FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 (618) 462-5415

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WHO SPENT BIG CAMPAIGN MONEY?

Now that the 1982 Congressional campaigns are upon us, we are hearing a great deal of discussion in the media about how money -- not issues, not personalities, not parties -- is the most important factor in being elected. We hear complaints about how those rich conservatives and Republicans spent so much money in the 1980 campaigns, and particularly how those "right-wing" PACs fed large sums of money into critical races.

It was quite a surprise, therefore, to see the figures of how much money was actually spent in key Senate races in 1980. All these money figures are a matter of public information through the reports all federal candidates are required to file with the Federal Election Commission.

Senator George McGovern spent $3.2 million to hold on to his South Dakota seat, but James Abdnor was able to replace him by spending only $1.8 million. Birch Bayh of Indiana spent $2.7 million to try to stay in the Senate, but he lost out in November 1980 to Dan Quayle who spent $2.5 million.

In Georgia, Herman Talmadge spent $2.2 million in a valiant effort to remain the Senator from Georgia, but he was bested by Mack Mattingly who spent only $0.5 million. In Florida, Democrat Bill Gunter spent $2.1 million, while the Republican winner Paula Hawkins spent only $0.6 million.

Other races where Republican candidates won a Senate seat while spending less than Democratic opponents were Warren Rudman over John Durkin in New Hampshire, Robert Kasten over Gaylord Nelson in Wisconsin, and Frank Murkowski over Clark Gruening in Alaska.

Republicans did slightly outspend Democrats in a few key Senate races in 1980. Winner Charles Grassley spent $2.3 million to loser John Culver's $1.7 million in Iowa. Alabama winner Jeremiah Denton spent $855 thousand to loser Jim Folsom, Jr.'s $356 thousand. In Idaho Steve Symms spent $2 million to defeat Frank Church who spent $1.9 million. John East spent $1.1 million in winning the North Carolina seat from Robert Morgan who spent $0.9 million.

When you add it all up, it is clear that Republicans were able to spend less and enjoy the results more. The total Republican spending on the twelve U.S. Senate seats that Republicans took from Democrats last year amounted to $14.7 million (including the $722 thousand spent in independent expenditures by NCPAC -- National Political Action Committee). Democrats, on the other hand, spent a whopping $19 million.

In addition to the campaign expenditure figures reported to the Federal Election Commission, the Democratic incumbents had the benefit of immense, unreported [redacted] Congressional office budgets for their political use. These incumbency perks include a professional staff, the franking privilege for free mailings to all constituents, tremendous free media, WATS telephone lines, and the headstart of a high name identification.

If money were the only factor in winning elections, a challenger would have to count on spending about a quarter million dollars in order to defeat an incumbent Congressman. It is obvious that the twelve Republican challengers who defeated Democratic liberal Senators in 1980 had something going for them other than money. That "something" was being on the right side of issues and having a dedicated corps of campaign volunteers who worked effectively for their candidates.

The same liberals who make phony complaints about Republicans being the big spenders in campaigns are usually also ready to denounce the PACs -- the political action committees — and their contributions to political campaigns. Critics of PACs, such as Common Cause, complain that PACs are "special interest" groups.

It would be a great mistake to think that the PACs are a right-wing pheonomenon, or that business PACs are automatically conservative. An analysis of campaign contributions in Congressional races where there was a clear choice between a conservative and a liberal candidate shows that the top twenty liberal corporate PACs include the Chrysler Corporation and the Coca-Cola Company.

Money is certainly a factor in political campaigns, but its importance is much overrated. The election of Ronald Reagan and the conservative Republican Senate in November 1980 was due to a great many factors more important than money, and If the Administration wants to maintain and extend its power and influence, it should spend a part of every day studying the question of WHY they were elected. (end)