

President Obama succumbed late Monday to the dark logic of the Super PACs, instructing top West Wing staffers to help raise money for the so-called "independent" groups that have been successful in picking winners and losers thus far in 2012.

"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," Obama's campaign manager Jim Messina [wrote supporters](#) in an email Monday night.

This is no small news — which explains why the [New York Times](#) placed this story on page one today — as it signals that the president has reversed his earlier stance against working with Super PACs and joined others on the low road to political influence.

It also sounds the starting gun for the real race to win the White House in 2012 — one that will very likely award the candidate who raises the most cash with victory in November. In this case, though, it won't be the victor who gets the spoils, but the wealthy corporations and individuals that funded him.

What's really happening in 2012 is a transfer of money and power unlike any other in the history of U.S. politics. It's a process that's unfolding in corporate boardrooms and corridors of political power, far from public view or scrutiny.

Here's the supporting evidence.

**1. Money Wins Elections:** According to the [Center for Responsive Politics](#), the federal candidate who raised more money in 2008 won his or her race nine out of 10 times. Former White House political czar Karl Rove knows this well. His Super PAC American Crossroads and his 501(c)(4) group Crossroads GPS recorded an unbroken string of victories in 2010 after spending an estimated \$40 million. This year he's aiming to raise more than five times that amount.

**2. The Wealthiest Give the Most:** Thanks to the 2010 Citizens United decision, the overwhelming majority of political contributions (in terms of dollars) now come from the wealthiest corporations and individuals. [According to the Sunlight Foundation](#), almost half of the contributions to the nine largest Super PAC spenders thus far came from just 22 donors who each gave more than \$500,000. Nearly 80 percent of the donors were those who gave more than \$100,000. It's a list that includes [some of the wealthiest](#) hedge fund managers (Julian Robertson: \$1 million for pro-Mitt Romney Super PAC), Hollywood execs (Jeffrey Katzenberg: \$2 million for pro-Obama Super PAC) and property developers (Bob Perry: \$2.5 million for Karl Rove's Super PAC).

**3. There's More Being Spent Now than Ever Before:** 2012 will break all previous records for contributions to campaigns, Super PACs and some even less accountable 501(c)(4)s, all of which are concentrating their spending on media buys in local television markets. [Kantar Media's Campaign Media Analysis Group](#) estimates that candidates, political parties and independent groups will spend up to \$3.3 billion to buy TV ads during the 2012 election season. That's a 57

percent increase over the estimated \$2.1 billion that was spent on local ads during the 2008 election cycle.

**4. Political Ads Work:** The reason so much money is being spent on so many ads is that it's a proven formula for success. Newt Gingrich saw a near-complete reversal of his political fortunes in both Iowa and Florida after "Restore Our Future," a pro-Romney Super PAC, plowed many times more money into ads in those states than the Gingrich counterpart. In Florida, Romney's camp and his allies aired nearly 13,000 television commercials in the state, compared with fewer than 300 by Gingrich and his supporters, according to a [study by the Wesleyan Media Project](#). As in Iowa, this on-air onslaught coincided with the decline of Gingrich support in the polls, and, ultimately, at the ballot box.

**5. Broadcasters Are a Part of the Problem:** The broadcasters benefiting most from this massive transfer of money oppose any effort that would require them to better disclose who's buying political influence. Broadcasters balked at the Federal Communications Commission proposal to put online the political advertising information in their "public files," preferring to keep this information hidden away. But it gets worse. According to Free Press' recent report [Citizens Inundated](#), stations are also providing less of the sort of local political coverage that would help viewers separate political fact from fiction in an election year.

**6. Transparency Can't Take a Back Seat to Business as Usual:** The FCC chair who is supposed to hold stations accountable just got a signal from his boss in the White House that this backdoor money-and-media game is now business as usual in Washington. The FCC would do well to ignore that message and push broadcasters to embrace the sort of [transparency and accountability](#) that would shed light on the money that makes these Super PACs tick. This action becomes even more important now that the president has decided to cast his lot with these shadowy outside groups.