

POLITICS

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Independent vote no waste, Perot says

Candidate rejects 'politics as usual'; supporters waiting for personal campaign

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS— Ross Perot sought on Wednesday to counter arguments that votes for him are wasted, releasing new ads that say instead, "This is no time to waste our votes on politics as usual."



Perot

Meanwhile, aides said they hoped he would be on the stump soon. And they said the campaign had begun putting together plans for a Perot administration.

The 60-second commercials are aimed at voters who Perot supporters fear will shun him on Election Day because they view his

chance of winning as slim — even though they were impressed by his debate performance.

The four separate ads focus on trickle-down economics, health care reform, urban problems and government waste.

Each ends by saying, "This is no time to waste our votes on politics as usual. It is time for a candidate who will get down to business."

In Monday's final presidential debate, Perot himself said voters should "stop letting these folks in the press tell you you're throwing your vote away."

Despite Perot's third-place standing, general counsel Clay Mulford said the campaign was encouraged by independent polls after the debates that showed 60 percent of those surveyed viewed Perot more favorably and overall support had doubled to the mid to

high teens.

"We think, with that 60 percent more favorably disposed for us, that we can capture only a third of that, coupled with the amount we've already increased in the polls, and prevail," Mulford said.

Perot has not decided where to personally campaign, if at all, aides said. But they also said they hoped to announce a schedule Thursday.

"Perhaps some rallies, perhaps some visits to particularly interesting facilities, perhaps some town halls," said Orson Swindle, leader of the Perot supporters' organization. "All over America, we're looking at it."

Perot's running mate, retired Adm. James Stockdale, would likely join him on the stump, Swindle said. Stockdale has met with editorial boards of several California newspapers in recent

days. Perot will broadcast the second part of a biography program Thursday night on ABC.

In an excerpt released Wednesday, Perot recalled his involvement in Vietnam POW issues and said, "This is going to be dealt with as a head-on priority. We're not going to duck it."

Perot has also bought half-hour time slots on Friday and Saturday on other networks.

Despite Perot's longshot odds, Mulford said some thought has been given to pulling together a transition team and Cabinet.

"We wouldn't have to worry about political party debts and obligations to the Democrats or to the Republicans. People have contacted us expressing interest if things go the way we think they will, which would be our victory," he said.

S&L directors show Lanier, others favor, officials say

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON— Federal regulators are using a deal between Houston Mayor Bob Lanier and failed University Federal Savings Association as evidence that thrift directors allegedly rubber-stamped ventures with prominent businessmen without proper review.

The Resolution Trust Corp. filed a federal lawsuit in February against Entex, the Houston gas utility that bought the thrift from Lanier in 1977, and 16 former University officers and directors.

Lanier, who was not mayor at the time of the transactions, is not a defendant in the lawsuit. But regulators allege Lanier was shown favoritism in a deal with University that will cost taxpayers more than \$13 million.

"This loan and the related joint venture relationship exemplify University's penchant for affording preferential treatment to certain borrowers, including Lanier, to the detriment of the institution," Resolution Trust, the federal agency responsible for bailing out failed thrifts, said in the lawsuit.

The Houston Chronicle reported Wednesday it had obtained a copy of the lawsuit, which has been placed under seal by U.S. District Court Judge David M. Hittner. The lawsuit accuses Entex of lying to federal thrift regulators about the financial condition of Entex and University. Entex had to file detailed financial documents with regulators in 1987 because the company needed, and gained, regulatory approval to sell the thrift, which failed two years later.

Taxpayer-funded mass mailings on the rise, watchdog group says

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON— Thirty-one million pieces of taxpayer-funded mass mailings from Texas congressmen have been stuffed into Texas mailboxes since the start of the 102nd Congress, a watchdog group said Wednesday.

For the first nine months of this year, House members from Texas mailed 11.5 million newsletters, cards and other franked mass mailings to their districts, the National Taxpayers Union Foundation said.

The NTUF, a non-partisan group seeking reform of franking laws, based its report on information obtained from the U.S. Postal Service under a Freedom of Information Act request.

The study found there was a 40 percent hike in House mail volume for the first eight months of this election year compared to the same period a year ago.

"With the election approaching, the House again went into a franking frenzy," said David Keating, president of the NTUF. "Excessive use of the frank is undermining the fairness of elections by subsidizing incumbents."

Keating said 310 of the House's 435 members spent more on franking this election cycle than the \$108,506 spent two years ago by the average challenger on an entire campaign. Eighteen of Texas' 27 congressmen spent at least \$108,506 on taxpayer-funded mailings since the start of 1992.

Dallas Democrat Martin Frost led the list, with \$333,235 in postal costs and 2.5 million

pieces of mass mail.

Each lawmaker's postal allowance varies, based on how many people live in the district. This year, lawmakers were allowed to spend up to 67 cents per district mailing address and also could transfer up to \$25,000 from their office accounts into their mailing budgets. Last year, the amount was 87 cents per address.

When ranked by cost per address, Frost was second among Texas members and 44th among all House members.

The top spender in Texas, per address, was Lufkin Democrat Charlie Wilson, who ranked 10th among all House members.

Other leading spenders in Texas, based on cost per address, were Houston Democrat Mike Andrews, ranked 68th; Fort Worth Democrat Pete Geren, 88th; and Sugar Land Republican Tom DeLay, 96th.

Those spending the least per address were: Austin Democrat J.J. "Jake" Pickle, ranked 433rd; Rockwall Democrat Ralph Hall, 425th; Stamford Democrat Charles Stenholm, 417th; Mission Democrat Kika de la Garza, 405th; and Houston Democrat Craig Washington, 380th.

Defenders of Congress' taxpayer-financed mail system say it allows them to stay in touch with constituents and respond to their problems.

"Do (critics) ever say anything about how they would propose a congressional office maintain communication with constituents?" asked Elaine Lang, Wilson's press secretary.

Lang defended Wilson's postal expenditures and noted that he has not issued a newsletter since last spring.

"We stayed within our budget. And, our mailings include critically important things like notices of when the mobile office is going to be coming to town."

Frost said a "very significant" portion of his postal spending is from town hall meeting notices. Cutting back on franking expenditures could end up hurting constituents, he said.

"You wouldn't be able to have town hall meetings as often," he said. "The only way you can really get the word out to people is to directly mail (notices) to them."

Frost noted that the House already has reformed franking practices, imposing limits on how much members can spend annually. "We've made some very significant changes," he said. Critics note that historically Congress' mail costs go up during election years as lawmakers seek to increase their publicity back home.

Frost's expenditures remained relatively constant from last year to this year. Some Texans, however, significantly increased their mailings this year.

El Paso Democrat Ron Coleman, who faces a stiff challenge from Republican Chip Taberski, has spent \$100,208 so far this year, compared to \$47,706 last year. In another tight race, San Antonio Democrat Albert Bustamante has spent \$103,001 in the first nine months of this year, compared to \$37,076 for all of last year.

Beaumont Democrat Jack Brooks has spent \$73,953 this year, versus \$9,500 for all of last year. Washington, the Houston Democrat, has spent \$52,636 this year, compared to \$7,445 last year.

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