



Groups seek straight answers from candidates

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BATON ROUGE -- Two of Louisiana's better-known public-policy groups say political candidates running for state office this fall have become overly ambiguous in answering voters' questions and are taking indistinguishable stances on important issues.

The Council for a Better Louisiana recently sent surveys to major governor candidates and posted them on its Web site before qualifying opened last week.

The surveys cover a multitude of issues, such as coastal restoration and improving roads, and offer voters their first real view of contenders.

Some responses provided by the candidates, however, are less than revealing and more than disappointing.

"I was surprised that so many of the answers provided were short shrift," CABL CEO Barry Erwin said. "I would think that candidates would want to take advantage of opportunities like this."

Next up, CABL is getting ready to survey the state's many legislative candidates, and it plans to post those responses online as well.

The good-government group is hoping residents and the media will help pressure potential lawmakers into spelling out their priorities.

As for this trend of candidates saying a lot of stuff while saying nothing at all, the Public Affairs Research Council, another Baton Rouge-based policy advocate, has issued a report that instructs voters on how to question candidates and get real answers -- rather than more fluff.

PAR's goal for the outline, dubbed "Questioning Candidates Beyond the Platitudes," is that it will encourage voters to scrutinize politicians and determine who truly has action plans to back up slogans and sound bites.

"This report can help voters to make that distinction," said Jim Brandt, PAR's president. "It challenges both candidates and voters to push for more meaningful debate."

Even Blueprint Louisiana, a group of affluent and civic-minded activists hoping to impact change on state government, is having trouble getting gubernatorial candidates to take clear stances.

Blueprint is pushing a reform agenda with five priorities, including developing a skilled work force, ensuring access to health care and building a better transportation system.

Three of the four major contenders -- state Sen. Walter Boasso, D-Arabi; Public Service Commissioner Foster Campbell, D-Elm Grove; and U.S. Rep. Bobby Jindal, R-Metairie -- refused to sign the group's pledge.

Metairie businessman John Georges, who has no political-party affiliation, is the only candidate from the top tier on board.

On Wednesday, Blueprint will begin to post on its Web site the names of the other legislative and statewide candidates who have signed their contract.

"We will let voters know through various mediums who is supporting the Blueprint Agenda," said Blueprint Chairman Matt Stuller, CEO of Lafayette-based jewelry manufacturer and distributor Stuller Inc. "It's our hope citizens will consider a candidate's support of the Blueprint Agenda when deciding their vote."

To view the CABL survey, visit www.cabl.org.

For the "Questioning Candidates Beyond the Platitudes" report, point your browser toward www.la-par.org.

Additionally, information on Blueprint Louisiana can be found online at www.blueprintlouisiana.org.