

US midterm elections dominated by corporate cash

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Two weeks before the polls open in the US midterm elections, the American population is being bombarded by an unprecedented barrage of political propaganda. Billionaires and corporate lobbies are pumping record sums into the campaigns of Democratic and Republican politicians, all running on programs of a right-wing, pro-corporate, pro-imperialist character.

The sums being expended have broken all records for a midterm election. One US Senate race alone, in North Carolina, will cost an estimated \$90 million, of which \$56 million comes from outside political action committees, many of which conceal the identity of those providing the funds. In the Kentucky Senate race, a single committee raking in secret donations, the Kentucky Opportunity Coalition, has spent \$14 million to back Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell in a state with just over four million people.

So blatant is the role of big money that the *New York Times Magazine* published a lengthy article in its latest edition on the contest for governor of Florida under the headline “Money Talks.” The article details the role of billionaire Tom Steyer in backing the campaign of Democrat Charlie Crist against the flood of corporate cash behind Republican Rick Scott, including money from the billionaire Koch brothers.

As the article notes, the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision in 2010, legalizing unlimited campaign funding by the wealthy, means that “any players with the wherewithal can start what are in essence their own political parties.” The 2014 election marks a certain tipping point, as spending by outside committees is likely to surpass spending by the Democratic and Republican parties themselves.

Money from the super-rich plays a controlling role in both parties. For the Republican Party, long the open champion of Wall Street, this presents no difficulty. For

the Democratic Party, it is a factor in the timid and thoroughly insincere character of its demagogic appeals to working-class voters.

The Republican Party campaign strategy is simple: rely on popular disillusionment with the Obama administration, under conditions where the two-party system offers no other alternative. As Republican strategist Alex Castellanos, in a moment of blunt cynicism, told the *Washington Post*: “People are trapped in a room with President Obama and the Democratic Party, and there is a huge demand for change. They want to get out of that room. But the only door out leads to a room full of lepers—that’s the Republican Party.”

The Democratic Party strategy involves more appeals to identity politics—targeting women, African Americans, Hispanics—by highlighting the bigotry of the Republican Party’s fundamentalist and Tea Party base. After so many such efforts, however, this has only a limited impact. The vast majority of working people are increasingly moved by class questions.

In this context, a revealing exchange took place on the ABC News Sunday interview program “This Week.” Republican neoconservative pundit William Kristol gloated over the decision of Democratic candidates to focus on claims that Republicans were anti-women: “One Republican consultant said to me the other night, thank God they’re running ‘war on women’ and it’s not ‘war on working class’ ads. If they ran a more economic populist message they would do better...”

His Democratic fellow panelist, black television host Tavis Smiley, ruefully admitted, “A lot of the reasons it might not be the top of the agenda is that Democrats know that they haven’t even done everything they could have done on this issue... there’s been no real

fight even by Democrats for increasing the minimum wage to a living wage in this country. That...can only go so far if you don't have the record to back that up."

It is less than two years since President Obama, in the first State of the Union address of his second term, pledged a laser-like focus on economic inequality, which he described as the defining issue of this century. Since then, his administration has gone about its business of serving the needs of the wealthy and the gap between the super-rich and everyone else has only widened further.

Obama joined his first rallies of the fall campaign Sunday, in Maryland and Illinois, boosting Democratic campaigns for governor. He sought to make an argument against Republican policies of tax cuts for business, deregulation and slashing the social safety net. Since the Democrats have collaborated with these policies in one bipartisan deal after another, however, this election-eve pitch has no credibility.

The president's main function in the campaign is to raise money, meeting with Democratic Party fat cats. So far this year, Obama has attended 56 fundraisers, most of them private, closed-door sessions with multimillionaires, while appearing at only a handful of public events open to the general public.



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