

# ROLL CALL



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## GUEST OBSERVER

By Doug Jaraczewski

### Donors Need the Personal Touch From Democrats

Winston Churchill said in "The Gathering Storm" that "One thing is absolutely certain, namely, that victory will never be found by taking the line of least resistance."

Approaching a tough election, Democratic donors are observing that for the past year many Democratic Members of Congress have taken the line of least resistance in campaign fundraising by not aggressively communicating with them through phone calls and personal meetings. Instead they are reaching out to donors only through e-mails and electronic invitations. This is alienating donors and contributing to the feeding frenzy that Democrats can lose control of the House. It's not too late, however, for Democrats to find redemption this Lenten season by getting back to more traditional, effective and less offensive means of fundraising.

Recently I was consulting a challenger running for Congress in Virginia. We were working on "call time" — the primary, time-tested means of raising campaign funds. Several prospective donors were stunned that a challenger was calling soliciting a donation, because they hadn't yet heard from the incumbent Democratic Member they had contributed to in 2008. These individuals had extensive donation histories and were \$500 to "double max out" (\$4,600) givers.

Several of these donors expressed concern that the Democrats may lose the House, and it was fueled by the fact that they had not received any communication or reassurance from their Member about the race. Further, the conversations revealed an undertone of dissatisfaction. Donors want to hear directly from their Member of Congress, in addition to the Members' fundraisers, so they can share their opinions. Speaking to individual donors is also a way for Members to stay in touch with their progressive base.

Donors are offended when Members fail to call them. If you start a business, your investors certainly insist on hearing from you on your progress.

Members constantly preach to open-seat and challenger candidates that they have to make fundraising calls in order to raise the money it takes to win. When he was Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman, the late Rep. Bob Matsui (Calif.) told one of my challenger candidates that he needed to dedicate 42 hours a week to fundraising call time, affirming what I had already recommended.

But if Members themselves do not call donors, it sets a bad example for candidates. It is like the father who tells his son, "Don't do as I do, do as I say."

Donors find e-mail updates from Members informative. E-mail updates have become a part of donor maintenance. Further, e-mail solicitations are an effective way to reach out to small-dollar donors and to cultivate new givers. However, many donors are communicating that they are not receiving the personal call, meeting or attention anymore. They are receiving e-mails from the Member's political action committee fundraising firms without even a call from the firm, let alone the Member. Not personally reaching out to donors is a true disservice to these firm's clients and the Democratic Party because it offends the donor.

E-mails from a Member's fundraising consultant asking a large donor to contribute cannot replace the personal touch from a Member. In fact, some donors believe it suggests a sense of entitlement on the part of the Member, especially since the Democrats control Congress. Large donors want to hear from the Member directly, and it is insulting to receive an e-mail asking for a large donation without that call. Wouldn't you, reader, be insulted if your brother e-mailed you wanting \$2,300 or \$4,600 as opposed to calling you and talking to you personally? A donor gets that same feeling.

It's not all the PAC fundraiser's fault. Members need to take more



responsibility for their fundraising, as they have in the past. I managed a DCCC targeted campaign in 2002 and I remember when then-Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) called my candidate on his cell phone to ask if he had received a contribution from a major union. After he responded that he received \$2,500, Pelosi called back five minutes later and told him she had just called the union's officials and that they would send an additional \$2,500. This is the kind of fundraising determination every Democratic candidate, including Members, needs to exhibit this year if the Democrats are to maintain control of the House.

Democrats' control of Congress should not give them a sense of

entitlement. They cannot expect a contribution or expect a donor to show up at an event just because they've sent them an e-mail. It takes a more personal touch to receive a big donation.

Many Democratic donors believe that Members of Congress may not represent their progressive views, and the fight over health care reform has left progressive donors exasperated. Whether this will still be the case remains to be seen now that the House has passed the health care bill. More and more often donors are turning to progressive organizations to represent their views and are sending their money in that direction instead of to a Member's campaign. The result is that

Members are becoming estranged from the progressive base of the party — the exact people they need to show up on Election Day if Democratic control of Congress is to survive.

Now that health care insurance reform has passed the House, it is an opportune time for Democratic Members to reach out to their base financial supporters personally. There may be a storm gathering, but it is not too late for Democrats in Congress to take steps to avert it if they begin communicating more effectively with their donor base.

Doug Jaraczewski is president of the Campaign Finance Group, a Democratic fundraising firm based in Washington, D.C.

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