

Billionaires Run for the US Congress

Beware of America's Rich Political Saviors

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Consumer confidence is terrible; citizen confidence is worse: Only 11 percent of Americans have confidence in Congress. No surprise there is record-setting anti-incumbency anger rampant among Americans. But the sad truth is damned if you do and damned if you don't vote for incumbents.

The problem is that the reformers, populist outsiders, tea party candidates, surprise primary winners and others expecting to oust incumbents in the coming mid-term elections for members of Congress and state governors and other officials mostly suck. Why? They are nutty, ignorant, dishonest or racist.

Pathetic US Senate candidates like Alvin Greene on the left in South Carolina and Sharron Angle on the right in Nevada , for example, are intellectual nits and an insult to a once envied political system. And in Memphis , Tennessee Willie Herenton, who is African-American, sells black racism to oust two-term incumbent Congressman Steve Cohen in a primary, telling blacks to not vote for his white opponent.

Many ambitious candidates drained the economy to become super-rich. Is this any time to trust people who have taken advantage of our corrupt corporate system to run the government and serve those they have previously taken advantage of for personal gain? Will anger about the corrupt, dysfunctional government system be sufficient for voters to turn the government over to people who have nothing in common with most Americans?

Consider California . Meg Whitman, a Republican candidate for governor wants to beat the familiar, incumbent-like Democrat Jerry Brown, now attorney general, and was previously the chief executive of eBay. She has outspent all other self-financed candidates across the country by using \$91 million of her own money to knock out Steve Poizner, who spent \$24 million of his own money, in the Republican primary. California is big, but \$91 million and likely even more!! She will greatly outspend Brown. And Carly Fiorina, a Republican who is challenging Democrat Senator Barbara Boxer in California, has the audacity to claim on her website that she will "fight for every job" if elected even though, as chief executive of Hewlett-Packard in 2003 she cut about 18,000 jobs and did little good for the company. She has already spent \$5 million. Are these people worthy of public support?

Consider Florida Republican Rick Scott, the former head of Columbia/HCA Healthcare — an awful large hospital chain that paid \$1.7 billion in fines for fraudulently billing government programs like Medicare — has become the front-runner for Florida governor. He supposedly is worth about \$200 million. He was ousted by his own board of directors in 1997 amid the nation's biggest health care fraud scandal. He loaned his campaign \$22.9 million during the

period from April 9 through July 16 and spent \$22.65 million of it. In contrast, he received only \$415,126 in contributions. Bill McCollum, his Republican opponent, raised a little over \$1 million during the reporting period and spent about \$1.7 million. He has raised \$5.7 million since he announced his campaign last year. He has less than \$500,000 left. Democrat candidate Alex Sink, with no primary opponent, raised \$1.1 million for the reporting period and has raised \$7.3 million so far. Is Scott better qualified because of his wealth and ability to advertise more?

Also in Florida is Jeff Greene who wants to be US Senator, a Democrat who had been a Republican with a strange gang of friends like Mike Tyson and Heidi Fleiss. Incredibly, most of his fortune, estimated at \$1.4 billion, came from derivatives that let him profit from the collapse of subprime mortgages which helped tank the US economy. He lives in an oceanfront mansion when he is not on one of his yachts or his plane with gold seat-belt buckles. He recently reported taking a paltry \$3,036 in outside contributions, while lending himself — and spending — \$5.9 million in the second quarter. Recent polls found Greene roughly even in the primary with Democrat Representative Kendrick B. Meek, who had been the party favorite and took 18 months to raise a similar amount. Incumbent-like candidate Governor Charlie Crist still leads as an independent in a three-way general election. Greene boasts that now is the moment for self-financed candidates. “If 2008 was the year of change, 2010 is the year of frustration,” he said. But does frustration justify voting for these characters?

And then there is Linda E. McMahon, a Connecticut Republican who made her fortune in professional wrestling before her Senate run. She has stated a willingness to spend \$50 million of her own money to win the election, a lot of money for such a small state, and has already spent \$21.5 million. A television ad declares “politicians have had their chance, and blown it” while her jobs plan “is backed by experience.” She became president of the WWF as a legal maneuver to save the company in 1993, because her husband was indicted for distributing steroids to his wrestlers. Cleverly, she blew the whistle and told regulators something few in the industry would admit: wrestling matches were scripted shows and not athletic competitions that required the kind of oversight that, say, boxing required. The financial benefit was that her wrestling business operates in 29 states without supervision by state athletic boards or commissions, saving the company licensing fees. She served only a few months on the state Board of Education and then became a candidate. She supports policies that favor the rich and advocates offshore oil drilling. She faces Democrat incumbent-like Richard Blumenthal, now attorney general of Connecticut. Is her wrestling business experience really the basis for being a great senator?

Voters should remember this: None of these characters are legitimate populists, progressives or reformers with a political record to show their true capabilities or positions. Why trust them? Would they perform better than incumbents? I don’t think so. More likely, they would serve elites and corporate interests. In the past very few rich candidates have won office (just 11 percent), but considering the anti-incumbency sentiment this year, big money may prevail.

Is the evil you don’t know really better than the evil you do know because of failed government experience? Are some incumbents worth support? Or will many Americans admit that voting no longer can fix and reform our battered democracy and stay home? I think I will. There are just too many fools and idiots voting that offset the votes of informed and intelligent citizens. Maybe if voter turnout was totally abysmal, say 20 percent, maybe then we would get the reforms or revolution we need by de-legitimizing our delusional

democracy.

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