

*Straight Talk on Campaign Finance:
Separating Fact from Fiction*

Paper No. 4



VOTER MOBILIZATION

Only 8.3% Of Party Soft Money Spent On Party Building, GOTV, and Voter Education;
38% Goes To Sham Issue Ads

- **In a campaign finance debate filled with red herrings, the biggest fiction yet is that a soft money ban will kill party building activities.**
- *Eight cents on the dollar.* Based on FEC data, in the 2000 campaign just 8.3% of soft money spent by the Republican and Democratic parties went to voter education, phone banks, voter registration, get-out-the-vote drives (“GOTV”) and other party-building activities.
- The parties spent 38% of their soft money – far and away the largest expenditure – on issue advocacy (television, radio, and direct mail).
- These soft money television ads virtually always mentioned candidates (99.8% of ads) and rarely mentioned the party (8% of ads). All of these party-sponsored “issue ads” were, in fact, aimed at electing or defeating candidates. And in the last two months of election season, a majority of ads (54%) purchased with party soft money attacked an opposing candidate.
- The parties spent almost five times as much soft money on sham issue ads in 2000 as they did on GOTV and other party building activities.
- Party soft money spending on salaries (14.3%) and administration (18.1%) together equaled four times the amount of soft money spent in 2000 on party building.
- Party soft money spending on fundraising (15.4%) also swamped the party resources devoted to party building.
- Party building activities ranked fifth in party soft money spending in 2000:
 - 38.0% Issue advocacy
 - 18.1% Administration
 - 15.4% Fundraising
 - 14.3% Salaries
 - 8.3% VOTER MOBILIZATION**
 - 3.5% Consultants
 - 2.4% Mail



- *More soft money* in the hands of the parties has meant that they have become *less engaged in party building* and *more committed to televising sham issue ads* to help elect a limited number of specific candidates.
- In two presidential election cycles, from 1992 to 2000, soft money spending by the parties increased over 500 percent, from \$86.1 million to \$487.5 million. Democratic Party reliance on soft money during this period ballooned from 19% to 47% of total expenditures. Republican Party soft money spending jumped from 16% of total expenditures to 35%.
- In 1992, state party spending on party building activities constituted 14% of soft money spending. Spending on issue advocacy made up only 3%.
- After the explosion in party demand for soft money put almost a half billion dollars of soft money into party hands in 2000, *soft money spending on party building declined to 10%*, and soft money spending on issue advocacy skyrocketed to over 50%.
- The massive influx of soft money has coincided with a single-minded focus by parties on producing campaign ads for candidates:

State Party Soft Money Spending	1992	2000
Party Building	14%	10%
Issue Advocacy	3%	52%

The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law has conducted groundbreaking research studies of political television advertising in the 1998 and 2000 elections. Brennan Center attorneys testify frequently before Congress on the constitutionality of campaign finance bills, appearing this month before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and the Committee on House Administration.