

ROLL CALL

White House Hopefuls Eye K St.'s Young Pros

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*By Tory Newmyer,
Roll Call Staff*

In the heat of its fundraising sprint toward the first-quarter reporting deadline, the presidential campaign of former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (R) is laying down long-term plans for gathering young Beltway money.

The program, called Young Professionals for Mitt Romney, or YP4Mitt, follows in the footsteps of President Bush's "Mavericks" program during his 2004 re-election campaign, which required participants to raise \$50,000 each. The effort ended up netting Bush more than \$5 million.

But in attempting to recreate its success, Romney's team has some competition. The campaign of Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) last week rolled out its own version: Young Professionals for McCain, or YP4M.

Both camps already have recruited about 30 political operatives and lobbyists in town whom they hope will serve as the foundation for national networks of young fundraisers. Meanwhile, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani has a similar effort in the works, though it is not yet ready to debut, according to people close to his campaign.

The pitched battle for every last K Street dime reflects the intensity of the race, expected to be the most expensive in history and for which early fundraising returns can help make or break candidates. This week, political observers are fixating on the federal fundraising reports for the first three months of the year as a strong indication of how the field is shaping up.

The focus on young political professionals in town also reflects a growing recognition by the campaigns of the generational shift in the lobbying industry, a perennial cash cow for candidates.

"A lot of us were involved up on the Hill and remain fairly active downtown," Drew Maloney, a Republican lobbyist helping organize the Romney effort, said of the younger crowd. "It's a different set of people. So this is a good place to start incubating a young professional network as it starts growing around the country."

Romney's effort here is aimed at those younger than 40. The group gathered for the first time last night at A.V. Ristorante Italiano off Capitol Hill to hear a briefing from deputy campaign manager Carl Forti and begin discussing how to organize.

The plan, for now, is to start a local chapter of YP4Mitt and enlist 100 people to join the steering committee. The group will then help open chapters across the country. Participants are charged with signing up volunteers for the campaign, spreading the word about Romney and raising \$2,300, although that figure can shift depending on the market, according to Alex Annett, a Patton Boggs lobbyist helping the Romney team.

Tom Worrall, a former Bush Maverick and partner at Whitmer & Worrall, said he is working with the campaign to build a higher-dollar tier of fundraisers among the young professionals committed to raising \$50,000. He said he is "absolutely going to aggressively pursue the Bush Mavericks and convince them that Romney is someone they should be supporting. But the reality is there are going to be a lot of new folks, too.

"The point is the Republican National Committee doesn't have a very good business plan for incorporating a successful 35-year-old into [its] program, whereas an inspiring candidate can be a force getting people to open their Rolodex, and spend time and money to help," Worrall said. "There's an opportunity for young people to have a significant impact on the results of these races."

Among those signed on to YP4Mitt so far are Brad Card, brother of former White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card and a lobbyist at Dutko Worldwide; Roy Coffee, a former Bush aide now lobbying for Locke Liddell Strategies; former White House spokesman Taylor Gross, at the Herald Group; Mark Isakowitz, partner at Fierce, Isakowitz & Blalock; and Brett Shogren, of the Washington Group.

Leading White House contenders on both sides of the aisle have been busy hunting for young supporters in cash-rich locales across the country. And while campaign officials acknowledge the junior set inside the Beltway may not be able to match the check-writing prowess of their counterparts from Silicon Valley and Wall Street, they offer other resources candidates are eager to tap. Specifically, Romney spokesman Kevin Madden pointed to their contacts.

"A lot of networking that goes on with this particular group allows you to grow a campaign very quickly," he said.

Maloney, a partner at Ogilvy Government Relations, said beyond fundraising, the group will contribute to "Washington buzz," contribute policy expertise, and help build support among Members of Congress.

The Romney campaign plans to hold a local kickoff event for YP4Mitt in early spring.

Like that of the former Bay State governor, McCain's youth effort still is largely local. The program has yet to roll out formally, but participants were heavily involved in an event last week at the Mandarin Oriental hotel that reportedly netted the Arizona Senator more than \$600,000.

Nevertheless, McCain spokesman Danny Diaz pointed out the operation already has a presence in eight states, "and it's growing."

Chairing the effort is Kirk Blalock, a top Bush fundraiser and partner at Fierce, Isakowitz & Blalock. He said group leaders are ready to help younger participants unaccustomed to raising five-figure sums, but he doesn't anticipate problems hitting their marks.

"Most people I've talked to signed up because they believe they can do it and they want to do it," he said. "That shows an energy and passion that's important."

It is less clear so far what leading Democrats have planned to organize young K Streeters. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and former Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) have both sworn off money from registered lobbyists. Their campaigns did not return calls for comment.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), meanwhile, has built an impressive lineup of downtown support. A source close to her camp said an effort to tap junior lobbyists is being developed, but the campaign was unavailable for comment.