

# Picking Fights

## Our Sparring Fundraisers Also Found Some Common Ground



**Jonathan Bydlak** was finance director for Ron Paul's presidential campaign. He's now development director for Citizens in Charge Foundation, which promotes the ballot initiative process.



**Kimberly Scott** is president of ConklinScott, a Democratic firm specializing in strategic fundraising.



**Kimberly Bellissimo** owns Base Connect, a Republican fundraising firm.



**Chris Massicotte** is director of sales and marketing at the Democratic fundraising firm National Geographical & Political Software (NGP).

This month's Shop Talk was in the private room at BlackSalt, our favorite new D.C. power-lunch spot (and our new section sponsor.) Over a couple bottles of wine, we duked it out over donor limits, Twitter and John Murtha. Who knew fundraisers would get this rowdy?

**Politics:** How do you like organizational versus candidate fundraising?

**Jonathan Bydlak:** I guess I have a slight preference for candidate fundraising. I had a great experience with the Ron Paul campaign for a number of reasons. It's obviously more stressful and time intensive, but there was a tight-knit feel. Citizens in Charge, though, there's only six of us, so I guess that's also very tight-knit.

**Kimberly Scott:** Well, on the progressive side, that's a large organization. (laughter)

**Politics:** Kimberly, do you have a preference?

**Scott:** My first love will always be candidates, specifically open seat and challengers.

**Kimberly Bellissimo:** I'm kind of like you—I like doing the challenger races. We got approached by three of the presidential campaigns, but it's not something we like getting into. You have to commit a lot of resources and we like picking a fight with the challenger. That's where we do the best. We had the top

two races in the country, based on dollar transfer. One of them would have been the first African American woman doctor ever elected to Congress, Deborah Hon-eycutt. That was pretty exciting, we raised over \$4 million, we nationalized her race. We also did William Russell against John Murtha, that was fun. He just announced at CPAC that he's taking on John again, the king of pork.

**Chris Massicotte:** John's like my grandpa, why would you do that? (laughter)

**Scott:** It's great cutting your teeth on an open-seat challenger. I started my firm because the candidate I worked with at a previous firm wanted to hire me afterward and not the firm. He had won the second top congressional race that year. His name is Harry Johnston, from Florida—just this incredible statesman, and to this day the person I respect more than anybody in my life outside my family. That set the threshold for everybody afterwards. Almost all my races have started with open-seat challenges. But starting with an incumbent?

**Bellissimo:** Booooooring.

**Massicotte:** I totally disagree. After I got fired from a job in New York, I was driving back home to Washington with all my stuff in my trunk. I got a phone call and he said, “Hi, this is Rush Holt.” I said, “Congressman Rush Holt? Really?” He wanted to talk to me about becoming his finance director. I was in Trenton, so I literally just turned around and went to his home. And I got the position. Now, at NGP, I see so many different kinds of fundraisers—from PACS, to organizations like BISC (the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center), and incumbents. The people who work for their incumbent directly, who don’t work for a firm, just have such a passion for their boss, because they really believe in them.

**Bellissimo:** I still think it’s easier to shake loose money for a member. The challenger race that really helped us get off the ground was Jeff Davis in Kentucky against George Clooney’s dad. It was open seat. We had this incredible package where we listed all the Hollywood money that was pouring into Kentucky for this race—and we beat him with an average contribution of \$25. We worked with Jeff for two cycles, and now he doesn’t need us because he’s a member and he’s got all the money he needs.

**Scott:** You just put your finger on the difference—it’s strategy. The world of campaign fundraising and member fundraising are different on a lot of levels. When we’re doing an open-seat challenger, we do strategy—we’re not just a fundraiser. I’m rather elitist about that, because it’s a big difference. It’s like if you talk to a campaign person versus a Hill person. The Hill person’s perspective is that they are making a difference in legislation. The campaign people, which I consider myself, think, “You wouldn’t have a job unless we got you there.”

**Massicotte:** But it’s also nice when you have the incumbents who win by the skin of their teeth, like the Carol Shea-Porters of the world.

**Bellissimo:** That was almost John Murtha, we almost had him on the ropes.

**Massicotte:** Exactly. And that’s what gets you fired up. It’s a whole different ballgame when you’re fundraising for somebody

who’s in danger of losing their seat. And I’m sure you guys had a lot of experience with that last cycle. But I remember 1994. We have the maps of who won and lost, and I wanted to put 1994 in front of my office with a bronze plaque that says, “Never Forget.”

**Bellissimo:** Can I borrow your plaque? (laughter)

**Politics:** You know, I just realized this is the first of these lunches where we had two women at the table.

**Bellissimo:** And Kimberly and I are very alike. Our businesses are very alike, and we’re both women-owned businesses. People talk about the glass ceiling, but I’ve always worked with conservative men and I’ve thrived, because I’ve never been treated with anything but respect from them. And they’ve given me such opportunity from the get-go that I’m so grateful for it. I think conservative men get a bad rap.

**Scott:** I think the stereotype with conservatives goes more to the elected themselves—as far as colleagues, I wouldn’t say I’ve heard anything along those lines. But even within our own party, we know there are those who are good to work with and those who are not.

**Bydlak:** At the end of the day, ability trumps all, right? If someone knows you do a good job, there’s a disincentive to push you away because they’re harming themselves by doing so.

**Politics:** But at the same time, haven’t you found an old boys network of men who play golf or go hunting together?

**Bellissimo:** Maybe it’s my personality. I had three brothers and a dad, so I can talk sports with my colleagues and drink them under the table. Men aren’t afraid to be around me.

**Scott:** We really are very much alike. Without question, though, when I first started I experienced the old boys network, prejudice, sexism, attempts to go beyond professional relationships.

**Bydlak:** Well, I could argue that I’ve ex-



#### **About This Series**

Each month, we invite the top minds in their field to share ideas over lunch at **BlackSalt**, one of the city’s best restaurants. Visit them online at [www.blacksaltrestaurant.com](http://www.blacksaltrestaurant.com).

▶ **“When we’re doing an open-seat, we do strategy too. We’re not just a fundraiser.”**

perienced discrimination—it's not black/white, male/female, it's old versus young. Perhaps times have changed, but I would argue that ageism is still very prevalent. But when you really have to get things done, then I would imagine these sorts of issues rather wither away.

**Scott:** I don't think it ever withers away being a woman. I can tell you many a story about the things I've dealt with over the years. You just learn that when you're dealing with someone over 60, there's a greater likelihood they'll use a term that they don't think is prejudicial, or call you 'honey.'

**Politics:** Is it easier or harder to raise money as a woman?

**Bellissimo:** I think with the high-dollar experience, a woman always does better. Donors are looking for that nurturing relationship, they're looking for somebody to listen to them and hold their hand. It's a little bit different than just writing a check, especially on the nonprofit side.

**Scott:** Chris, you have a slightly different perspective, because you're dealing with all the people who are raising money. What percentage are women?

**Massicotte:** I have to say I like working with the women better. (laughter) But it's actually pretty even. One thing I've noticed is that fundraisers are getting younger and younger, especially in the Democratic Party, because they don't remain a finance director for many cycles. They go, "Oh, I won a campaign, I've got some clout and a reputation, let me hang out a shingle and see what I can do."

**Scott:** It's hard to live through it more than once. (laughter)

**Massicotte:** One of the differences I see in fundraisers is that the more mature fundraisers are not as a whole embracing the new technologies, but the younger ones are saying, "Why don't you have text messaging right out of your database," or "I want to be able to better target my small donors through Facebook and Twitter." Kimberly, you probably don't deal with \$25 donors anymore, do you?

**Scott:** No, we do mostly organizations. But I'm very adamant about all the technology—you have to be on top of it.

**Bellissimo:** At Base Connect, we do direct-mail fundraising, period. That's our demographic. Why change if it's working? Find someone else to Twitter with. (laughter)

**Massicotte:** Also, I don't think direct mail's going to go away anytime soon.

**Bellissimo:** It's not. It's death has been predicted for many years now.

**Massicotte:** You saw a great example with those Michelle Bachman comments ...

**Politics:** Which ones in particular? (laughter)

**Massicotte:** She's my favorite. But when she made those comments, I almost fell off the treadmill. When I got home that night, I posted the YouTube video on my Facebook page, with a link to El Tinklenburg's contribution page—incidentally, he used NGP. Then I started getting comments on Facebook, like, "This is the first political contribution I've ever made, her comments infuriated me." Thirty-six hours later, I went to the person who does our online contribution processing, and asked, "Out of curiosity, how many contributions has Tinklenburg processed?" He checked and said, "Hang on, this can't be right—12,000." In two days, he raised \$1.3 million through NGP alone. That was the power of these social networking sites. Had they been even more prepared for this—the campaign itself did not promote it—using the power of their e-mail list and social networking tools, they could have raised even more money.

**Politics:** Jonathan, the Ron Paul campaign had a very novel approach to fundraising. It was incredibly decentralized. How much control did you have over the fundraising that was going on out in the field?

**Bydlak:** I should probably start with a little background. When I started with the campaign in August 2007, we had no idea, when we sent out an e-mail, how much money was coming in because of it. Com-



► **“The mature fundraisers aren't embracing new technologies.”**

ing from my hedge-fund analyst background, I thought, "This is absurd." So we looked at historical fundraising, and all of a sudden it became clear that X-thousand dollars started coming in because Ron had his dust-up with Rudy, or because we sent a particular e-mail. At the time they had raised maybe \$2.5 million for the second quarter of 2007.

**Massicotte:** Which was not the least amount of all the candidates.

**Bydlak:** No, it was more than you would expect for a candidate with Ron's level of name recognition. The other important thing to keep in mind was that most people coming on were political neophytes. You had people watch a debate, get really jazzed by what Ron said, and then they were like, "Now what do I do?" So they put signs on highway overpasses. We had all these potential assets, but they weren't being tapped into effectively. We had to get across to them just how important fundraising is. Someone once said, "If you don't care enough to raise

money for your cause, you don't really care about your cause." So Mitt Romney's campaign was big-donor driven and direct mail played more of a role. In our campaign, it was the complete opposite, it was more of a psychological thing. It was very consistent with Ron's political philosophy, actually—it was trying to incentivize these people to do what was best, but at the same time it was also relatively hands off.

**Scott:** But you didn't have much of a choice, though, because you didn't have the resources. And I say that as a compliment—you capitalized on the technology very effectively.

**Bydlak:** The brilliance of (Ron's campaign chairman) Kent Snyder is that he recognized that Ron had virtually no name recognition at all, so if we were going to try to do anything in this campaign we'd have to leverage technology. The campaign literally started with him and a laptop in his apartment putting up YouTube videos. Then the question became, what other ways can we



Pure results.  
Pure victory.

## Postcard Campaigns WIN Elections!

"First off, **we won!** Thanks in no small part to your help. I cannot begin to tell you what an impact the postcards made. The full-color, large postcards were something many voters had never seen. I actually had people say that they were saving the postcards to show their friends in other towns. Please thank your entire staff for a great job. There is no question that we will use Pure Postcards again." – D.S.

**We GUARANTEE the lowest price on complete postcard marketing campaigns including printing, addressing, & postage.**

5000 4.25" x 6" Postcards  
with FULL Color on Both Sides



Toll Free: 866.413.1562 | [www.purepostcards.com](http://www.purepostcards.com)





► “I knew I had arrived when Olbermann called my firm the worst person in the world.”

get them to want to give, other than us just sending out direct mail or e-mail. So the idea we had was to let them know how they were helping. When we put the widget up on the website with people’s names—

**Massicotte:** I loved that! That was so great.

**Bydlak:** That idea came from Ron’s security director. A lot of the ideas on the campaign came from a lot of random sources. We wanted to be more transparent with our numbers, but there were a lot of drawbacks, like if you don’t meet your goal, then people will hold that against you. So our web developers created a widget for Constitution Week. And rather than putting dollar figures out, we were trying to get 1,776 donors. We got triple that number of donors. People responded to the fact that they were getting feedback—they were seeing their name on the website and sending screenshots.

**Massicotte:** Jonathan, I am so impressed with how Ron created something that lasted, and something that will last. I have a motto that “Thou shalt never speak ill of an NGP client.” But I consider Dennis Kucinich the opposite end of the spectrum from Ron Paul. He did everything right by creating a community of people—they might have been movie stars, but they firmly believed in his politics. But he did nothing with the good will he had.

**Politics:** Interviewing one of those supporters, Viggo Mortensen, was one of the high points of the primary for me. I sat down with him in a bar in Manchester on the eve of the New Hampshire primary.

**Scott:** Is he as charming in person?

**Politics:** Much more so. And he asked for my cell number. Unfortunately—but fortunately for my husband—some friends from XM were chaperoning me. (laughter)

**Massicotte:** Just one more digression. I was an extra on the new Ben Affleck movie that’s coming out in April, “State of Play.” I was Reporter No. 4, and I had five lines. It was supposed to be a congressional hearing room. And I noticed the portraits on the wall were all presidents. I went to the director and said, “You would never have portraits of

the presidents on the wall in the Capitol.” He said, “Oh my god,” and had it changed. There was another scene where I was playing poker with these extras dressed up like pages. And I said, “Guys, there are no pages in the hearing rooms, they’d only be on the floor.” So I feel bad, but they got cut. But you have to have artistic integrity, right?

**Politics:** Ok, so if you guys could change any FEC law, what would it be?

**Bellissimo:** I would change the limits.

**Bydlak:** It harms candidates who don’t have much name recognition. So if your goal is to get more diversity in the public debate, it’s horrendous.

**Scott:** So what would you say to self-funders, then?

**Bellissimo:** Oh, boo-hoo. I am a champion of the underdog who is not self-funded.

**Massicotte:** Me too. But if there are no limits, my cousin or my grandfather could fund my campaign.

**Bellissimo:** You guys have more self-funders than we do.

**Massicotte:** We do, traditionally. But this past cycle, we had to be practical and support the guy who could throw \$5 million into his race.

**Scott:** But practical doesn’t necessarily make up the best caliber of representation that we’re seeking. So taking the limits off doesn’t prove in any way the integrity of the candidate.

**Bydlak:** Mitt Romney gave his campaign a huge amount of money. Hillary Clinton loaned her campaign a massive amount of money. Jared Polis, John Corzine, both fabulously wealthy. So the idea this legislation is stopping people who are wealthy from having a significant impact on the political process is nonsense.

**Massicotte:** I like the limits because it’s a way of keeping score before votes are cast. Everybody knew Romney was self-funding, so I was like, “Okay, minus \$20 million, how

much did you really raise?" Privately, the Hillary Clinton campaign knew they were facing something really, really tight when all their contributions were \$2,300 and all the president's contributions were \$25—and they were done with their contributors but he had more and they could keep giving.

**Bydlak:** That's a myth, by the way. Obama's median contribution was closer to \$200.

**Massicotte:** That's still way low. But my biggest two pet peeves on the FEC is, one, that we don't report more often. We have to wait three months to find out if our opponent is self-funding, and in a campaign, three months is forever. And my other pet peeve about the FEC—and I don't know if you know this is coming—is the form 3L. You'll have to disclose which of your contributors are registered lobbyists. Lobbyists are also entitled to a say—they shouldn't be made out to be bad people.

**Bydlak:** But it's okay if rich people are considered bad people.

**Massicotte:** I don't think they are at all. The limits are there because they don't want some n'er-do-well kid saying, "Grandpa, I want to be in Congress," and getting \$10 million to run. We are looking for the highest caliber.

**Bellissimo:** But that is already happening, isn't it?

**Scott:** Like Duncan Hunter Jr.—Daddy I want to be in Congress, please give me your seat. Ok, Junior, it's yours.

**Massicotte:** Some liberal bloggers at the Daily Kos convention a few years ago were chiding Hillary for taking lobbyist money. After the session was over, I saw one of those bloggers smoking outside, I was like, "C'mon, you don't think you have lobbyists working for you? Phillip Morris is out there for you."

**Bellissimo:** Do you have any influence over Talking Points Memo Muckraker?

**Massicotte:** I'm sorry, I know what you're talking about, but I have none. I just do the boring part of politics, counting the money and reporting it.

**Bellissimo:** They were constantly attacking us on literally a daily basis. I was like, "Get a life!" And I knew I had arrived when Keith Olbermann called my firm the worst person in the world.

**Massicotte:** Congratulations, that's a great honor!

**Bellissimo:** We beat Karl Rove, and the people who let the woman die in the emergency room at King's County Hospital. So I was like, "Guys, we've made it, this is the badge of courage."

**Politics:** Would you like to say why you were branded the worst?

**Bellissimo:** Well, they were talking about the Honeycutt race, saying the fundraiser took 90 percent of the money and ran away. We don't get a percentage, we don't get kickbacks. We get a set fee.

**Scott:** Set fee plus bonus.

**Bellissimo:** We don't even get bonus. And the post office takes 40 percent off the top when you're doing direct mail, so already the 90 percent doesn't work.

**Scott:** The whole fundraising profession has become a true profession in just the past 20 years. We're still defining for ourselves, regardless of which side you're on, what that professionalism means. When I first started, people worked for a percentage. The year after, we were called in by the leadership of the House. There'd been whole series of special elections and there was a lot of resentment that fundraisers were making so much. They said, "We would like you to switch the way you work from percentage to fee-based, and you're not going to bite the hand that feeds you." Labor was particularly adamant about that. And it weeded out a lot of the people who weren't in the business for the cause or the belief.

**Bellissimo:** That's exactly right. So this TPM and Olbermann stuff, it was just silliness. At the end, it comes back to what Kimberly said—if you're not good at what you do, if you're not honest, you're not going to be in business very long. 