

# SOUTHEAST LAW INSTITUTE™

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

This is the last month before the November elections. This is a presidential election year. There are also a number of other offices that will be voted on in local and state races. This month's Educational Update is a reminder of your right and need to vote. Not only that, but you need to cast an informed vote.

The old cliché is that you cannot discuss religion or politics. If that is true, then you certainly should not be able to discuss religion and politics together. However, the cliché is not true and there is a compelling need to participate in the public debate on the issues that face us as a body politic and as a culture. As a country of laws and not men, we must participate in protecting our God given rights and the centuries of legal precedent upon which our freedoms have been based.

SLI cannot tell you how to vote. We are not going to give voting scores or make references to candidates. We only wish to call attention to the importance of this year's elections and, particularly, the presidential election. There is a great deal of campaign rhetoric through which you must sift in order to make an informed decision. Our update provides some guidance.

Christians sometimes have questions about their role in government and politics. The *Birmingham Conference on Theology and Life* will be held on October 8-10, 2004, at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham. We enclose a brochure which is self-explanatory. SLI is a sponsor and we believe this conference will be very helpful to understanding our roles in the world around us and to understanding the relationship between church and state. We urge you to attend.

Please remember our needs. On a daily basis we take several phone calls and provide legal advice on principally religious freedom issues. Citizens face many questions in their daily lives concerning what they can and cannot do in their employment and in public schools. As we spend our time on these efforts, as well as the larger issues we report to you, please contribute to us as generously as possible so that we can help pay the expenses of continuing to operate the office and to pay our bills. It is sometimes a difficult balancing act to provide SLI services, do our private work, and pay bills.

We appreciate your support from last month and we hope that our explanation of the mission of SLI is something you will remember in your daily prayers. On behalf of all that we hold sacred and dear, I am,

Yours Very Truly,

A. Eric Johnston  
General Counsel

AEJ/mc

**AN EDUCATIONAL UPDATE FROM  
THE SOUTHEAST LAW INSTITUTE™, INC.**

**To: SLI Supporters**  
**Date: October 2004**  
**From: A. Eric Johnston**  
**Re: What did you do in the 2004 Presidential Election, Daddy?**

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**Introduction**

Our children ask many questions and as they grow older, their questions become more meaningful. The “What did you do, Daddy?” questions are actually rhetorical indictments for “Did you do your duty?”

A few weeks ago I did a television program on the ABC affiliate with Briarwood Presbyterian Church Pastor Harry Reeder on the importance of participating in elections. I believe the ideas we discussed are important enough that SLI should state them as a reminder of what our duties are. SLI cannot by law tell you for whom to vote and we do not do political “report cards”. What we want to do is point out your obligations so that when your child asks what you did this year in the election, you can answer I voted intelligently. The choice for whom you vote is yours.

**What to do**

If you are eighteen years or older, a U.S. citizen, and not a convicted felon, your first duty is to **register to vote**. It is not difficult. You may obtain a registration form from any registrar’s office at the probate court in your county. Many churches and civic groups will distribute these forms in drives to get voters registered. Simply fill out the form and mail or deliver it to the address shown for your county probate court. You will receive confirmation of your registration and a statement of where you go to vote.

The next thing you must do is **vote**. The right to vote is an important constitutional right of every United States citizen. Many countries in the world do not permit this right and many that do are in such a limited form as to be meaningless. However, our freedom to vote allows you to vote for the candidate of your choice in private and without fear of reprimand. To vote, you simply go to your appointed polling place, show identification to a worker who will mark your name off the list, and you will be given a ballot for your selections. The election this year will be on **Tuesday, November 2, 2004**, in most places from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Mark that day on your calendar and make it a priority. Do not let “every day” concerns hinder you.

**An Informed Vote**

Uninformed voting is like playing Russian Roulette. You must determine which candidate shares your values. That is not an easy task. It requires a little effort. You may have a trusted acquaintance who is informed on issues and from whom you may get advice. The average person will not have such ready access to informed advice. Therefore, you must search out the information.

You must begin with prayer and preparation. Use God’s word as a guide. It is not wrong for a Christian to spend time and effort to determine if God’s word and its concomitant values are shared by candidates for political office. Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, stated one of the duties of a Christian citizen was “**to become informed**”. How do you do this? Famed theologian Dr. Frances Schaeffer said you cannot trust major media because it has a different world view. While you may get your daily news from network and cable television, you must seek additional information to become informed. You may already have some alternative media sources. The internet is a wonderful resource. Perhaps, the best place to go for information is [www.townhall.com](http://www.townhall.com). From this one site, you can link to virtually any Christian value based organization for information. **Share what you learn with others.**

You need to be specifically informed of a candidate's position on issues like abortion, stem-cell research, religious freedom, same-sex marriage, the War on Terror, and other issues which are generally not divisive in the Christian community, as well as, issues dealing with the economy, immigration, and other more general issues. We will not all agree on what positions should be taken on some of the issues. You know your values and you know what scripture requires. Do not believe political rhetoric or campaign slogans, but search out the truth through previous statements, voting records, and evaluations by trusted organizations and commentators.

### **Conclusion**

There are a number of political races this year. Identify local candidates and their positions. The most important office is for president. Keep in mind that four of the U.S. Supreme Court justices are over the age of seventy years and there is a possibility the next president will appoint justices who will determine the course of America on issues like abortion and same-sex marriage. Consider the War on Terror. It is not a war that we can gracefully back out of and return home to safety. Where does your candidate stand on these issues? Become involved. Take the first step, register, then vote intelligently. Time is short, so act quickly.