



Money Wins Presidency and 9 of 10 Congressional Races in Priciest U.S. Election Ever

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WASHINGTON -- The historic election of 2008 re-confirmed one truism about American democracy: Money wins elections.

From the top of the ticket, where [Barack Obama](#) declined public financing for the first time since the system's creation and went on to amass a nearly two-to-one monetary advantage over [John McCain](#), to congressional races throughout the nation, the candidate with the most money going into Election Day emerged victorious in nearly every contest.

In 93 percent of House of Representatives races and 94 percent of Senate races that had been decided by mid-day Nov. 5, the candidate who spent the most money ended up winning, according to a post-election analysis by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. The findings are based on candidates' spending through Oct. 15, as reported to the Federal Election Commission.

Continuing a trend seen election cycle after election cycle, the biggest spender was victorious in 397 of 426 decided House races and 30 of 32 settled Senate races. On Election Day 2006, top spenders won 94 percent of House races and 73 percent of Senate races. In 2004, 98 percent of House seats went to the biggest spender, as did 88 percent of Senate seats.

"The 2008 election will go down in U.S. history as an election of firsts, but this was far from the first time that money was overwhelmingly victorious on Election Day," Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics, said. "The best-funded candidates won nine out of 10 contests, and all but a few members of Congress will be returning to Washington."

Overall, 95 percent of House incumbents and 93 percent of senators won re-election on Tuesday. (This includes incumbents who lost their primaries but does not account for several other races featuring incumbents, such as the [Minnesota Senate race](#), where a recount is pending in the contest between incumbent Republican Sen. Norm Coleman and Democrat Al Franken.) In the prior 10 years and five election cycles, an average of 97 percent of House members and 86 percent of senators [won re-election](#).

Average Pricetag for House Seat Exceeds \$1 Million

The average cost of winning a House race in 2008 was nearly \$1.1 million, based on pre-election finance reports, and almost \$6.5 million for a Senate seat. Marcia Fudge, a Democrat running in [Ohio's 11th District](#) to succeed the late Stephanie Tubbs Jones, spent the least to win a House seat--just over \$46,000 at last report. For the Senate, Wyoming Republican John Barrasso was the bargain-buyer, spending \$1.4 million on his [re-election](#).

Funds received and spent in the final days and hours of the 2008 campaign will not be reported to the FEC until Dec. 4, but as of Oct. 15, all congressional candidates who ran this cycle had spent almost \$1.4 billion in the last two years. The Center has estimated the total cost of the 2008 elections for Congress and the White House at \$5.3 billion, including candidates, national political parties and outside issue advocacy groups. That would make '08 the most expensive U.S. election ever.

"The politicians who were just elected potentially owe their campaign contributors billions of dollars for helping them win," Krumholz said. "When policy-making resumes in Washington, citizens, activists and the media should vigilantly 'follow the money' to ensure that these representatives always remember that voters, not contributors, elected them."

The [national party committees](#) reported spending more than \$865 million--\$440 million

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by Republicans through Oct. 15 and \$424 million by Democrats. Issue advocacy groups--commonly called [527 committees](#)--spent nearly \$200 million to influence federal elections and issues, with liberal interests accounting for about 60 percent of that.

1 in 4 House Seats Weren't Competitive

Despite the record expense to elect Congress, a quarter of House races--112 in all--involved a candidate with zero financial opposition, and two senators were similarly unchallenged.

"The cost of winning a seat in Congress--more than \$1 million in the House and millions more in the Senate--is prohibitive for most people. Many politicians get elected and re-elected to Congress simply because no one can afford to take them on," Krumholz said.

The [most expensive Senate race](#) in the country, as measured by all candidates' spending before Election Day, was the Coleman-Frankens race in Minnesota, where the candidates alone spent more than \$35.4 million. The costliest House race, based on pre-election spending, was [California's 4th District](#), where the candidates spent more than \$10.6 million. As of mid-day Wednesday, Republican Tom McClintock, the bigger spender in the race to succeed Rep. John Doolittle, had a slight lead over Democrat Charles Brown.

While the overwhelming majority of yesterday's races featured incumbents running for re-election, money was also decisive when newcomers squared off. The top spender in House open-seat contests won 84 percent of the time. In the Senate, all of the biggest spenders came out on top. In open races two years ago, top spenders won 94 percent of all House races and half of all Senate races.

Self-Funders Mostly Lose, Again

Following a long [tradition](#), Tuesday's elections did not go well for self-financed candidates. Forty-nine congressional candidates spent more than \$500,000 of their own money in 2008. Only 24 of them even made it to the general election, and just six House candidates and one Senate candidate won, although four House races had not been decided by Wednesday.

The [biggest spender of personal funds](#) in this election cycle appears to have been Sandy Treadwell in [New York's 20th House District](#), a Republican who invested at least \$5.9 million of his own money to compete for a job paying \$169,000 annually. Treadwell lost to incumbent Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, who spent more than \$3.6 million--but only \$250 of it from her own pocket.

Outspent But Still a Winner

The chart below shows all 2008 congressional races where the winning candidate was outspent by the loser. All spending totals are through Oct. 15. House totals include money spent in 2007-2008; Senate totals include 2003-2008. Incumbents' names are in italics.

Office	District	Winner	Loser	Winner Spent	Loser Spent
House	AL02	Bobby Neal Bright Sr	Jay K. Love	\$849,975	\$1,928,985
House	CO04	Betsy Markey	<i>Marilyn Musgrave</i>	\$1,956,470	\$2,206,249
House	FL16	Tom Rooney	<i>Tim Mahoney</i>	\$1,021,359	\$2,418,043
House	GA13	<i>David Scott</i>	Deborah Travis Honeycutt	\$842,343	\$4,406,103
House	IL14	<i>Bill Foster</i>	James D. Oberweis	\$4,374,827	\$4,786,838
House	IN03	<i>Mark E. Souder</i>	Michael Anthony Montagano	\$605,726	\$669,584
House	IN04	<i>Steve Buyer</i>	Nels Ackerson	\$407,961	\$563,674
House	KS02	Lynn Jenkins	<i>Nancy E. Boyda</i>	\$1,160,628	\$1,278,941
House	LA06	William Cassidy	<i>Donald J. Cazayoux</i>	\$620,165	\$2,279,085
House	MD06	<i>Roscoe G. Bartlett</i>	Jennifer P. Dougherty	\$111,328	\$118,337
House	MI07	Mark Schauer	<i>Tim Walberg</i>	\$1,238,821	\$1,310,247
House	MO08	<i>Sam Graves</i>	Kay Barnes	\$2,129,503	\$2,562,193
House	NC08	Larry Kissell	<i>Robin Hayes</i>	\$1,099,839	\$2,508,780
House	ND01	<i>Earl Pomeroy</i>	Duane Sand	\$1,312,885	\$1,490,984
House	NJ07	Leonard Lance	Linda D. Stender	\$941,606	\$2,091,805
House	NV03	Dina Titus	<i>Jon Porter</i>	\$1,381,364	\$2,475,915
House	NY20	<i>Kirsten E. Gillibrand</i>	Sandy Treadwell	\$3,638,157	\$5,578,400
House	OH01	Steven Leo Driehaus	<i>Steve Chabot</i>	\$1,041,329	\$1,698,680

House	OH02	<i>Jean Schmidt</i>	Victoria Wells Wulsin	\$973,975	\$1,454,503
House	OH15	Steve Stivers	Mary Jo Kilroy	\$1,411,554	\$1,823,162
House	OR05	Kurt Schrader	Mike Erickson	\$1,030,413	\$2,307,806
House	PA03	Kathleen Dahlkemper	<i>Phil English</i>	\$711,583	\$1,905,167
House	PA10	<i>Chris Carney</i>	Christopher Lawrence Hackett	\$1,875,397	\$2,168,020
House	PA12	<i>John P. Murtha</i>	William Russel	\$2,007,635	\$2,678,706
House	SC01	<i>Henry Brown</i>	Linda Ketner	\$702,488	\$1,640,621
House	TX07	<i>John Culberson</i>	Michael Peter Skelly	\$1,306,611	\$2,194,873
House	VA02	Glenn Nye	<i>Thelma Drake</i>	\$732,882	\$1,372,431
House	VA10	<i>Frank R. Wolf</i>	Judith Feder	\$941,625	\$1,575,187
House	WY01	Cynthia Marie Lummis	Gary Trauner	\$960,148	\$1,045,636
Senate	NCS1	Kay R. Hagan	<i>Elizabeth Dole</i>	\$6,014,978	\$15,716,000
Senate	NHS2	Jeanne Shaheen	<i>John E. Sununu</i>	\$5,915,935	\$5,928,293

About the Center for Responsive Politics

Celebrating its 25th year in 2008, the Center for Responsive Politics is the nation's premier research group tracking money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. The nonpartisan, nonprofit Center aims to create a more educated voter, an involved citizenry and a more responsive government. CRP's award-winning website, OpenSecrets.org, is the most comprehensive resource for campaign contributions, lobbying data and analysis available anywhere. For other organizations and news media, CRP's exclusive data powers their online features tracking money in politics. CRP relies on support from a combination of foundation grants and individual contributions. The Center accepts no contributions from businesses, labor unions or trade associations.

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