NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Cottle on the \"Dark Art\" of Polling

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 1, 2010 NCR Today

Michelle Cottle?s essays over at The New Republic are always worth reading but her takedown of Republican pollster Frank Luntz?s new book [1]is a must-read. (You don?t need to know the name of the book because after reading Cottle you won?t want to shell out the $24.99 to get it. In fact, I will give you $24.99 to read anything else!)

Luntz is a pollster and polling is, as Cottle calls it, a ?dark art.? It is also the principal reason our politicians are so bland: They are afraid to go to the bathroom without having a pollster tell them the decision will sit well with the voters. More than that, polling is a principal reason our politics are so bad. They turn campaigns into marketing strategies, they ignore the fact that voters are, at any given time, motivated by a medley of concerns that change from morning to night and from yesterday to tomorrow. For example, I will bet, although I have never been polled on the subject, that my concern about rising food prices is higher after I go to the market. Just a hunch.

Pollsters also try and imagine that they themselves are not part of the story but the key thing a pollster does is devise questions and any pollster worth his or her salt can devise a question to get the result they desire. Most of what they produce is mind-numbingly obvious yet candidates are only considered serious if they hire an expensive pollster. If you ever wonder where all the money that candidates raise goes so early in the election cycle, why some candidates raise 100k but have nothing in the bank, it is the pollster. They produce what are known as baseline polls which confirm what you could find out from going down to the Dunkin? Donuts and listening to people as they stand in line for their coffee in the morning.

Luntz?s book claims to show what Americans want. If most Americans knew how campaigns are run today, they would want pollsters banished from campaigns.

Source URL (retrieved on *10/08/2015 - 21:59*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/cottle-dark-art-polling

Links:
[1] http://www.tnr.com/book/review/whom-the-bell-polls