



# First Choice 2004: Know *What You Want Before You Choose Who You Want*

**1** Curb pollution through sensible regulations

**2** Putting environmental protection in perspective

**3** Preventing further environmental destruction



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## ▶ *How to Use This Guide*

Most voters' guides compare the candidates. That's useful, but how can you decide who you want in office until you're sure about what you want that politician to do? And these days that's harder to figure out than it should be.

When politicians present their plans, they naturally play up the quick, easy, cheap part of their program and downplay the messy, expensive, risky parts. In reality, however, many problems don't get solved without facing harsh choices; the government can't avoid pleasing some people and offending others.

First Choice 2004 is designed to help you make the most of your vote by having strong, informed opinions about what those choices might be. With these guides, you can find out more about the problems facing the nation and weigh your values against the policies politicians put forward.

With First Choice 2004, we're not claiming to have the "correct" solution to a problem. What

you'll find here are some key facts along with three different points of view about how to address the issue. Each point of view comes with the arguments for and against, along with some potential costs and tradeoffs. We focus on what each problem means to the average person – and because Public Agenda isn't pushing a particular solution, we're not interested in sugar-coating any options or trashing other points of view. We call this section Chicework.

That doesn't mean, by the way, that the broad choices we present are the only ways of dealing with a problem. Many people would mix and match from different perspectives, and you may have your own ideas we haven't considered. We're also not suggesting that you should go looking for a candidate who agrees with you on every single issue. What we are suggesting is that it'll be easier to judge the candidates if you've considered where you want the country to go in the next four years – and what you're willing to do to get there.



Originally launched in 1992, "Choose or Lose" is MTV's comprehensive pro-social campaign to inform young adults about the political process, voice their most urgent political concerns, compel leading Presidential candidates to address those concerns, and organize young adults aged 18-30 to register and vote. In 2004 the campaign is dubbed "20 Million Loud," a movement to mobilize more than 20 million people aged 18-30 to vote in the 2004 election.

You can find out more about Choose or Lose at our Web site, [www.mtv.com](http://www.mtv.com).



Founded in 1975, Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization devoted to public opinion and citizen education. Public Agenda's two-fold mission is to help American leaders better understand the public's point of view, while also helping citizens know more about critical policy issues so they can make thoughtful, informed decisions.

You can find out more about us at our Web site, [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org).

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### Choicework In Brief: What Are the Options?

#### Approach One

##### *Curb Pollution Through Sensible Regulations*

###### *What should be done*

- ▶ Government must strengthen its enforcement of environmental regulations, and increase funding for environmental protection.
- ▶ To cut fuel consumption and reduce greenhouse gases, the government should set higher fuel efficiency standards.
- ▶ To reduce air pollution from power plants, government should take additional measures to encourage better energy use.
- ▶ Increase fines and other penalties for environmental violations.

###### *Arguments for this choice*

- ✓ You fight pollution by going after polluters, not by blaming the average person and forcing them to change their lifestyle.
- ✓ Where environmental progress has fallen short, it's been because regulations have been inadequate and unevenly enforced.

###### *Arguments against this choice*

- ✗ This doesn't go nearly far enough – the only real environmental solution is to take far less from the planet and that means fundamental changes in people's attitudes and lifestyles.
- ✗ Forcing businesses to spend the time and money to comply with environmental rules is a drag on the economy.

#### Approach Two

##### *Putting Environmental Protection in Perspective*

###### *What should be done*

- ▶ Replace government regulations with what works best: the free-market system, which relies on individual responsibility and financial interests to protect the environment.
- ▶ Use incentives, not regulations, to encourage property owners to preserve land as habitats for rare or endangered species.
- ▶ Re-examine environmental protection laws to eliminate excessive or unreasonable regulations.

###### *Arguments for this approach*

- ✓ Individual property owners are the best environmental stewards, because they have a keen self-interest in protecting the value of what they own.
- ✓ Environmental regulations often lead to lost jobs and economic devastation for communities.

###### *Arguments against this approach*

- ✗ When it was left unchecked, the free-market system led to all kinds of dangerous environmental practices, such as clear-cutting of forests and strip mining.
- ✗ Environmental regulations can encourage businesses to be more efficient and less wasteful. In many cases, jobs lost in some industries are made up in others.

#### Approach Three

##### *Preventing Further Environmental Destruction*

###### *What should be done*

- ▶ Make environmental protection our highest priority, and reduce pollution and consumption to levels that can be sustained.
- ▶ Ratify the Kyoto treaty to fight global warming. Impose strict limits on "greenhouse gases" that cause the warming effect.
- ▶ Raise taxes on coal, oil, gasoline, and pesticides to discourage their use, and encourage people to resort to products that are less damaging to the environment.

###### *Arguments for this approach*

- ✓ We may lose some jobs as we move toward environmentally friendly technologies and lifestyles, but we'll create new ones in "green" industries.
- ✓ The United States, which produces a more than its share of global pollutants, has a special responsibility to take the lead in environmental protection.

###### *Arguments against this approach*

- ✗ This choice ignores the fact that technology can solve many of the problems it creates. Cars and industries can be made cleaner and more efficient, crops can be bred or even engineered to deal with changing climates.
- ✗ Global warming advocates call for measures that would seriously hurt worldwide economic growth.

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### Chicework: Approach One

## Curb Pollution Through Sensible Regulations

We've made progress on environmental protection, but we can't let up now. Growing awareness has led to sensible limits on our use of natural resources and pollutants that are side-effects of industrial society – sometimes by government and sometimes by businesses themselves, who understand that it's in no one's interest to commit environmental suicide. Yet it's unrealistic to expect people to make dramatic changes in their lifestyles or give up their jobs. What's needed now are more stringent guidelines on pollution, and stepped-up enforcement of the laws. Through prudent regulation, we can achieve a balance between environmental protection and economic growth.

#### What Should Be Done?

- ▶ Government must strengthen its enforcement of environmental regulations, and increase funding for environmental protection.
- ▶ To cut fuel consumption and reduce greenhouse gases, the government should set higher fuel efficiency standards, particularly for sport utility vehicles.
- ▶ To reduce air pollution from power plants, government should take additional measures to encourage better energy use, such as requiring household appliances to use less energy.
- ▶ Increase fines and other penalties for environmental violations.
- ▶ Use "pollution credits" to reduce the overall amount of pollution without dumping too much of the burden on any one community. Work with other countries to limit greenhouse gasses that cause global warming.

#### Arguments For This Approach

- ✓ A rich nation like ours can afford to have both continued economic growth and environmental protection. We just need enough inspectors to make sure that the businesses that provide the economic growth follow the rules.
- ✓ You fight pollution by going after polluters, not by blaming the average person and forcing them to change their lifestyle. Trying to cut air pollution by raising gasoline prices is like trying to improve airline safety by making it harder for people to buy plane tickets.
- ✓ Air and water quality has improved considerably over the last three decades, largely because of regulatory efforts.
- ✓ Where environmental progress has fallen short, it's been because regulations have been inadequate and unevenly enforced.

#### Arguments Against This Approach

- ✗ This doesn't go nearly far enough – the only real environmental solution is to take far less from the planet and that means fundamental changes in people's attitudes and lifestyles.
- ✗ This approach overstates most environmental problems, which for the most part have been addressed adequately with environmental regulations that are already in place.
- ✗ Businesses should be enlisted as partners in cleaning up the environment, not treated as suspects by a posse of government inspectors. We should be using incentives to encourage business to operate more cleanly, not punishing those who make mistakes.
- ✗ Environmental standards have to make some allowance for the cost to business and the potential for losing jobs. Forcing businesses to spend the time and money to comply with environmental rules is a drag on the economy.

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### Chicework: Approach Two

## Putting Environmental Protection in Perspective

Human beings, just by going about their daily lives, inevitably affect the environment. That's all right so long as harmful pollution is controlled. But many people act as if environmental protection is our only concern. Environmentalists have become a special interest group who insist on unreasonable and costly measures, or ones which infringe on private property rights. We certainly should protect the environment, but we need to take a careful look at the laws we've put in place to see that they are not costing us too much in money or jobs for the benefit we're getting.

#### What should be done?

- ▶ Replace government regulations with what works best: the free-market system, which relies on individual responsibility and financial interests to protect the environment.
- ▶ Open more public lands for carefully managed mineral and oil production, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- ▶ Require government to study the economic impact of proposed environmental regulations.
- ▶ Use incentives, not regulations, to encourage property owners to preserve land as habitats for rare or endangered species.
- ▶ Re-examine environmental protection laws to eliminate unreasonable regulations.
- ▶ Continue research into global warming and other environmental concerns. We've got to be sure we understand what's happening before we jump into costly reforms.

#### Arguments for this choice

- ✓ The goal of environmental regulation should be protection against clear threats to public health, not the reduction of pollution to an absolute minimum.
- ✓ Individual property owners are the best environmental stewards, because they have a keen self-interest in protecting the value of what they own. When government restricts the use of private land, it is only fair to compensate the owners.
- ✓ You can't eliminate all the risk in life. High-priced environmental efforts often force us to make elaborate attempts to head off remote risks.
- ✓ Environmental regulations often lead to lost jobs and economic devastation for entire communities.

#### Arguments against this choice

- ✗ This view is dangerously short-sighted. It represents the short-term interests of business, but not the public's long-term need for environmental protection.
- ✗ When it was left unchecked, the free-market system led to all kinds of dangerous environmental practices, such as ocean dumping, clear-cutting of forests and strip mining. Government had to step in precisely because the environment deteriorated under the free market system.
- ✗ Government has the authority to require property owners to use their land in an environmentally sound way – an authority that's been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.
- ✗ Environmental regulations can encourage businesses to be more efficient and less wasteful. In many cases, jobs lost in some industries are made up in others.
- ✗ In seeking scientific certainty before acting, this choice would delay initiatives until it's too late to do anything about global warming.

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### Chicework: Approach Three

## Preventing Further Environmental Destruction

Because a safe and sound environment is the precondition for human life itself, environmental protection must take precedence over other public goals. And the fundamental problem is how Americans live – we consume too much, waste too much and restore too little. Despite some gains, we're still making an unprecedented assault on the environment, leading to irreversible and perhaps catastrophic effects. Global warming, in particular, is a real threat that requires coordinated global action. The best option is to move toward a sustainable society where we make decisions based on how they impact future generations. Government has to go much further in reducing pollution.

#### What should be done?

- ▶ Make environmental protection our highest priority, and reduce pollution and consumption to levels that can be sustained.
- ▶ Make comprehensive efforts to prevent pollution rather than simply trying to limit it, or clean it up after pollution occurs.
- ▶ Raise taxes on coal, oil, gasoline, and pesticides to discourage their use, and encourage people to resort to alternative products that are less damaging to the environment.
- ▶ Ratify the Kyoto treaty to fight global warming. Impose strict limits on "greenhouse gases" that cause the warming effect.
- ▶ Strengthen auto emissions standards, increase subsidies for public transportation, and encourage transportation technologies that don't require carbon fuels.

#### Arguments for this choice

- ✓ It's our moral obligation to use natural resources in a way that can be sustained, generation after generation, and to protect endangered species. We need to leave a healthy planet for our children and our grandchildren.
- ✓ Our consumer culture is incredibly wasteful and ultimately unsatisfying. We buy more and more stuff and yet we're not any happier – and we're destroying the environment in the process.
- ✓ Preventing environmental damage is more effective and less costly over the long run than trying to clean up pollution after it has occurred.
- ✓ We may lose some jobs as we move toward environmentally friendly technologies and lifestyles, but we'll create new ones in "green" industries.
- ✓ The United States, which produces a more than its share of global pollutants, has a special responsibility to take the lead in environmental protection around the world.

#### Arguments against this choice

- ✗ This asks us to take drastic action against threats that may not even exist.
- ✗ This choice ignores the fact that technology can solve many of the problems it creates. Cars and industries can be made cleaner and more efficient, crops can be bred or even engineered to deal with changing climates.
- ✗ Global warming advocates call for measures that would seriously hamper worldwide economic growth. Here and abroad, economic growth, and not an absolutely pristine environment, is the key to improved quality of life for most people.
- ✗ Industrial societies inevitably affect the environment. That's always been the case, and people have always adjusted. The important thing is to prevent clear and present dangers to the environment.

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### Status Report: Where Are We Now?

Most "green" issues are presented as choices between protecting the environment and growing the economy: You can have a logging industry or save the spotted owl. You can reduce greenhouse gases or have industrial growth.

Much of the day-to-day political debate centers on whether regulation has gone too far or not far enough – whether standards for drinking water, land use, endangered species protection and other rules are too loose and endangering wildlife and the public, or too tight and needlessly burdening business. Environmental groups and the Bush administration have fought fiercely over most of these issues in the past four years.

Most Americans, however, seem to be seeking a choice that includes *and* rather than just *or*. They tell pollsters they care about the environment and fear it will get worse, yet seem torn on how to respond and unready to accept the sacrifices that some environmentalists believe are necessary. There's a line (now a cliché) from the Sixties: the personal is political. Nowhere is that more true than in environmental policy – and nowhere else does that have such an impact on possible solutions.

#### The Personal Touch

Both environmentalists and their critics do agree that the real threat to the environment is people: billions of small decisions by millions of people that add up to trouble. It's what to do about it



Fuel consumption is a critical factor in air pollution. Find out more in our [issue guide](#).

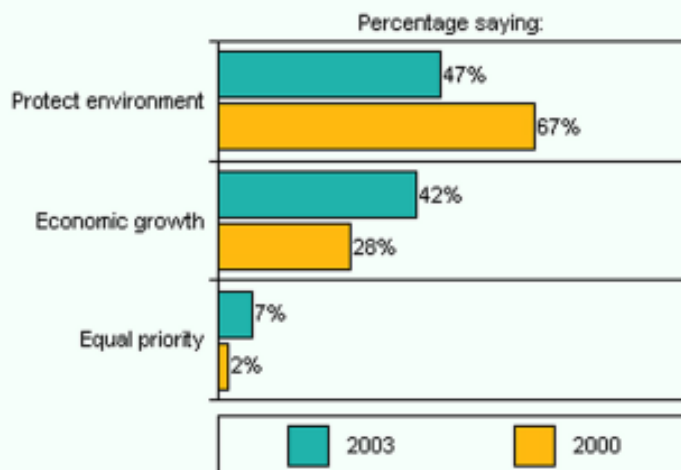
that causes the debate. Many environmentalists argue that humans, particularly Americans, just consume too much. The key to change is making people behave differently, to consume more wisely and thus "leave a smaller footprint" on the planet.

Environmental critics contend this attitude is much the same as hanging out a "keep off the grass" sign on the planet. To these critics, the environment is one among many priorities, not least of which is a robust economy. Besides, the critics argue, technology can solve many of the problems it creates by coming up with cleaner alternatives.

For example, there's no question that cars are a major source of air pollution and greenhouse gases. Many environmental groups say the government should attack the problem by raising fuel-efficiency standards for cars (particularly sport-utility vehicles) and raising gas taxes to encourage people to drive less or switch to smaller cars. The auto industry and others argue that the government should instead encourage research into fuel-cell powered vehicles, which

#### During a lagging economy, fewer Americans say they favor protecting the environment at the risk of curbing economic growth

Which of these statements comes closer to your own point of view? Protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth; or, economic growth should be given priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent.



Source: Gallup Organization 4/00, 3/03

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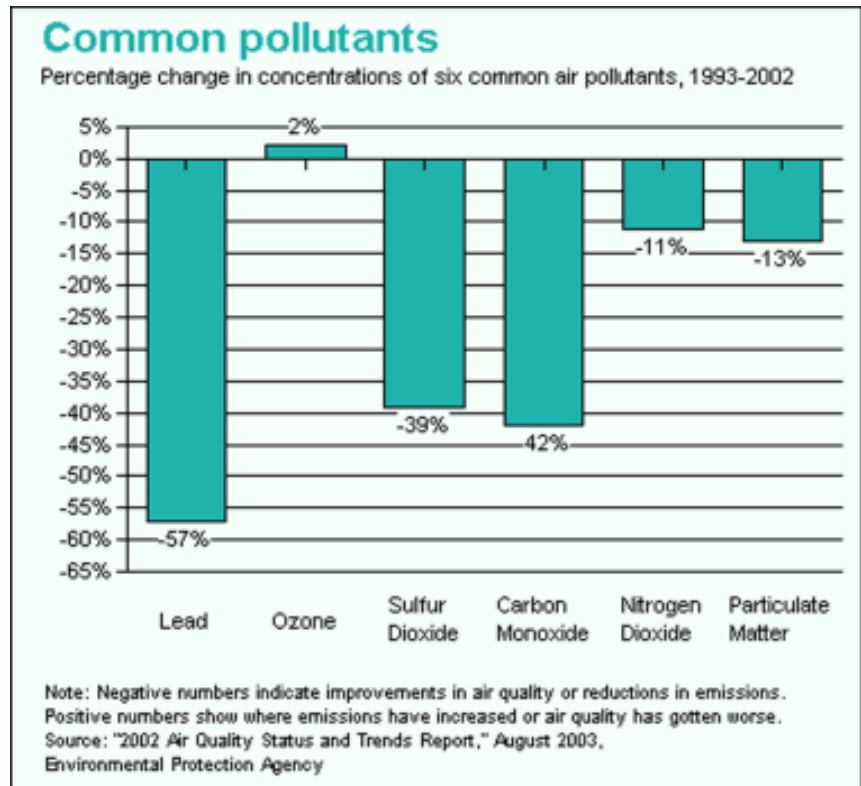
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would be almost pollution-free but won't be ready for many years.

### Getting the Point

Environmental problems were never simple, but 30 years ago, environmentalists could target "point sources" — pollution that could be tied to a specific source, such as smokestack industries, toxic waste dumping, and ocean discharge pipes. It was a war against pollution that people could see (and frequently smell). It was also a war with significant victories. Between 1975 and 1985, for example, lead emissions in the air were reduced by 90 percent. Substantial progress has also been made on other aspects of air quality. Water quality in many lakes and streams improved.

Those "point pollution" battles are still there to be fought. The current debate over the Clean Air Act, for instance, pits those who believe older power plants should be required to install new pollution "scrubbers" against those who support "cap-and-trade systems." Under trading systems, an overall cap on pollution is set. A power plant can install new technology to cut emissions, or it can buy



"credits" from a more efficient plant, so long as the overall cap on pollution is met.

But often it isn't so straightforward. Many environmental problems don't have a single source and

may not have a single solution.

The oceans are a good example. A prestigious research effort, the Pew Oceans Commission, recently reported that "America's oceans are in crisis." One of the basic

### The Public's Viewpoint

Half of Americans say they consider themselves environmentalists, but that's down from three-quarters of the public in 1989. Yet most Americans, particularly younger people, also tell surveys they expect the environment to get worse in the 21st century. **Although most people say the environment is an important issue, few rank it as high as terrorism, the economy or education.**

When surveys ask people to

choose between the environment and the economy, answers change depending on how well the economy is doing. When the economy was doing well in 2000, two-thirds of Americans said they favored protecting the environment even at the expense of economic growth. But during the sluggish times of 1992 and 2003, less than half of Americans favored giving priority to the environment. Even during the boom of the 1990s, however, **most Americans said it's not necessary to**

**choose between protecting the environment and economic growth.** There is a similar pattern on questions about conserving energy.

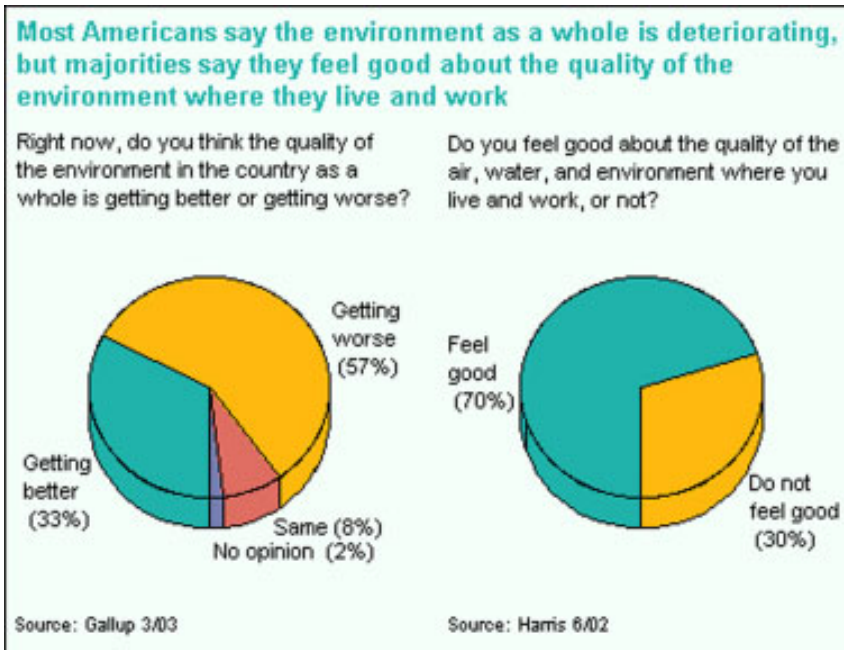
One possible explanation for these mixed signals may be that few Americans believe pollution has touched their lives. Most people tell pollsters they feel good about the quality of the environment where they live and haven't been personally harmed by environmental problems.

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problems is "runoff"; pollutants washed into the sea from farms, businesses and lawns.

Every eight months, the panel said, as much waste oil runs off the U.S. coastline as was spilled in the notorious Exxon Valdez accident –

### Face the Facts

**The amount of solid waste, mostly made up of paper (35.7 percent), generated in the U.S. has increased from 88.1 million tons in 1960 to 229.2 million tons in 2001. But the percentage of waste recycled has also significantly increased from just 6.4 percent in 1960 to 29.7 percent – that's 68 million tons - in 2001.**

11 million gallons. Also thanks to runoff, every summer a "dead zone" the size of Massachusetts appears in the Gulf of Mexico, where no fish can live because of a lack of oxygen in the water.

But there's no single polluter, or even a group of polluters, that can be blamed. Runoff comes from thousands of sources, from large industrial and agricultural outfits to people who change the oil in their car and let it run into the sewer. And since no one's "in charge" of the ocean, there is no single government agency that can take this problem on.

That doesn't mean there's nothing that can be done. But it does mean coordinating a lot of efforts by government, business and individuals. The Chesapeake Bay Initiative brings together seven state governments to cope with problems affecting 64,000 square miles of watershed and roughly 16 million people. That means working on sewage treatment, fishing regulation, farming, industry and

suburban sprawl. And the initiative has made a solid difference, halting the long-term decline of the bay – but even so, the non-profit Chesapeake Bay Foundation says the bay is only holding its own and isn't getting better.

Global warming is perhaps the best example of a potentially catastrophic problem that can't be solved without coordinated action. In the worst-case scenario, air pollution in the form of greenhouse gases (like carbon dioxide) could seal in the Earth's heat, raising global surface temperatures from one to four degrees over the next 50 years. That doesn't sound like much, but scientists say that could lead to massive climate changes – rising sea levels that would swamp coastal cities, the spread of tropical diseases into wider areas and changes in agriculture. The vast majority of scientists believe the climate is getting warmer and that greenhouse gases are to blame, although there is a vocal and skeptical minority. Even so, deep differences exist about how urgent the problem is and who should bear the burden of addressing it.

All those differences come out in the global warming treaty called the "Kyoto Accord," — differences between skeptics and believers, "have" and "have-not" countries, free-market proponents and environmental advocates. The Kyoto treaty would require all the industrial nations to cut their production of polluting gases below 1990 levels, with the U.S. target set at a 7 percent reduction by 2008. But the U.S. rejected the treaty, saying it would cost too much and failed to limit emissions by rapidly developing nations like China. The U.S. has instead proposed voluntary measures to slow the growth of greenhouse gases.

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**1** Invest in making sure all students can attend college

**2** Provide opportunity to the needy

**3** Keep tuition down by making colleges more efficient

### Additional Resources

- ▶ Visit our partner, [The New York Times Learning Network](#) for the latest campaign news, stories, and information on what the candidates are saying about these issues. Read the day's top stories and check out the "Issues in Depth" section for additional information.
- ▶ Even more information about the candidates and the campaign is available from our partner, [MTV's Choose or Lose](#).
- ▶ For more information on the environment, visit [Public Agenda Online's issue guide](#).
- ▶ Think you know this topic? Try our [Test Your Knowledge](#) feature.
- ▶ Think these choices don't go far enough? Do you want to mix and match options? Visit Public Agenda Online and try our [Create Your Own Choicework](#) feature.
- ▶ Want to find organizations on all sides of this issue? Visit [Sources and Resources](#).

#### Set Your Own Priorities

Making public policy decisions isn't just about choosing the best way of attacking a problem – you also have to consider which problem should be tackled first. There are lots of things the government *could* do, and many it *should* do, but not even the federal government can do everything at once. So priorities have to be set. With our [First Things First](#) feature on Public Agenda Online, you can work through what you think the next administration should do – and what it should do first. Find out more at:

[www.publicagenda.org/firstchoice2004/first-things-first.cfm](http://www.publicagenda.org/firstchoice2004/first-things-first.cfm)

#### Find Out More About the Issues

If you like this edition of *First Choice 2004*, read some of our companion guides on:

- ▶ Terrorism and Foreign Policy
- ▶ Health Care
- ▶ Race and Affirmative Action
- ▶ Gay Rights
- ▶ Paying for College
- ▶ The Environment
- ▶ Jobs and the Economy
- ▶ Taxes and the Deficit
- ▶ Immigration

For even more detail, visit [Public Agenda Online](#), which offers nonpartisan issue guides on 21 issues ranging from abortion to welfare reform.