

The looming specter of the political-industrial complex

By: [Guest Opinion](#) November 16, 2012

A half-century ago, President Dwight D. Eisenhower cautioned Americans to be mindful of the “military-industrial complex.”

He said, “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence... by the military-industrial complex... Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing... so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Accordingly, I have come to believe that we must also safeguard against the sway of what some call the “political-industrial complex” — a term I use to describe the chattering class of consultants and the ilk.

This election cycle, like all others, illustrates the looming, multi-faceted concentration of influence within the machinery of this political-industrial complex, of which I am a card-carrying member.

The consultants, media buyers, politicians, email vendors, mail houses, production crews, pollsters, fundraisers, social media gurus and “smart guys/gals” from the District of Columbia — are a cottage industry that exists to receive the rising dough (money) that politicians work so hard to knead in order to project their messages of hope and tax-cuts.

This commentary is not advocating for a particular side — it is aimed at all sides that work for the benefit of candidates, political issues and themselves.

On Nov. 7, after a month of fast-forwarding TV commercials about the depravity of a candidate’s soul and deleting emails about Prop. (insert number here), who among us did not breathe a resonant sigh of relief when it was all over? Whether your candidate or issue won or lost, we all woke up a little relieved that Wednesday.

Don’t misunderstand. These election professionals are some of the most talented and hard-working marketing/consulting whizzes around. They know the issues, peoples’ behavior, the brand and how to communicate to their audience effectively and efficiently.

Despite the “spin” you hear, most consultants use this little rule of thumb: People who vote, vote — and those who don’t vote, don’t vote. Scarce resources are not devoted to people who may not vote. If a consultant targets “new” voters, get a new consultant or a bigger checkbook.

Politicos don’t judge voters to be smart or dumb, they judge their opinion and whether certain urgings move or augment their opinion.

That is what polling tells consultants. The media gets polling partially wrong. It is not always about John Doe receiving 52 percent of the vote. Real, honest scientific

survey work — that the public rarely sees — is about demographic sub-data and blocks of voters.

Fortunately, Sam Wang, a Princeton neuroscientist and part-time election polling sage, did not have to eat a bug. Wang said that he would eat “a really big bug” if Ohio went to Mitt Romney. He projected that Obama would win 51.1 percent to 48.9 percent. He also projected that Obama would receive 303 Electoral College votes with Florida being a toss-up — but likely going to Obama (i.e. Florida is worth 29 Electoral College votes making the total 332 Electoral College votes for Obama). Anybody check the score lately? Do I need to tell you that Obama received 332 electoral votes?

So while the D.C. pundits and talking heads were using polling much like a drunkard uses a lamp-post — more for support than enlightenment — the real smart guys with the real polls should have gone to Las Vegas. They knew who was going to be the president. And so did Obama senior campaign adviser David Axelrod. A lot of those beltway TV/radio experts, pundits, and prognosticators got it wrong. Yet, the real smart guys, the ones who look at data, got it right.

As Americans, we can be forgiving of those who had a “feeling.”

Conversely however, “...we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence ...” by the political-industrial complex. This group is made up of non-candidates with a vested interest in election outcomes and we should be less forgiving of its so-called “negative” contributions to the election cycle.

With that said, lets just get something straight right here and now.

If negative campaigning did not work, nobody would do it. It happens under our noses as we engage in our God-given rights to maintain a political opinion and vote for our favorite candidate.

However, each election cycle, applying some political common sense by following the money is a most reasonable course of action. You were bombarded because you vote. And so, your vote supports the political-industrial complex.

Maybe it is time to heed President Eisenhower’s advice from five decades ago: “...Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing... so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

— *Gibson McKay is a public affairs consultant. He was involved in more than 40 primary and general campaigns during the 2012 election cycle.*