



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on February 7, 2012

Obama Campaign Supports Priorities USA “Super PAC”

To counter recent fundraising surges in the Republican presidential primaries, on Monday Obama’s 2012 reelection campaign urged wealthy fundraisers to support Priorities USA Action, a “super PAC” (political action committee) that is allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money to mobilize political campaigns. The move has attracted criticism from both sides of the political aisle, as the President has been an outspoken critic of high or no limits on campaign contributions and has consistently rebuked the influence of special interests in politics.



Super PACs emerged after the 2010 Supreme Court decision *Citizens United* held that the First Amendment prohibits government from placing limits on independent spending for political purposes by corporations and unions. While these new committees do not have the authority to coordinate directly with campaigns, they are allowed to raise unlimited donations from individuals, corporations, unions, and other groups. Obama adamantly opposed the Supreme Court’s decision, asserting that eliminating limits on donations would even further stimulate special interests’ already deep presence in government.

But despite such opposition, the Obama campaign emboldened major fundraisers in a Monday night conference call to support the super PAC called Priorities USA. Interestingly, Priorities USA has failed to compete with its Republican counterparts; many of these GOP-backed groups have played a prominent role in the Republican primaries, raising millions of dollars for negative ad campaigns in early primary states such as Iowa, Florida, and South Carolina.

Several Democratic congressmen told [Politico](#) that in light of recent events, the timing of the campaign’s disclosure appeared rushed:

It was made in a 10 p.m. call to Obama’s top bundlers, known as the National Finance Committee. Several party fundraisers raised the possibility that the campaign wanted to offset bad publicity generated by a Monday *New York Times* story, which reported that the campaign had returned \$200,000 to the family of a wealthy Mexican fugitive seeking a pardon for drug and other criminal convictions [see [here](#)].

Obama campaign manager Jim Messina [addressed](#) supporters in a Monday email asserting that the campaign “can’t allow for two sets of rules” in which the Republican presidential candidate benefits from “unlimited spending and Democrats unilaterally disarm.” He added, “We decided to do this because we can’t afford for the work you’re doing in your communities, and the grassroots donations you give to support it, to be destroyed by hundreds of millions of dollars in negative ads.”

The Obama campaign’s decision to promote Priorities USA arrived soon after new fundraising reports showed that American Crossroads and Crossroads GPS — two Republican super PACs associated with GOP strategist Karl Rove — raised a hefty \$51 million last year while Democratic groups collared only



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\$19 million.

Both Republicans and Democrats chided the President's decision, asserting that it's hypocritical for Obama to rail against special-interest fundraising while at the same time embracing the very same practices. "This is a brazenly cynical move by Barack Obama and his political handlers, who just a year ago had the chutzpah to call outside groups a threat to democracy," charged American Crossroads spokesman Jonathan Collegio.

Ex-Senator Russ Feingold, a Wisconsin liberal who co-authored campaign finance legislation with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) to regulate political campaigns, also [censured](#) the move:

This is dancing with the devil. I know a lot of Democrats in D.C. don't agree, and I understand the desire to do everything possible to win. But this decision will push Democrats to become corporate-lite, and will send us head-on into a battle we know we will lose, because Republicans like Mitt Romney and his friends have and will spend more money.

Feingold added that by promoting Priorities USA, Obama is urging an action he previously railed against. "The president is wrong to embrace the corrupt corporate politics of Citizens United through the use of super-PACs — organizations that raise unlimited amounts of money from corporations and the richest individuals, sometimes in total secrecy," the former Senator alleged. "It's not just bad policy; it's also dumb strategy."

Campaign officials defended the move on Tuesday during a conference call with reporters, explaining that the decision to support Priorities USA was made after observing the prominent impact super PAC spending has had on the Republican primaries. "With the influx of Republican spending on super PACs [and] the recent reports that Republican super PACs are committed to raising half a billion to defeat the president," a campaign official [asserted](#), "we made the decision to not allow the Republicans to be the [sole] beneficiary of unlimited spending."

But considering Obama's so-called opposition to "special-interest politicking," endorsing Priorities USA could ignite future controversies for him, as well as conflicting with some of the policies implemented by his campaign and the Democratic National Committee. For instance, campaign officials have no control over how the super PAC raises its money, and the group has the authority to accept donations from registered lobbyists. So in effect, the President and his campaign's decision to reach out to Priorities USA could very well result in his actually promoting the use of lobbyist donations to his campaign. Considering his numerous campaign pledges to put an end to special-interest campaigning, one might suggest this decision is yet another broken promise — [a promise Obama made](#) during a speech in Des Moines, Iowa on November 10, 2007:

I am in this race to tell the corporate lobbyists that their days of setting the agenda in Washington are over. I have done more than any other candidate in this race to take on lobbyists — and won. They have not funded my campaign, they will not run my White House, and they will not drown out the voices of the American people when I am president.



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