



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on August 9, 2012

Obama Bringing Chicago-Style Politics to Election Season

It would seem that all of the optimistic talk of “hope” and “change” that marked President Obama’s campaign of four years ago is now ancient history. This election season, as the Obama administration forecasted prior to the completion of the GOP primaries, would be full of nit and grit. As the most recent Obama super PAC ad makes abundantly clear, the president is making good on his word.



Priorities USA Action produced an ad — “Understands” is its title — that implicates Mitt Romney in the death of the wife of a steelworker whose Kansas City plant — GST Steel — was closed down by Bain Capital while Romney presided over its affairs.

The ad begins with these words: “Mitt Romney and Bain Capital made millions for themselves and then closed this steel plant.” Immediately thereafter, steelworker Joe Soptic explains that it was precisely because his place of employment ceased to operate that he could no longer afford the health insurance necessary to pay the medical expenses of his cancer-stricken wife. “I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he’s done to anyone,” Soptic says. “Furthermore, I do not think that Mitt Romney is concerned.”

In spite of the fact that Romney’s campaign spokesperson, Andrea Saul, characterized the ad as “despicable,” Obama refuses to repudiate it. Moreover, Bill Burton — a one-time White House aide to the president and a co-founder of Priorities USA Action, stood by the ad.

However effective the ad may be is anyone’s guess. But luckily for the Obama campaign, effectiveness rarely depends on accuracy.

Bain Capital took over GST Steel in 1993. In 2001, Soptic’s employer went out of business. For two reasons, these dates are highly relevant vis-à-vis Mitt Romney. First, had Bain Capital, under Romney’s leadership, not assumed control of the steel plant when it did, it would have been all but a foregone conclusion that GST Steel would have shut down shop at a much earlier date. Being the immensely successful private equity firm that Romney helped it to become, Bain Capital would invest money only in those businesses that it was either trying to get off the ground, like Staples, say, or those that it was trying to save — like GST Steel. What this means is that it almost certain that Joe Soptic would have been out of a job much sooner than he was had it not been for Bain Capital coming to the rescue of the fledgling GST Steel.

Second, in 2001, when the steel plant actually closed, Romney had already been absent from Bain for two years. While being interviewed on Bill Bennett’s nationally syndicated radio talk show, Romney was not short on words when it came to his assailant. “I don’t know what happened to a campaign of hope and change,” he said to Bennett. “I thought he was a new kind of politician.”

Obama, Romney continued, persists in running ads that numerous fact-checking agencies repeatedly expose as inaccurate. This former Massachusetts governor does not exaggerate. Obama has chosen to make Bain Capital the centerpiece of his campaign against Romney, yet beginning back in May when the attacks began, the claims that he and his supporters have made in this regard have been exposed by



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disparate sources as baseless.

Even some of Obama's supporters, like such prominent Democrats as Bill Clinton, Cory Booker, Ed Rendell, and Deval Patrick, to name but a few, have categorically repudiated the president's strategy while defending both Bain and Romney's record as its CEO.

Yet it hasn't been only Obama's supporters among politicians who have renounced his campaign against Bain and Romney. Democrat-friendly CNN, ABC, and *The Washington Post* are among the media agencies that have revealed Obama's allegations to be without merit.

Despite Romney's current air of incredulity regarding the decidedly negative approach of his rival's campaign, this isn't the first time that Obama has gone for the jugular veins of his opponents. Indeed, there really has never been a time when he hasn't been willing to get down and dirty in order to achieve victory. Way back in 1996, in his first race for a Chicago Senate seat, Obama manipulated election rules to eliminate from the ballot three fellow Democrats who were running against him. All of the signatures that they had accumulated on voting petitions were effectively invalidated.

As Chicago Tribune columnist, John Kass, remarked in 2008: "That was Chicago politics." Kass added: "Knock out your opposition, challenge their petitions, destroy your enemy, right? It is how Barack Obama destroyed his enemies back in 1996 that conflicts with his message [of "hope" and "change"] today."

Kass also mentioned that while Obama "may have gotten his start registering thousands of voters" as a community organizer, "in that first race, he made sure that voters had just one choice."

When Obama ran against Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary contest of 2008, who can forget how nasty that competition became? Even seasoned politician Bill Clinton cried foul, charging Obama and his cronies with "playing the race card on me." Clinton said at the time: "I think that they played the race card on me. And we now know, from memos from the campaign and everything that they planned to do it all along."

Nor was Obama's campaign against John McCain for the presidency in 2008 devoid of its share of below-the-belt blows. Because of the injuries he sustained while being held captive for five years in a Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp, McCain's mobility was considerably restricted. Among the activities that he found it difficult to engage in was that of using a computer. But this didn't stop Obama from running an ad mocking McCain for this handicap.

Obama also encouraged his supporters during a campaign speech in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to get aggressive with their political opponents. Referring to Republicans, Obama promised: "If they bring a knife to the fight, we bring a gun."

McCain's campaign spokesperson at the time, Tucker Bounds, quickly replied: "Barack Obama's call for a 'new politics' is officially over. In just 24 hours, Barack Obama attacked one of America's pioneering women CEO's, rejected a series of joint bipartisan town halls, and said that if there's a political knife fight, he'd bring a gun."

Whether Romney is really surprised by Obama's tactics is doubtful. One thing is for sure, however: If the president's track record is any indication of the events to come, none of us should be surprised to see Chicago-style politics dominating this election season.

Photo of Barack Obama: AP Images



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