

The Politics of Deceit



Being the CEO of an important think tank in Washington, D.C., I was hardly surprised when I received, not one, but two letters within two weeks from Sen. George Allen (R-Va.) asking me to join two very prestigious organizations. Now the cynics among you will point to the fact that George's signature was printed, not an original. But U.S. senators are busy people, and if they have to send their personal letters to a printer, so what?

The point is I'm recognized as a very important person in this town. In the first letter, George asked me "to serve as Dinner Co-Chairman [this being a dinner to honor the president himself] and the Inner Circle's personal representative from Falls Church, Virginia." Personal representative from my hometown, mind you. The neighbors will be green with envy. Surely they didn't receive identical letters.

But it gets better. George writes, "Candidly, I have been hoping for a while now that you would take more of a leadership role." Who knew? My very own U.S. senator has been sitting there trying to screw up the courage to let me know he's been hoping I'd provide the GOP with a little more leadership. Such candor is, well, rare in politics these days. Anyway, George apparently took his frustration to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) because he goes on to write, "That's why Senator Frist has authorized me to make you an unprecedented offer." Here the subject of money is discussed, but given the unprecedented nature of this arrangement, it's probably best that we keep things between George, Bill, and myself. You understand.

Then comes the second letter from George. This one asks me to become a member of the Republican Presidential Roundtable. He writes, "You are being invited to join this prestigious organization because of your involvement and your commitment to our Party. Congratulations." I'll say congratulations are in order. Turns out that membership in the Republican Presidential Roundtable is "by invitation only and strictly limited." And as luck would have it, George writes that he is "pleased that we currently have a few spaces available in Virginia." Be still my heart!

There's more. You know that next year is when the presidential nominating conventions take place? Well, Sen. Allen will personally keep me, as a Roundtable member, "fully briefed on the

details of the Convention as they become available." Can you imagine? A man as important and powerful as George Allen is willing to take the time out of his busy schedule to keep me fully briefed. Of course, with the convention a year and a half away one might hesitate to pony up \$5,000 (this apparently is not an unprecedented offer so I can let you in on the deal). But such hesitation would be ill-advised. "Although these events are over a year way," writes George, "I mention this because I cannot guarantee that the Presidential Roundtable will be accepting new members as we approach the 2004 elections." Thank God he mentioned that. Can you imagine my disappointment if the National Republican Senatorial Committee returned my \$5,000 check because there was no more room in the Roundtable?

Okay, enough of this. We all know direct mail is often a dishonest business. Many groups inside the Beltway exist solely as direct mail operations, soaking little old ladies out of their Social Security checks for some good cause or another and then pouring all the money into more direct mail. The cause is ignored while direct mail operators—liberal, environmentalist, conservative—get rich.

But, really, do national political parties have to engage in such transparent dishonesty? Never mind that I'm not a Republican (proud to be an Independent nearly every time a Republican or Democratic politician opens his mouth). The reality is that Congress is entrusted with a solemn obligation under the Constitution to preserve our American heritage of liberty. It is a serious responsibility that should be undertaken by honorable men and women. Yet politics in America is drenched in dishonesty. The "trust fund" for Social

Security? Doesn't exist. But the \$20 trillion unfunded liability in the system does exist, courtesy of dishonest members of Congress who claimed they were merely borrowing your payroll tax.

I don't mean to pick on the NRSC (well, yes I do), because neither party has a monopoly on this upfront, blatant dishonesty. The letters I received were packed with lies. But they wouldn't send them out if people didn't respond to them. Which is kind of sad. There are credulous people out there who so believe in the greatness of America that they can't conceive of U.S. senators engaging in such shameless activities.

—Edward H. Crane

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