.S. residents are deeply concerned about hunger and poverty.

How to Use This Handbook

You can participate in many ways during the election season. By choosing one or more of these actions, you can help guide our national leaders to do more about hunger in the United States and globally:

- Educate yourself and others on hunger and poverty as an election issue.
- Engage with the candidates.
- Encourage all people to register and vote.
- Get your concerns before the media.
- Register and vote!
- Keep in touch with elected officials.

This handbook will help you determine the best way to become involved and then help you do it.

Please join us in offering prayers and working in a bipartisan way to make sure our leaders know that together we can solve the problem of hunger.



Educate Yourself and Others

The numbers are sobering:

- More than 842 million people in the world are hungry.
- Every day, 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes—one child every five seconds.
- In the United States, 14.5 percent of households struggle to put food on the table. More than one in four American children are at risk of hunger. More than one in five children live in households that struggle to put food on the table.



Bread for the World's strength is that it is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. We are stronger when we act together in Christ's name to help our neighbors, whether they live in the next house, the next state, or the next continent. So the logical place to look for others interested in fighting hunger is in our own congregations.

Educating yourself and your church is easier with help from Bread. You can order educational materials that give you in-depth background information on hunger and poverty, along with bulletin inserts and worship and reflection resources. Visit www.bread.org/store, or call 800-822-7323. In addition, Bread staff members in Washington, D.C., and in four regional offices across the country are ready to help you.

Lay the Foundation: Understand Voter Attitudes about Hunger

If you think you are alone or part of only a small group that is concerned about hunger policies, guess again. Although many voters have long had concerns about hunger at home and abroad, recent studies indicate that the proportion is growing and that the concern is deepening. Research by the Alliance to End Hunger, an affiliate of Bread for the World, consistently

shows that voters are more likely to support a candidate who makes fighting hunger and poverty a priority.

Since the Alliance started polling voters on this issue, we know that voters believe that:

- Hunger is a complex issue that needs multifaceted solutions.
- Government efforts to end hunger have been inadequate.
- More taxpayer dollars should go to effective hunger programs.
- U.S. residents have a moral duty to address hunger abroad, and to do so is in the national interests of the United States.

This research is consistent with other independent polls, like the one conducted by Hart Research Associates in early 2012. Hart, one of the leading survey research firms in the country, polled voters on food stamps and hunger in America. The results:

- No matter what their political affiliation, more than four in five voters said hunger is a serious problem in this country today. Eight out of ten American voters thought that low-income families and children not being able to afford enough food to eat is a serious problem.
- Voters overwhelmingly rejected the idea of cutting spending on hunger. Only one voter out of eight thought that the government is spending too much money to solve hunger; 78 percent said it should be spending more money in solving the problem of hunger.
- The issue of hunger is a personal one for voters. More than one in five voters polled said that they are worried about putting enough food on the table.
- Voters are more likely to vote for candidates who make reducing hunger a top priority. Nearly 50 percent polled said that they would not support candidates who want to cut SNAP funding, compared to 9 percent who would support them.

The issue of hunger is a personal one for voters.

Understanding the American voters' perceptions will help you to be more effective in participating in electoral activities.

Before You Start: Legal Issues

Don't let uncertainty about the legalities of election work prevent you and your church from educating candidates and others about hunger and poverty. Working to change policies on hunger is a Christian duty. Once you know the rules, you will feel free to engage in a wide spectrum of activities that can raise the awareness of candidates and ultimately result in legislation and policies that address the roots of hunger.

Churches, Synagogues, Mosques, and Other Organizations

The Internal Revenue Service labels most nonprofit organizations as 501(c)3 groups, a reference to the section of the tax code that governs their work. The tax code grants nonprofit status to churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious organizations. These organizations are allowed to engage in political activities, provided that they do so in a non-partisan manner.

However, they cannot “intervene in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.” After some well-publicized dialogue during elections several years ago about the role of churches and community organizations doing electoral work, the Internal Revenue Service clarified and reiterated its rules.

Specifically, in a 2007 document, the IRS said that nonprofit organizations “are permitted to conduct certain voter education activities (including the presentation of public forums and the publication of voter education guides) if they are carried out in a nonpartisan manner. In

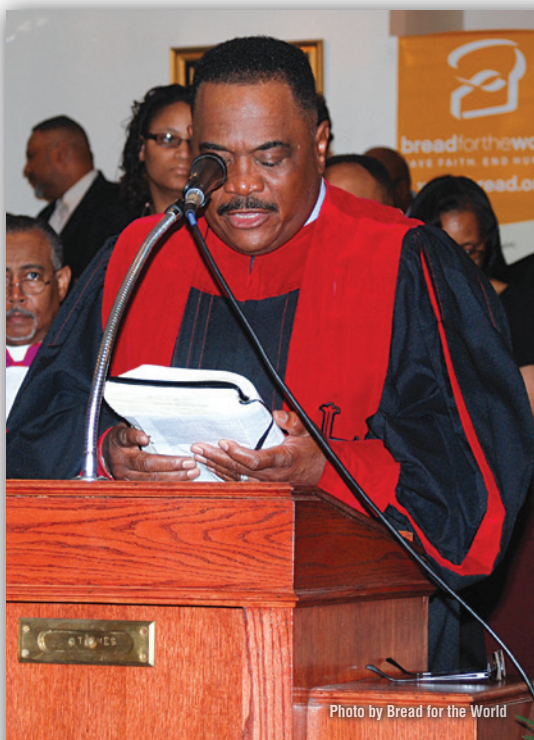


Photo by Bread for the World

addition, 501(c)3 organizations may encourage people to participate in the electoral process through voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives conducted in a nonpartisan manner. On the other hand, voter education or registration activities conducted in a biased manner that favors (or opposes) one or more candidates is prohibited.”

Churches can invite candidates to address their congregations. Churches can also sponsor voter-registration drives. However, nonprofit religious institutions cannot give financial or moral support to specific political candidates or recommend that the members of a congregation vote for a particular candidate or political party. It is critically important that your church, synagogue, or mosque make no appearance of backing any particular candidates.

Some groups, such as Bread for the World, are registered as 501(c)4 groups, a reference to a different provision in the tax code, one that permits more leeway in political undertakings. However, since Bread is a nonpartisan organization, we do not endorse any political party or candidates.

Of course, you have considerably more latitude as an individual, no matter what group you belong to. For instance, you may wish to attend a candidate forum and ask tough questions that give away your choice of candidate. It’s legal to take such actions. Just be sure to make it clear that you are reflecting your individual concerns and not acting on behalf of your house of worship.



Engage the Candidates

Get the Attention of Candidates at Forums and Debates

During campaigns, candidates seek every opportunity to speak publicly and interact with constituents deciding whether or not to vote for them. These tips may help you effectively engage with candidates and raise issues of hunger and poverty at a forum:

- Arrive early to get good seats as close to the front as possible or near microphones in the aisle.
- During the question-and-answer session, raise your hand first, fast, and high. It is easier to ask the first question than to be called upon later. There's usually a pause after the speaker asks for questions; be the first to raise your hand.
- At the end of the event, try to be one of the first to work your way to the front of the meet-and-greet line. Shake the candidate's hand, and mention something to him or her about how important the fight against hunger and poverty is to you as a voter. If you can get a group together to attend the forum, this works even better. If a candidate hears about hunger and poverty issues from many people during the meet and greet, he or she will realize how important an issue this is to voters in your state.
- Bring a digital camera, and ask to have your photo taken with the candidate. Taking a photo is a great way to extend the discussion with candidates and to get them to make specific commitments in the fight against hunger and poverty. Post the photo on Facebook or Twitter as a way of making the candidate accountable to the public.
- After the event, find a member of the media or a blogger and offer a quote that can be included in a news report. Journalists want a local perspective on the event and will want to hear your feedback about the candidate's statement or answer to your question. But journalists will not find you—you've got to find them.



Joseph Molieri/Bread for the World

Sample Questions for Candidates

For candidate forums, have your questions ready. Depending on the setting, you may wish to include questions about hunger both in the United States and globally. Below are some sample questions; more are available in Bread's Town Hall Meeting Tips.

- If elected, will you push to enact immigration reform that significantly reduces hunger by giving the 11 million undocumented immigrants in this country better access to jobs, fair working conditions, and economic mobility?
- If elected, will you support reforming our international food-aid programs so they can reach millions more people by providing greater flexibility, including better nutritional quality, and so they are well-funded?
- What's your position on hunger-related issues like minimum wage? Mass incarceration?
- What two specific policy proposals would you suggest that address hunger?

Write a Letter, Send an Email, or Phone a Candidate

Tell the campaigns how important issues of hunger and poverty are to you as a voter. Ask what their plans and platforms are to address these issues. Hold a letter-writing or call-in action with a church committee, at a group meeting, or from a table in the student union on a campus.

Visit the Campaign Offices in Your Area

Arrange a meeting with the candidate, a key campaign adviser, or a key staff member. Organize a group from your congregation or campus to accompany you. Invite local reporters to cover your efforts, if appropriate.

Encourage All People to Register and Vote

Many barriers may prevent a low-income individual, new citizen, young person, or other potential first-time voter from participating in elections. We can help people feel more at ease and fully engaged in this civic responsibility.

Recruit a Group of Friends, Determine Your Target Audience, and Seek Partners

- Form a group with other interested people.
- Decide which specific underrepresented group you wish to approach.
- Consider partnering with other groups, such as soup kitchens, homeless shelters, immigrant groups, social service organizations, inner-city churches, and ethnic congregations to reach out to these communities.

Seek Input from the People You Are Trying to Encourage

Your partner groups can plan meetings with people you have targeted for encouragement and assistance. This will allow you to identify specific barriers that often prevent people from voting.

You may hear people say the following:

- I don't know how to register to vote.
- I need transportation or someone to watch my children on Election Day.



- I don't know where to learn about candidates or election issues.
- The voting process is intimidating.
- I have trouble understanding English.
- I'm afraid I will be told I can't vote.
- I feel that my vote will make no difference.

Develop an Action Plan

With your partner group, find ways to address those concerns. These are possible actions you can take to help new voters:

- Arrange daycare in people's homes or at your church.
- Develop a ride schedule.
- Educate people about the Election Day process.
- Translate written materials into Spanish or another language.
- Arrange a voting-machine demonstration with the county board of elections.
- Show people a mock ballot.
- Arrange a candidate forum or meeting specifically for low-income or immigrant concerns.

Be creative, but remain nonpartisan.



Get Young People Involved

In recent years, young people have worked hard to reverse trends of declining youth participation in elections. They forged new organizations and new strategies to get people involved in electoral activities as soon as they are eligible to vote. Even if they are not yet eligible to vote, young people can be a powerful force for change. Their participation in the fight against hunger is essential.

Here are just a few things young people can do to help:

- Conduct voter registrations for people who just turned 18.
- Write letters or make visits to members of Congress.
- Hold mock elections at church or school.
- Offer child care while voters go to the polls.
- Volunteer at campaign offices.
- Help get people to the polls on Election Day.
- Volunteer as a poll worker in states where it is permissible.

These resources may help with youth outreach.

- Rock the Vote (rockthevote.org)
- MTV - Power of 12 (powerof12.org)

Organize a Voter Registration Drive

Citizens in the United States rank last among the world's developed nations for voter participation. In the last presidential election of 2012, only 57.5 percent of the electorate went to the polls. This was lower than 2008's level of participation. Yet the process for registering to vote is far simpler now than it was several decades ago. Voter registration drives can improve these low participation rates.

If possible, voter registrations should be conducted separately from voter-education activities, even if you are educating voters about all of



Joseph Molieri/Bread for the World

the candidates. Following is a step-by-step process for organizing a voter registration drive.

A. Recruit a Committee

Persuade your congregation's hunger task force, social justice committee, women's group, Bible study group, or campus group to organize a voter registration drive.

B. Obtain Permission

Seek permission from the proper authorities, such as the pastor or council, campus dean of students, or leaders of the student government. Anticipate probable questions, prepare responses, and practice before presenting your case. (See rules in D.)

C. Build a Relationship with Local Election Officials

The county registrar or board of elections office should be your partner throughout the process. They can supply you with registration applications and state/local requirements. Get their contact information through the state board of elections or secretary of state's office.



D. Be Sure You Understand the Rules

Here are some questions you may wish to ask election officials:

- Is special training required? For all volunteers?
- Does a post office box or campus box count as an address, or must the person list a street address or dormitory name with a number?
- If a person is homeless, what address should be listed?
- Are there voting restrictions for people who are ex-offenders?
- What arrangements should be made to secure registration applications during a multi-day drive and to deliver them following the drive?
- Must all registration applications be turned in at the end of the drive, including those that remain blank or have been voided due to mistakes?
- What does the county office do with multiple registrants from the same address? For example, let's say that several students from the same group house register to vote. There are no variations in the address except each individual's name. Sometimes unrelated people with the same address raise suspicions of fraud. You want to make sure no one is disqualified if the address is legitimate. (Raise this question following the registration drive and only if the situation arises.)

E. Choose Your Target Audience, Venue, and Date

Is the audience your congregation, church, or campus? Or do you wish to increase participation of a specific underrepresented group such as low-income people or new citizens? If you plan to target a group beyond your church or campus, consider partnering with other groups reaching out to these communities, and choose a venue where people congregate. This could be an ethnic grocery store, a community center, a public housing complex, or a popular restaurant. Get proper permission from these groups or venues.

You cannot specifically choose as a target audience people who favor a particular candidate or political party. All people who request registration during your drive must be offered an application if they meet the legal requirements.

The date of the drive should be planned for maximum interest and participation, while still allowing sufficient time to meet deadlines. Voter registration drives must be nonpartisan.

F. Publicize the Voter Registration Drive

Put articles or announcements in places that might reach your target audience: newsletters, church bulletins, campus bulletin boards, and community or campus listservs. Pass out fliers, and put up posters.

Consider publishing some of your materials in Spanish or in other languages spoken widely in your community. (Your local ethnic grocery store or restaurant will most likely have free copies of non-English newspapers.)

Above all, find creative ways to reach your target audience.



G. Conduct the Voter Registration Drive

- Place your tables where they will get a lot of foot traffic. Near an entrance or an exit is often a good place.
- Draw attention to your tables with posters or decorations. It may be against state law to give incentives such as candy or balloons to registrants.
- Prominently display a sign that reads, “Our voter registration services are available without regard to voters’ political preferences.” This is a federal requirement.
- Have plenty of pens and registration applications available.
- Do not put other materials on the tables, such as candidate information or issue statements (even if you have materials for all the candidates).



information or issue statements (even if you have materials for all the candidates).

- Offer assistance if needed, but respect people’s privacy. Do not keep any information from the voter registration application. If you plan to follow up with people to offer rides or other help on Election Day, or if you wish to include them in future nonpartisan voter education, provide a separate voluntary sign-up list.
- Do not state preferences for candidates or political parties. If asked, ignore the question and say you are promoting the democratic process. Some groups like volunteers to work in teams so that there is a witness in case a volunteer’s nonpartisan stance is questioned later.
- Be engaging, friendly, and enthusiastic; don’t coerce or twist arms to get people to register.
- Return the registration applications to the county election office as soon as possible.

Get Your Concerns Before the Media

Another way to get your information out to a targeted audience is through your local media. Your hard work can be multiplied if it is brought to the attention of the media (newspaper, radio, television, and blogs). Articles or reports about your work are an essential way of getting and keeping public awareness.

In reaching out to reporters and bloggers, do your best to

- be persistent
- build relationships
- bring reporters and bloggers up to speed on the issues
- be sensitive to the demands on a reporter's time

Be sure to contact the media if you plan a voter registration effort or before a candidate forum. Even if the reporter does not cover your event, the contact you make will help you to build a relationship with him or her.

This section does not cover social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). However, if you have accounts in these social networking platforms, you can use them to advertise the voter registration drive or engage your followers and friends in a civil conversation on the importance of elections in a democracy.



Using Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

Letters to the editor are another important media tool. Letters and opinion articles in your local newspaper can help make issues of hunger and poverty part of the campaign debate. Not only will your opinion piece be read by the newspaper's subscribers, but there's a good chance the candidates will read it themselves. Your letter could call on all of the candidates to address extreme poverty, hunger, and diseases such as AIDS and malaria in their campaign platforms.

Writing Tips

Be sure to consult the news outlet's guidelines before writing a letter or an op-ed. Most news websites will post guidelines on the same page as the "opinion" or "contact us" section. Newspapers generally print guidelines on their editorial page.

If you're not able to find the guidelines, simply call the news outlet to request them.

"The fight against hunger and poverty is an issue of vital importance..."

- Keep your letter to 250 words or less (two or three short paragraphs).
- Be aware that op-ed articles run around 600 words and usually have a lead time of two or three weeks (publications receive a lot of submissions).
- Refer to a recent article in the newspaper about a relevant issue or a candidate's visit to your town.
- Include a fact about hunger or poverty that supports your opinion.
- Try to use your own words and a personal or local perspective as you write.

Some Points to Make in Your Letter or Op-Ed:

- As candidates ask for my support, I'll be asking them what they plan to do to address the challenges of hunger and poverty.
- The fight against hunger and poverty is an issue of vital importance, both to our nation's security and to our world's future. Yet rarely does it receive the attention it deserves from either the candidates or the media.

- Before I decide which candidate to support in the upcoming election, I call on the candidates to unveil their respective plans to tackle hunger and poverty.

If you email your letter, send your message as plain text only (.txt, not .doc) so that it is stripped of any pre-formatting.

Do not use attachments. Also, do not cc: your letter to Bread for the World or any other organization or individual. If you want someone else to see your letter, copy the letter into a separate email.

Always include a daytime telephone number and your mailing address in case the newspaper wants to verify you as the author. If you submit a letter by regular mail or fax, don't forget to sign it. Many newspapers won't publish a letter without a signature.

Remember that it may take a week or more from the time a newspaper receives a letter until it gets published. Weekly papers and news magazines take even longer. However, submissions to comment sections in online publications are faster, sometimes instantaneously if that section does not have a moderator. If it does, the moderator or editor usually vets the submission.

Small-circulation newspapers usually print most of the letters they receive. It's more challenging to get a letter printed in major metropolitan

newspapers, as they receive a larger number of letters. But the more feedback a news outlet receives on hunger, the more likely they are to print news stories and opinions related to the issue. So even if your letter doesn't get printed, remember that your voice still influences the editorial process and creates awareness about hunger.

If you have any questions about reaching out to your local media, you can contact Bread for the World's media relations team at 800-822-7323.



Keep in Touch with Elected Officials

After the election, it's time to move to a new phase in your advocacy. You can maintain and enhance your connections with your newly elected representatives in a variety of ways.

Congratulate the Winners

When the election is over, send a note to the winning candidate. Congratulate him or her, and remind the victor that you hope he or she will remember hungry and poor people as the legislative process unfolds.

Conduct an Offering of Letters

Each year, Bread for the World invites churches across the country to take up a nationwide Offering of Letters to Congress on an issue that is important to hungry people. Tens of thousands of handwritten letters and personalized emails to elected officials are brought forward with the Sunday offering. You can organize an Offering of Letters in your church. See www.bread.org/ol for help. Or contact any of Bread's organizers in the hub offices.

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Pay a Visit

Keep in touch with your senators and representative by visiting their offices to keep them up to date on hunger concerns, and ask for their support on key legislation. Keep abreast of current Capitol Hill policy developments on hunger by subscribing to email updates from Bread for the World at www.bread.org.

Visit your legislators in their home offices during congressional recesses in the late summer and during holiday periods.

Especially when they are newly elected, legislators need to know that they have a constituency that cares about hunger and poverty. New legislators are rapidly educating themselves in the weeks after the election on the issues they will deal with during their terms.

Include Election Activities in Your Worship

If your congregation would like to lift up election concerns or include your campaign involvement in worship, consider these worship elements:

Litany

Gracious God, you are the source of all blessing. Among the many gifts that you have given us, we in this nation are blessed with the ability to have a voice in our government.

Let us be good stewards of our citizenship and use it for the common good.

God of steadfast love, whenever your people have gone astray, you have sent your prophets to call us back to the way of justice and righteousness.

Let your church be a voice for justice in public life.

Almighty God, you are the source of all power and authority. All of our earthly differences melt away in your presence.

Let us be bound together in your name alone, making a place at the table for all your children.

God of wisdom, you have raised up citizens to be leaders of cities, states, and nations. Guide our candidates for public office and all officials to be faithful and courageous leaders, and give them the strength to do not what is expedient but what is right.

Let us bring our moral convictions to public life, encouraging our representatives to work for the common good.

Holy God, it is our privilege to participate in your work in the world. Free us from the cynicism that makes us despair of ever seeing justice and lets us serve only our narrow interests. Encourage us with the knowledge that what we are engaged in is larger than ourselves.

Let us join together to exercise faithful citizenship in the service of your mission.

God of unquenchable hope, you are with us in times of plenty and in times of need. Continue to uphold your people who are hungry now, and use our lives as a witness to your love for them, seeking shalom and justice for all.

Let us be your vessels to bring blessing to hungry and poor people.

Prayer for Our Nation's Leaders

Almighty God, you alone reign over all the peoples of the earth. Guide us, we pray, in selecting leaders who will serve with courage, integrity, and humility. Bless our leaders with a vision of, and commitment to, the common good. Give us the persistence as citizens to speak out for justice until all your children have a place at the table. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

A Prayer for Guidance and Support

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. ...

For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight. ...

May there be abundance of grain in the land; may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. ...

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth.

Amen and Amen.

Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14, 16-19

ONLINE RESOURCES

These websites may provide more tools during the election season:

- www.politico.com
- atr.rollcall.com
- www.thomas.gov
- www.votesmart.org
- www.opensecrets.org
- www.cookpolitical.com



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