

## ***HOW TO BEAT BUSH***

**By Michael Ventura**

**April 2, 2004**

1) MONEY – A crucial fact of this presidential election received little attention when reported by the Associated Press on March 18: As of March 1, the Kerry campaign had \$2.4 million in the bank, against \$7.7 million in campaign debts. That's a shortfall of \$5.3 million. Contrast the Bush campaign's bank account on March 1: \$110 million. A 115-to-nothing advantage. *The New York Times* reports that "so far, Mr. Bush's campaign has spent nearly \$20 million in advertisements while Mr. Kerry has spent nearly \$2 million." A 10-to-1 disparity. Kerry can't win that way. Everyone who feels that the re-election of George W. Bush would be catastrophic to the economy, the Bill of Rights, and the safety of the world had better get serious and put their money on the table. The Kerry campaign and advocacy groups such as MoveOn need all the money we can spare from now through the fall, when federal financing kicks in. As Howard Dean's campaign proved, small contributions are important. Anyone who can afford 5 or 10 dollars must contribute 5 or 10 dollars. Anyone who can afford more must contribute more. And continue contributing as often as possible. There's more to elections than voting. Especially this time. We can complain all we want about fat cats and corporate contributors, but unless we *act*, it's *their* election.

2) ADVERTISING ON THE CHEAP – As Thomas Pynchon wrote, "If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers." The Bush crowd excels at getting folks to ask the wrong questions. How can a financially outnumbered Kerry campaign keep the real questions in focus?

Television is the most but not the only powerful medium. Cheaper venues, used cleverly, can effectively keep key issues in the foreground of the national debate. This could prove crucial in an election that may be split literally down the middle. *Anything that can influence even a few people might decide the outcome.* For example:

In the election of 2000, three states were decided by less than 1% of the vote: Florida for Bush, Iowa and New Mexico for Gore. Three were decided by 1%: New Hampshire for Bush, Wisconsin and Oregon for Gore. Minnesota went to Gore by 2%, Missouri to Bush by 3%, Nevada and Ohio to Bush by 4%, and Pennsylvania to Gore by 4%. Eight of these states have lost jobs under Bush, and the biggest losers – Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Missouri – total 52 electoral votes. Bush is more than vulnerable, he's beatable. But Kerry and the advocacy groups will not be able to match Bush's television onslaught ad for ad. And Bush owns right-wing radio.

Obviously, there must be as many pro-Kerry and anti-Bush television spots as possible, but other venues are necessary. For instance: Every day, urban and suburban Americans drive slowly through rush-hour traffic jams to and from work. Those routes could be plastered with billboards (the cheapest form of public advertising). Keep the billboards simple: on a black background, white letters that read (one sentence per billboard), HEY,

BUSH – WHAT ABOUT OUR JOBS?; HEY, BUSH – WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY?; HEY, BUSH – WHAT ABOUT MEDICARE?; HEY, BUSH – WHERE ARE THE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION?; HEY, BUSH – WHAT ABOUT HOMELAND SECURITY?; HEY, BUSH – WHAT ABOUT THESE GAS PRICES? At the same time, in the rush-hour time slots, run 10- to 30-second radio spots with "just folks" voices giving clear succinct facts that address the questions drivers are seeing on the billboards. Such as: "Ohio has lost 225,700 jobs under President Bush, and he has yet to tell us anything specific about what he intends to do about it." "President Bush, your budget director said outsourcing is a good idea – for whom? China? How is it good for us?" "President Bush, a bipartisan delegation of Republicans and Democrats urged you to spend \$10 billion to protect our ports and nuclear sites. You refused. But you're spending *lots* more money than that rebuilding Iraq. What's going on?" "The Bush administration ordered Medicare officials not to tell Congress the real cost of its Medicare proposals. Now we're told Medicare will go broke in 2019, just when a lot of us are really going to need it. What's going on?" Catchy refrains like "Hey, Bush" and "What's going on?" can do real damage. Radio spots are cheap to produce and broadcast. Radio repetition, reinforced by billboard ads, could keep essential questions in the voters' consciousness and force the administration to deal with its record.

Radio spots could also emphasize turnout. A Minneapolis suburbanite on the way to work should hear, over and over: "In the presidential election of 2000, Minnesota was decided by just 2 percent of the vote. This year it might be even closer. In elections like this, every vote matters – especially yours."

3) TARGETING AND REGISTERING PRO-KERRY OR ANTI-BUSH VOTERS – As Lakshmi Chaudhry reported in *AlterNet* (reprinted in the March-April *Utne*), "[N]ever-married, divorced, and widowed women constitute a whopping 20% of the electorate and 42% of all registered women voters. ... [In 2000] George W. Bush led by 1 point among married women, while unmarried women preferred Al Gore by 31 points." These women, Chaudhry notes, constitute 46% of all eligible voters, but only 42% of them are registered and only half of those voted in 2000. Given the pressing economic situation of the majority of these women, the election is Kerry's if they vote. But they need help. They need to be reached, registered, and, most of all, on Election Day the single mothers need babysitters or pooled child care. That takes grassroots organizing by the Democrats, the unions, and anyone interested. In states where 1-3% could decide the outcome, these women are crucial.

Writes Eliseo Medina in *Democratic Left* (also reprinted in *Utne*), "Only 25% of Asians and Pacific Islanders and 27% of Latinos – the two fastest growing ethnic groups – have participated in the political process." If a fraction of these are enlisted, it could decide the election.

Nor should rural citizens be neglected. John Nichols wrote in *The Nation* (again reprinted in *Utne*), "Poverty rates are now higher in vast stretches of the Great Plains than in America's big cities, and 27% of rural workers earn a wage that can't lift a family of four out of poverty. ... In 2000, Bush won 59% of the rural vote." Yet his policies are killing them. Radio is really cheap in these parts. Radio should be used to inform these citizens

about the economic realities of Bush's policies and of Kerry's. Progressive causes have failed because we talk down to such people. Franklin Roosevelt didn't. He got on the radio and talked straight to them.

4) TALK – No communication medium is more powerful in its direct effect than personal conversation. Responsible people need to learn the facts and talk about them. Even that could make a real difference in states decided by 1% or less of the vote.

Bush was having fun for two weeks redefining John Kerry, and it was starting to work. Then, on March 21's *60 Minutes* and the 9/11 hearings that followed, former national security anti-terrorism official Richard Clarke redefined Bush. The ferocity of the personal attacks against Clarke measure how vulnerable this president feels and is. Economically, Bush can't run on his record. If the facts become widely known about how vulnerable the United States remains, and the many, many ways this administration has left essential weak points (ports, nukes) unattended, he can't run on homeland security. All he has left, then, is 9/11 and Iraq, and his record is open to question on both. He must be made to run on his record.

In the March 18 *Los Angeles Times*, Frank Newport, editor-in-chief of the Gallup Poll, discussed some interesting stats. Bush's approval rating is 50%. (This is before the Clarke flare-up; as I write, no post-Clarke polls are available.) No incumbent with a 50%-or-less approval rating has won the presidency since modern polling techniques began in 1952. But no incumbent has had Bush's enormous financial advantage.

People who sit on their hands (and their money) for the next eight months; people who keep their mouths shut; people who fail to vote; and people who righteously throw away their vote on a more-righteous-than-thou candidate – they will bear responsibility for the history of the next four years if Bush wins.

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