US midterm election campaign enters final 100 days

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Sunday, July 29, marked the start of the final 100 days of the US midterm election campaign, with the Democrats and Republicans, the two parties of the capitalist class, having already spent more than $2 billion. It is predicted that the final total will far surpass the record $3.8 billion for a midterm election spent in 2014 and likely approach $5 billion.

According to a tabulation published Sunday in the *Hill*, the two parties have already spent $170 million on television advertising for Senate candidates alone and booked another $230 million, bringing the total to $400 million just for television. This is despite the fact that most of the closely contested races are in smaller rural states such as West Virginia, North Dakota and Montana.

Another $281 million in television time has been purchased or reserved for contests for the House of Representatives, and $340 million has been bought or reserved in advertising for gubernatorial elections.

According to the tally maintained by the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), which monitors campaign spending, the two corporate-controlled parties have spent $1.6 billion so far just for congressional and Senate campaigns. Adding the gubernatorial races, where the candidates are not required to file campaign finance reports with the Federal Election Commission, total election spending is undoubtedly well past the $2 billion mark.

The CRP figures include only money raised and spent by candidates who file reports with the Federal Election Commission (FEC), and not the hundreds of millions being spent by billionaires such as Charles and David Koch on the Republican side, and Michael Bloomberg, Tom Steyer and George Soros on the Democratic side.

Most of the billionaires funnel their money through political action committees, some run by the political parties, others run by nominees of the funders. The biggest single PAC is Senate Majority PAC, mainly backing incumbent Democrats, which has booked one in every 10 dollars spent on television nationwide thus far in the campaign—$102 million. Two PACs run by aides to Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell account for $67 million in television time.

The most expensive Senate campaign will undoubtedly be the contest in Florida between incumbent Democrat Bill Nelson and his Republican opponent, Governor Rick Scott, a former health care capitalist with a personal fortune topping $500 million—an amount that has increased enormously during his eight years in the governor's mansion, in part due to the effects of Obamacare, which Scott opposes politically but has profited from personally.

The most expensive governor's race is likely to be in Illinois, where the Democratic candidate is billionaire J. B. Pritzker, an heir to the Hyatt Hotel fortune, who is opposing incumbent Republican Bruce Rauner, a hedge fund boss with a personal fortune of more than $500 million. Each candidate has given more than $100 million to his own campaign.

These vast sums are being mobilized on behalf of candidates campaigning on programs that reflect that vast chasm separating the political representatives of the American financial oligarchy from the broad mass of the population. Both parties are so out of touch with the realities of life for most Americans as to give their campaigns a delusional character.

On the Republican side, the tone has been set by President Trump, who seized on last week's report of 4.1 percent growth in the US gross domestic product in the second quarter of 2018 to declare, "The economy may be the strongest it's ever been in the history of our country."

The essential thrust of the Republican campaign is that the combination of deregulation of business, driven by executive orders from the White House requiring agencies to stand down in the enforcement of pollution and health and safety regulations, and the enormous corporate tax cut pushed through Congress last December has rejuvenated American business and ignited economic growth.

Such arguments ignore obvious economic facts, particularly the temporary bonanza for business from the tax holiday provided to companies that have trillions of dollars in profits stashed overseas to avoid US taxation. This influx of cash is combined with a surge in orders for US exports from customers in China and other countries who are fearful that they will have to pay far more once the US trade war gets going at full tilt.

More fundamentally, the growth statistics serve to cover up the actual conditions of life facing the vast majority of the population—the working class. First Obama and now Trump have created the “best of all possible worlds” for the financial elite and a privileged section of the upper-middle-class, whose wealth is tied closely to their stock portfolios. But most working people are facing an increasingly difficult struggle to survive, facing low wages, contingent and part-time employment, the slashing of public services, and now the prospect of inflationary price boosts in the cost of basic necessities.

As for the Democrats, they are focused entirely on the equally delusional claim that Trump is an agent of Moscow elected through Russian intervention in the 2016 presidential campaign. This allows them to attack the administration largely from the right, denouncing its policies in the Middle East and Eastern Europe as insufficiently aggressive and militaristic, attacking Trump for undermining the FBI and CIA, and demanding a crackdown on the Internet and other attacks on democratic rights.

The Democratic Party is unable and unwilling to offer any real opposition to the Trump administration’s anti-working class policies. The more the working class begins to stir into action, as in the wave of teachers’ strikes this spring, the more uneasy are the Democratic leadership and their billionaire backers over any appeal to the economic grievances of workers.

A report published this week in the *New York Times* provides a remarkable window into the dramatic shift to the right by the Democrats. Based on a precinct-level review of the 2016 vote, the *Times* found that in the richest neighborhoods in the United States, Hillary Clinton defeated Donald Trump decisively and won a far greater proportion of the vote than Barack Obama four years earlier, when he defeated Republican Mitt Romney.

According to the *Times*, the shift was of stunning dimensions and was the result of a deliberate decision by the Clinton campaign to appeal for support from the wealthy: “The precinct data implies that Mrs. Clinton’s gains were concentrated among the wealthiest voters; she carried precincts where the median income was over $250,000 by a 27-point margin, and improved by 39 points over Mr. Obama’s performance.”

The data also demonstrates—although the *Times* does not draw this political conclusion—that Clinton’s decision to seek the support of the super-rich involved consigning much of the working class to Trump. This decision might seem absurd in electoral terms, since there are far more lower-income voters than wealthy voters, but it was essential to the kind of administration Clinton intended to establish.

Similarly, in 2018, the congressional Democratic leadership has made a strategic decision to focus its campaign on wealthier suburban districts with Republican incumbents, seeking to appeal to voters offended by Trump’s crude and erratic behavior rather than appeal to broader layers of working people.

As part of this strategy, the Democratic leadership has promoted a layer of candidates with military, intelligence or other national-security backgrounds, as well as self-funding businessmen and other millionaires, who comprise the vast majority of Democratic candidates in the marginal congressional seats which the Democratic leadership aims to take from the Republicans.

The Democrats have adopted this right-wing course under conditions of deepening crisis for the Republican Party. The number of Republican seats where the incumbents have resigned or retired and left vacant, now at 42, is the largest for either capitalist party since 1930.

In 37 Republican-held seats, the Democratic challengers have more cash in hand, according to reports filed with the FEC by June 30. In key Midwest states that Trump won from the Democrats in 2016, Republican gubernatorial candidates are trailing in the polls. An NBC-Marist College poll found Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, who won elections in 2010 and 2014 and a recall election in 2012, trailing by 13 points. The likely Republican nominees were also trailing in the polls in Michigan and Minnesota.