

BUILDING A BETTER MESSAGE MACHINE: DO IDEAS MATTER?

A ONE-DAY CONFERENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA WASHINGTON CENTER

Thursday, October 12, 2006

**1608 Rhode Island Ave N.W.
Washington, DC 20036**

Contacts: **Jerry Lubenow** – 510 848-6808
Jlubenow@berkeley.edu
Liz Victoreen - 202 974-6345
elizabeth.victoreen@ucdc.edu

Conventional wisdom among Democrats holds that the Republican political ascendance in recent decades relied on a political infrastructure created in the 1970s and 80s. At the base of this powerful message machine, according to this model, is a network of think tanks and advocacy groups that generate a steady flow of fresh ideas to nourish Republican candidates and fuel Republican campaigns.

Democrats, determined to close the political idea gap, have recently pledged upwards of \$80 million over five years as part of a major effort to counter the conservative message machine. But is there really an idea gap, or is it a political artifact, a modern version of 1960's missile gap? In political battles, are ideas heavy weapons that can determine the outcome of a campaign or shape a legislative agenda, or are they simply sidearms that all candidates and officeholders are expected to carry?

This conference will examine where political ideas arise, how they are framed and fed into in the political dialogue, and the part they play in determining outcomes. Two afternoon panels of leading experts involved in the process will assess the origins, evolution, and impact of the Republican message machine and the Democratic response. An evening dialogue will address how new technologies, methods of finance, and campaign techniques are reshaping how political messages are framed, delivered and received.

Panel I - 2:00pm – 3:30pm

The Republican Message Machine: Model or Myth?

Chair: Bob Hawkins, President, Institute for Contemporary Studies and IGS Visiting Scholar

Panelists

- William Schambra, President the Bradley Center on Philanthropy and Civic Renewal
- John J. Miller, National Review
- John Duncan, Wexler and Walker, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Legislative Affairs
- Eleanor Clift, Newsweek Magazine

Panel II - 3:45pm-5:15pm

The Democratic Response: Too Much, Too Late?

Chair: Susan Rasky, UC, Berkeley

Panelists

- John Halpin, Center for American Progress
- Will Marshall, Progressive Policy Institute/Democratic Leadership Council
- Rob Stein, The Democracy Alliance
- Celinda Lake, President, Lake Research Partners
- Tom Edsall, Author and political writer for the New Republic and National Journal commenting on Democratic attempts to develop innovative policies and agendas.

Panel III – 7:00pm-8:30pm

Rethinking the Message: A New Model for New Media

Chair: Bruce Cain, Director, UC Washington Center

Panelists

- Tony Blankley, Editorial Page Editor, The Washington Times
- George Lakoff, Founder/Director, The Rockridge Institute