

Of Candidates and Negative Campaigning: Lobbyists and the Floodgates of Money

Money and Wars of Aggression Abroad Seem to Rule the Day.

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"[At Bain Capital] We got money from other people and we would use that to help start businesses or sometimes acquire businesses that were in trouble or not doing so well and then try and make it better or get the businesses to grow." Mitt Romney, Republican presidential candidate, former governor of Massachusetts and former venture capitalist and corporate raider (January 8, 2012)

"I like being able to fire people who provide services to me." Mitt Romney (January 9, 2012)

"They [the corporate raiders] apparently looted the companies, left people unemployed and walked off with millions of dollars," Mr. Gingrich said. ... "if somebody comes in, takes all the money out of your company and then leaves you bankrupt while they go off with millions, that's not traditional capitalism." Newt Gingrich, Republican presidential candidate and former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (January 8, 2012)

"I think people who don't serve when they could and they get three or four or even five deferments - they have no right to send our kids off to war ... I'm trying to stop the wars, but at least, you know, I went when they called me up." Ron Paul, U.S. Congressman and Republican presidential candidate (January 7, 2012)

In current American politics, money and wars of aggression abroad seem to rule the day. When a candidate's fortune turns sour, the natural reflex is to spend \$millions in negative ads to destroy adversaries and/or to issue hawkish policy statements with the promise to start new wars abroad and even to rekindle old ones.

The motto seems to be that "If you destroy me with your negative ads; I will destroy you with mine."—This is truly amazing.

Lobbyists have always played an important role in U.S. politics, but with the floodgates of money presently wide open, their work has been considerably facilitated. Indeed, since the U.S. Supreme Court's (5-4) January-20-2010- decision to allow unlimited amounts of money to be spent by corporations or labor unions during elections under the specious pretext that such legal organizations are "people", money rules unimpeded in American politics. This has the more or less unanticipated consequence of raising negative campaigning to a new level, to the delight of corporate media which rake in hundreds of \$millions in political advertising

or propaganda. Can democracy survive such an onslaught of money? This remains to be seen.

As for the U.S. presidential candidate Mitt Romney, for instance, during the recent primary campaign in the state of Iowa, he was confronted with a sudden surge of popularity of one of his opponents, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Romney's camp and its allies went to work and pumped more than \$2.8 million in a TV air deluge of negative ads against candidate Gingrich, arguing that the former Speaker had "more baggage than the airlines" and spelling out a series of flaws in Gingrich's long political career. Sure enough, Newt Gingrich soon plummeted in the polls in Iowa and even nationally. He finished a distant fourth (13.3%) in the Iowa Republican Caucus (U.S. Presidential Primary) of January 03, 2012, while Republican candidate Romney squeezed by to finish in 1st position.

In retaliation, the Gingrich's camp has opted to turn the tables on candidate Romney for the New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries and has tried to picture him as the Wall Street movie villain Gordon Gekko. Indeed, thanks to a "super PAC", supposedly financed by casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson, who is reported to have poured \$5 million into Mr. Romney's campaign, it intends to pump some \$3.4-million into new television ads in order to picture multi-millionaire candidate Mitt Romney as a cold-blooded capitalist raider who made his fortune on the back of workers when they were fired en masse, after Mr. Romney's private equity firm, Bain Capital of Boston, gorged itself on financially stressed companies. Mr. Gingrich has even suggested personally that Mr. Romney's company was comparable to "rich people figuring out clever legal ways to loot a company."

—And there you have it, negative campaigning at its best!

Negative ads, whether they are based on facts or on fabrications or on outright lies, can be very effective politically because they raise doubts in the mind of undecided or hesitant voters, even though some voters may be repulsed and turned off by them and this could translate into lower voter turnout. Nevertheless, the more distracted people are, the more they tend to remember negative information better than positive one. Therefore, for those who have no scruples in relying on such tactics and who have the means to pay for them, negative campaign ads have a triple advantage: First, they are a good way to change the subject and steer the debate away from one's own failures; secondly, they place adversaries on the defensive, forcing them to spend time and money to try to refute the attacks; and, thirdly, they dispense the attackers from clearly spelling out their own positive political agenda beyond generalities and pious slogans. Negative ads maybe a curse for democracy but they work for those unethical politicians for whom power is the only thing that they yearn for in politics.

But negative campaigning or smear campaigns cost a lot. Indeed, they have to be researched and produced and, above all, they must to be aired in the mass media, especially on television. Historically, negative campaigning has always existed. However, modern means of communication and the concentration of national wealth in relatively fewer hands have multiplied its influence. Indeed, in the modern free-for-all electronically based U.S. politics, it can be said that those with the most money and with fewer principles have a decisive, if not an insurmountable advantage in winning elections. In the U.S., and especially with the benediction of a majority of judges on the current Supreme Court, so-called "super PACs" can accept unlimited donations for purposes of supporting or attacking candidates, thus placing the political game clearly in the hands of people or corporations or

labor unions with the most money. Money has thus become the principal deciding factor in American politics.

The current campaign is a clear demonstration.

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