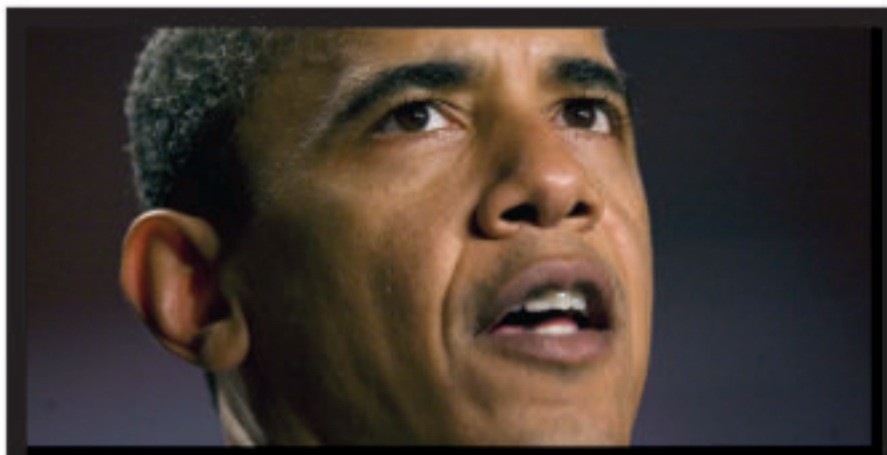



Where they stand

You've seen the campaign ads and, perhaps, even watched a debate. But what are the presidential candidates really about? Here, we look at where John McCain and Barack Obama stand on some of the major issues facing the nation.

By David Lightman, McClatchy Newspapers

 <p>BARACK OBAMA</p>	<p>VS.</p> <p>PHOTOS BY CHUCK KENNEDY/MCT</p>	 <p>JOHN MCCAIN</p>
ISSUE		
<p>Sees most subsidies as "safety net" against "the unpredictable dynamics of weather and markets." Somewhat more skeptical of free trade agreements, saying there must be protection for American workers. Opposed Central American and South Korean Free Trade pacts.</p>	<p>AGRICULTURE</p>	<p>Wants to dramatically tighten subsidy payments to wealthy farmers. Has opposed some programs to promote sale of agricultural products. Big backer of free trade pacts, saying they open more markets for American farmers.</p>
<p>Promotes a "zero to five" plan that would give grants to states to help preschoolers learn and develop. Also would double charter school funding and revamp the assessment system used to track student progress under the No Child Left Behind program.</p>	<p>EDUCATION</p>	<p>Would one create "Centers of Excellence" in each state to assure that pre-kindergarten children get quality care and education. Defines public education as a system "in which our public support for a child's education follows that child into the school the parent chooses."</p>
<p>Proposes a "hemispheric security initiative" aimed at combating gangs, drug trafficking and criminal activity. Would allow unlimited Cuban-American family travel and tell any post-Fidel Castro government that if it takes strong steps toward democracy — starting with freeing all political prisoners — the U.S. is ready to take steps to normalize relations.</p>	<p>CUBA/LATIN AMERICA</p>	<p>Will keep the Cuban embargo in place until Cuba releases all political prisoners unconditionally; legalizes all political parties, labor unions and free media; and schedules elections. Promises to strengthen ties to other countries in the region as long as countries "share our values."</p>
<p>Redeploy one to two brigades a month, so combat troops would be out by summer of 2010. Would leave behind an unspecified number of American troops to provide security for U.S. interests, and train and advise Iraqi forces.</p>	<p>IRAQ</p>	<p>Says it would be a "grave mistake" to leave before al-Qaida is defeated. Believes the U.S. troop surge is working and sets no firm timetables for U.S. withdrawal. Expects U.S. combat involvement to end by 2013.</p>
<p>Would engage in "direct presidential diplomacy with Iran without preconditions." If Iran abandons its nuclear program and backing of terrorism, Obama would allow membership in the World Trade Organization and economic aid. If Iran is uncooperative, "we will step up our economic pressure and political isolation."</p>	<p>IRAN</p>	<p>Says this is not the time for "unconditional" dialogue with Iranian leaders. Instead, the U.S. must "bolster its regional military posture to make clear to Iran our determination to protect our forces and deter Iranian intervention."</p>
<p>Says, "Our first and inconvertible commitment in the Middle East must be to the security of Israel." Strongly supports Israel's right to self-defense.</p>	<p>MIDDLE EAST/ ISRAEL</p>	<p>Encourages peace talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, but warns, "we must also ensure that Israelis can live in safety until there is a Palestinian leadership willing and able to deliver peace." Considers himself a strong supporter of Israel and its right to self-defense.</p>
<p>Backed the "path to citizenship" plan. Wants to create a system to make it easier for employers to verify whether workers are legally in this country, and has supported efforts to keep immigrant families together.</p>	<p>IMMIGRATION</p>	<p>Led Senate efforts to establish a "path to citizenship" for people in the country illegally. During the campaign, he has stressed the need for border security first after conservatives criticized his stance.</p>
<p>Would make it easier for modest-income veterans to get health care, and revamp the current benefits system by hiring more claims workers and training them more effectively. Would also recruit more mental health professionals and improve screening of veterans.</p>	<p>VETERANS</p>	<p>Long-time supporter of more money for veterans' health programs. Wants to give more pay to veterans' physicians, make veterans eligible for many veterans' health programs even after they are eligible for Medicare and guarantee benefits to veterans exposed to radiation.</p>
<p>Would require insurers to cover pre-existing conditions "so all Americans, regardless of their health status or history, can get comprehensive benefits" at reasonable prices. Small businesses would get tax credits to help make coverage affordable to employees.</p>	<p>HEALTH CARE</p>	<p>Would encourage competition by providing health care tax credits of \$2,500 for individuals and \$5,000 for families to offset the cost of coverage. Would work with states to create a "Guaranteed Access Plan" for people having trouble getting insurance. Would have government promote more walk-in access to clinics in retail areas.</p>
<p>Says he is "considering plans that would ask those making over \$250,000 to pay in the range of 2 to 4 percent more." Would also close the "doughnut hole" in the Medicare prescription program and end subsidies to the Medicare Advantage program.</p>	<p>SOCIAL SECURITY/ MEDICARE</p>	<p>Says he "supports supplementing the current Social Security system with personal accounts — but not as a substitute for addressing benefit promises that cannot be kept." Says the program needs a bipartisan fix, but has ruled out any new taxes. Says Medicare badly needs better costs controls.</p>
<p>Would reduce carbon emissions 80 percent by 2050 with a market-based cap and trade system. Would begin by establishing annual targets, and mandate reducing emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.</p>	<p>ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p>Backs a phased-in emissions reduction system that would bring emissions levels down to 2005 levels by 2012. By 2050, they would be 60 percent below 1990 levels. Would create a cap and trade system for major polluters, though small businesses would be exempt.</p>
<p>Would significantly increase fuel efficiency standards; allow offshore oil drilling in limited instances; provide a \$1,000 emergency energy tax rebate to families; and work toward assuring 10 percent of all electricity comes from renewable sources by 2012, growing to 25 percent by 2025.</p>	<p>ENERGY</p>	<p>Offers a \$300 million prize to improve battery technology that would lead to development of plug-in hybrids or fully electric cars. Would promote building 45 new nuclear power plants by 2030. Supports offshore oil drilling unless an individual state objects.</p>
<p>Allow most 2001 and 2003 income tax cuts for individuals earning more than \$200,000 and families making more than \$250,000 to expire on Jan. 1, 2011. Leave others' cuts in place, and also provide a "Making Work Pay" tax credit of \$500 per person or \$1,000 per working family.</p>	<p>TAXES</p>	<p>Would make most 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, due to expire Jan. 1, 2011, permanent. Also wants to cut the corporate tax rate, now 35 percent, to 25 percent.</p>
<p>Wants to take a fresh look at the North American Free Trade Agreement, saying it was "oversold" to Americans. Would put new pressure on the World Trade Organization to enforce agreements, and end tax breaks for companies that send jobs overseas.</p>	<p>TRADE</p>	<p>Calls himself an enthusiastic free trader, and says the U.S. "should engage in multilateral, regional and bilateral efforts to reduce barriers to trade, level the global playing field and build effective enforcement of global trading rules." Wants to overhaul unemployment insurance laws, and create a program to better retrain and relocate workers who have lost a job.</p>
<p>Would require the cost of any new program be offset by higher revenues, and vows to require more "disclosure and transparency" for earmarks. Does not specify how he would substantially reduce the federal deficit.</p>	<p>DEFICIT</p>	<p>Says he will balance the budget by the end of his first term in 2013 with a combination of spending cuts and changes in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and by reducing spending as the Iraq war ends. Also vows to eliminate congressional earmarks. Experts are skeptical he can balance the budget, particularly since he wants to extend the tax cuts.</p>
<p>Would increase the size of the Army by 65,000 troops and the Marines by 27,000. Help the National Guard by giving it better equipment and more time off before being redeployed. Create a Military Families Advisory Board to "provide a conduit for military families' concerns" to be brought to top military officials.</p>	<p>DEFENSE</p>	<p>A longtime member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, taxpayer watchdog groups have often praised him for criticizing waste and abuse in Pentagon spending. He would increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps, and reconfigure the services to reflect new global challenges. Generally opposes funding the military with "emergency" legislation.</p>
<p>Urged "aggressive diplomatic action" after Russia invaded Georgia. Generally, proposes a "comprehensive strategy" that includes "supporting democratic partners and upholding principles of sovereignty" throughout Europe and Asia. Wants to strengthen alliances "so that we deal with Russia with one, unified voice" and engage with Russia on "issues of mutual interest."</p>	<p>RUSSIA</p>	<p>After Russia invaded Georgia, said, "We are all Georgians," and has taken a hard line against Russia. Warned, "The impact of Russian actions goes beyond their threat to Democratic Georgia," and urged multilateral pressure to get Russia to stop its aggression.</p>

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