Look Out For Union Politicking

In Congressional Campaigns

March 7, 1996 by Phyllis Schlafly

The theater of the presidential primaries is tending to obscure the fact that the fight is already on in earnest for control of the next Congress. The victory of a liberal Democrat for U.S. Senator from Oregon to fill the seat vacated by Bob Packwood may prove anew the truth of the old adage that "Coming events cast their shadows before them."

The political director of the AFL-CIO bragged that his union had sent 37 full-time campaign workers to Oregon to work for Democrat Ron Wyden and to attack the Republican on key issues such as Medicare. The union made more than 230,000 phone calls and sent out more than 350,000 pieces of mail on behalf of the Democratic candidate.

It wasn't just the AFL-CIO. At least eleven other individual unions joined forces to bring in $183,000 in political action committee donations. That made a mighty big presence in one targeted campaign.

PAC spending is only part of what the unions are doing in Congressional races. The unions' phone banks, direct mail, paid advertising, and grassroots organizing are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars more than the direct donations reported to the Federal Election Committee.

Much of this union politicking is financed through mandatory worker dues, and much is unreported and unregulated by federal election laws. To use a favorite political metaphor, union support is a ten-ton gorilla in Congressional elections.

The Oregon race is the start of a massive campaign to use leftwing, liberal political muscle in targeted races in order to undo the Republican victories of 1994.

The AFL-CIO has announced plans to spend $35 million to defeat 75 Republican Congressmen in the 1996 November elections. This is seven times more than the union usually spends in federal elections and does not even include the millions more spent by individual unions, or the so-called "soft money" and the "volunteer" political campaigning done by union members.

The unions have suffered many years of declining influence. John Sweeney won election as AFL-CIO

President last year by promising not only an aggressive campaign to increase union membership, but also a vocal political campaign to promote the union's liberal agenda.

The National Education Association (NEA), one of the most powerful of all the individual unions, has targeted 42 Republican Congressmen for defeat. According to the NEA's own press release, the NEA will run "a grassroots organizing drive" and a media ad campaign accusing these Congressmen of "cutting off our children's future."

The NEA has already spent $4.75 million on a multi-media ad campaign designed to scare voters about Medicare and Goals 2000 reductions. This lavish campaign was targeted in 55 Congressional districts and included press conferences, leafleting, and phone banks.

It's unfortunate that Congress, by a slight margin, failed to abolish the preferential property tax exemption enjoyed exclusively by the National Education Association. No other union has this unique financial advantage.

The polls indicate that the public is blaming the Republican Congress for not getting much of anything done last year. In fact, President Clinton deserves most of the blame because he vetoed a perfectly reasonable Balanced Budget Act and also a perfectly reasonable compromise welfare reform bill.

The members of Congress most at risk from the AFL-CIO assault are the freshmen who came to Washington determined to cut government down to size. They are our hope for a conservative Congress in the future.

It is a freshman Congressman who is leading the battle to abolish the Department of Education. It is a freshman Congressman who is championing the cause of the brave U.S. soldier (Michael New) who refused to wear a United Nations uniform.

It was a freshman Congressman who dared to push for a vote on the Mexican bailout. It was a freshman Congressman who stopped the totalitarian anti-terrorism bill (to give Janet Reno the power to wiretap all our telephones.)

It was freshmen Congressmen who voted against Clinton's unconstitutional sending of U.S. troops into

the war in Bosnia. It is freshmen Congressmen who are working for campaign spending reform and term limits.

These are the Congressmen you will hear the media complaining about as "obstructionists" and "extremists." That's because they are daring to challenge business as usual and have a real dedication to doing what the voters sent them to Washington to do.

You can bet that the freshmen members of Congress will be the ones targeted for defeat by the big money and organizational muscle of the liberal unions.