



LEO J. SHAPIRO & ASSOCIATES LLC.

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Campaign Cleanup

Nowhere is the freedom that we enjoy as Americans expressed more than in election campaigns. Our campaigns are long, beginning with primaries, and hard-fought. The current campaign for the nomination of President marks a moment in American history to be long remembered as the first woman and first African American vie for the Democratic nomination for President. This campaign will also be remembered because it began so early, nearly two years before the Presidential election to be held in November, 2008, and the hard-fought primary caucuses and election of delegates in each of the states.

Many candidates at all levels of office have spoken about the need to save the planet as the growing threat of global warming looms and the carbon imprint of our own nation and the developing world requires increasing diligence by business and the public to become environmentally friendly.

One of the ways that even the smallest of our schoolchildren know that an election is coming is the many signs that candidates put in public spaces and walkways. Those signs, which represent an array of colors and an array of candidates, are emblems of our freedom. They remind us that something important is happening in our democracy. The people's voice will be

heard, and those who represent them or seek to do so are moving towards a moment of accountability.

What's wrong with this picture is that when the election is over and the people's voice has been heard, those signs continue to inhabit public spaces and walkways until they are blown away by the wind or find their way into the gutter or garbage can. The candidates who speak so glowingly about public responsibility and promise improvement do little or nothing to clean up after they depart from the podium and airwaves.

In Chicago, where primaries were hard-fought, over the course of a two-mile stretch nearly three weeks following the primary election, no less than 26 signs were counted in public spaces of a residential neighborhood. Nearly all those signs are recyclable paper and metal; few, if any, were picked up for recycling by the many volunteers that served the campaigns of the candidates. The names of vaunted candidates at all levels of government – even trustees of sanitary districts – lie torn in the gutter and garbage can, rather than becoming productive recycling material to, perhaps, live as paper for yet a future campaign.

*For more information on studies underlying this report,
contact George Rosenbaum at georger@ljs.com*