

## Is Occupy Wall Street Succeeding in Changing the Terms of Debate?

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By Jim Geraghty

Patrick Hynes, a political strategist specializing in online communication formerly with the Tim Pawlenty presidential campaign, warns that while conservatives are laughing at the Occupy Wall Street protests occurring in Manhattan and elsewhere, they shouldn't completely dismiss them as a political player in 2012.

**NRO: You posit that the protests are changing the debate. How so?**

Hynes: "I was watching Megyn Kelly the other day. She had a conservative free-market type and a typical liberal debating about the scene in New York – the kind of rhetorical match-up in which the good guys almost always win on points. Instead the liberal woman delivered scripted message after scripted message about Wall Street greed bringing our country down against B-roll of protesters at least *claiming* to represent the majority of Americans. For the first time I thought: Wow, what they are trying to do is working.

I view the OWS thing as another effort to demonstrate manufactured outrage and direct it at (allegedly) conservative institutions, as opposed to liberal ones. The first iteration was the laughable "coffee party." The second was the even more laughable "No Labels." I'm not necessarily suggesting that these are the same people as the OWS crowd, but to me each reflects an obvious effort to repurpose long-standing liberal grievances. The one difference is that the OWS effort has been successful tactically in terms of creating meaningful images on television and the front pages of national newspapers and in forcing a debate on cable television and elsewhere on their terms. Such successes have a bandwagon effect that allows them to grow their numbers beyond the core agitators and, in some cases, trained political organizers.

In 2010, we had the people behind us and we could demonstrate it with thousands of YouTube videos of legitimately and justifiably angry tea [party activists](#) taking action against idiotic government policies. The Left is now, successfully in my opinion, creating a photo negative of those images that help Obama and liberals in Congress shift blame from their own failed policies to corporate greed on Wall Street."

**NRO: Does the lack of a coherent message or agenda hurt the Occupy Wall Street crowd, or does the nebulous, almost contradictory list of demands create an**

**environment where everyone, no matter what their gripe, feels welcome to join?**

“I believe it helps the OWS crowd. Boomlets like this one grow into something bigger when they speak to a general sentiment of frustration and anger and do little more than direct it at a common enemy. Once it becomes about something specific, or worse, comes under the command of someone specific, it loses steam or becomes a pet project. We saw this in 2008 and Barack Obama’s subsequent presidency. People rallied and voted for Obama for countless reasons: He opposed the war in Iraq, he was a popular and credible African American with a legitimate chance of winning, he made outlandish promises that, to them, seemed credible. They embraced a popular ideal of Obama and virtually carried him into the White House on their shoulders. But now that the Obama presidency is *about something* – the stimulus program, the health care law, etc. – there is less to cheer about, far less.”

**NRO: There’s no doubt that after three, perhaps four years of high unemployment and lousy economic conditions, Americans are angry. Is it really conceivable that their ire will be mostly focused at the private sector in 2012?**

“What’s the figure? Something like forty-seven percent of Americans pay no federal income taxes? A similar share actually receives a check from the government? Yes, it is conceivable, in my opinion, that these folks view the private sector as the main focus of their ire. We may be experiencing an entire generation of young people who have no real private sector experience and therefore don’t see it as worth defending.”

**NRO: A lot of big private-sector institutions try to avoid being too closely tied controversial political activity. With the free market being more explicitly denounced than ever before, and with Democrats being more explicit in their belief that they can demand more of the private sector— see Elizabeth Warren – will the story of the 2012 cycle be how America sees the private sector, and whether or not they are independent creators of wealth for their employees and shareholders or whether they are resources to be co-opted and directed by the government in the name of ‘The People’?**

“I think this is a debate that could happen in 2012. However, I have no idea who’s on our side in that debate. There is a good number of people on Wall Street who benefited handsomely from TARP, directly or indirectly. My guess is that the good people at, say, the Cato institute don’t view these folks as emblematic of the “private sector” but rather partners with the government in this very odd amalgam of government control of the allegedly free market.

I definitely think that the current administration believes “corporate responsibility” means enacting business models – even unsuccessful ones – that mirror the president’s worldview. And his worldview will be the subject of intense debate in 2012. Many corporations and CEOs may be forced to choose sides more publicly than they would normally like.”

Of course, Patrick later reminded me that he could be overestimating the impact of the OWS crowd, pointing to [this article](#): “Protesters said Park, of Stamford, Conn., had a hard time keeping his hands off the cheap booze and drugs and free food at the encampment — and also off the women.”