

# Ignore the nonsense— save the middle class



*William H. Young*

**O**ver the past eight years, the economy grew, the rich got richer—and incomes for average families declined, the first time that has ever happened. Health and pension coverage has dropped precipitously. Energy costs are through the roof. The national debt has more than doubled, to nearly \$10 trillion (that's 12 zeroes), thanks to huge tax cuts for the wealthy during a time of war.

Since January 2001, our trade and budget deficits have soared into the hundreds of billions. Millions of Americans have lost jobs. Millions more are losing their homes and their 401(k) savings as the mortgage crisis swamps Wall Street. You'd think fixing the economy would be front and center in this year's elections. But you'd be wrong—at least as of mid-September.

How a great democracy can let its elections degenerate into debates over nonsense is both bizarre and troubling. Since the conventions ended, we've seen a lot of phony outrage about "lipstick on pigs" and "bridges to nowhere." But there has been very little talk about what matters most to working people trying to keep their places in the middle class. Sen. Barack Obama has tried to focus on the issues, but a relentless stream of attack ads from Sen. John McCain has been aimed at anything but the real concerns of voters.

**I was born at night, but I wasn't born last night.** McCain and his allies are running away from the record of his political party and the Bush administration. They can't talk about the real issues because the GOP lobbyists controlling McCain's campaign represent the same corporate interests that sucked us into this mess.

Former Sen. Phil Gramm, the architect of banking deregulation in the 1990s who is now a banking lobbyist, is McCain's closet economic advisor. He stepped back into the shadows after saying America's "mental recession" is all in our heads and we are "a nation of whiners." Rick Davis, another big business lobbyist and McCain's campaign manager, says this election "will not be about the issues."

Well, at least so McCain hopes. We know better. The fact is, John McCain has em-

braced George Bush's economic policies wholeheartedly. And not just in the past. Going forward, he wants to extend the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy and slash corporate taxes even more. He wants to tax our health benefits—that would cost the average letter carrier \$1,500 to \$2,500 per year and give us nothing in return—and privatize Social Security, which he has called a "disgrace." He plans to continue the vengeful war on unions and stay in Iraq indefinitely. No wonder he doesn't want to make this election "about the issues."

During a week when the government had to bail out huge mortgage and insurance companies (Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae and AIG) and broker the takeover of Merrill Lynch to stop an economic meltdown following the collapse of a major investment bank (Lehman Brothers), Sen. McCain actually told his supporters, "I think still, the fundamentals of our economy are strong." That may be the strangest and most frightening thing I have ever heard a politician say.

**McCain was a war hero 40 years ago,** but he is out of touch today. Worse, he is running a dishonorable campaign and has committed himself to an agenda that would destroy the American middle class, dragging the members of the NALC down with it. If this does not convince us to get off our duffs and volunteer 10 hours to the Carrier Corps, we will not have anyone to blame but ourselves for the consequences.

Barack Obama and his running mate Joe Biden understand that the economy is in deep trouble and that working men and women are struggling. At the center of their plan to rebuild the middle class is enactment of the Employee Free Choice Act, a law that will revitalize the labor movement. They are also committed to strengthening the Postal Service while banning the outsourcing of letter carrier jobs. As letter carriers, we will have allies in the White House if we do all we can to get them elected. As Americans, we can help make this country great again by voting our hopes, not our fears. So ignore all the nonsense and let's work our butts off right up to November 4 to make it happen. ☒