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The Root of All Evil?

Money won't turn political garbage into gold.

Terry Michael | October 29, 2010

My tart-tongued mother, of Scotch-Irish mixed-with-German descent, and with Southern Illinois wisdom to boot, would have had some good advice for President Barack Obama's political message consultants had she lived to see the craziness of 2010 politics: "You can't turn shit into Shinola." And not just this bizarre year but every year, her son tells his political journalism students, "Money follows message. Not the other way around."

To summarize: No amount of dirty Chamber of Commerce foreign money—conjured up by the White House a few weeks ago in a vain attempt to fire up left-liberals—could create the crappy set of electorally damaging facts that Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi, and Harry Reid visited on both the Democratic base and the relatively apolitical center of American politics over the past 22 months.

In other words, "It's the policies, stupid!" that have created the forthcoming November disaster for Democrats, not some failure to communicate.

In "White House Goes Into Bunker Mode," written October 25 from his new position as Washington bureau chief for *The Daily Beast*, former *Washington Post* media critic Howard Kurtz quotes White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer: "There's an alternative story here that we're trying to tell. But there's an element of spitting in the ocean."

In his piece, Kurtz raises the question of whether, in our data-wired world, a U.S. president is just another guy salivating in the political meme stream or whether Obama's best and the brightest are only making excuses for their poor messaging.

The answer is neither.

Former George W. Bush press secretary Dana Perino gets it pretty much right, also quoted by Kurtz: "I remember being in a meeting where someone said, 'We have a communications problem with Iraq.' I said, 'No, 89 soldiers were killed this month in Iraq. That's your problem.'"

The Democratic Party's problem is that the leader it elected to end a war is keeping 50,000 "non-combatant" troops in the country George W. Bush elected to attack, sacrificing the lives of over 4,000 Americans and 100,000 Iraqis. Obama also decided to wage his own elective war in Afghanistan, complete with a George W. Bush-style speech at West Point last December, further demoralizing his liberal

base.

After dissing his most reliable supporters, Obama added insult to the Great Recession injury with a big government health care takeover. Pelosi and Reid joined him in a politically tone-deaf assault on centrist voters, many of whom helped elect congressional Democrats in 2006 and Obama in 2008. Already furious with Bush's bailing out of bankers, and scared to death about losing home equity and retirement fund value, the center reacted with Tea Party vengeance to ObamaCare's corporate welfare for Big Pharma, Big Insurance, and Big Hospital.

In denial, the K Street wing of the Democratic Party now pats itself on the back for Great Legislative Achievements, and claims that secret Karl Rove/Chamber of Commerce money is keeping their story from being told to those stupid, gullible voters—conveniently forgetting their own big bucks patron saint of a few years ago, George Soros. Not at all stupid, Soros refused to throw his good money after the Democrats' bad policy message, proclaiming a few weeks ago, "I can't stop a Republican avalanche."

There's also the inconvenient truth about which party has actually spent the big money in 2010. As *Politico's* Jeanne Cummings reported on October 27, "The money race totals come to \$856 million for the Democratic committees and their aligned outside groups, compared to \$677 for their Republican adversaries, based on figures compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics."

It remains to be seen whether Obama stays in the bunker after November 2nd. Will he receive the message that Democrats and a majority of independents are tired of the liberty-infringing, permanent state of warfare that one of the party's co-founders, James Madison, warned against two hundred years ago? Will he follow Bill Clinton, himself brought back to earth from a failed healthcare "reform" in 1994, and re-proclaim that the era of big government is over?

As a libertarian Democrat, I'm going to hope—perhaps against hope—that Obama will. It's time to pull Democrats kicking and screaming into the 21st century by returning to the classical liberal philosophy of the party's founders, Jefferson and Madison.

Transported across time, those Virginia gentlemen might offer this advice to their wounded Democratic Party leaders: "Assure liberty by keeping government as far away as possible from the balance books, the bedrooms, and the bodies of those you represent. Nurture pluralistic democracy and free markets on this earth by example, understanding that neither can be planted by armed force on political ground lacking indigenous human cultivators for growth. Affirm the moral authority of the inalienable rights we are guaranteed by fashioning public policy for individuals, not tribal identity groups."

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