In the 2000 election, President Bush’s pledge to combat the “soft bigotry of low expectations” was a pillar of his compassionate conservatism and crucial to his razor-thin margin of victory. That election begat the now-controversial No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The law has split the Right between those who cheer accountability and those who jeer federal overreach and insufficient attention to school choice. Among the Left, those who see a punitive law that’s unfair to teachers scuffle with NCLB hawks committed to closing racial achievement gaps. So far, those debates have drawn little attention on the stump, as the campaigns focus on Iraq and immigration, terrorism and taxes. Will education matter in ’08? Are the political parties as deeply divided on education issues as on tax issues and foreign policy? Two leading political consultants—Democrat Chris Lehane and Republican David Winston—offer their takes. Lehane calls for the Democrats to seize the mantle of reform, while Winston assures GOP candidates they need only to stay the course.

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