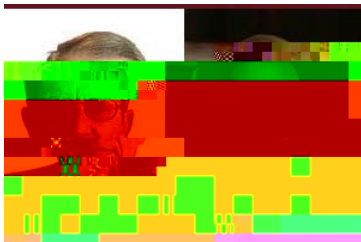


HALF-TRUTHS, UNEQUAL FUNDING DEFINE BOOKER-BELL RACE FOR U.S SENATE SEAT

JOE TYRRELL | OCTOBER 31, 2014

Former Newark mayor's \$17.6 million war chest dwarfs GOP opponent's \$400,000 FEC filing



Republican challenger Jeff Bell and U.S. Sen. Cory Booker

As the race for a U.S. Senate enters its final days, incumbent Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Republican challenger Jeff Bell have persistently tried to define their opponent for voters.

In their lone debate, Bell mentioned President Barack Obama almost as often as he named Booker, frequently in an "Obama-Booker" combination. For his part, Booker talked of "my Tea Party opponent" to the point where Lewis Carroll might have felt summoned.

The thrust and parry of this campaign has had one advantage over others across the nation. Most of the purported attacks are true, although not the whole story.

So when Booker talks of Bell spending three decades in Virginia and moving back to New Jersey just to make this race, that's something the Republican has readily acknowledged, even admitting its might seem "presumptuous."

Booker already had an ad up for weeks, **featuring him standing in front of a slogan, “Common Ground”**, talking about his willingness to work with anyone to help New Jersey.

And he left that debate, which aired Sunday on ABC stations in New York and Philadelphia, with another commercial on Jersey values, intended to contrast his views with some of the opinions Bell set forth in a 2012 book “The Case for Polarized Politics: Why America Needs Social Conservatism.”

If as Bell suggests, Booker remains better known as a friend of billionaire Mark Zuckerberg than as a Washington player, it is also true that the former Newark mayor has only been in the capital since last year. He was appointed to the unexpired term of the late Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), then beat rightwing Republican Steve Lonegan in a special election.

The current contest is for a full six-year term, and whoever wins will still be a junior senator in what is likely to remain a gridlocked Congress, with everything revolving around the 2016 presidential election.

Against that background, the self-image the Booker campaign is trying to present is of a reasonable man, willing to work with the other party in an era when a dysfunctional Congress finds little favor in public opinion polls.

Bell’s message is that he worked for Ronald Reagan, and even worked with Democrats in an attempt to forge immigration reform. But his main talking point is a bit offbeat, returning America to the gold standard.

“I don’t think people find it esoteric, well, maybe esoteric, but they understand money that

The trend in the Stockton polls has been even better for Booker. The incumbent's favorables have been creeping up, and his negatives are lower than Bell's. In the latest edition, more respondents were unfamiliar with Bell, 37 percent, than had a favorable view of him, 35 percent.

"This is late in the game for the challenger to still be introducing himself to the voters," Daniel Douglas, director of the Hughes Center, said in a press release. "It may be impossible at this point to overcome Booker's advantag

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