



Politicians walk where money talks

By PAUL HEISE

The primary we are finishing up showed an electoral system gone wrong. The wrong people debated the wrong issues, and all we really learned was that money matters.

Money determined the people who would compete and the people who would win. Money also determined the issues that would be debated and which side would win.

Our electoral process has come to the point George Orwell once spoke of: Though you speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not money, you are become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

No one has accused Mitt Romney of speaking with the tongues of angels. He won because he had and was willing to spend the most money. Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich were able to hang on as long as they did only because each had a personal billionaire funding their super PAC.

As to the issues, just follow the money. If a commonsense solution would threaten profits, that solution will not be part of the campaign. This is plain to see with issues such as our criminal financial sector, the truly frightening situation at Fukushima, global climate change and fracking. They were excluded despite the fact some of them threaten our very existence.

A second set of important issues were not touched because not enough money is involved. These include constitutional infringements like body searches for traffic violations, indefinite detention without trial and the National Security Agency spying on everybody all the time. It doesn't matter that these issues are changing our fundamental civil rights.

Some social and political issues were predetermined to be treated solely as sounding brass: abortion, contraception and Sharia law.

Contraception? Who cares when there's no money involved?

The same pattern exists across the social agenda.

These limits on our political choices did not happen by accident. The shift of public support to issues that reward certain American industries and favor the wealthy is part of an explicit plan. It began in the 1970s when corporations and wealthy individuals began

to harness PR to politics and public opinion. The corporations and the very wealthy began their program by financing a new breed of opinion makers - agenda-oriented think tanks.

Until that time, think tanks, research groups and academic departments were independent and self- or government financed. Professors, for instance, did not patent or copyright their findings. Their agenda, if they had one, was discovering and publishing something that was new and interesting. All that has changed.

Now, if a think tank like the Brookings Institution doesn't have an agenda, it is accused of being "left-leaning." I rather like the idea that independence and objectivity are associated with "left-leaning."

By the mid-'80s and since then, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute were the highly esteemed flagships for this corporate agenda. Huge endowments funded the purchase of support for the efficiency of markets, the deregulation of government and tax cuts for the wealthy.

These groups are assuming and advocating what they should be questioning and testing. Independence and objectivity in research are no longer valued: Truth might set some people free.

This public-relations program was aimed at and succeeded in capturing the soul of the Republican Party. As a result, Republicans have borne the brunt of this attack on independence, transparency and objectivity. Not all Republicans bowed down before money. The Tea Party, Ron Paul and even the Cato Institute showed some spunk, but they did not have the resources to sustain the defense.

Probably no one has suffered more than Romney. As governor of Massachusetts, he worked for effective solutions. But then he ran for president and discovered that he faced money that dwarfed his measly \$200 million.

He was forced to follow the money because it had bought the base. As money discovered its power, it sold the conservatives a new bill of goods.

The medical, pharmaceutical and hospital industries saw that Romneycare was working in Massachusetts and that parts of Obamacare were really popular. That was a threat to profits, and the corporate position shifted. In the same way, the energy industry turned against cap-and-trade and in favor of a carbon tax. They knew any tax was a nonstarter when half of the politicians had signed Grover Norquist's anti-tax pledge.

In case after case, money became aware of its power and abused the Republican Party. Romney is just a symbol of what money can do, even to the super rich. The Democrats will feel the same onslaught very shortly.

Politics is one thing; criminality is another. No one seems willing to prosecute the blatant criminality of the financial sector. Do they have that much money?

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