

Website takes voters beyond the political frenzy

August 23 2012

In a political arena dogged by sound bites and catfights, a conversation rooted in depth and detail can make all the difference.

That's the idea behind U.S. Political Conventions and Campaigns, a free, nonpartisan website developed by Northeastern faculty and launched earlier this week. The website, which will be updated throughout the campaign season, serves as an online resource for both educators and individuals seeking more information.

"We want there to be something for everyone," said site creator Daniel Urman, director of the Law and Policy doctorate program in the College of Professional Studies. "It's for the high-school student getting ready to vote for the first time, someone following the campaigns on TV who wants to learn more and the seasoned political professional."

The site serves as a powerful educational resource, providing college faculty and high-school teachers with tools and quizzes designed to align with national educational standards in areas including civics, American history and government.

The site's content includes in-depth video interviews with more than 20 political insiders from across the political spectrum, including former Massachusetts state Senate minority leader Richard Tisei, a 1980 Reagan youth delegate and current Republican candidate for Congress in Massachusetts; Thalia Schlesinger, a 2008 Obama delegate; Richard Counts, a 2012 Romney delegate; and former Massachusetts governor Michael

Dukakis, the 1988 Democratic nominee for president and a Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Northeastern.

"One of the reasons I teach these days is because I want to encourage young people to go into public service," Dukakis said in one of the site's videos, "Why Politics Matters." "There is nothing more important or more personally fulfilling and satisfying than being in a position where you can make a difference in the lives of your fellow citizens. That's really what politics and public service are all about."

Multimedia elements include information on topics such as American political history, campaign finance, public policy, party platforms and the evolving role of media and technology in government and campaigns.

"We are nonpartisan and we're offering depth, which sets us apart," Urman said. "We're providing details that are important to people's lives. Government touches every aspect of someone's life, whether they like it or not, so it is important to have an informed citizenry."

The political insiders who gave interviews for the website, Urman noted, were enthusiastic to participate in a project that approached government and politics as serious topics meriting close examination.

"They enjoyed the ability to speak for more than five seconds at a time," Urman said. "Many of our interviews were scheduled for 20 minutes but went well over an hour. Of course, that frustrated our editors, but it showed how these experts appreciated the opportunity to discuss these important topics in greater depth."

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Citation: Website takes voters beyond the political frenzy (2012, August 23) retrieved 23 April

2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-08-website-voters-political-frenzy.html>

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