

Big money influences political outcomes

Kansas voters have been bombarded by commercials for candidates for various political offices, but nothing like the surrounding states as spending on politics has reached a record level especially by outside groups spending millions to influence the outcomes.

A report by the Center for Responsive Politics on Friday showed independent ideological groups for both parties, business associations (Chamber of Commerce) and unions have set a record by spending more than \$167 million on the election process including advertising, setting up systems to poll and influence voters and to get out the vote on election day.

The total is up 367 percent from the \$35.7 million spent during the 2006 midterm elections – the previous record. The spending level does not match the total of \$220.4 million spent during the presidential election cycle two years ago.

The money is coming in at a rapid rate as the Center for Responsive Politics reported the outside groups spending jumped \$13.6 million in about 24 hours from Thursday to Friday before the latest report was released.

The report said the \$167 million figure does not account for spending by party committees. When added together, combined outside spending by independent groups and party committees reached \$247.6 million, again a record-setting pace for this point in a midterm election cycle.

The leading groups spending on campaigns include: National Republican Congressional Committee, \$34.3m; Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, \$26.2m; US Chamber of Commerce, \$22.8m; Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, \$22m; American Crossroads, \$12.8m; Service Employees International Union, 10.5m; American Future Fund, \$8.5m; American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, \$8.1m; Americans for Job Security, \$8m; and Crossroads Grassroots Policy Strategies, \$7.9m.

The top races money is being spent on include the Colorado Senate race where the total being spent by outside groups is more than \$22.3 million. The Missouri Senate race has attracted more than \$10.7 million. The Nevada Senate race has attracted more than \$9 million.

With election day two weeks away, the Democrats have 40 Senate seats for sure and 6 considered solid giving the Democrats 46 seats and needing five to stay in control. Republicans have 23 seats and 12 considered solid to give them 35 seats, but need 16 to take control. Of the remaining 19 seats Republicans have 8 leaning their way to get to 43 and the Democrats have 3 leaning their way to get to 49. In the mix are 8 seats considered toss ups including Colorado, Missouri and Nevada.

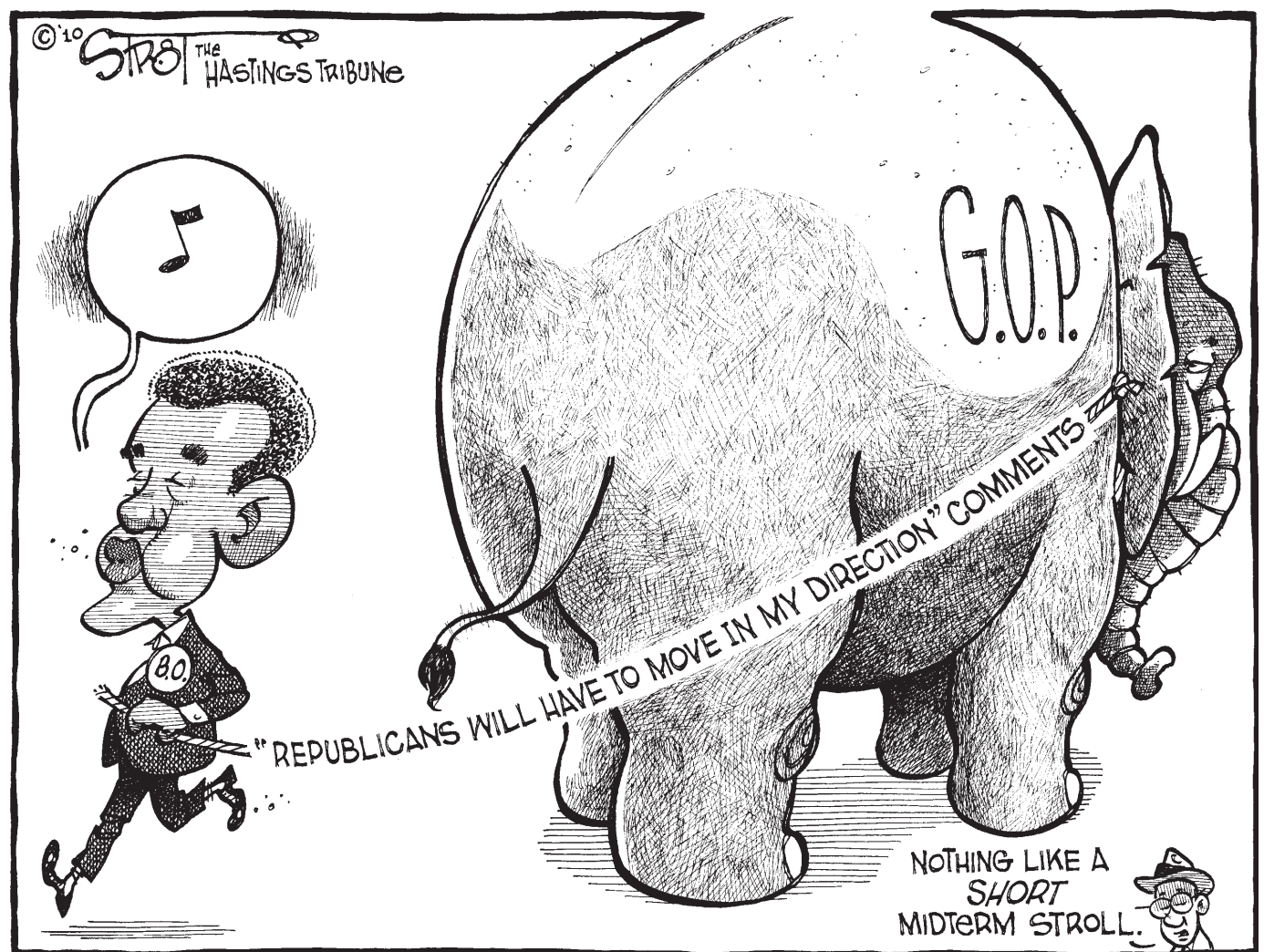
The toss up races are attracting the big money with control of the Senate the goal.

In the rush for control the truth is getting trampled – especially by the outside money groups – and adding more voter dissatisfaction with the political process. When the clouds clear after the Nov. 2 election, it will be interesting to see what influence the big money had in determining who is in control in Washington.

The bet is the Democrats will barely hang on to the Senate and the House may narrowly move to the Republicans.

No matter the outcome people can be sure the big money groups will be in control on both sides of the high stakes game.

– Tom Betz



Many memories over the many miles

We've put many miles under the tires of our little red van in the last 12 days. From Kansas to Mexico to Louisiana to Texas and in a few days, God willing, we'll be back in our own Kansas bed.

Mexico was great. We built a special little house for Erica, a single mom, and her two little girls, Abril (April), 4, and Emily, 18 months. All the houses we build are special but we learned some new technique on this one. A team member owned one of the largest cement companies in Amarillo, Texas, so he was the concrete man. Not only did he give us the best finish on a floor we've ever had, but he also provided a tint for the stucco and it turned out to be the most beautiful Terra cotta color.

The Casas por Cristo staff also introduced a couple of new building techniques that we liked. So "old dogs" really can learn new tricks. We never saw any violence and felt perfectly safe the entire time we were in Juarez. In fact, we took off by ourselves and drove to the homes of families we built for in the past. What a joy to see how a simple, little house could improve their lives so much. In the end, that's what it's all about.

A few days later and we were back in civilization (hot showers and flushing toilet paper) at the home of one of our San Antonio daughters. It was a whirlwind of grandkids, shopping (a great Goodwill Store), and talking. Jim was able to fix an office chair for Jennifer and all the kids got a jar of my homemade peach or plum jam. The great-grandson, Kaden, is even cuter than we expected him to be and little Ani, 4, was a pure delight. If something

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



she ate was good, it was "be-licious". I hated to leave. Jennifer took such good care of us. We slept late our first morning at her house and when we woke up, our laundry from Mexico was done. Who knows, maybe it walked into the laundry room by itself. It certainly could have.

The next leg of our trip was to Houma, La., a sprawling city southwest of New Orleans in bayou country, to visit my old high school friend, Galene (Metz) Griffith. This is where she would like me to mention that she is single and willing to travel. We have had a ball. When you reconnect with someone who shares some of your history it's easy to pick up right where you left off. It's been non-stop eating, laughing and talking for two days. She was a great tour guide and we saw most of downtown New Orleans (New Ah-lens) from a trolley car. Sunday afternoon, we drove to Grand Isle on the very tip of Louisiana where we dipped our toes in the Gulf of Mexico. We could see, what looked to us, like oil on the marshland grasses and the beach sand, closest to the water, looked darker than the sand farther inland. Galene pointed out "camps" which were houses built on stilts, where hundreds (maybe thousands) of workers lived who were hired to help

with the oil spill clean-up. We, of course, don't know what it was like before but, it all looked pretty good. We saw people fishing, kids playing and birds flying. It looked pretty normal.

Downtown New Orleans is beautiful. We walked down Bourbon Street, just to say we had. And, of course, met interesting people everywhere we went. We talked with a beautiful black family from Connecticut who were in the city for a nephew's wedding and lots of other tourists like us. Jim's goal was to eat some real Cajun food and we had our chance. Not only is Galene a wonderful cook, but we sampled some good stuff at one of the local eateries. While here, we've eaten red beans and rice, shrimp gumbo, etouffe, seafood casserole with shrimp and crawfish, bread pudding, jambalaya, pecan pralines and fried catfish.

Between all the Mexican and Cajun food I've eaten these last two weeks, I've about tripled my antacid consumption. Heartburn has been my constant companion.

Gay and I are parting with promises to get together more often. She is even committing to visiting Kansas. Just not in the winter.

We will be in Dallas with Halley, Kara and Adam and Taylor for a few days before pushing on home. This trip marks the longest we've ever been gone and it's been a test of our endurance. Perhaps we try to pack too much into our trip but, we never know if we'll have the chance to do it again. So, as they say in Louisiana, "Let the good times roll."

The times, they are a changing

Insight

John Schlageck

File this under the category of the lamest excuse to come along in my lifetime.

What I'm talking about are the recent attempt by some in the media and entertainment business to blame America's farm and ranch families for the growing epidemic of obesity. Seems they would like us to believe that farmers and ranchers are producing food that is too affordable and too available.

Stop right there. Many Americans can remember a time when their families or neighbors had trouble keeping food on the table. The concept of food that was too cheap was as foreign as paying nearly a buck and a half for a soda.

But the times they are a changing. Americans' incomes have increased, and farmers are producing food more efficiently than ever before. That means food costs take a smaller bite out of Americans' pocketbooks than ever.

Rather than thank farmers for producing abundant, affordable food so that most of us will never experience the pangs of hunger, making farmers the scapegoat for obesity appears to be a popular trend. Some also say federal programs that help stabilize the farm economy encourage farmers to overproduce. Blaming agriculture only diverts attention away from the factors that do contribute to obesity.

Some media types may think they are performing a public service, but singling out farmers is a serious disservice to one of our nation's most important industries.

It also is a slap in the face to the thousands of families that depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and to the millions of Americans whose high standards of living are built on our varied and efficient food and fiber system.

Without our nation's farmers and the federal programs that help them through economic and weather disasters, Americans might have to depend on other countries for food just like we already do for oil. That would be a kick in the backside not only to our food supply, but our national security as well.

Recent evidence of a global obesity trend indicates that the problem involves more than access to and an abundance of snack foods, desserts and soft drinks. People are reportedly getting heavier even in developing nations, where citizens do not have all of the foods and snacks found on our supermarket shelves. That tends to point toward rising incomes and less physical labor around the world as the cause, not just U.S. food industry practices.

Since when do farmers grow junk food?

When did farmers begin to force consumers to eat a specific diet, healthy or otherwise?

Farmers and ranchers are not responsible for the U.S. consumer's dietary and exercise habits. These are all individual choices and matters of personal responsibility.

We must also consider the constantly on-the-go lifestyles Americans now lead. This also helps the fast food and vending machine industries turn a profit. And what about our technology boom that encourages kids to sit in front of the television or play video games and working their jaws (snacking) instead of exercising outdoors?

Recent statistics show Americans spend an average of more than 1,700 hours a year in their car, at their computer or in front of their television screens.

Whatever happened to personal responsibility in this country? What about the amount of food we eat at each meal? How about the many times we eat between meals? How about the individual holding the knife, fork or spoon? Used to be a time, I can remember, when people didn't eat between meals, or is that a long and distant dream?

It is time we start looking for real solutions to fix America's growing weight problem, instead of blaming the very hands that nutritiously and safely feed America. It's important to note that while farmers produce a wide range of healthy food options, the ultimate consumer choices – moderation and exercise – are made far beyond the farm or ranch.

Dear Editor:

Thumbs up to the 4H members and their interesting and well written letters in the Oct 8 insert section of the Norton Telegram. In addition to their ag related talents, they are very good at letter writing, a trait not common in this day and age. The 4H clubs are obviously a very worthwhile organization for our youth and our community.

John Snyder, Norton



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