

Campaign Promises

IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME. Bruce Schobel's idea, actually—at our last editorial advisory board meeting in January. Since this is an election year, he suggested, maybe we could invite the presidential candidates to weigh in on issues important to actuaries: Social Security, Medicare, etc.

So that's what I did. In early April, I wrote to the press secretaries of both campaigns (Nader wasn't a serious candidate at the time), sent them copies of *Contingencies*, told them about us and our concerns, and offered them 1,500 words each to make their respective cases to our knowledgeable and influential readers. I gave them both a deadline of June 15.

I heard back first from the Bush campaign. Count us in, they said. We'd love to do it.

Great, I thought. This just might work after all.

Next I heard from the Gore campaign. Thanks for the offer, they said, but Mr. Gore really wouldn't have time for an interview.

I understand that, I replied, but that isn't what I was asking for. So I sent the material all over again. I tried to make it clearer that what I was looking for was not an interview but a finished article, written by whatever ghost writer or writers they wanted to use, that would appear under the candidate's byline.

Oh, they said, that's different. Sure, we can do that.

I waited. Knowing *Contingencies* would not be their highest priority, I called and sent reminders a couple weeks before the deadline. Just in case.

Silence.

I waited some more. The suspense made life interesting.

The Gore response came by e-mail precisely on June 15. It focused almost exclusively on Social Security (I had asked them to include Medicare reform) but at least I had

something. All I needed was the other half of the equation.

The deadline came and went. After a week or so, I inquired and was told the Bush staff was working on it, but the approval process was taking longer than expected. June turned into July and I tried to use my impending vacation as an impetus to speed. Didn't work. Neither did my daily phone messages. Not even when I got a little testy and pointed out they might look a little foolish missing the boat like that.

Finally, the week before the drop-dead deadline of July 21, more than a month late, I was calling not just every day but several times a day, even from home in the evening. At one point, all I had to do was hit the "last number dialed" button on my phone, hoping I might be able to slip in and catch the real, live person. No luck.

I got a couple of after-hours phone messages in response, though, both promises that it was coming just as soon as possible. Thanks for being so patient.

So I was patient. And then time ran out.

What to do? It didn't seem fair to penalize one for the failure of the other. But nobody was prepared to weather the inevitable fallout if we published only one side.

So we arrived at a solution Solomon might have endorsed if he had had access to the Internet. We found a Bush stump speech on the candidate's Web site, extracted the part about Social Security, and put it opposite the article the Gore people wrote for us.

It's a second-best solution to be sure. But at least both candidates' positions are here. ●



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