

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST DISHONEST CAMPAIGNS

by Supervisor Linda Parks and Nora Aidukas, November 2012

This November's election set records for negative campaigning.

In Ventura County's biggest races there were at least twice as many attack ads mailed than positive ones, with households receiving an average of 30 mailers per candidate.

While negative advertising dominated our airwaves, mailboxes and inboxes, what was worse is that much of it was false. To some it may not make a difference if a lie is told about a candidate they love to hate, but we believe facts should matter.

Unfortunately with all the lying, distortions and mischaracterizations — and both political parties doing it — voters lacked unbiased sources for reliable information to verify the dozens and dozens of dubious claims.

Here are a few of the most common campaign tactics that brought lies, big and small:

- Parsing words and quotes:

Beware of the oddly phrased claim. For example, one campaign accused a candidate of "refusing to vote" on a bill, implying she was opposed to it when, in fact, she was absent due to illness but had previously voted for it. Also beware of ellipses. It's a sure sign that the quote is a partial quote, moreover, it's a sign that the complete quote might not support their claim.

- Faking sources and cherry-picking facts:

Don't take a citation for granted. Campaigns used bogus citations that had nothing to do with the subject matter. Other campaigns picked what they liked from a respected source but omitted the parts they didn't like, substituting instead facts more to their liking.

- Come with me and you'll be, in a world of pure exaggeration

We documented some of the nastiest races in the region at HonestyCounts.org. The "grab" seen around the world in the congressional race that became a "headlock," which had to be broken up by deputies. A \$4,000 break on a loan to a congressman was called a "bribe" even though there was no support for the claim that there was any vote traded for the deal.

Another candidate's lobbying experience was compared to being a pimp, with photo-shopped pictures included!

- Pure fabrication:

Then there were the campaigns that just made stuff up including one attributing a quote to a candidate saying he called for "double the cuts" to education when the quote actually came from

the candidate's critic. Another lied in a TV commercial saying the candidate had accused Israel of war crimes when she did not.

- Unintentional slips:

And then there's the Assembly candidate who early in the campaign included a pretty impressive list of political action committees and lobbyists along with their emails and telephone numbers on his website, a link that was intended for fundraising, not public viewing. Although the list was quickly removed, Honesty Counts commemorated the disclosure for its honesty.

We encourage the current efforts in Congress to require truth in advertising in political campaigns. Voters want honesty from our elected officials and from their campaigns.

Meanwhile, the public must hold campaigns accountable and reduce the effectiveness of their untruthful attacks.