



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 12, 2010

DNC “Stealing Democracy” Ad Rips Chamber, Republicans

A YouTube ad that has generated a lot of attention in the major news media accuses the U.S. Chamber of conspiring with GOP operatives Karl Rove, former political adviser to President George W. Bush, and former Republican National Chairman Ed Gillespie for the purpose of "Stealing Democracy."



The ad, sponsored by the Democratic National Committee, calls the Chamber "shills for big business" who have joined "Bush cronies" Rove and Gillespie to spend "millions from secret donors to elect Republicans to do their bidding in Congress." The video includes a scene of a man stealing a woman's pocketbook in a dimly lit public garage. The narrator tells viewers "it appears they even take in secret foreign money to influence our elections."

As noted in *The Washington Post*, the phrase "it appears" indicates the Democrats are not actually accusing the Chamber or the Republicans of talking illegal foreign contributions. They're just saying "it appears" that way. "There's no sourcing text at the bottom of the screen, which is usually a big clue that there's little-to-no proof behind the claim," the *Post* article said. Yet the ad goes on to say: "It's incredible, Republicans benefiting from secret foreign money. Tell the Bush crowd and the Chamber of Commerce, stop stealing our Democracy."

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The DNC ad, posted on YouTube last Friday (October 8), follows the line taken by President Obama the previous day. *The New York Times* reported that in campaign stops Thursday Obama cited a blog posting from a liberal advocacy group about fundraising by the Chamber, a frequently vocal critic of the President and his policies.

"Just this week, we learned that one of the largest groups paying for these ads regularly takes in money from foreign corporations," Obama said. "So groups that receive foreign money are spending huge sums to influence American elections." The President raised the issue again in a rally in Philadelphia on Sunday.

"They are being helped along this year by special interest groups that are spending unlimited amounts of money on attack ads ... just attacking people without ever disclosing who's behind all these attack ads," Obama said of the Republicans "You don't know. It could be the oil industry. It could be the insurance industry. It could even be foreign-owned corporations. You don't know because they don't have to disclose."

"In fact," the *Times* article said, "the controversy over the Chamber of Commerce financing may say



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more about the Washington spin cycle — where an Internet blog posting can be quickly picked up by like-minded groups and become political fodder for the president himself — than it does about the vagaries of campaign finance."

The blog detailed the chamber's overseas memberships, "but it provided no evidence that the money generated overseas had been used in United States campaigns," the *Times* reported. "Still, liberal groups like MoveOn.org pounced on the allegations, resulting in protests at the chamber's offices, a demand for a federal investigation by Senator Al Franken, Democrat of Minnesota, and ultimately the remarks by Mr. Obama himself."

Franken has called for an investigation by the Federal Election Commission, Newsmax.com reported, while Sen. Max Baucus, Democrat from Montana, is seeking a probe by the Internal Revenue Service. In its lead editorial Monday, *The Wall Street Journal* took aim at the threat of having the U.S. Chamber besieged by government auditors.

"Democrats are unleashing government power to silence their political opponents," *The Journal* said about what it called an "attempt to stifle political speech. This is one more liberal abuse of power that voters should consider as they head to the polls." Gillespie made a similar argument in an op ed piece appearing today (Tuesday) in *The Washington Post*:

The fate awaiting Democrats in November is a result of their dismal economic record and their arrogance, the former RNC chairman wrote. "One reason voters are deserting President Obama in droves is because of fears of unfettered, invasive government power — fears that will only be reinforced by the Democrats' new political vigilantism.

On CBS's *Face the Nation* Sunday, host Bob Schieffer asked David Axelrod, political adviser to the President, if the White House had any evidence that foreign money is underwriting ads for Republican candidates.

"Well, do you have any evidence it's not, Bob?" Axelrod replied.

The tactic is not new, as *The Times* noted. The President's conservative foes raised the issue two years ago, suggesting Obama's online fundraising efforts during the 2008 campaign may have pulled in illegal contributions from foreign nationals. "No allegations were substantiated," *The Times* reported.

"People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," said Bruce Josten, chief lobbyist for the Chamber, who accused Obama of "smear tactics." Rove called the accusation against the Chamber baseless and "a desperate ploy" by the Democrats.

Obama raised the issue of foreign money in U.S. political campaigns early this year when he said in his State of the Union address that the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the *Citizens United* case, striking down as unconstitutional a key provision of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance law, may have opened the door to previously illegal expenditures by foreign corporations. Other federal election laws, however, prohibit foreign contributions and the Supreme Court said in the *Citizens United* case it was not ruling on the constitutionality of such bans.

"We need not reach the question of whether the Government has a compelling interest in preventing foreign individuals or associations from influencing our Nation's political process," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote for the Court in the 5-4 ruling.

Obama, in his recent statements, has merely been trying to call attention to the inadequacy of campaign finance disclosure laws, according to White House legal counsel Bob Bauer. "The president was not



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suggesting any illegality," Bauer told *The Times*. But White House spokesman Joshua Earnest called on the Chamber to go beyond the requirements of the law to show that no foreign funds are being used for its ads.

"They can put this to rest," said Joshua Earnest, a White House spokesman. "They have the keys to the file cabinet."

Photo: President Barack Obama talks with Roland Burris after speaking at a fundraiser for U.S. senatorial candidate Alexi Giannoulias at the Drake Hotel in Chicago, Oct. 7, 2010: AP Images



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