

2018 Election - A Potential Political Opportunity for the Democrats Will They Blow IT??

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Money in Politics – The Key Issue

In the upcoming 2018 federal elections, the Democrats may well gain control of one or both of the houses of the U.S. Congress. If the Democrats continue to engage in the political process as usual, they will blow any opportunity they have to lead the American populous out of the current view of Congress as an ineffective institution in a perpetual state of conflict, inefficiency and malaise. Post 2018, whatever laudable progress Democrats may make in implementing their progressive social, economic, judicial and environmental programs, they will have failed at the fundamental level of what is really needed to address the key underlying infestation that has taken hold in the American polity: the horrendously negative impact of money in politics.

Virtually every problem/challenge that the United States faces at both the federal and state levels is either directly caused by or very significantly influenced by the negative effect of money in politics. Put simply, America succeeds and flourishes internally and leads internationally to the extent it balances appropriately the influence of its competitive, capitalist economy and its cooperative, egalitarian polity. When one or the other of these institutions comes to dominate the other, the fabric and influence of the United States deteriorates – whether the programs that are being promoted by the party in power are liberal or conservative in nature.

Presently, the major forces of the economy – corporations and the financial industry – have gained excessive influence within and over the nation's political institution – super PACs, billionaires, lobbyists, etc. And support for this condition of imbalance comes from both of the major parties: Republicans and Democrats. Clearly, this situation favoring an economic perspective makes more sense for the conservative Republicans than for the more liberal Democrats. But Democrats, who often complain secondarily about this money problem, remain fully complicit, excusing their behavior as a matter of necessity if they are to be competitive politically. Just look at the very active fund raising by Democrats from any and all sources at every political level. An examination of Democratic surveys, which are mostly just fund raising tools, rarely even identify money in politics as a significant issue for supporters to consider or rate.

Anyone who wants the detailed information on the negative effect of money in American politics can get current assessments in the book length works of both an expert academic researcher and a highly respected investigative journalist:

Timothy K. Kuhner, Capitalism V. Democracy: Money in Politics and the Free Market Constitution, Stanford, CA. [Stanford Univ. Press] 2014.

Jane Mayer, Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right, New York, 2016.

Two conditions favor a focused Democratic response in 2018 to the money in politics challenge. First, the truth-impaired, billionaire Republican Donald Trump is President, and he currently faces the likelihood of impeachment as well as criminal indictments for corporate and personal financial malfeasance. Second, the Republican dominated Congress has shown its colors 1) in its passage of comprehensive tax legislation to benefit corporations and the wealthy and 2) in its deregulation of many environmental and economic restraints on corporations. Given this overall money “laundered” and squandered context, Democrats may finally have a real opportunity to address the money in politics problem – and root out this cancer on the American polity. And while campaign finance reform must certainly be a major component of any real effort to address money in politics, the issue runs much deeper – to the aggressive political activity of corporations, PACs and lobbyists; the length of the campaign “season;” and the abusive employment of misinformation in political campaigns at all media levels.

If it takes a constitutional amendment to correct the country's money in politics problem, then after the 2018 election will be the best opportunity in years for the Democrats to focus on this need and begin the process. Democrats can sell this goal as the solution to both the anti-government sentiment in the populace and the condition of Congressional ineffectiveness. Most importantly, once the money matter is attended to, the country's downhill slide in the direction of economic inequality/oligarchy can be reversed and the real needs of the people and the country can begin to be addressed. At this point, the time will have arrived to initiate meaningful progressive programs. But if Democrats ignore the money challenge after 2018 and just promote a raft of progressive programs, 1) the underlying cancer in the American polity will continue to metastasize, 2) the Republicans will continue to get away with spinning the frustrated middle class, and 3) the country will most likely continue to bounce between dueling liberal and conservative populist agendas. And all the while, money will continue 1) to buy its way deeper into both political process and policy, 2) to erode the restraint on this eventuality in the judicial branch of government, and 3) to further alienate the disillusioned, frustrated, non-voting populace.

Post 2018 Election Democratic Win - What to Do About Trump?

In the event of a post 2018 election Democratic sweep of both houses of Congress, the Democrats may have an especially unusual opportunity to achieve many of their goals, including addressing the money in politics problem. If the Mueller Report decisively brings Trump into impeachment territory, then Democrats may be able to parlay Trump's vulnerability into a political flip on his part in a deal that would allow Trump to avoid impeachment if he agrees to 1) limit his presidency to a single term, 2) support all laws passed by a Democratic Congress, 3) select nominees and appointments to lead all executive agencies and organizations – including all federal courts - acceptable to the Democrats, 4) select White House advisers and staff acceptable to the Democrats, 5) develop and implement administrative rulings acceptable to Democrats. This is a “deal” that could be acceptable to Trump because he has no real political ideology, just the narcissistic need to constantly be accepted and applauded, and he has been a Democrat when that party affiliation met his interests. So, he is potentially flippable, and, very importantly, such a flip would avoid a Pence presidency which would greatly impede implementation of a progressive agenda. So, depending on how comprehensive the win is for the Democrats in 2018, they need to very carefully consider the full range of their options in dealing with Trump before they jump on the impeachment bandwagon.

The Kavanaugh Fiasco

In a post 2018 election win by the Democrats of at least majority control in the House of Representatives, they must insist on a full FBI investigation of Brett Kavanaugh, focusing on both the accusations against him of sexual assault and what seem to be his lies under oath to the Senate Judiciary Committee in both his former nomination to the Appellate Court and his nomination to the Supreme Court. If the Democrats are smart they will leave the fact gathering to the FBI and not get embroiled in divisive hearings. If the FBI report clears Kavanaugh, all must accept that. If this report identifies serious disqualifying evidence in Kavanaugh's testimony and behavior, then the Democrats can offer Kavanaugh the option of resigning from the Supreme Court and of accepting being barred from serving on any federal court, or face impeachment. The goal of Democrats must be to as quietly as possible insist on a real and full FBI investigation of Kavanaugh, and if justified get him removed from the federal courts. In the process, the point will be made – without fanfare – that the Republicans have acted very badly in the Kavanaugh nomination process. Democrats should not make this Kavanaugh review process a media “show.” Just get the full picture supported by the comprehensive facts and proceed where the facts lead. Put the post election emphasis elsewhere – as on the money in politics issue!

Democratic Congressional Leadership

A new Democratic Party focus on a progressive agenda led by addressing money in politics needs to be matched by a new face for the Democratic leadership in both the House and Senate. The same old, same old leadership carries all the baggage that is tied to the old Democratic orientation and the old Democratic way of doing business: continuous major money raising efforts linked to wealthy contributors, large corporations, financial institutions, and lobbyists to finance political campaigns to elect candidates to office to support progressive legislative programs. If this situation is ongoing, it will accommodate all the corrosive, special interest influence peddling that comes with it. A government that has allowed itself to be “bought” by the few will not embody or reflect the democratic values, ideals and principles of the many, whether the many support a conservative or progressive perspective. The negative effects of the money cloud that envelops Congress is a major underlying cause for both the extreme behavior across the aisles of Congress and the intense dissatisfaction with government that exists in the American citizenry. Democrats can lead the way out of this mess, but it will take a new leadership face to have a better chance to be successful.

Thank you Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer [recent inheritor from Harry Reid] for your past efforts. Now, please have the dignity and strategic courage to step aside and allow an unfettered new leadership regime to offer a new direction and to motivate the public to get behind it!

Final Statement

As a research social scientist, I want to see the Democratic Party become truly instrumental in bringing America into a state where it is socially, environmentally, economically and politically responsible and sustainable – to become the party guided by reason, critical thinking, and real facts and evidence. Adequately addressing the money in politics problem is the key to Democrats being able to make their way to this eventuality. If the Democratic Party wins substantially in the 2018 elections and does not make very real moves in the direction identified above, I will support a third party that will. At this point, I am tired and disgusted with both of our major political parties. I am just presently less disgusted with the Democrats. But the Democratic Party will lose me if it continues along the path it has taken in recent years – promoting progressive programs while all but ignoring the money cancer that taints the path to achieving legitimate such programs, that underpins Congressional gridlock, and that leaves the public rightly suspicious of the integrity and efficiency of government in general.