



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on January 8, 2012

Debate: SuperPac “Attack Ads” a Hot Topic

Both the official Ron Paul campaign and an independent, pro-Mitt Romney SuperPac, Restore Our Future, spent millions each in the attack on Gingrich in Iowa. *The Atlantic* magazine [credited](#) Restore Our Future with handing Romney the Iowa victory. "The Iowa caucuses, more than any single contest in 2010, will mark the arrival of the super PAC as a potent, and likely lasting, political weapon. Restore Our Future, the super PAC that has run millions of dollars in television advertisements on Romney's behalf, deserves an Oscar for the role it played in Iowa."



In the January 8 NBC debate, moderator David Gregory [asked](#) Gingrich if he had changed his position on "negative" advertisements after being hit by about \$5 million in advertisements in Iowa highlighting his record:

Gregory: You complained bitterly about the Super PAC, the outside groups that were lodging charges against you, bringing up some old issues against you. And now you have a former campaign spokesman who is preparing attacks against Governor Romney, calling him "a predator" for his involvement at the investment company, Bain. You agreed with somebody who said that Governor Romney was a liar, when he didn't take account for those attacks against you. Are you consistent now, as you're preparing to launch against Governor Romney?

Gingrich: Sure.

Gregory: How so?

Gingrich: I'm consistent, because I think you ought to have fact-based campaigns to talk about the records.

The pro-Gingrich SuperPac, "Winning Our Future," plans a 27-minute movie on Romney called "[The King of Bain](#)," a reference to Romney's time as partner in the venture capital firm Bain Capital in the 1980s. And Gingrich's ally will have plenty of cash to spend in South Carolina to promote that video. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson gave a \$5 million donation to the same pro-Newt SuperPac "Winning Our Future," [according to](#) the *Las Vegas Sun* for January 7. Donations to candidates' campaigns are limited to about \$2,500 per election cycle, but under federal court rulings in [SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission](#), donations to SuperPacs, also called 527s for their classification in the tax code, are unlimited. SuperPacs do have to report their donations to the Federal Election Commission, however.

During the January 8 debate, Romney [defended](#) his actions while distancing himself from the SuperPac. "Well, of course, they're — former staff of mine. And of course they're people who support me. They wouldn't be putting money into a PAC that supports me if they weren't people who support me. And with regards to their ads, I haven't seen 'em."



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But then, less than a minute later, Romney contradicted himself, [saying](#):

But let me tell you this. The — the ad I saw said that — that you'd been forced out of the speakership. That was correct. It said that — that you'd sat down with Nancy Pelosi and — and argued for — for a climate change bill. That was correct. It said that you'd called the — the — Ron Paul — wrong Paul — Paul Ryan's plan to — to provide — Medicare reform — a right-wing social engineering plan. It said that — that as part of an investigation, an ethics investigation that you had to reimburse some \$300,000. Those things are all true. If there was something related to abortion that it said that was wrong, I hope they pull it out. Anything wrong, I'm opposed to.

Romney [claimed](#) he had no control over the SuperPac content. "The Super PACs that are out there running ads, Ron Paul's, mine, yours, as you know, that is not my ad. I don't write that ad. I can't tell them not to."

SuperPacs have become a [whipping boy for the Left](#) since the 2010 Supreme Court [Citizens United](#) decision allowed their creation, and have caused comedian Stephen Colbert of the Comedy Central television channel to [parody](#) the idea of a SuperPac. The Left has [campaigned for a repeal of Citizens United](#) (which would ban SuperPacs) because it is concerned that more money will flow into the elections outside of the traditional left-wing gate-keepers of the mainstream media. SuperPacs do seem to be raising a fair amount of money, though less than a quarter of donations to official candidate committees. [According to the Center for Responsive Politics](#), "As of January 08, 2012, 269 groups organized as Super PACs have reported total receipts of \$32,008,813 and total expenditures of \$18,701,508 in the 2012 cycle." That's roughly equivalent to the [amount Mitt Romney \(the top GOP fundraiser\) raised](#) for his political campaign through the third quarter of 2011.

The reality is that anonymous independent political speech has been essential to American liberty, even anonymous speech that is banned by *Citizens United* and *SpeechNow.org* court decisions. Independent and anonymous speech was key to organizing American complaints against the British (Samuel Adams frequently wrote anonymously as "[Vindex](#)" in newspapers against British rule in Boston before the war for independence). Moreover, after independence James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay wrote a series of 85 anonymous letters as "[Publius](#)" urging adoption of the U.S. Constitution; their letters later became known as *The Federalist Papers*. Opponents of the Constitution also wrote prolifically against the Constitution under pen names such as "[Brutus](#)"; many of these writings were later collected and published as the *AntiFederalist Papers*. After the Constitution was adopted, anonymous writers continued to campaign on both sides of George Washington's 1793 Neutrality proclamation as [Americanus and Pacificus](#) (Alexander Hamilton) and [Helvidius](#) (James Madison).

Independent — and even anonymous — political speech is not only as American as the U.S. Constitution, it also arguably produced the U.S. Constitution.

Photo of Mitt Romney: AP Images



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