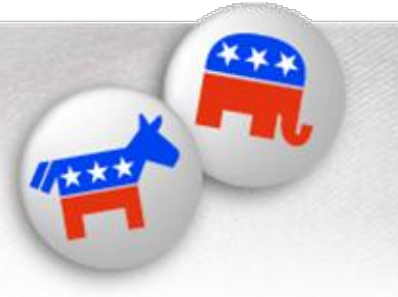


The Caucus

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The T-Shirt Groups

By [LESLIE WAYNE](#)

DES MOINES — They show up in red T-shirts, blue T-shirts and then, there is the “Cookie Mom” who is associated with the yellow T-shirt crowd. While most political rallies here in Iowa consist of politicians preaching to the crowds, a number of activist groups are turning that political model on its head. Folks in the red T-Shirts are from a group called Divided We Fail, which is part of the American Association of Retired Persons and they show up candidate gatherings to pose questions and influence the current crop of Presidential candidates.

Ann Black, who heads the Des Moines chapter of Divided We Fail, said that the group is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates. Instead, they raise questions about health care and Social Security – wherever they can. “These are important issues and we want to get the candidates talking about them,” said Ms. Black, who headed the handful of red T-shirted advocates at a John Edwards rally in Des Moines. “We’re not proposing any position, we just want to hear a discussion of these issues and we want these issue to become national priorities.”

No matter the candidate, no matter the location, someone with one of these T-shirts will be there with their particular concern. The blue-T shirts – saying “Are You Covered” - belong to a group that includes the Alzheimer’s Association, A.A.R.P. and the American Cancer Society and is seeking broader health care coverage. “We have to be careful to not endorse a candidate or a position,” said Stacy Frelund, a member of the group. “We want to find out where all the candidates stand.” The group passes out four questions for its members to ask of all candidates – about health care availability, affordability, preventive care and access.

Perhaps the most colorful group wears yellow T-Shirts with a big pie chart on the front showing Pentagon spending relative to all other government expenditures. This group “Iowans for Sensible Priorities,” wants to shift \$60 billion in Pentagon weapons spending to other social programs. It was started by Ben Cohen, the founder of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream and a social activist, and has one chapter in Iowa and the other in New Hampshire, the two states where it is easy to meet a Presidential candidate face-to-face.

Amanda Huppert of Des Moines is the “cookie Mom.” The preppy-looking Ms. Huppert drove to three Edwards campaign events yesterday, Des Moines, Perry, and Jefferson, carrying a lovely wicker basket and giving out cookies with the same pie chart, outlined in icing.

Do these groups get their voices heard? If an Edwards rally in Jefferson is any indication, the answer is a qualified yes. When one member of the “Sensible Priorities” group asked Mr. Edwards a question about the new DDG Destroyer for the Navy, Mr. Edwards said he did not have enough details to answer their specific question but praised their efforts. “This group goes to all candidates forums and raises issues about bloated Pentagon spending,” said Mr. Edwards. “They ask harsh questions and I applaud them. Bless them.”