

Striking in a Hot Market for Lobbyists

By Anita Huslin



Pete Metzger
Vice Chairman, CTPartners

Morris L. Reid may have sold near the top of the D.C. powerbrokers market when he made a deal earlier this month with Republican lobbying powerhouse BGR.

The pending change in administration has created a "bare-knuckle battle for talent" among lobbying firms seeking to bolster their Democratic capabilities, said Pete Metzger, director of the Washington office of CTPartners, an executive search firm that helps place senior

lobbyists and trade association heads.

Compensation packages for lobbyists have doubled in the past six months, Metzger said. Firms are hiring twice as many people as they think they'll need. Competition for Democrats is fierce.

Reid, a Democrat who worked as a senior staff aide to Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and HUD Secretary Andrew M. Cuomo, has kept a relatively low profile for the past eight years. In an interview in his firm's Pennsylvania Avenue office, Reid said he and his wife and business partner, Jaci, had been thinking about moving to New York before the presidential campaign took off. But instead they opted to move to BGR's new District offices next month.

A longtime friend of the Clintons, Reid had declined an offer to work for Hillary Clinton's campaign, he said. He has known BGR chairman Ed Rogers for years, he said, and they often bumped into each other in green rooms before appearing on talk shows where they represented party issues.

When it became clear that Obama was headed toward the White House, the two said they began discussing Reid bringing his firm, Westin Rinehart, to BGR.

"The more policymakers want to tinker and change things, the more winners and losers there are," Rogers said. "People will be coming to town looking for a fair hearing in front of policymakers, and you need to be able to identify the group of people who matter and get a hearing in front of those people. That's not going to change, regardless of what party is in power."

BGR, formerly Barbour Griffith & Rogers, was founded 18 years ago by Haley Barbour, former Republican National Committee chairman and current Mississippi governor; former George H.W. Bush staffer Lanny Griffith; and Rogers, head of Ronald Reagan's 1984 re-election campaign and Mike Huckabee's campaign chairman. Since Democrats won control of Congress two years ago, BGR has been working to take on a more bipartisan flavor.

Both parties declined to discuss financial details of the acquisition but said they expect Reid to build on BGR's work with financial services firms, in lobbying and public relations.

Reid's practice emphasizes entertainment marketing. It is working with arts advocacy group the Creative Coalition on its inaugural party and hopes to bring a flavor of that industry to Washington.

The demand for Democratic lobbyists is expected to taper off after the new administration gets in place.

"Firms will generally say if we need three people, we'll bring in six," Metzger said. "And the laws of nature and the economy will mean that you may end up with two or three. But right now, it's a hot market."

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