



# Doorstep Democracy: Face-to-Face Politics in the Heartland

*James H. Read*

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The famous Tip O’Neill axiom “all politics is local” comes alive in this chronicle of Democrat James H. Read’s hard-fought but unsuccessful—by 98 votes—bid for state legislature in the socially conservative communities of Stearns and Morrison Counties, Minnesota. Read door-knocked 7,500 households during his campaign, visiting with voters and engaging in genuine dialogue on doorsteps from St. Anthony to St. Joseph.

At once a memoir of a hard-fought contest and a meditation on the state of American democracy, Read’s work contrasts the modern media-driven political campaign, where candidates glean their knowledge of voters from pollsters and communication only flows one way, with the kind of true understanding of constituents and issues that can only grow from individual encounters. Face-to-face doorstep conversations, he claims, give a candidate (or volunteer) and voter an opportunity to truly persuade and learn from one another. In a district where the pro-life movement dominated politics, Read’s invitation to honestly discuss abortion and reject single-issue politics resonated with many voters.

Refusing the “red state” versus “blue state” view of American voters, *Doorstep Democracy* shows the power and importance of kitchen-table politics—people sitting down together to tackle the issues that affect us—and proves that voters and candidates can be convinced to change their minds. Read ultimately demonstrates how conversations between citizens concerned about their communities can get us beyond the television ads, mass mailings, and sound bites to rejuvenate American democracy.

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