

PAC Sees Businesses Gaining Favor of Workers, Voters

By Carrie Dann

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The nation's economy and job market may be lurching like a storm-tossed ocean liner, but when it comes to political decision-making, analysts at the pro-business group BIPAC say that American workers are increasingly asking employers, not their unions, to throw them a rope. "In the last four years, credibility of business as a messenger to the voters has doubled," said Greg Casey, president of the Business Industry PAC. At a briefing today, Casey and BIPAC political analyst Bernadette Budde said a growing "investor class" -- American shareholders or those who are married to a shareholder -- have come to dominate the nation's electorate. In 2008, they said, 66 percent of voters fell into that category, the second most common trait of the electorate after race. Shareholder voters are not only financially invested in the success of their employers, Casey and Budde argued, but they are intellectually invested and are listening when their employers talk politics in the workplace. One in 10 respondents to the group's most recent market research report called their employer the "most credible" source of information about business and politics; while less than 3 percent said the same of labor unions. Casey predicted that "business grassroots activity will surpass that of organized labor in 2010 for the first time ever."

Casey and Budde say that could have major consequences for political candidates. Singling out Majority Leader Reid, Budde said he and the class of senators up for re-election in 2010 are "singing off a different sheet of music" than colleagues whose recent campaigns were more defined by online professional networking and employer-employee communication. BIPAC favored Republican candidates by a 4-1 margin over Democrats in 2008 contributions, but it notably gave to pro-business Democrats like Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia and Rep. Bobby Bright of Alabama. Budde said Republicans risk misfiring in 2010 if they reflexively target pro-business Democrats, saying that there is no "perfect overlap" between the Republican agenda and the interests of the business community. Asked if House Republicans could find themselves in electoral hot water because of opposition to the economic stimulus, which received broad support from business groups, Budde said it's too early to tell. "I don't think we can evaluate political impact of the stimulus, for or against, this close to the event," said Budde. "The electorate appears to be very patient in waiting for a period of time as to whether or not this begins to work."