

MITT DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WHEN MI'S RECESSION STARTED

[youtube]9fUJ87p9Htw[/youtube]

I thought I was going to be all-Santorum all-the-time until the primary on February 28. Apparently Mitt has gotten the jump on Santorum, though, here with an ad that proves he knows so little about the state he was born in that he doesn't even know when the depression here started.

The ad starts with the suggestion that people who go to the North American Auto Show—an event attended by people from all over the world—makes you a Michigander.

But it's the word salad that comes later that is really funny.

President Obama did all these things the liberals have wanted to do for years. And the fact that you've got millions of Americans out of work, home values collapsing, people here in Detroit in distress. I want to make MI stronger and better. MI's been my home.

The implication is, of course, that Obama did a bunch of liberal things—like investing in new technologies in MI—and as a consequence millions lost their jobs, home values collapsed, and people in Detroit got distressed.

There's a big problem with that. Both unemployment and foreclosures started going up in MI well before Obama became President. Unemployment peaked in June, just 5 months after he got elected. And while home prices everywhere peaked in 2006, in MI they started falling a little ahead of the rest of the country (though I'm not about to defend Obama's housing policies). MI actually entered this recession in 2003, not 2007.

If you blame a state's woes on the guy who was president when those woes started (you don't, but that's the word salad argument he is trying to make), then Mitt should be talking about how Bush, by enacting all these things conservatives have wanted to do for years, doomed MI.

That wouldn't be the truth, either. But at least it would reveal a passing familiarity with the recent plight of the state you're trying to claim as home.

WILL MI DEMOCRATS CHAMPION WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS SANTORUM SURGES THROUGH OUR STATE?

[YouTube]dZJ3KnxG5xM[/youtube]

I noted the other day how tired I am of MI's Democrats asking women to ignore the anti-choice stance of so many of our Democrats, a stance which led to MI Democrat Bart Stupak dictating what kind of medical insurance women across the country can get.

Well, in the next 2 weeks, the party will have the opportunity to take the same stand the President just took and the same stand former Governor Jennifer Granholm, herself a Catholic, has taken, solidly in favor of health equality for women.

Over the next two weeks, of course, Rick Santorum will be wandering around our state, trying to score a decisive victory against Mitt Romney by preaching that women should not be encouraged to work outside the home, that women should not serve in combat for fear it would

distract their male counterparts from doing their jobs, that women who are raped should “make the best” of it by carrying their rapist’s child, and, yes, that health insurance should not cover contraception. In short, Santorum will be calling for downright regressive treatment of women as a way to beat Mitt in his home state.

Not even Republican women support these extreme stances.

All that might not matter for Democrats—we might have the luxury of sitting back and laughing at their contest—except for one thing. Rick Santorum will also, as he has been doing, distinguish himself from Mitt Romney by championing manufacturing. Our issue. Manufacturing.

And while his policies wouldn’t actually help manufacturing as much as, say, cracking down on China’s cheating would, he will nevertheless be speaking to the plight of those working in manufacturing, even while preaching against the autonomy and equality of women.

If Santorum wins—as he is poised to do—this year’s electoral match-up may actually get decided here in MI. This year’s electoral match-up may get defined, at least locally, in the next two weeks. And that means it’s time to lay out what Democrats—what all people who believe women should not be second class citizens—stand for.

While Santorum wanders around our state we absolutely have to remind voters that the new manufacturing jobs were brought by Granholm’s outreach and Obama’s energy investments. We absolutely have to remind Michiganders that Santorum also opposed the auto bailout.

But I hope we’re also making that case that whereas Santorum believes in the dignity of just half the electorate, there is a party that champions—or damn well better champion—the dignity of all the electorate.

A RACE TO GET EXCITED ABOUT: TREVOR THOMAS

[youtube]1hJi8rLT8k0[/youtube]

I noted last week that we might have an exciting candidate—Trevor Thomas—running against Justin Amash to be my congressman.

He has officially filed his papers to run. So I now have something to officially get excited about for this election.

His video, above, really captures why I think he'll be such a good candidate.

That's my city!

(Well, there are a few shots of Battle Creek, home of Kellogg's, which is also in the district; also, don't tell anyone, but my building has a cameo in the video but Trevor doesn't know that).

The video captures the mix that Grand Rapids is: factories, lots of them closed, and an increasingly funky downtown and neighborhoods. It's a great mix of Midwestern grit and funky revival, a mix of struggle and optimism.

And that's what Trevor's story is too: he comes from a family of working people. But he's also thrived in this newer economy. He will fight for the working people in the area who have been struggling, but he'll also be able to lead in new directions.

Here's his website. You'll be hearing more about Trevor from me.

MY LADY PARTS WILL BE VOTING THIS YEAR

A funny thing happened when I wrote that I was excited that Trevor Thomas might run for the 3rd Congressional District because he was involved in one of the most exciting underdog victories progressives have had in recent years.

A local Democratic activist (he's known me for years but apparently hasn't followed what I've been up to) left a comment telling me I had to have the humanity to talk to some people in West Michigan before I spoke about the race. He followed that with a comment claiming I've just lived in Grand Rapids for 16 days so I "simply do[] not have a well-informed take on West Michigan." (This, at a time when I've got a post up reminding Pete Hoekstra about the Laotian-Americans in his own town.)

Now, for any other Democrats who don't want to bother reading my posts or consulting the voter rolls or lists of MDP members with West Michigan addresses, let me correct the mistaken impression that I've lived here just 16 days: I've lived in West Michigan for 18 months. I moved to Holland in August 2010, then moved to Grand Rapids last April because I liked its mix of artsy culture and Midwestern grit. As I walk every day through some of the most Democratic neighborhoods in the city, I've learned to love the city.

Sure, I haven't lived in Grand Rapids long, but I'm the kind of person who has been moving to this city of late. I'm the kind of person who has begun to make the city more Democratic. I'm one of many kinds of people local Dems need to understand if they want to understand how their city is changing and how we can win the 3rd CD in November.

I probably shouldn't have used the word "bigot" in my original post and I apologize that I did. But let me explain why I was upset by the

impression that the local party doesn't want a pro-choice candidate on the Democratic ticket here in Grand Rapids. I've lived in MI a long time now. I'm very familiar with the argument that says there's a particular kind of Midwestern Democrat that is great on economic issues but may be anti-choice, the argument that says women just have to suck it up and accept that.

But then, in 2009, one of those otherwise great Dems, Bart Stupak, decided to risk blowing up the Health Insurance Reform Bill to make sure he got to dictate to women in every congressional district in this country what kind of medical care they could get. One of those otherwise great Dems made it the law in this country that there should be medical insurance, and then separate medical insurance for the lady parts.

Since that time, women have been told more and more they just have to suck it up, sacrifice autonomy over their own medical care because other issues are more important. Our Democratic President ignored the science on Plan B. Planned Parenthood has become the new ACORN. And Republicans have pursued the latter effort even at the expense of cancer patients.

So I apologize I used the word bigot. But let me make one thing clear: I will not take kindly to the Democratic party telling me paternalistically I just have to suck it up, it knows what's best for Grand Rapids and me and my lady parts. There are far too many women in this country who are losing medical care for things that go far beyond abortion and contraception for that to be acceptable this year.

My lady parts will be voting this year.

PETE HOEKSTRA MOCKS HIS ASIAN-AMERICAN NEIGHBORS

[youtube]kxw4uZAezaI[/youtube]

When I first saw Crazy Pete Hoekstra's racist ad, I thought the woman in it—who is supposed to depict a Chinese woman who speaks English well—looked more Thai or Laotian than Han Chinese. And while Hoekstra claims that her parents are “100% Chinese” there are unconfirmed reports that the actress is actually Laotian-American.

Which would be particularly galling, given that Hoekstra's home town has a significant population of Laotian-Americans (note, Holland Township is basically the northern suburbs of Holland city).

Holland Township's population is 10.1 percent Asian, which includes mainly Laotian and Cambodian families, but also Filipino and Vietnamese. That's more than double the concentration of the U.S., and five times more than Holland city.

Some Laotians have converted to Christianity, but many still practice Buddhism. The Holland area has two Buddhist temples – one on 112th Avenue and another on Port Sheldon – each with several monks.

Both temples have around 120 members, according to Nace Phimthasak, President of the Lao Buddhist Temple of Holland. But as manufacturing companies downsized, many families moved out of state, putting an added burden on other members, who continue to support the temple financially.

Laotian refugees came to Michigan in the

aftermath of the Vietnam war and were often sponsored by Dutch Reform Church communities—Hoekstra's own faith.

The Laotian community (along with the growing Latino population) gives the Holland area an increasingly diverse feel. Not only can you get superb "Thai" food, but where I lived on the edge of the cornfields and just a mile or so from the MI office of the right wing Family Research Council, I lived closer to a Buddha statute than to one of Jesus (the statue was at the community center described as being planned in the article—in thoroughly American fashion, it watches over a sand volleyball court where members play for hours on warm Sundays).

Hoekstra's ad was bigoted and wrong in any case. But it turns out he may have been making fun not of a distant Asian community in California or China, but his neighbors and former constituents in Holland.

If Hoekstra can't even figure out that his neighbors are good Americans, then he's not the guy to be fighting to defend the American Dream.

MI POLITICS GETS INTERESTING: TREVOR AND CRAZY PETE

Just interrupting pre-game to bring two pieces of interesting political news from MI.



First, we might finally have exciting news in my congressional district, where the party has thus far failed to recruit anyone to run against the unpopular Justin Amash even after his own party put a target on his back by making the district more Democratic. One of the key players in the successful DADT fight, Trevor Thomas, is thinking of challenging Amash. Now, local Dems are worried about an out gay and pro-choice man carrying the Democratic banner. Even aside from the bigotry implied by that worry, they don't seem to be thinking about the benefit of having such a proven campaign winner carrying the banner of working people. Don't our working men and women deserve the same kind of successful advocate that our gay service members got? (Trevor was also involved in Jennifer Granholm's thumping of Dick DeVos in 2006, so he knows how to win locally, too.)

Trevor is reportedly going to make his decision in the next few days. If and when he announces, you can expect to hear more from me about him, because I'd be genuinely excited about this race.

Meanwhile, speaking of bigots, here's the stupid, racist ad I'm going to be treated to during the Super Bowl.

[youtube]kxw4uZAezaI[/youtube]

So Crazy Pete wants us to vote for him—rather

than someone who has fought for MI's workers—based on the argument that he doesn't spend money, as proven by his decision to spend \$75,000 to run a stupid stupid ad during the Super Bowl?

“CRACKPOTS DON'T MAKE GOOD MESSENGERS”

For the record, I have no intention of voting for Ron Paul in the General election (though depending on how the GOP primary rolls out, I might consider crossing over to vote for Paul in the MI primary, for similar reasons as I voted for John McCain in the 2000 primary: because I knew my vote wouldn't matter in the Democratic primary and I hoped a McCain win might slow down George Bush's momentum and focus some attention on campaign finance reform, McCain's signature issue at the time).

I don't want Ron Paul to be President and, for all my complaints with Obama, he is a less bad presidential candidate than Paul.

But that's an entirely different question than the one Kevin Drum purports to address with this post:

Should we lefties be happy he's in the presidential race, giving non-interventionism a voice, even if he has other beliefs we find less agreeable? Should we be happy that his non-mainstream positions are finally getting a public hearing?

Drum doesn't actually assess the value of having a non-interventionist in the race, or even

having a civil libertarian in the race (which he largely dodges by treating it as opposition to the drug war rather than opposition to unchecked executive power), or having a Fed opponent in the race.

Instead, he spends his post talking about what a “crackpot” Paul is, noting (among other things), that Paul thinks climate change is a hoax, thinks the UN wants to confiscate our guns, and is a racist.

Views, mind you, that Paul shares in significant part with at least some of the other crackpots running for the GOP nomination.

Of course, Paul does have views that none of the other Republicans allowed in Presidential debates share. And that’s what Drum would need to assess if he were genuinely trying to answer his own question: given a field of crackpots, several of whom are explicit racists, several of whom make claims about cherished government programs being unconstitutional, most of whom claim to believe climate change doesn’t exist, is it useful that one of the candidates departs from the otherwise universal support for expanded capitulation to banks, authoritarianism, and imperialism? Is it useful to do so leading up to a General election with a Democrat who has been weak against banks, expanded executive authority, and found new Muslim countries to launch drone strikes against?

Before I get into the reasons why it is, let me address a completely false claim Drum makes.

■ Ron Paul has never once done any of his causes any good.

Paul, of course, succeeded in getting a limited audit of the Fed’s bailout done. That hasn’t resulted in the elimination of the Fed, but it has educated a lot of people about the vast power of the Fed and showed how far government efforts to prop up the banks really went in 2008 and 2009. Of course, he did so in partnership

with Alan Grayson, someone who doesn't embrace all of Paul's views but nevertheless demonstrates why Drum's advice that those who share some views with Paul, "should run, not walk, as fast as you can to keep your distance from Ron Paul" is bad advice. We live in a democracy, and it's far easier to get laws passed if members of both parties support them.

And it's not just the Fed. By providing space to support civil liberties and oppose the war on the right, Paul slowed the steam roll in support of the PATRIOT Act, SOPA, the detainee provisions of the NDAA, and the wars. In these areas, he may not have had the limited but notable success he had with the Fed, but if—for example—Dianne Feinstein's effort to specifically exclude Americans from indefinite military detention has any success, it will in part be because Paul and his son mobilized opposition to indefinite detention on the right.

But all that explains why it has been useful to have Paul—bolstered by his 2008 campaign, which seems to disprove Drum's promise that, "in a couple of months he'll disappear back into the obscurity he so richly deserves"—in the House. That doesn't explain why it is useful to have him polling at almost 20% in the GOP race in IA.

Because that is, after all, what we're talking about. So when Drum scoffs at those who have, "somehow convinced yourself that non-interventionism has no other significant voices except Ron Paul," when we're talking about the Presidential race, I want to know what race he's been watching? While Gary Johnson supports non-interventionism, he's not a significant voice. In this presidential race, which is what Drum purports to be talking about, there are no other significant voices supporting non-interventionism or championing civil liberties.

And without a such a candidate—without someone playing the role Obama sort of did until July 9, 2008—then the focus of the billion-dollar political debate in the next 11 months will focus primarily on who will more aggressively

crack down on Iran and how many more civil liberties the President must dissolve to wage war against significantly weakened terrorists. Ron Paul's presence in the race not only exposes voters to commonsense but otherwise impermissible observations—such as that the detainees we're holding are, with just a handful of exceptions, suspects, never proven to be terrorists in a trial. But his presence also raises the cost for Obama for not addressing his past claims and promises on civil liberties.

And then, of course, we lefties are supposed to be trying to defeat these right wing nutjobs. Drum may think Paul toxic, but his views are equally toxic to the rich donors paying for these Republican candidates. And while Paul doesn't threaten to become a viable anti-Mitt, he can (and did, in 2008) stay in this race long enough to be an annoyance to GOP claims to unity. All the time by differentiating himself with issues—anti-imperialism, civil libertarianism, and anti-banksterism—for which Paul is the only significant voice in this election. Twelve years ago, my support for a policy that I supported, championed by a flawed messenger, contributed in a small way to making Bush spend more money and reveal his loathsome (if transactional) racism in South Carolina. That didn't make Al Gore the winner, but it didn't hurt. Why would we categorically oppose something similar to happen to Mitt Romney?

As Drum himself notes, there's no danger that by calling out those areas where Paul is good, he's going to be elected President and implement his more loathsome ideas. "Ron Paul is not a major candidate for president." But for those guarding the DC common sense, support for Paul in these areas does seem to present real danger.

It's telling, ultimately, that Drum's piece, which doesn't prove what it purports to (that having Paul in the Presidential race is bad for lefties) but does call him a crackpot crackpot crackpot, is a near mirror image to this Michael Gerson column, which points towards the very

same repulsive stances—as well as some downright commonsense ones—as Drum to call Paul a scandal.

No other recent candidate hailing from the party of Lincoln has accused Abraham Lincoln of causing a “senseless” war and ruling with an “iron fist.” Or regarded Ronald Reagan’s presidency a “dramatic failure.” Or proposed the legalization of prostitution and heroin use. Or called America the most “aggressive, extended and expansionist” empire in world history. Or promised to abolish the CIA, depart NATO and withdraw military protection from South Korea. Or blamed terrorism on American militarism, since “they’re terrorists because we’re occupiers.” Or accused the American government of a Sept. 11 “coverup” and called for an investigation headed by Dennis Kucinich. Or described the killing of Osama bin Laden as “absolutely not necessary.” Or affirmed that he would not have sent American troops to Europe to end the Holocaust. Or excused Iranian nuclear ambitions as “natural,” while dismissing evidence of those ambitions as “war propaganda.” Or published a newsletter stating that the 1993 World Trade Center attack might have been “a setup by the Israeli Mossad,” and defending former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke and criticizing the “evil of forced integration.”

Each of these is a disqualifying scandal. Taken together, a kind of grandeur creeps in.

Neither wants to deal with the downright logic (and deserved widespread support) of some of Paul’s views. They both seem to want to, instead, suggest that any deviation from the DC consensus is lunacy (and lunacy of a kind not exhibited by Bachmann, Perry, Newt, and Santorum).

The question of whether it is good to have Paul audibly in the Presidential race—which is fundamentally different from whether we want him to be President—is ultimately a question of whether it is good to have a diversity of views expressed in our democratic debates. Neither Drum nor Gerson object here to the lunacy espoused by the other GOP candidates, per se—the ones that espouse lunacy embraced by the DC consensus, what Drum approvingly calls the “mainstream.” So what is so dangerous in having Paul’s ideas—both sound and repulsive—expressed?

I’m perfectly comfortable having Paul exposed—as he has been—as a racist over the course of this race. Why are Drum and Gerson so upset that the other candidates might be exposed as authoritarians and imperialists in turn?

DO IOWANS CARE MORE ABOUT FAMILY AND CHRISTMAS THAN GOP PRIMARY REALITY SHOW?

Today is the day of the year when a bunch of Big 10.2 teams get thumped in bowl games. As such, it is a key part of the holiday season for college football fans, including those who live in the Midwest.

Tomorrow is the day of the Presidential electoral season where a few hundred thousand Iowans go to caucuses and exercise a unwarranted amount of control over who our next President will be.

Mind you, last Friday was the day when both Iowa and Iowa State got thumped in bowl games, but if these Iowans are Sugar Bowl fans, tomorrow is

also the day when people stay home to watch the game rather than get herded around a crowded room for several hours. (The caucus was just one day later, on January 4, in 2008, though bowl games were skewed earlier because of the calendar.)

The juxtaposition of the heart of bowl season with the IA caucuses shows that we've arrived at that state invoked so often by those raising concerns about the logical outcome of the Mutually Assured Destruction on primary timing of the last decade or so: when the holiday season basically became campaigning season (though some raise the specter of pre-Christmas votes, too).

Isn't it about time that some of the bajillions of reporters on the ground in Iowa do some reporting on whether or not this is good for democracy? Rather than tracking granular differences in polling numbers or thinking of different ways to say "Santorum Surge," couldn't some of these reporters interview Iowans—those caucusing as well as the majority who won't caucus—to find out whether they paid more attention to their family's regular Christmas celebration or the political circus being staged around them?

I don't doubt that the volatility in polls this year stems, in significant part, from the terrible candidates in the GOP field; none of them, it seems, can survive the scrutiny of a few weeks. But I also wonder whether the timing plays a part. That is, it's likely that a goodly number of likely caucus goers haven't been concentrating all that much on whether Newt will force their grand kids to quit school and instead take a unionized janitor's job, whether Mitt will outsource their jobs, and which of them are promising to start a war with Iran. The Des Moines Register's highly respected poll says 41% of those polled may change their mind. Isn't it possible that these citizens who have been entrusted with such power over our political system simply have been doing what the rest of

us have been, enjoying one of the only weeks of the year when we get to spend extended time with our families?

Maybe it's time we actually figured out whether waging an electoral campaign as if it were background Christmas Muzak is good for democracy.

FLORIDA JOINING RE-AWAKENING? GOP VOTERS AGAINST SS-MEDICARE CUTS, TEA PARTY CHIDES SCOTT OVER ETHICS

The elections from earlier this week may well go down in history as a watershed event in which voters finally began to understand, and then to overwhelmingly reject, the most extreme elements of Republican views that take the "pro-life" movement into a completely indefensible realm, demonize collective bargaining and promote institutional racism. Developments reported today in Florida indicate that this re-awakening may be spreading, with a survey of Republican voters indicating that they favor withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq over cuts to Social Security or Medicare when reducing the deficit and with the Tea Party scolding Governor Rick Scott over his failed campaign promises to institute ethics reforms.

Note first the remarkable result in Ohio. In a state that provided Barack Obama an election margin of only 51% to 47% over John McCain in 2008, the restrictions on collective bargaining by public employees put in place by Governor John Kasich and a Republican legislature were

voted down by a margin of 61% to 39%:

With a beer in his hand and a smile on his face at the We Are Ohio celebration at the Hyatt Regency, Ohio Democratic Chairman Chris Redfern said public workers should not be the scapegoats for the state's economic problems. "That is the lesson John Kasich must remember after tonight, and if he doesn't, he'll be a one-term governor.

"If you overreach, the people will respond. There is no one tonight who could suggest this was about Democrats versus Republicans," Redfern said, noting the wide margin of defeat. "This is literally about what is right and what is wrong, and what Ohioans feel is important."

The outcome of the so-called "Personhood Amendment" in Mississippi is no less striking.

In one of the most conservative, anti-abortion states in the nation (won by McCain 56% to 43% in 2008), we learned that just as Kasich and his cronies over-reached on collective bargaining, the Pro-Life movement over-reached in Mississippi, as the measure was defeated 58% to 42%:

Objectors also raised the specter of legal challenges. Most of all, many said, the amendment allowed no exceptions for abortions in cases of incest or rape – a claim not disputed by proponents, who are trying to end abortion in the state.

In a statement from the anti-initiative group Mississippians for Healthy Families, spokeswoman Valencia Robinson said, "... (W)e were successful because Mississippi voters ultimately understood that there is no contradiction in being pro-life and standing in opposition to an initiative that threatened the health

and very lives of women.”

And in Arizona, voters recalled Russell Pearce, the author of SB 1070, the “papers please” extremist anti-immigration bill. Pearce lost to a more moderate Republican by a margin of 53% to 45%:

For years, Russell Pearce, Arizona’s most powerful legislator and the architect of its tough immigration law, has sought to make life so uncomfortable for illegal immigrants in the state that they pack up and go.

But Mr. Pearce, known for his gruff, uncompromising manner, was the one sent packing on Tuesday after disgruntled voters in this suburban neighborhood outside Phoenix banded together to recall him from the State Senate and replace him with a more moderate Republican.

With that as background, consider these remarkable developments in Florida from today’s news. First, a poll of Republican voters in Florida packs plenty of surprises:

But even modest changes to benefits for future retirees are opposed by 66 percent of voters, the poll shows. Only 27 percent favor future reductions, which could include raising the retirement age, though the poll didn’t specifically address that issue.

Asked if they favored or opposed reducing Medicare benefits to help reduce the deficit, only 22 percent liked the idea. About 70 percent didn’t.

/snip/

When specifically asked if they favored Medicare cuts over withdrawing troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, only 9 percent wanted the former and 66 percent

favored the latter. The numbers were similar for Social Security.

Favoring withdrawal in Iraq and Afghanistan over cuts to Medicare by a margin of 66% to 9% is a result one might expect for a poll of Democrats in a liberal state like Massachusetts or California, not a poll of Republicans in Florida. Although Florida very narrowly went for Obama in 2008, politics at the state level is heavily dominated by Republicans, with extremely conservative Republicans wielding most of the power. Congress would be well-advised to pay close attention to this result as the Supercommittee nears its deadline for recommendations on addressing the budget deficit. Reliance on cuts to Medicare and Social Security without advocating for ending the wars and closing tax loopholes is likely to lead to a huge bipartisan revolt of voters.

But there is even one more bit of news today that breaks out of the usual mold. It turns out that the Tea Party in Florida, which aided greatly in his election, is now turning on Rick Scott, accusing him of not following through on campaign promises of ethics reform:

On Rick Scott's first day as governor, he declared ethics and integrity "essential to maintaining the public trust" and ordered his office to find ways to implement suggestions from a grand jury assembled to investigate public corruption.

More than 10 months later, there appears to be no plan.

That frustrates some tea party activists who propelled Scott to victory. They believed Scott was talking about ethics reform in all those campaign ads where he blasted "Tallahassee insiders."

"He led Florida voters to think he was going to be a strong proponent of ethics reform, and his record shows he's very

weak,” said Nick Egoroff, a tea party activist from Orlando. “I haven’t heard him say one word on it.”

Yes, the Tea Party should have taken a hint that backing a candidate who holds the record for the largest fine ever paid to the federal government for Medicare fraud might not be the the best route to achieving ethics reform, but they must be given credit for speaking up when he has failed to deliver.

Where this re-awakening will go remains to be seen. My own explanation attributes it to a combination of people being forced to pay more attention to politics based on losing their jobs and homes, along with that awareness being amplified by the Occupy movement. When the public begins to pay more attention to what is happening in the political arena, it appears that the most extreme positions taken by conservative Republicans are rejected out of hand. That is a tremendous first step. Now all we need is a leader to promote Progressive ideals.

Oh well, you can’t win them all.

COMMERCIALIZING CAMPAIGN ADS: CALIFORNIA ROLL FOR MAYOR

We have an interesting phenomenon underway



here in Phoenix – the outright commercialization of political campaign ads. It is the handiwork of a Scottsdale sushi restaurant, Stingray Sushi. In short, a corporation is using a political race as a straight up advertising vehicle for their product, without officially supporting or donating to either candidate. The ploy started off just riffing on hot button political issues such as:

- “Bill Clinton Likes My Sushi”
- “Larry Craig Likes Our Bathrooms”
- “Blagojevich is the Best Tipper”

Stingray then morphed into playing off of a local initiative drive on the ballot. But now they have stepped square into a heated political race between competing candidates.



The current, and heaviest manifestation of

this novel activity by Stingray to date, is the current Phoenix Mayor’s race, which will be decided on November 8. The race itself is supposedly non-partisan, however it pits longtime uber-Republican operative Wes Gullett, who was the chief of staff for disgraced (and convicted) Governor Fife Symington and has served in several administrative and campaign capacities for John McCain over the years, against a moderate, but fairly clear Democrat, former City Councilman Greg Stanton.

If the question is “is this legal”? Yes, it appears to be quite legal under both state and federal campaign law, although Stingray has had to put stickers on their signs advising that it is “Not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s campaign committee.”

The ad campaign is the brainchild of a local ad and political consultant by the name of Jason Rose. I will have to give Jason credit here, it is pretty inventive and has certainly captured the imagination of Phoenix residents. Everybody has seen them, even my high school daughter talks about them. My wife thinks they are hilarious catch phrases now. Anytime I mention politics, she blurts out “Mayors Are Yum Yum!”.

Now, here is the better question – where does this go from here? Stingray is playing both sides of the electoral race fence in this campaign, but it is hard to believe others necessarily will do the same. Will bigger corporations exercise their right to free political speech decreed in *Citizens United* by branding themselves to a particular candidate? Is it a good thing to have electoral races clouded by raw corporate advertising pitches as opposed to actually taking a side?

I honestly do not know the answers to the questions raised, not the plethora of others that arise from this ad campaign. But I doubt it is a one off deal, you can expect to see other similar ad campaigns attached to elections in the future. What do you think??