

Corporate bribery and political corruption on display at Republican, Democratic conventions

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The world was spared one day of the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida thanks to the arrival of Hurricane Isaac, which forced the organizers to delay the proceedings until Tuesday. For the next three days, however, the degradation and corruption of the American political system will be on full display.

There is in this year's quadrennial conventions an unabashed flaunting of the role of corporate money in what passes for American democracy that goes beyond even the debased levels of previous presidential elections. The Republicans openly champion the interests of corporate America. The Democrats are a bit more devious.

Away from the minutely scripted and orchestrated proceedings in the convention hall—with all their hokum and stupidity—the serious business of peddling influence and selling votes will take place in what the *New York Times* on Sunday called a “parallel convention.” The newspaper's front-page article on the Republican meeting, in a tone closer to admiration than revulsion, begins as follows:

“The railway giant CSX, which has spent \$2 million this year lobbying on issues like greenhouse gas regulation and hazardous waste transportation rules, will park special train cars near the Tampa Bay Times Forum to host parties and meetings.”

It goes on to list various parties and events at exclusive venues, including a yacht, for convention delegates, office-holders and Republican Party officials that are being hosted by super PACs such as Americans for Prosperity (co-founded by the oil billionaire and Tea Party sugar daddy David Koch), trade groups such as the American Petroleum Institute, lobbying firms, corporations, and multimillionaire fundraisers.

The Republican host committee has a \$55 million budget and is sponsored by such corporations as Target, Chevron and Microsoft.

“Lobbyists and trade groups, virtually all with business before Congress and federal agencies, are paying for a nonstop schedule of beach parties, concerts and cocktail hours,” the *Times* writes. “Each party’s quadrennial conventions,” it declares is “a gathering of money and influence unrivaled in politics.”

What goes on at these events, however, is only a more concentrated and extravagant version of politics as usual. “What happens day to day in Washington—fundraising, lobbying, dining and entertainment—expands to a gigantic scale around the conventions.”

It has been decades since the nominees for president and vice president of the two big business party were actually selected at the national conventions. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted in its August 24 article, headlined “Red Carpet for Republican Donors:”

“The official function of a political convention—the selection of a nominee—is now fulfilled long beforehand. Its events serve two other important purposes: introducing a candidate to a prime-time audience for one hour each evening; and, during the rest of the time, showing love and appreciation to donors.”

In the case of the Republicans, this means 1,500 top fundraisers with whom Romney will meet in a series of exclusive events reserved for “Stars,” who have raised at least \$250,000, and “Stripes,” who have gathered at least \$500,000. “This will be a flagship taking-care-of donors convention,” Woody Johnson, owner of the New York Jets and head of Mr. Romney’s fundraising

in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, told the *Journal*.

The other side of this orgy of official venality is a massive security operation to intimidate and marginalize political protest. The City of Tampa is, according to *The Hill* web site, “on virtual lockdown this week.” Thousands of protesters will be penned into a “designated free speech zone” away from the convention hall. In other words, they will be denied the right to effectively exercise their free speech rights while being set up for police provocations and large-scale arrests.

The massive security operation, headed up by the Secret Service, involves the FBI, the Coast Guard and the military. Thousands of police from surrounding cities are expected to be deployed to bolster the local police. Federal officials have closed a major highway and placed floating barriers in the harbor. Air and water security zones have been set up and traffic restrictions imposed.

The Hill reported Saturday that the FBI and Homeland Security Department issued a joint intelligence bulletin last week declaring their “high confidence” that anarchist groups are “preparing to use violence and criminal tactics in an attempt to disrupt the Republican National Convention.”

The level of repression is in inverse relation to the level of public enthusiasm for the elections and the two major candidates. Last week, a joint *USA Today*/Gallup poll was published showing that for the first time at this point in at least six elections, voters view both the Republican and Democratic parties unfavorably.

Far from the Wall Street debacle four years ago abashing the corporate-financial elite and its political parties, the domination of corporate money over the political system has become even more naked. Since the Supreme Court’s 2010 decision in the *Citizens United* case removing all legal restrictions on corporate funding of election campaigns, it seems, both the bribers and the bribed have concluded they have a green light.

At the Republican gathering, for example, the Financial Services Roundtable, Wall Street’s leading trade group, will host an invitation only luncheon for members of Congress and financial regulators, followed by a panel on how federal policy affects its

members’ retirement and annuity products.

Some 27 corporations and industry trade groups are known to be sponsoring the Republican convention, including the American Petroleum Institute, the American Natural Gas Alliance, Chevron, Coca-Cola, CSX, Ford, Google, Microsoft, UPS, Walmart, Wells Fargo and Xerox.

The Democrats, who meet next week in Charlotte, North Carolina to officially nominate Barack Obama, have made much of their decision to bar corporate donations to their convention host committee. This is cynical ruse.

They have set up a related entity, New American City Inc., which is accepting money from such firms as Bank of America, Duke Energy, AT&T, Coca-Cola and Wells Fargo. Between the \$36 million being raised by the official host committee and the \$10 million to \$15 million goal of New American City, the Democrats expect to collect nearly as much as their Republican opponents.



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