

Bill Kraus: Back to the future

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The campaign of 2016 brought forth an immediate and very large “never again” from up to 85 percent of the voters. There were many different reasons led by “too much money” and “way too long.”

And nothing happened.

If anything, 2018 has already been too long and promises to be the most expensive midterm election ever.

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Why?

The most important reasons are that the money is buying power, which is what the money wants. The other player in the “too too” game is less obvious and visible but just as important.

It’s the campaign industry, which is being funded by the money and stretched by the beneficiaries into a 24/7 and 12 month business for its practitioners.

Some pundits have pegged it a \$6 billion dollar industry. It provides campaign managers, pollsters, media mavens, and all the major parts of the upper-level races that fill our executive and legislative offices.

It’s the new Tammany Hall. Full-time and fully funded.

This version of Tammany Hall is much less visible and less tightly organized history tells us about Tammany Hall. There is no campaign management “association” that

I can find. It's even hard to find out who is running what and why.

The how is more evident. The campaign business is eerily similar to sports coaching. Everybody is playing the same game, using the same tactics: bewitch the base and beat up on the opposition. Full time and full speed and full force.

But this is not about the ad hominem of current campaigns. It's about who is running things and who is not.

They are.

You and I are not.

And they are running things in ways that promote power and money and the revenue streams the industry covets and needs.

The voters are the buyers of what the business is selling.

The voters didn't count in 2016. They are not going to count in 2018.

If they are ever going to count again, the system has to be rebuilt in ways that makes ideas and participation more important and slogans and insults less so.

Now that you know this, what can you do about it?

Plenty.

Start by getting smart. Find facts and fact providers you trust. Want to know where the money is coming from? The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign's website tracks the flow of money into politics every day and every way.

The candidates' websites are mostly about asking for money, more push out than welcome in; so to find out who is running things you have to ask. So ask.

It would be nice if you had the time, energy, and inclination to be active and to help candidates who you find worthy. Short of that, stay informed and informative. Pay attention to what the people we voted for are doing to us and for us. Tap valid and valuable information so you know what's really happening not merely what the Russians are telling you.

Then use the ultimate weapon—the vote—to express your approval or disapproval.

Start with judicial and other “non partisan” elections. Don’t vote for outspoken partisans who are running for these offices. Do vote for candidates whose letterhead leaders come from both sides.

The next priority is primaries. Because the turnout is low primaries are the new Tammany’s favorite playground and the candidates and incumbents new minefield. Primaries are a big reason why candidates will tell you that politics are all about the money and how the money dispensers keep the candidates in line.

The old Tammany rigged elections at the voting booths with ballot tricks. The new Tammany’s strategy is more media and timing driven. A big, unexpected, and too-late-to-respond-to media attack just before the election is a favorite new Tammany tactic. Get smart. Don’t fall for it. Vote against it.

Vote against the money you don’t like. Vote against incivility. Vote in every election for every office.

As former NYC mayor once said: “If you approve of 9 of 12 things I said or do, vote for me. If you approve of all 12, go see a psychiatrist.”

Politics is not a “best TV commercial” contest. Politics is about finding the best people for increasingly difficult jobs.

Find them. Vote for them.

— Kraus, a former leader of Common Cause in Wisconsin, is a longtime Wisconsin politico who advised Govs. Dreyfus and Knowles.