

Lobbying & Law

GOP Rainmaker Rides High

By Peter H. Stone

■ Ed Gillespie is everywhere these days, raising money for Republican candidates.

■ He's trying to get conservatives better coordinated.

■ Gillespie is filling a vacuum left by the faltering Republican National Committee.

Among many Washington fundraisers and strategists, the name Ed Gillespie is becoming synonymous with GOP hopes to secure big gains in the 2010 elections.

Little wonder: The former Republican National Committee chairman has been on a money-harvesting tear in recent months, raising millions of dollars for new and established groups supporting Republican candidates this year. Gillespie has been pushing conservatives hard to improve their coordination efforts so that they can get better value for their money come November 2. "Conservatives need to do a better job of being as effective as liberals are [in] sharing information and working together toward common objectives," Gillespie said in an interview.

Early last month, Gillespie sent a brief missive to some of the most powerful GOP veterans and fundraisers in Washington, inviting them to drop by Karl Rove's Northwest D.C. home on April 21 for a political and legal briefing about Republican prospects in dozens of this year's volatile House and Senate contests.

The invite worked like a charm, coming at a highly sensitive time for the Republican Party because of Michael Steele's wobbly leadership as RNC chairman. About two dozen movers and shakers arrived around midday at Rove's Weaver Terrace residence.

Among the guests eager to get the political dope from Gillespie and Rove were former Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn., and GOP fundraiser Fred Malek, the CEO and chairman, respectively, of the fledgling American Action Network, which hopes to raise about \$25 million this year. Also attend-

ing were Steven Law, the former general counsel at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce who's president of the recently created "527" American Crossroads, which is trying to raise \$60 million; and Bill Miller, the political director of the chamber, which is looking for \$50 million.

Others in attendance included Greg Casey, the president of the Business Industry Political Action Committee, and David Norcross, a powerful lawyer/lobbyist with Blank Rome who is a Republican National Committee member from New Jersey.

GOP veterans say that Gillespie is on the right track. They expect his message to be heeded and called the session at Rove's just the start. "It's fair to say that this kind of gathering will be occurring not infrequently," Coleman told *National Journal*, adding that Gillespie is "one of the most highly respected folks on the right. He's got a lot of friends and very few enemies."

In the past few months, Gillespie has been on a fundraising sprint. He has pulled in millions of dollars with the help of Rove for American Crossroads (both men are informal advisers to the group); assumed the chairmanship of, and raised millions more, for the Republican State Leadership Committee, a powerful group that helps candidates for state legislatures and races for attorney general and lieutenant governor; and raised big bucks for Resurgent Republic, a group that Gillespie co-founded last year that helps improve messaging through polling and focus groups.

Gillespie's skills are in great demand in no small measure because of the financial and image problems that have plagued the RNC for months under Steele's leadership. Steele has come under fire over the RNC's lagging finances: At the start of 2010, the committee had only \$8.4 million in the bank, versus \$22.8 million when Steele took the reins a year before.

"The RNC is doing well with the In-



■ Ed Gillespie

■ He's got a lot of friends and very few enemies.

LIZ HANZL

ternet but not with major donors," one GOP operative grouches.

Many GOP politicians say that the efforts of Gillespie, Rove, and some other veterans are essential if the party is to fill a power vacuum at the RNC that could hurt Republican fortunes in the fall.

Gillespie is trying to fill that void as he works to capitalize on the electoral opportunities for his party in the midterms. Speaking about his fundraising for American Crossroads and other groups, Gillespie explained that he's trying to help "maximize the positive environment for Republicans and conservatives [in the coming elections]. I'm raising money and encouraging people to contribute across the board."

Gillespie has traveled widely in recent months to help fill the coffers of American Crossroads and other groups. He and Rove made a fundraising trip to Texas earlier this year that won a sizable pledge of help from Harold Simmons, the Dallas billionaire. And on March 8, Gillespie pitched American Crossroads to some big donors in New York City at a gathering where Coleman and Malek were also fundraising for their American Action Network.

On another political front, Gillespie says he's using his nationwide contacts to try to double the budget of the Republican State Leadership Committee from \$20 million to \$40 million for the two-year election cycle.

Gillespie's party-building and fundraising drives are helping him earn a livelihood as well. The leadership committee, he says, pays him a monthly retainer for his services. But Gillespie, who estimates that he spends about 20 percent of his time on committee matters, notes that the group's electoral mission could yield big dividends down the road, given that redistricting will follow the November elections. "These elections have an added benefit in that they can affect redistricting for the Congress for a decade."

Gillespie's Resurgent Republic also gets good marks from many GOP hands, who say that it provides useful tools for their electoral drives this year. Modeled after the Democracy Corps, a group that was founded in 1999 by Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg and political operative James Carville, Resurgent Republic is "helpful in articulating and spreading a center-right message," Coleman stresses.

The group, which plans to do about six surveys of voter attitudes this year, rents office space from Gillespie's small consulting business, Ed Gillespie Strategies. Gillespie hung that shingle a little more than a year ago in Alexandria, Va. The former star lobbyist and onetime name partner at Quinn Gillespie & Associates says he's not lobbying any more but is providing strategic advice for five clients. Although he declined to name them, they are a mix of corporations and trade associations, and sources say that AT&T is among them.

According to several old friends and colleagues, Gillespie harbors ambitions to run for office someday and might try for either the Governor's Mansion or a Senate seat in Virginia. Both offices seem logical targets: Gillespie has been chairman of the state GOP and he chaired last year's campaign for Gov. Bob McDonnell, two roles that won him political chits.

Gillespie is coy on the subject. "I think about running from time to time," he says. "But right now I'm comfortable trying to get other people elected." ■

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