

November 2001

Issue Advocacy Groups and Money in the South Carolina Republican Presidential Primary

William V. Moore

Danielle Vinson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moore, William V. and Vinson, Danielle (2001) "Issue Advocacy Groups and Money in the South Carolina Republican Presidential Primary," *Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 29 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol29/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Politics at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Political Science by an authorized editor of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact commons@coastal.edu.

The South Carolina Republican Presidential Primary:

Issue Advocacy Groups and Campaign Spending

William V. Moore
College of Charleston

Danielle Vinson
Furman University

The Federal Election Campaign Act created restrictions for presidential candidates on the size of campaign contributions, candidates' personal campaign spending, and spending levels by candidates and other groups. In Buckley v. Valeo (1976), the Supreme Court declared limitations on campaign spending unconstitutional, unless candidates accept federal matching funds. One result has been the growing importance of expenditures and campaign activities by issue advocacy groups. This paper describes the important consequences of campaign finance reform and issue advocacy groups in the important South Carolina Republican Presidential Primary.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, presidential candidates depended on large contributors to finance their campaigns; however, the costs of running a successful presidential campaign have escalated because of the expanded use of communications. Congress, in response to these spiraling costs and "fat-cat" influence over campaigns, enacted the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971. This act placed limits on the

We wish to thank the Pew Charitable Trust for its support in the production of this paper.

amount candidates could contribute to their own political campaigns, limited media activities, and required strict disclosure of the campaign finance activities of candidates and political committees (Gierzynski 2000, 42).

The campaign abuses that occurred during the 1972 presidential election by Richard Nixon's Committee to Re-elect the President resulted in amendments to the FECA in 1974 designed to limit the influence of money in elections. The Act limited the size of contributions, limited the amount candidates could contribute to their own campaign, established a level of expenditures by candidates and other groups, and set up a system of public funding for presidential candidates (Gierzynski 2000, 42). During the presidential primaries, candidates could receive matching funds if they adhered to expenditure limits. In 1976, however, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* declared unconstitutional many of the provisions involved with spending limits. In particular, the Court said such limitations constituted a violation of the freedom of speech clause of the First Amendment (*Buckley v. Valeo* 1976). The provisions declared invalid included those limiting expenditures by candidates, by groups operating independent of candidates, and by candidates spending their own money. The Court did uphold, however, limits on contributions to presidential campaigns and limits on expenditures by those candidates who accepted public funds.

In 1979, Congress passed additional amendments to the FECA. One amendment raised the minimum contributions and expenditures that had to be reported from \$100 to \$200. Another amendment permitted party committees to raise and spend an unlimited amount of money on party building activities, such as registration and getting out the vote (Wayne 2000, 34-35). This soft money provision created a loophole that allowed the national parties to raise and distribute enormous amounts of money to state

and local parties. For example, in 1996, the National Democratic Party reported soft money expenditures of \$121.8 million while the National Republican Party had soft money expenditures of \$149.7 million (Wayne 2000, 46).

Issue advocacy groups have also become more involved in political campaigns. These groups are not limited in how much they can spend independently for or against a candidate and there are almost no regulations or requirements requiring them to report how they paid for their advertising. As a result, issue advocacy groups are becoming a much more significant part of the election process as more money is channeled through interest groups instead of candidates. As long as these groups' ads do not expressly advocate a candidate's election or defeat, they are not subject to donation limits. In fact, the Annenberg Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania estimated that one-third of the total dollars spent on advertising in federal elections in 1996 was attributable to issue advocacy efforts (Faucheux 1998, 18).

In 2000, both federal funding for presidential campaigns and issue advocacy groups played a role in Governor George W. Bush's primary election victory in South Carolina. Bush chose to finance his own primary election campaign and raised \$60 million in 1999. That combined with money the campaign raised in 2000, resulted in a new record for most money raised by a presidential candidate, more than \$102 million.¹ Senator John McCain chose to accept federal matching funds, a decision that limited his total expenditures as well as his expenditures by state. In addition, numerous issue advocacy groups became involved in the South Carolina primary campaign in support of Governor Bush. The Bush financial resources coupled with the efforts of the issue ad-

¹"Campaign Spending Sets New Record." *New York Times* on the Web, 6 November 2000.

vocacy groups, resulted in a major victory for the Bush campaign in South Carolina.

SOUTH CAROLINA: THE SETTING

As in recent presidential elections, South Carolina was a crucial battleground for the Republican Party's presidential nomination. While New Hampshire has made a habit of deflating front-runners, South Carolina has restored them to their original position.² Since 1980, the state has supported every presidential front-runner. In fact, South Carolina has been referred to as the "firewall," since insurgents like Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson have seen their campaigns end with the South Carolina primary.

The South Carolina Republican presidential primary is historically the first primary in the South, making it an important barometer for candidates, the media, and political analysts of southern Republican political preferences. In 2000, the state took on added importance because of insurgent John McCain's stunning 19 percentage-point victory over front-runner George Bush in New Hampshire and because Senator McCain had targeted South Carolina as the second of four states essential to his campaign—New Hampshire, South Carolina, Michigan, and Arizona. McCain's campaign believed that if he won those four contests, he could force Bush out of the race.³

South Carolina has undergone significant political change in recent years. Immigration from the Northeast and Midwest has changed the state's demography, primarily in the Piedmont section and the retirement communities along the coast. In addition, in the 1990s, \$42 billion was invested in manufacturing industries,

²Jim Yarley and David Firestone, "Old-Line Republicans Find an Independent Streak Among the Voters," *New York Times*, 17 February 2000.

³John Weaver, McCain Campaign Staff, telephone interview by David Magleby, 14 June 2000.

creating 207 thousand new jobs.⁴ This economic growth has been a boom for the state's Republican party. In 1987, Republicans held only 29 of 124 seats in the state house, while in 1994, the party controlled a majority of the state house seats for the first time since Reconstruction. In 1994, South Carolina also elected a Republican governor for the third consecutive time. While the Democratic Party regained the governor's position in 1998, the state's Republican base is considered the strongest of any Deep South state. Thus, South Carolina's presidential primary is considered an important barometer of Southern Republican sentiment.

THE CANDIDATE CAMPAIGNS

John McCain's election strategy in South Carolina was designed to attract the newer Republican voters in the state along with independent and Democratic voters, who could vote in the state's open primary. In contrast, George W. Bush emphasized conservative themes to energize the traditional economic and social conservatives in the state's Republican party. His strategy in South Carolina was to build a wall between McCain and the social conservatives.⁵ Bush started his campaign with an appearance at Bob Jones University, a Christian fundamentalist school in Greenville that banned interracial dating and whose leaders had once labeled the Catholic Church, a "Satanic Cult."⁶ In a state where the Christian Right is estimated to be one-third of the Republican voters, the Bush strategy, coupled with the efforts of issue advocacy groups, proved to be effective.⁷

⁴Yarley and Firestone, *op cit*.

⁵Warren Tompkins, telephone interview by Danielle Vinson, 19 June 2000.

⁶Glen Johnson, "Bush Regrets Bob Jones Appearance," *The [Columbia] State*, 28 February 2000, A1.

⁷Bob Paslay and James Hammond, "Upstate a Force in Bush Win," *Greenville News*, 21 February 2000, 1A.

In addition to McCain and Bush, Steve Forbes and Alan Keyes were also active in South Carolina. Forbes campaigned in South Carolina until February 9, 2000. Following his loss in the Delaware primary on February 7, he abandoned his campaign after spending \$35 million; Forbes' departure was so abrupt that his commercials attacking Bush were still running on South Carolina television and radio stations after his withdrawal from the race.⁸

The two front-runners ran positive campaigns in South Carolina through January 2000. McCain's victory in New Hampshire, however, quickly changed the tenor of the South Carolina race. Both candidates aired negative ads on radio and television, and their campaigns accused each other of using negative push polls to sway voters. Both trotted out high profile members of the South Carolina Republican party to appear at campaign events, to record ads and phone messages to voters, and to sign their names to campaign literature. Bush had the support of former Republican Governor Carroll Campbell, Senator Strom Thurmond, Attorney General Charlie Condon, several local congressional representatives, and numerous state legislators, including the speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives. McCain received active support from Congressional Representatives Lindsey Graham and Mark Sanford and some members of the state legislature, including the speaker pro tempore. Though many perceived Bush as the national party establishment candidate, McCain was able to make inroads into the state party. These divisions contributed to some of the rancor of the campaign.

In addition to the very visible airwave war, with advertising and appearances designed to attract the media, the major candidates mounted an extensive ground war to increase their support through phone banks and mailings. At least 21 different phone

⁸Richard L. Berke, "Forbes Exits and the Contenders Rush In," *New York Times*, 10 February 2000.

messages were sent out by the candidates' campaigns, most of them during the final two weeks of the primary battle.

The Bush calls included a canvassing ad "Would you support Bush?," a call inviting voters to meet Bush, and at least two get-out-the-vote calls. Bush's campaign also paid for recorded messages from Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL), SC Attorney General Charlie Condon and former governor Carroll Campbell. The campaign also paid for 45 to 50 thousand recorded get-out-the-vote calls by Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson. (Magleby 2000, 13). Bush's polling firm made at least 300 push poll calls that included harsh "questions" about McCain without identifying who was paying for the poll (Fineman and Isikoff 2000, 22). One woman in Spartanburg, South Carolina said her son had taken a call from a pollster who portrayed John McCain as a "cheat and a liar and a fraud."⁹ Bush said he would fire anyone who had conducted a poll portraying McCain as a liar and fraud. Bush aides released a script of one of their phone messages in which the Senator Strom Thurmond said, "unfortunately the race has turned ugly. John McCain has TV ads comparing Governor Bush to Bill Clinton. There is no excuse for the negative ads."¹⁰ Thurmond called it sad and said it was the sort of message the people of the country have rejected.

McCain had at least one persuasion call and two GOTV¹¹ calls. His campaign also paid for calls that targeted Democrats. In one of these, Democratic State Senator Phil Leventis called "20,000 of [his] closest friends" to ask them to vote for McCain.¹² People who received this call and others like it claimed they had only

⁹Alison Mitchell with Frank Bruni, "Spotlight Turns on Ugly Side of Politicking," *New York Times*, 11 February 2000, A22.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Get-Out-the-Vote.

¹²South Carolina State Senator Phil Leventis, telephone interview by William Moore, 12 June 2000.

voted in Democratic primaries in the past and could not have been on any Republican phone lists. Keyes also had one GOTV call.

Candidates bombarded targeted voters with mail. A network of voters turned up 21 different mailings paid for by the Bush campaign and 31 pieces paid for by McCain. In addition, McCain sent out at least 15 e-mail messages to active supporters and people who had added their names to his subscription list. The Bush campaign maintained an e-mail tree of more than 12 thousand names of people who had provided their e-mail addresses to the campaign.¹³ The messages distributed across this network were mostly campaign updates, press releases, candidates' schedules, news articles about the campaign, and the campaign's response to some of the news reports.

CANDIDATE CAMPAIGN SPENDING

Because of the importance placed on the South Carolina primary by the candidates and the media, the amount of money spent on the Republican primary by the major candidates was inordinately high. While George Bush was not required to file a state-by-state report with the Federal Election Commission, Tucker Eskew, a representative for the Bush campaign, said Bush spent in the neighborhood of \$4 million in South Carolina.¹⁴ *Newsweek* and an anonymous Republican Party contact estimated that Bush spent closer to \$8 million in the state,¹⁵ while one member of the McCain campaign staff estimated that Bush spent between \$10 to 15 million.¹⁶ South Carolina state Democratic Chairman Dick Harpootlian said, "George Bush spent \$10 a vote or more, so it

¹³Warren Tompkins, telephone interview by Danielle Vinson, 19 June 2000.

¹⁴Joseph Stroud, "South Carolina Saves Bush," *The State*, 20 February 2000, A16.

¹⁵"Back From the Brink," *Newsweek*, February 28, 2000, 24.

¹⁶Trey Walker, McCain Field Campaign Director, telephone interview by William Moore, 13 June 2000.

shows he does live by the Golden Rule: 'He who has the gold rules.'"¹⁷ McCain's report to the Federal Election Commission listed his South Carolina's expenditures at \$2,940,377 while Alan Keyes spent approximately \$280,662 and Steve Forbes, who did not have to report his expenditures, spent \$48,600 on advertising in the state's four major media markets.

The largest expenditures went to media advertising. In the major media markets—Columbia, Charleston, Florence, and Greenville—Bush only outspent McCain by approximately \$170 thousand: Bush spent an estimated \$1,681,554 to McCain's \$1,511,930. However, the timing of the advertising worked to Bush's advantage. McCain started his advertising in 1999. While this provided him with greater name recognition, it negatively affected his campaign in the final week of the primary contest since he had reached the maximum expenditures allowed in South Carolina. McCain's Deputy Campaign Manager, Roy Fletcher, said, "we had reached our spending cap and we couldn't fight back."¹⁸ McCain's field director, Trey Walker, said that even though money was available, McCain refused to violate the spending limits.¹⁹ In contrast, the Bush campaign had bought so much media advertising that Bush commercials were still running in South Carolina the day after the primary.

Since the Bush campaign did not significantly outspend McCain in the major media markets, the obvious question is how the additional monies were allocated. Bush strategists, Warren Tompkins and Heath Thompson, believed Bush spent more on radio advertising than McCain. The Bush campaign wrote and

¹⁷Schuyler Kropf, "Decisive Win Boosts Momentum," *The [Charleston] Post and Courier*, 20 February 2000, 14A.

¹⁸Roy Fletcher, McCain Deputy Campaign Manager, News Forum on Issue Advocacy, National Press Club, Washington, D.C.; 17 July 2000.

¹⁹Trey Walker, McCain Field Campaign Director, telephone interview by William Moore, 13 June 2000.

produced these radio spots locally. They were harder edged, localized, and easy to target, especially when McCain went after Democratic support. In addition, the volume of telephone calls people received from the Bush campaign suggests that Bush also devoted substantial resources to phone contacts. While Warren Tompkins estimated that at least 1 million phone calls were made by the Bush campaign, Heath Thompson estimated the figure to be between 2.5 and 3 million.²⁰ Thompson said the campaign started with volunteer phone banks in 21 counties; however, the vast majority of calls during the last three weeks were paid calls. They included recorded messages from various political figures.

THE INTEREST GROUP CAMPAIGNS

The candidate campaigns were supplemented by an intense, personal, and negative issue advocacy campaign by interest groups. Nearly three-fourths (74%) of the issue advocacy money was spent attacking or supporting candidates; only 26% constituted pure issue advocacy. Virtually all of this activity attacked John McCain. The interest groups used e-mail, fax, phone, mail, newspaper ads, and radio and television communications. Some have described what happened as "carpet bombing," and state Republican Party Chairman Henry McMaster said the ground war was "like flying over a jungle; you couldn't really tell what was going on."²¹

The interest groups involved included the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), South Carolina Citizens for Life, the Christian Coalition, the Keep It Flying PAC, the National Smok-

²⁰Heath Thompson, Bush campaign staff, telephone interview by Danielle Vinson, 22 June 2000.

²¹Henry McMaster, Chair, SC Republican Party, telephone interview by William Moore, 13 June 2000.

ers Alliance, several anti-immigration groups, the English Language PAC, and Capital Watch.

Just as the candidates adopted a negative tone in South Carolina, interest groups also shifted their themes and messages from New Hampshire to South Carolina. The groups active against McCain in New Hampshire shifted their theme and message in South Carolina to a highly personal attack on McCain's character and his views on religious conservatism. Several of these groups had criticized McCain months earlier. In September 1999, representatives of the NRLC had held a press conference in South Carolina with representatives from the Christian Coalition, Americans for Tax Reform, and the National Rifle Association to criticize McCain's position on campaign finance reform.

On February 10, the NRLC and South Carolina Citizens for Life threw their support behind Bush in press conferences in South Carolina and Washington, D.C. This unusual endorsement fractured relationships among some of the strongest abortion foes in the state. Cyndi Mosteller, the leader of the Citizens for Life Chapter in Charleston, called the endorsement inconsistent with the group's policy of withholding endorsements when more than one anti-abortion candidate is in the race.²²

Holly Gatling, Executive Director of South Carolina Citizens for Life, stated the group's shift in strategy from New Hampshire to South Carolina was the result of McCain's uncertainty over how to answer a hypothetical question posed to him in New Hampshire concerning what he would do if his teenage daughter wanted an abortion. His statements convinced the pro-life groups that McCain would not be strongly pro-life. McCain's statements also reinforced their concerns about his campaign finance reform pro-

²²Michelle Davis, "Abortion Foes Endorse Bush in the South Carolina Primary," *The State* 10 February 2000, A8.

posals. When it became clear after the New Hampshire primary that the race was really between McCain and Bush, the groups decided to endorse Bush to avoid any confusion on the part of the voters about who the "real pro-life" candidate was. This coincided well with the Bush campaign's decision to energize the religious conservatives in the state.

One activity of the NRLC in South Carolina consisted of running ads, especially on Christian radio stations, throughout South Carolina questioning McCain's pro-life record and commitment. The ads talked about McCain's votes in favor of fetal-tissue research and his friendship with former Senator Warren Rudman who is pro-choice. FEC figures show that the group spent \$44,287 on radio ads. The FEC also reported that the NRLC gave \$3 thousand to South Carolina Citizens for Life, which coordinated with the national organization on the radio ads. The director of the South Carolina organization said her group only spent \$5 hundred on the race; everything else was by the national group.

The national and state pro-life groups worked together to send mailings to about 80 thousand households. The mailings encouraged voters to compare the candidates, citing Bush's pro-life position against *Roe v. Wade* and the use of "tax dollars to fund experiments that use body parts from aborted babies" in contrast to McCain's conflicting statements and voting record on these issues. The mailing noted that in New Hampshire, "pro-choice Republicans overwhelmingly preferred McCain above all the other candidates." The NRLC did one push poll phone call. The call encouraged people to vote for Bush, saying McCain would not reverse *Roe v. Wade*. It also claimed that Bush had maintained a strong pro-life position and that he was endorsed by Henry Hyde.

The Christian Coalition was also involved in the anti-McCain effort, reportedly targeting 140 thousand voters in the state. The Christian Coalition of South Carolina sent out a card two days

before the primary, entitled "10 disturbing facts about John McCain." These "facts" targeted McCain's stands on abortion, taxes, and other issues important to the Christian Right. For example, Fact 5 stated that "John McCain voted repeatedly in favor of federal funding of experiments using tissue from aborted babies" and Fact 6 said "John McCain's economic plan would result in the taxation of certain contributions to churches and charities." The mailing claimed McCain said he might appoint Warren Rudman attorney general, quoting from Rudman's book: "The Republican Party is making a terrible mistake if it appears to ally itself with the Christian Right." The mailing mentioned that McCain was the only Republican candidate "who sought and received the endorsement of the Log Cabin Republicans, a pro-homosexual rights group." Finally, the mailing raised concerns about McCain's position on abortion and campaign finance reform.

The Christian Coalition of American also sent out a GOTV card to select voters encouraging them to vote. Members were also active in putting up signs, working phone banks, and going door-to-door. On a Sunday talk show during the South Carolina campaign, Pat Robertson made a veiled allusion to "some of those other things that are in John McCain's background." Finally, as previously noted, the Bush campaign distributed a recorded phone message by Pat Robertson. Robertson's personal involvement illustrates the intensity of the anti-McCain sentiment within the Christian Coalition and the religious right.

Other groups besides the pro-life and religious-right organizations were active in the campaign. The Keep It Flying PAC entered the campaign at the last minute. The group, which advocated keeping the Confederate Flag flying above the South Carolina capitol, sent out an estimated 80 to 250 thousand letters dated February 11, 2000. The letter quoted McCain as saying "The Confed-

erate Flag is offensive in many, many ways. As we all know, it's a symbol of racism and slavery." However, the letter omitted the rest of McCain's statement that said he could "understand how others might not feel that way" and mentioned his own relatives who fought for the Confederacy.²³ The letter noted that of the major candidates, only George Bush had refused to call the Confederate flag a racist symbol and it quoted Laura Bush as saying, "It is not a symbol of racism." In addition to supporting Bush, the letter attacked "liberal Democrats" in the state legislature, Governor Jim Hodges, the NAACP, Bill Clinton, and Al Gore. It included a "Keep the Flag! Dump Hodges!" bumper sticker and asked contributions to pay for TV and radio ads. The McCain campaign staff suggests the Bush campaign and the PAC might have coordinated their efforts because the head of the group, Richard Hines, is a friend of Bush strategist Warren Tompkins. Tompkins denied any prior knowledge of the PAC's activities.²⁴

The National Smokers Alliance also attacked McCain, in part because of his sponsorship of an unsuccessful bill in 1998 that would have increased tobacco taxes by more than \$500 billion.²⁵ The Alliance spent \$25 thousand on radio and television advertising to remind smokers and tobacco growers in South Carolina, a state where tobacco is the number one cash crop, of McCain's record.²⁶

One other group opposing John McCain was the English Language PAC, which spent \$7,075 on newspaper ads in two cities. The ads claimed that McCain opposed English as the official language. They ended by saying "When John McCain asks for your

²³Dan Hoover, "McCain Backtracks on Flag," *Greenville News* 11 January 2000, 113.

²⁴Warren Tompkins, telephone interview by Danielle Vinson, 19 June 2000.

²⁵Hoover, *op. cit.*

²⁶Michelle Davis, "The GOP Primary: Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," *The [Columbia] State*, 6 February 2000, D4.

vote, answer him, answer him in a language he understands: 'No!'"

The only identified group supporting McCain was Health Physicians for McCain. However, this turned out to be a front name for the owner of a pawnshop in Columbia who was upset about the attacks on McCain.²⁷ He bought \$2,500 worth of commercials on one television station in Columbia. Another individual, the president of Carolina Solar Lighting, ran a full-page ad for two days for his company that included a letter of support for McCain and two pictures of McCain (one current and the other a 30-year-old military picture) in two major newspapers in the state. Although he claimed to have received a special rate for the ads,²⁸ an estimate based on the cost of a full-page retail ad suggests that he spent close to \$24 thousand.

Anti-immigration groups constituted the major non-candidate specific issue advocacy groups active in South Carolina. The groups include Numbers USA.Com, Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), Negative Population Growth, Population Environment Balance, and American Immigration Control Foundation. These groups did not endorse a candidate, but told people to ask candidates about mass immigration. The groups ran newspaper ads of approximately one-half a page in eleven major dailies in South Carolina. Numbers USA, FAIR, and Negative Population Growth also ran radio and television ads and advertised on billboards across the state. In the major media markets, Numbers USA spent \$34,500, FAIR \$31,432, and Negative Population Growth \$49,192 on electronic advertising.

²⁷Trey Walker, McCain Field Campaign Director, telephone interview by William Moore, 13 June 2000.

²⁸Dan Russell, President of Carolina Solar Lighting, telephone interview by Jenny Willis, 7 March 2000.

One other general issue group, Capital Watch, ran radio ads in Charleston and Columbia asking candidates to sign a pledge not to spend social security. Their expenses totaled \$1,150.

Other campaign activity attacking McCain was undertaken individually. For example, Thomas Burch, chair of the National Vietnam and Gulf War Veterans Coalition, joined Bush for a rally in Sumter, South Carolina, and endorsed him. In the endorsement, Burch maligned McCain's record on veterans' affairs. The next day, five U.S. senators criticized Bush for the appearance and voiced support for McCain's record. A Bob Jones University professor sent an e-mail claiming that McCain had fathered two children out of wedlock and had a reputation for partying, drinking, and womanizing. A Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas faxed a flyer criticizing McCain's "Fag Army" to South Carolina radio stations, all media outlets in Phoenix, Arizona, and all media outlets in Washington, D.C.²⁹ *World Magazine*, sent out by God's World Publishing Company in Asheville, North Carolina, also attacked McCain. On election night itself, some people went so far as to call radio talk shows and claim that a team of psychiatrists had determined that the Vietnamese had brainwashed McCain and programmed him to destroy the Republican Party.

EFFECTIVENESS OF OUTSIDE SPENDING

Both campaigns agreed that the pro-life groups and the Christian Coalition were most effective, because they clearly presented to their supporters that McCain was not a pro-life, religious conservative, and was even a threat to these things. Roberta Combs, the Executive Vice President of the Christian Coalition said after

²⁹Westboro [Topeka, KS.] Baptist Church Representative, telephone interview by Anna Nibley, 14 June 2000.

the election, "I think we played a major role."³⁰ The decision by NRLC and South Carolina Citizens for Life to endorse Bush prevented the religious conservatives from splitting their votes between Bush and Keyes, who was an attractive alternative for some people. In an interesting twist, Keyes gave these groups more credibility when he publicly declared in his speeches and debates that he could not support McCain if McCain won the nomination because of his views on abortion, thus corroborating what the pro-life groups were saying.

The impact of other groups is less certain. Much has been made about the late entry of the Keep It Flying PAC into the race. However, Warren Tompkins, a Bush strategist, questions the importance of the PAC's involvement "in the grand scheme of things" for several reasons. First, the mailing by the group, while timed with the presidential primary, actually attacked numerous officials and groups in the state. In fact, McCain was not mentioned until the bottom of the first page, and only eleven lines of the two-page letter dealt with McCain or Bush. Second, though the letter did include only part of McCain's statement, there had been much news coverage of the subject in most of the major papers across the state, and those articles had included McCain's positions and his attempts to clarify the confusion on the issue. As Tompkins points out, people to whom this was an important issue had plenty of opportunities to read about McCain's positions in the newspaper or hear about them on television or radio, and they had probably already formed their opinions about the candidates. Also supporting this theory is the existence of high profile pro-flag state legislators active in McCain's campaign.

The Keep It Flying letter did generate some response, though it is not clear from whom. On election day, some people reported

³⁰"Christian Conservatives May Have Decided Win," *The [Columbia] State*, 21 February 2000, A10.

receiving a phone call warning that Bush was in favor of keeping the flag on the capitol; the caller encouraged voters to support McCain.

The issue advocacy groups, primarily the anti-immigration organizations, were visible during the campaign through their media commercials, newspaper ads, and billboards. These groups, however, had little impact on public opinion in South Carolina, a state that has a small immigrant population.

The National Smokers Alliance ad campaign complemented the Bush campaign. In particular, the ads appeared while McCain and Bush were debating tax cuts. These ads reinforced Bush's message that he, not McCain, was the candidate for tax reform.

CONCLUSION

South Carolina became a critical state for George Bush following his defeat in the New Hampshire primary. In order to secure the state he effectively moved to the right. He successfully courted the state's religious conservatives starting with his appearance at Bob Jones University. He also vowed to keep the strict pro-life plank in the GOP platform and he refused to meet with the Log Cabin Republicans. He was assisted in his successful campaign by several groups that attacked McCain in a variety of ways. Dick Polman of Knight Ridder said that Bush won in South Carolina "with extensive help from Ralph Reed, Pat Robertson and other Christian activists who painted McCain as a hypocrite with an immoral past."³¹ *Newsweek* noted that local surrogates in South Carolina accused McCain of various apostasies on abortion, gambling, and taxes. It also cited the role played by Pat Robert-

³¹Associated Press, "Exit Poll," Voter News Service, 19 February 2000.

son, Jerry Falwell, the National Smokers Alliance, Keep It Flying, and pro-life forces.³²

The nasty and personal tenor of the South Carolina primary was frequently mentioned in interviews with the campaign staffs of both Bush and McCain. Bush pollster Jan Van Lohuizen saw South Carolina as "personal, going both ways with veracity being the issue."³³ John Weaver of the McCain campaign said he had "never seen a more negative environment" than the 2000 South Carolina Republican primary.³⁴ Richard Quinn, a South Carolina consultant to McCain described the allied attack on McCain as a "scorched earth strategy."³⁵ Trey Walker, another campaign consultant described the campaign as a "jailhouse rape,"³⁶ while Ray Fletcher said, "I've never seen anything like it and I come from Louisiana."³⁷

Exit polls show the effectiveness of the campaign by George W. Bush and his surrogates. With the negative tone and the sheer volume of voter contacts and ads, the contest generated extraordinary voter interest. Pre-election projections predicted that as many as 400 thousand voters would turn out.³⁸ The actual turnout was 565,704.³⁹ In 2000, over 100 thousand more voters went to the polls than in 1996 and the 2000 voter turnout nearly doubled the 1992 turnout of 356,289 voters.

³²"Back From the Brink," *Newsweek*, 28 February 2000, 24.

³³Jan Van Lohuizen, President, Voter Consumer Research, telephone interview by David B. Magleby and Jason Beal, 14 June 2000.

³⁴John Weaver, telephone interview by David Magleby, 14 June 2000.

³⁵Richard Quinn, McCain Campaign Consultant, telephone interview by David B. Magleby and Jason Beal, 14 June 2000.

³⁶Trey Walker, McCain Field Campaign Director, telephone interview by William Moore, 13 June 2000.

³⁷Roy Fletcher, News Forum on Issue Advocacy, National Press Club, Washington, D.C., 17 July 2000.

³⁸"Record Turnout Being Predicted at Polls," *Greenville News*, 19 February 2000, 1A.

³⁹Paslay and Hammond, *op. cit.*

The single most important block of voters was religious conservatives. Of the voters in the primary 34% considered themselves to be part of the religious right and 67% of them voted for Bush—only 10% voted for McCain. On abortion, 41% of the voters felt it should be illegal in most cases; 17% said it should always be illegal. Fifty-eight and 66% of those, respectively, voted for Bush.

John McCain's effort to attract independents and Democrats was somewhat successful; however, the large turnout of core Republican voters doomed his effort. Exit polls showed that 79% of Bush voters said they were Republicans while 62% of McCain voters were not.⁴⁰

Ironically, the anti-McCain attacks by outside groups allowed Bush to present an image of himself taking the high road in the campaign. And, in fact, voters in South Carolina said that it was McCain—not Bush—who had run the nastier campaign.⁴¹ While the anti-McCain groups could not legally run a coordinated campaign, their attacks complemented Bush's successful campaign strategy and helped propel him to a 13 percentage-point victory in South Carolina. The victory in South Carolina provided Bush with the momentum needed to win the Republican Party's nomination for president in 2000. Contributing to his victory were federal laws limiting John McCain's expenditures and allowing issue advocacy groups to campaign on George Bush's behalf.

REFERENCES

- Faucheux, Ron. "The Indirect Approach," *Campaigns and Elections*, (June, 1998).
- Fineman, Howard and Michael Isikoff, "Dixie Donnybrook," *Newsweek*, February 21, 2000.

⁴⁰"Exit Polls Results," *The [Columbia] State*, 20 February 2000, D1.

⁴¹"Back From the Brink," *Newsweek*, 28 February 2000, 24.

- Gierzynski, Anthony 2000. *Money Rules: Financing Elections in America*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Magleby, David B. 2000. "Issue Advocacy in the 2000 Presidential Primaries," in *Getting Inside the Outside Campaign*, ed. David B. Magleby. Provo, Utah: The Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, Brigham Young University.
- Wayne, Stephen J. 2000. *The Road to the White House 2000*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.