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2010 ELECTION WRAP UP WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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Introduction

This November's election dramatically illustrated the influence of big money on politics, both nationally and in California. This is an issue that our communities cannot afford to ignore.

Unleashed by the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision earlier this year, vast amounts of money from corporations and other interests poured into congressional races nationwide.

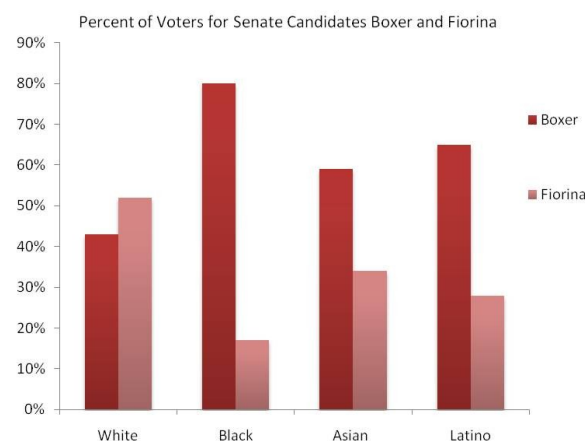
Conservative-leaning groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Karl Rove's American Crossroads are reported to have outspent their opponents by about 2-to-1.¹

In California, the initiative process was practically drowning in special-interest money – over \$200 million altogether this year.² What was supposed to be a form of “people’s democracy” has turned into something that the progressive reformers who created it would no longer recognize. Clearly, we have work to do.

Voters of Color Flexed Their Muscle

Exit polling results suggest that voters of color played a decisive role in many races. Latinos, for example, saved at least three U.S. Senate seats for the Democrats – in Nevada, Colorado and California.

In California, Sen. Barbara Boxer trailed Republican Carly Fiorina by nine percentage points among white voters, but more than made up for it with large margins among Latino, African American and Asian voters. And in Washington, where Democrat Patti Murray barely won reelection with a victory margin of only about 61,000 votes, that margin came entirely from voters of color. Exit polls showed Murray losing among white voters by two percentage points.^{3, 4}



In other words, people of color saved the Democratic majority in the Senate.

A similar pattern emerged in the California governor's race, with Brown trailing Whitman among white voters but winning handily among



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voters of color, who made up a record 38 percent of California's electorate.

Unfortunately, no exit polls have been released that show how Californians of color voted on most of the state propositions, but pre-election surveys showed strong movement toward a "no" vote on Prop. 23 among these voters in the last six weeks of the campaign.⁵

The National Picture

Republicans will now control the House of Representatives, while the Democrats will have a reduced majority in the Senate. Rep. John Boehner of Ohio is expected to become Speaker of the House.

Greenlining looks forward to working with Speaker Boehner on goals we all share, such as reducing the federal budget deficit and generating good jobs for the unemployed and underemployed. Our communities are suffering disproportionately from high unemployment and the ongoing foreclosure crisis, and we will all be better off with concrete action to solve these problems.

But repeal of health care reform or financial regulatory reform – both of which have been suggested by Republicans -- would be very harmful. We will work to see that these laws are successfully implemented and to ensure that the needs of communities of color and disadvantaged communities are protected -- and we will fight any efforts to undo these important reforms.

California

Money can buy a lot in politics, but Californians showed that it can't buy the governorship. Republican Meg Whitman spent some \$160 million, over \$140 million of it from her own wallet, but lost decisively to Democrat Jerry Brown, despite outspending him roughly 5-to-1.

We look forward to working with Gov. Brown next year on jobs, the economy, and a variety of other important issues, including implementation of both health care reform (much of which will happen at the state level), and A.B. 32, California's global warming/clean energy law.

Many of these efforts, however, will be made more complicated by the results of this fall's ballot measures.

Ballot Measures: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Happily, California voters decisively rejected Proposition 23, designed to block implementation of A.B. 32. Greenlining played a key role in Communities United Against the Dirty Energy Proposition, which mounted an aggressive campaign to educate voters of color about how this measure would have worsened pollution and strangled California's burgeoning clean energy economy. Because of this effort, Prop. 23 was defeated by the largest margin of any initiative on the ballot. The Communities United coalition gave us a taste of what our communities can do when we join together and work for a common purpose. Now it's time to take the energy and unity of purpose that clobbered Prop. 23 and put it to work on reforms that will make the electoral process fair to all Americans.

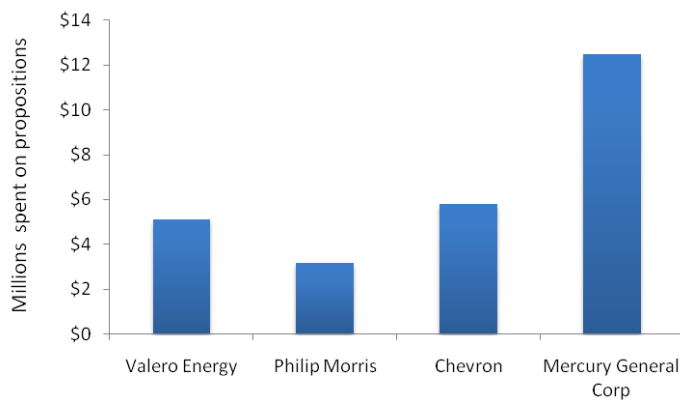
The bad news is that Prop. 26 passed, redefining regulatory fees – including fees charged to polluters – as taxes, thus requiring a two-thirds vote to enact them. This means another hit to already cash-strapped state and local treasuries while making it harder to raise revenue for critical state services.

If there was a connecting thread in the ballot measure votes, it was the continued distrust of politicians and dislike of taxes. Voters chose to take the job of drawing congressional districts away from the legislature and give it to the Citizens Redistricting Commission, the body currently being chosen that was already charged with drawing new state legislative districts. Fortunately, Greenlining has an effort in place to monitor the commission's work and assist our communities in advocating for fair and representative districts.

In addition to passing Prop. 26, Californians defeated other measures that would have raised revenue, including Props. 21 and 24. Californians may want government services, but apparently don't want to pay for them. Thanks to Prop. 25, it will be easier for the legislature to pass a budget, but not to raise the funds to save critical services. We will see the results

in more crowded classrooms, deteriorating or closed state parks, and erosion of programs that assist our most vulnerable citizens.

What's become clear is that California's initiative process is broken. What was supposed to be a tool for citizen democracy has become a means for corporations and other special interests to advance their own agendas. Many of this year's propositions were placed on the ballot by corporate interests seeking to boost their bottom line. And most of the over \$200 million spent on initiative campaigns came not from ordinary citizens, but from business groups and large companies such as tobacco giant Philip Morris, Mercury Insurance and oil companies like Chevron, Shell and Valero.²



Where Do We Go From Here? Ballot Initiative Reform on the Horizon

Communities of color have had plenty of unhappy history with the initiative process as well – dating back at least to 1964, when Californians voted by a two-to-one margin to *allow* housing discrimination based on race, sex and religion. Political factions regularly place measures on the ballot to stir up their base – often by targeting a minority group considered controversial or unpopular. In recent years, initiatives have targeted undocumented immigrants, same-sex couples and others.

The initiative process has become a club with which the powerful attack the less well-off and cripple the ability of government to protect our common interests. Greenlining is studying this issue and

actively looking at ways to advance common-sense reforms.

We are currently gathering ideas and encourage input from all interested parties.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE:

Communities United Against the Dirty Energy Proposition

<http://communitiesagainstop23.com/>

California Secretary of State (campaign finance)

<http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/Campaign/>

California Secretary of State (state election and voter information, including election results)

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/>

<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/main.results/>

(key national election results and exit polls)

<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/main.results/>

References

1. Center for Responsive Politics <http://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/index.php>
2. Figures are based on large donations to the campaigns in which the companies listed were most heavily involved, as reported on <http://cal-access.ss.ca.gov/Campaign/Measures/>, and if anything understate the total donated by these firms to initiative campaigns.
3. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/main.results/>
4. Also keep in mind that exit poll data may underestimate the Democratic share of the Latino vote: <http://latinodecisions.wordpress.com/2010/11/04/how-the-national-exit-poll-badly-missed-the-latino-vote-in-2010/>
5. See the following:
<http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=959>
<http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=960>
<http://field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RIs2356.pdf>
<http://field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RIs2365.pdf>



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The Greenlining Institute is a national policy, organizing, and leadership institute working for racial and economic justice. We ensure that grassroots leaders are participating in major policy debates by building diverse coalitions of grassroots leaders that work together to advance solutions to our nation's most pressing problems.

Our mission is to empower communities of color and other disadvantaged groups through multi-ethnic economic and leadership development, civil rights and anti-redlining activities.

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