

'E-roots' evolution revitalizes election

Online coverage brings voters' grassroots opinions

Kenton Benfield

The Clackamas Print

Although the freedom of the press, and correspondingly of speech, are protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, it is a well-informed and non-apathetic citizenship that is the ultimate defense of liberty. The politics of a democracy – Greek for “rule of the many poor” – is dependent upon the quality of the information available to the people.

The Internet is more than just the latest form

of media and entertainment; it is a revolution in democratic information exchange, and it is having a major impact in politics.

As Matt Ostergren, a philosophy and political science major, put it, “The Internet gets around media sources ... it allows for peers to organize regardless of geography ... lots of grassroots movements are popping up around ideologies.”

There lies a key distinction between mainstream media and the Internet, specifically in the democratic exchange of information that is accessible to historically unprecedented numbers of people. In terms of politics, this opens up the floodgates to a wider range of information and opinions that originate from the grassroots, or “e-roots.”

Over time, the temptation by those in power to usurp the media for political propaganda and “infotainment” has undermined legitimate reporting.

“It lulls people into a stupor,” Ostergren explained. “This requires bright colors to wake them up.”

'A double-edged sword'

The mainstream media “establishment” has undergone heavy consolidation under larger and larger corporate structures, such as Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation. This conglomerate owns FOX News, The Wall Street Journal, Dow Jones and MySpace, just to list a few. These organizations are private enterprise entities, whose primary interest may be to make money, not to provide public awareness.

“It’s no longer about money [on the Internet],” student Mike Takeyawe said. “We can get people’s opinions without them being paid on TV.”

According to Political Science Professor Dean Darris, this is a positive trend.

“In short, the Internet, through the democratization of information,

has broken down the stranglehold that the corporate media has over political information. I think that is a very healthy thing,” Darris said.

“... It is a double-edged sword ... given the fact that there is no editing mechanisms of, say, editors or fact-checkers, it can also be a vehicle of disinformation.

“We’ve got to be careful that we maintain the baby and throw out the bathwater. The baby is democratized information allowing people to express themselves absent the control of the corporate media. The bathwater is the fact that ... so much on there (the Internet) is simply not worth the time and attention it takes to read through it. But that’s true of mainstream media.”

The online campaign

The Internet creates a very powerful system with which to organize people, even those who fight for ideas that may be under- or misrepresented in the more traditional media. With a presidential election year in full swing, this has not gone unnoticed by those who desire the voters’ support.

“For example, the Ron Paul movement is very popular among college students,” Ostergren added.

Although not the first, the online campaign of United States Congressman Ron Paul, R-Texas, has been the most successful in the short history of the Web.

Due to the mediocre media coverage of his message, the Internet has stepped in as an interactive source of information that would otherwise be buried.

The success Ron Paul has enjoyed online provides an excellent example of what the Web could do for politics in the future.

For example, the fundraising efforts have hit record numbers while being completely organized and promoted by the supporters, or “e-roots”, not the official campaign. “Web 2.0” social networking sites, such as YouTube.com and MySpace.com, have allowed for the message to spread and the money to flow in, often through PayPal.com, a Web-based payment system.

On Nov. 5, 2007, a supporter-organized fund-

raising drive that began only a few weeks ago, playing off of the Guy Fawkes holiday movie “V for Vendetta” as themes, raised \$4.3 million in a single 24-hour period.

This “Money Bomb” was the result of an online fundraising in any Republican States presidential primary for a candidate. Supporters paid an average of \$100 each, accumulating total was reported in the first, on the campaign homepage, Ron Paul.com, alongside the name and city of voters.

Due to the unexpected success, supporters organized another similar event on Dec. 16, the anniversary of the Republican Party in 1773. On this day, the campaign not only their own previous record, but also produced the world record single-day fundraising result, beating John McCain’s \$6 million in 2004 with a surprising haul of \$6 million.

Making it fit

The question remains, and may be answered soon, if Internet-based support can translate into electoral support in the votes. The same Ron Paul campaign pulled in record fundraising online to win a single state in the primaries, although eight states have been decided so far, with the exception of Super Tuesday.

“The two entrenched parties (Democrats and Republicans) are way too adapted to their message fit whatever media,” Darris said. “You will find that those that practice spin doctoring and stagecraft; they can fit their message.”

“At the same time, it does allow for dissenting opinions like Ron Paul’s. Hopefully, eventually, this media (the Internet) will no longer be the tail, but the head of the tail.”

If a “no-name” candidate, as the mainstream media pundits, can build enough support, can the Internet and build enough support, can the Internet will have truly shifted in how the voters about political power and those who

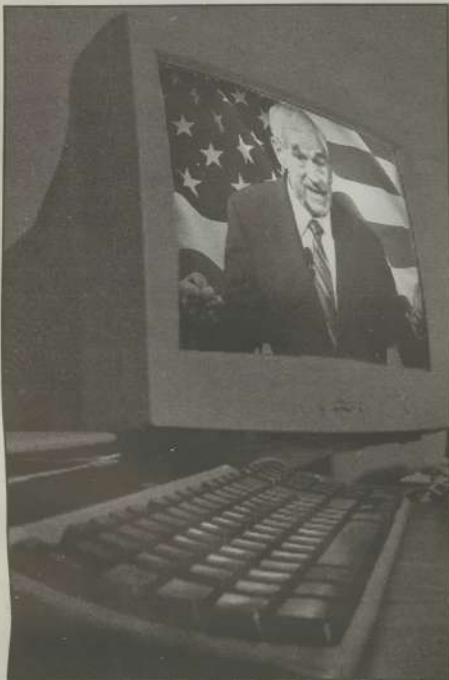
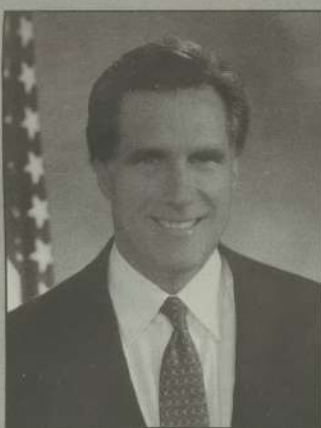


Photo illustration by Kayla Berge Clackamas Print

Mitt Romney: fiscally responsible savior or money-hoarding scrooge



Editor's note: This will be part of a continuing series featuring all current, viable presidential candidates.

Education:

Harvard Business School, M.B.A., 1975
Harvard Law School, J.D.
Brigham Young University, B.A., 1971
Cranbrook School

Public service:

Governor of Massachusetts, 2003 to 2007
Chairman, Republican Governors Association

Private experience:

Bain Capital, founded by Romney in 1984
Salt Lake Organizing Committee 2002 Winter Olympics
Bain & Co. vice president, 1978 to 1984

Book(s):

“Turnaround: Crisis, Leadership, and the Olympic Games”

Pros:

Of all the presidential candi-

dates, Romney best exemplifies the term “self-made man.” Academic recognition, success in business and his popularity as a Massachusetts governor are merely three of the areas where he has excelled.

Romney scored top grades and graduated with top honors from Brigham Young University, was a Baker Scholar, graduated in the top 5 percent of his Harvard business class and graduated cum laude from Harvard Law.

Within a few years of graduating, he rose to prominence with management consulting company Bain & Co. While there, he gained a reputation as a master of the business turnaround. He was involved in the creation or revitalization of hundreds of national companies such as Staples, Domino’s Pizza and the Sports Authority.

Of all the candidates, Romney is the only one who can be said to have made real, measurable and definable changes in America. He

is responsible for the creation of millions of dollars of wealth and the long-term creation of jobs and businesses.

In addition to his time as the Massachusetts governor, he is well-known for his turnaround of the 2002 Winter Olympics. Nearly bankrupted and scandalized by a corrupt steering committee, the Winter Games were saved by his efforts.

Romney’s other endeavors include many charitable organizations. He has served as a bishop and a stake president for his church, and has been involved in other civic organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America.

Cons:

Unfairly or not, Romney’s Mormon faith is seen as a major handicap to a wide swath of his potential conservative electorate.

His personal fortune is also quickly becoming a point of contention from his political rivals,

with accusations that he is trying to buy his way into the House. Also, it is very poor times of economic downturn for the poor and struggling to their troubles on the rich.

Romney has no experience in foreign policy and has served in the military, two things that might hurt him on the stage.

Analysis:

Mitt Romney is a natural achiever. He has enjoyed success in almost every endeavor he put his mind to and has been helped to create thousands of jobs.

Due to his innate ability to grow and overcome no matter the situation, Romney would shore up the national economy and create prosperity. With strengths and few weaknesses, Romney would make a first-rate president.

Grade: A-

The Clackamas Print

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