

US election campaign staggers to the finish line

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Four days before the November 4 mid-term elections in the US, there is a stark contradiction between the efforts of the Democratic and Republican parties to mobilize voters and the indifference and outright hostility of the vast majority of Americans toward the two big business parties, the candidates and the entire electoral process.

Billionaire backers of the rival parties are spending sums that are enormous compared to previous non-presidential elections, but trifling—a minor “cost of doing business”—compared to the vast resources they possess.

The Koch brothers, the leading contributors to the Republican campaigns, will pump as much as \$500 million into this year’s campaigns. But Charles and David Koch each own a fortune estimated at \$43 billion, making their 2014 campaign contributions less than 0.6 percent of their combined net worth.

Rival billionaires backing the Democratic Party, like hedge fund operator Tom Steyer and currency speculator George Soros, have matched the Republican mega-donors nearly dollar for dollar. If the Democratic Party takes a beating November 4, it will not be because it has been outspent.

The actual democratic content of this process is zero. The American people have little say in the outcome of the election and no say at all in what their elected “representatives” will do once they arrive in Washington.

Only one thing about the election is certain: whatever the division of power in the US Senate, House of Representatives, state governorships and state legislatures, the official two-party system will continue its inexorable shift to the right. Politics follows economics, and as a tiny financial aristocracy accumulates more and more wealth, it is reshaping the political structures in its image.

The ever more right-wing orientation of both official parties was on full display in the final week of the campaign. A few examples illustrate the general trend:

In the final debate of the **New Hampshire** Senate campaign October 30, incumbent Democrat Jeanne Shaheen defended the action of New Jersey’s Republican governor, Chris Christie, in forcibly quarantining a nurse just returned

from treating Ebola patients in West Africa, even though she was symptom-free. Shaheen called for the elimination of a provision in Obama’s health care “reform” imposing a tax on medical device manufacturers and opposed any executive action in favor of undocumented immigrants.

Her Republican opponent, former Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown, sought to focus the discussion on foreign policy, demanding stepped-up military action in Syria and Iraq. When Shaheen said she did not want US ground troops in Iraq because they would be viewed as an occupying force, Brown shouted, “We’re a liberating force, we’re not an occupying force, Senator, and I and every other person who has served in the military resents that you are calling us occupiers.”

In **Wisconsin**, Democratic multi-millionaire Mary Burke, daughter of the CEO of Trek Bicycles, is opposing incumbent Republican Governor Scott Walker. In an interview with Politico.com before a campaign rally featuring President Obama—one of a handful of such appearances in the 2014 campaign—Burke made it clear that she sought to change only the style of governing in Wisconsin, not the policies.

Burke objected to a recall campaign carried out against Walker in 2012, saying, “It divided the state, that’s the problem,” while declaring that if she were elected, “I don’t see any policy mandate.” In other words, the Democratic candidate has declared in advance that her election would not mean a reversal of Walker’s actions against state and local workers, which provoked mass protests and calls for a general strike in 2011.

In **Georgia**, where polls show Democratic Senate candidate Michelle Nunn with a slight lead over her Republican opponent, multi-millionaire former CEO David Perdue, in the race for an open seat, the final debate of the campaign saw the Republican demand “a hard right-hand turn” in the direction of US politics. Perdue, whose poll numbers plummeted after he boasted of his role in closing plants and outsourcing jobs, had positioned himself as the more “moderate” of five candidates for the Republican

nomination.

The response of Nunn, daughter of former Senator Sam Nunn, was to reiterate her pledge to compromise with Republicans in Washington. “I just don’t believe that it’s one party or the other,” she said. “I think it has to be both sides coming together... I don’t think it’s about prosecuting the other party.”

After this exchange, Nunn collected the endorsement of former Georgia Governor and Senator Zell Miller. Miller became notorious in 2004 when, as an incumbent Democratic Party officeholder, he gave the keynote speech to the Republican National Convention that renominated President Bush, denouncing any opposition to the “commander in chief” in time of war as tantamount to treason.

Neither party offers any program to improve the living standards and social conditions of working people or bring an end to escalating wars and attacks on democratic rights. Instead, they spend vast sums of campaign cash to vilify their rivals. There is little popular support for the candidates of either party.

Examples abound. In **Kentucky**, the incumbent Republican senator, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, has a favorable rating of only 37 percent, against 44 percent unfavorable. His Democratic challenger, Allison Lundergan Grimes, shows nearly the same profile: 37 percent favorable, 43 percent unfavorable.

The **Illinois** governor’s race, according to an article in the *New York Times*, pits the “failure,” incumbent Democrat Patrick Quinn, who has slashed pensions for public employees, against the “billionaire,” Republican Bruce Rauner, a private equity boss who opposes increasing the minimum wage. Quinn’s approval rating is only 34 percent, while Rauner, with nine homes and a wine club membership costing \$140,000 a year, personifies the most detested social layer in America, the multi-millionaire job-slasher.

In **Florida**, where incumbent Republican Governor Rick Scott faces the former Republican Governor, Charlie Crist, now a Democrat, the two campaigns have spent more than \$100 million in mutual mudslinging and the two candidates have approval ratings in the low twenties.

In **Alaska**, one of the least populous states, with barely 500,000 voters, nearly \$40 million has been spent on behalf of Democratic Senator Mark Begich and his Republican challenger, Dan Sullivan. That boils down to almost \$80 for every possible voter, and likely closer to \$200 for every vote actually cast.

Other statewide totals are almost as mind-boggling: more than \$100 million for the Senate contest in North Carolina; more than \$40 million for the Senate contest in Louisiana, a state with a likely voter turnout below 1.5 million people.

A general lack enthusiasm for either party largely accounts for the closeness of the contests in many states. For ten of the 36 Senate seats and 11 of the 35 governorships, the rival candidates are within 5 percent in pre-election polls.

While the Republican Party is expected to retain control of the House of Representatives, control of the Senate remains unpredictable, as well as the governorships in Florida and a series of Midwest industrial states (Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan) and much of New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Maine).

After being confined to Washington by the Ebola crisis—as well as the refusal of most Democratic candidates to be seen with him—President Obama has embarked on a last-minute campaign swing with rallies in Wisconsin, Maine, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Connecticut.

This coincides with increasingly desperate attempts by the most diehard supporters of the Democratic administration, such as the *New York Times* and the *Nation* magazine, to persuade voters to cast ballots in order to keep the Republicans from gaining control of the Senate. The *Times* published an editorial Friday on the subject, but could not cite a single substantive policy that would be affected by a change in party control of the upper chamber. The newspaper was reduced to complaining that a majority Republican Senate would, as a general matter, block legislation and nominations submitted by the White House.

The actual record of the Obama administration—the worst economic slump since the Great Depression, austerity policies and attacks on social benefits, unprecedented government spying, drone assassinations, wars in Afghanistan, Libya and now Syria-Iraq—is more reactionary than anything the *Times* could have conjured up in similar editorials warning of the danger of Republican presidential candidates John McCain, Mitt Romney and George W. Bush.

Whether the Democrats or Republicans control the US Senate, the House of Representatives or the White House matters little to the real rulers of America, the US financial aristocracy and the military-intelligence apparatus. For working people, both parties are implacable enemies and the building of a socialist alternative to the two-party system is the most urgent political task.



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