

# America's Got Talent – No Pity Party Please!

☒ I love America's Got Talent. Watching it puts a smile on my face. But what I've noticed is that some of the contestants LOVE to tell a hard luck story which, in my mind, is a plea for a pity vote. This is not unique to AGT. American Idol is a far worse offender of this practice. I'm not even sure whose idea it is – the producers, the network, the contestants themselves.

Here's a perfect example. Last week, opera singer, Branden James, was interviewed before his performance and laments that he was raised in a conservative household. When I heard that, I knew exactly what was coming next .... he is openly gay and his mother doesn't accept his homosexuality and opera allows him to be himself, blah, blah, blah. Woe is me! I'm a victim! Please vote for me!

Well, he went on stage, sung the aria from Puccini's Turandot, my favorite by the way, Nessun Dorma, and it was okay as far as I was concerned. I don't think I've ever heard Luciano Pavarotti sing Nessun Dorma without crying – that's how moving I find the song, particularly since I've seen the opera several times. Anyway, Mr. James was able to hit all the notes but his rendition did not even give me goose bumps, but that's just me.

What ticks me off is his complaining how his lifestyle isn't accepted by his family. Well, his mother was in the audience and I don't think I've ever seen a prouder or happier mother, especially when he hit the high C. So what does this guy want?

What does having sex with men have to do with your ability to sing? Are we supposed to vote for this guy because he's gay?

If you tell me you suffered from throat cancer a few years ago and you can now sing like Andrea Bocelli, I'll listen to you. If you tell me you lost your legs in a car accident and you're still an amazing gymnast with prosthetic legs, I'll be impressed. But the fact that you sleep with men has absolutely nothing to do with your ability to sing. So why do I have to know that? I've yet to see any contestant saying they have sex with the opposite sex. So why do we need to know this about Branden James?

Am I supposed to think worse of your mother because she doesn't accept your lifestyle? Or should I think more of you because you're gay? You come off as a crybaby. She looked like a very happy lady in the audience and you should be grateful she was there to support you.

So just shut up and sing. And while you're at it, I'll have some cheese with your whine.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.

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## **Election Ads: The GOP Needs to Pull on Some Heartstrings**

✘ As a conservative, one of the most frustrating things about campaign season is the lack of quality television commercials coming from my side of the aisle, especially the ones critical of Democratic opponents. Whether they're being put out by outside groups or the GOP itself, they're often sorely lacking.

The problem isn't so much with the message they convey. Conservative organizations typically do a decent job of making

their point to the viewing audience. The problem is in the presentation. Conservatives like to present big-picture statistics to highlight the failures of their opponents. They offer up graphs and flash numbers on the screen in hopes of educating and appalling an audience who might not quite grasp the scope of the problems and challenges we face. Conservatives also like to point out hypocrisy. If a candidate ever condemned an action that they themselves are guilty of carrying out, you can bet it will show up in a commercial.

That's all fine and good, and it might not seem like a bad strategy to the more politically savvy among us. After all, hypocrisy is always viewed unfavorably, and if \$16 trillion in U.S. debt, anemic U.S. economic growth, the staggering cost of Obamacare, and chronically high unemployment doesn't get the attention of voters, what will?

The reality, however, is that regardless of how serious a problem is, facts and figures on their own rarely connect with people who aren't already engaged with what's going on in the country. Most viewers only pay attention to political ads that touch them on an emotional level. Numbers with lots of zeroes, steep graphs, and sound bites just don't do that, even when presented in a simple way.

The Democrats long ago figured out a far more effective strategy. Much like their party's economic vision, they don't see numbers as being important. Instead, they go straight for the heartstrings. They put out commercials that feature people who look like everyday, working-class folk and present those people as sympathetic victims of those nasty Republican initiatives. Whether it's the teacher whose school can't afford adequate supplies, the fireman who doesn't have the equipment he needs, or the construction worker who can't afford to pay for his medical expenses, their pain is always the result of something done by some heartless Republican. To the viewer, it doesn't even matter whether or not the argument has merit. Half of the time, the argument is completely

illogical. Sometimes, no argument is even presented. And none of that matters. All the viewer sees is a good person who has been victimized.

Case in point, the Obama campaign is currently running a very effective ad right now in a couple of the swing states, including my home of Colorado. It features former factory workers of one of the plants that Bain Capital (Mitt Romney's former company) made the call to shut-down. You can hear the pain in these people's voices as they insist that Mitt Romney kicked them to the curb for no other reason than to increase his personal wealth before presumably leaning back in his chair, interlacing his fingers behind his head, and laughing maniacally.

To people watching at home, the ad is so emotionally-driven that they're left with little inclination to doubt its sincerity. After all, everyone knows by now that Mitt Romney is filthy rich. And with the the Obama administration leading the charge, today's culture of envy has taught us that undeserved rich people thrive at the expense of hard-working, poor people. Why not buy the commercial at face value then? Right?

The reality is that most people simply don't understand what private investment firms like Bain Capital do, and that's what the Obama campaign is banking on. People don't understand that private companies like the ones that come to Bain are typically struggling or even dying, and need either financing or restructuring in order to survive. They don't understand that the job losses of people working at those companies were likely an inevitability regardless of Bain's involvement. And if they don't understand any of that, they certainly don't understand how many jobs were prolonged, saved, or created as a result of Bain Capital. The only thing people sitting at home in front of their televisions see are poor workers who got screwed over by a rich guy. Thus, the commercial is effective. Rising Obama poll numbers in the swing-states where

these ads have been running have demonstrated that.

The irony here, of course, is that you'd have to take the number of workers in these commercials and multiply that number by a few million before you'd get the number of Americans who have suffered far worse under nearly four years of the Obama economy. I'm talking about people who've lost their businesses, people who've been out of work for over a year, single moms working multiple jobs, people who've had to move back in with their parents because they can't provide for themselves, etc.

That reality begs the question of why we don't see the Republicans more often employing the same tactics used by the Democrats. I think part of the reason comes from the natural inclination of conservatives to have faith in people's capacity to relate with big-picture problems. They don't feel the need to present individual suffering, because they assume that if the statistics are known, people are smart enough to figure out what those statistics mean to them and their families. Unfortunately, that's not a great assumption, especially in today's world of media spin.

Now, there have been some promising exceptions in this election cycle so far. Karl Rove's super PAC groups (*American Crossroads* and *Crossroads GPS*) have done a great job of portraying the challenges and anxieties felt by a large number of Americans under Barack Obama's presidency. However, even they haven't quite got the formula down. Many of the people they've used in their well-designed ads are clearly actors who look like they've been pulled directly off the set of a Lifetime Network movie. They're a little too contrived, even though the actors accurately personify the feelings of many Americans.

What I want to see is something more organic. I want to see blunt and honest talk coming from people who don't look like actors – real people who've been beaten down by the decisions

made by the current leadership of our country. There is certainly an enormous selection of people out there to choose from.

I want to see the truck driver with a baseball cap saying something like, "We see the president out there on television all the time, playing golf and hanging out with Hollywood celebrities, and he's telling us that the private sector is doing just fine. It's *not* doing just fine. His healthcare law has sent my family's premiums through the roof. Government regulations and high gas prices are eating away more and more of my bottom line. Mr. President, I don't need you to throw me a life-vest or life-raft to keep me afloat. I just need you to stop holding my head underwater!"

I want to see the young mother holding her baby and saying, "He's always talking about *fairness*, but he's driving our national debt up to \$16 trillion and beyond, and sending the bill to our children and grandchildren? How is THAT fair?"

I want to see the goofy-looking guy in his early twenties saying, "I voted for Obama four years ago because my friends did. \*chuckle\* He seemed like a cool guy to me. But now I'm living at home because my college degree hasn't gotten me a job. Having to live with your parents after graduation is anything BUT cool."

I want to see the person saying, "I don't care who he thinks *caused* the mess. He's been blaming other people for four years. We hired him to *fix* it. He *hasn't* fixed it. He's only made it worse!"

The GOP and other conservative groups need to catch up to the Democrats on playing the sympathy card. It works, and with the current state of the country, it's never been more justified. I hope they figure that out.