



BUNDLERS OF JOY Clockwise from left: Obama's top four L.A. fundraisers were music exec Nicole Avant and WildBrain CEO Charlie Rivkin (in Rivkin's Bev Hills office); David Geffen; and Jeffrey Katzenberg.

Access Hollywood

L.A. fundraisers were second only to Chicago's in helping put Obama in the White House. Meet the new prez's local dream team

| By Lizbeth Scordo | Photography by Ji Shin |

Although Los Angeles might be better known for its paparazzi than for its politics, President-elect Barack Obama must have a special place in his heart for Angelenos. Locals donated more than \$21 million to his campaign (placing L.A. just \$1.9 million behind Obama's hometown of Chicago) and helped catapult him from junior senator to President of the United States. But among contributors, there's one special group of some 50 area residents—known as “bundlers”—who get credit for the number of friends and acquaintances they can cajole to open their checkbooks and who have each raised enough money to be considered part of the campaign's inner circle.

Since campaign-finance law limits individual contributions to \$2,300 (per candidate, per election), many passionate but already personally maxed-out supporters spent recent months—and even years—reaching out to others through email campaigns, gala events and good old-fashioned face-to-face requests for campaign donations. While a solid chunk of L.A.'s bundlers (each of whom raised \$50,000 or more) are in the entertainment industry—including heavyweights like Endeavor Agency founder Ari Emanuel, DreamWorks CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg, Sony Pictures head Michael Lynton, billionaire David Geffen and producers Paula Weinstein, Lawrence Bender, Mike Medavoy and Joe Roth—the list also includes lawyers, private-equity partners and real-estate developers, many of whom began blazing a trail for Obama back when he was a true underdog.

“The key to it, from my standpoint, is having a rolodex that goes beyond any one industry,” says Charlie Rivkin, president and CEO of WildBrain entertainment company and cochair of Obama's California finance committee. Since joining the campaign in early 2007, Rivkin (who is also chairman of the board of the KidRobot toy brand) has raised more than \$500,000 and helped organize a variety of gatherings, including one at his Santa Monica home featuring Obama himself.

Rivkin is one of just four L.A. bundlers—along with Katzenberg, Geffen and Interior Music Publishing VP Nicole Avant—and one of only 45 in the entire country to have raised more than \$500,000 (as of late October) for the Obama campaign, which took in a total of more than \$640 million since it began.

Not surprisingly, Republican John McCain's list of Los Angeles bundlers was shorter than his opponent's, but the Arizona senator still garnered some big-name support, including private equity fund chairman Elliot Broidy, real-estate mogul Alan Casden, MGM CEO Harry Evans Sloan, and investment firm founder and recent L.A. Philharmonic chair John Hotchkis, each of whom brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars for the campaign. (None would agree to comment.)

When it comes to serious fundraising, the question of whether or not a presidential candidate's biggest backers want something in return can loom large. After all, George W. Bush appointed many of his “Pioneers” and “Rangers” (the kitschy names he bestowed

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...THE RADAR POLITICS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 86 upon bundlers who raised \$100,000 and \$200,000 for his presidential campaign) to positions in his administration. And there were those fabled stays in the Lincoln Bedroom with which President Clinton rewarded supporters. For the 2008 campaign, of course, the sums of money raised were even more staggering. "It used to be a big deal when a bundler would bring in \$100,000 or \$200,000," says Massie Ritsch, spokesperson for the Center for Responsive Politics. "Now that's a pretty low tier. We know there are bundlers who've raised at least half a million dollars, and if the candidates would tell us precise amounts the bundlers have raised, we'd probably find there are some who have raised more than a million dollars."

Continues Ritsch: "If history is any guide, the bundlers who raised hundreds of thousands of dollars will be the first in line for ambassadorships, for positions on regulatory boards, possibly overseeing the industries they work in. They'll get good tickets at the inauguration. If they ever need anything, their calls will get returned."

Still, most Obama bundlers insist that they're not only uninterested in government jobs or political favors, but that they never imagined such payback a real possibility in the first place. "When we started, the odds of Barack winning were pretty slim. But the people who jumped on board believed in him and what he represented," contends Rivkin. "That doesn't always happen in politics. A lot of times, people join a campaign because they think someone's going to win and they want to put their money on the odds-on favorite. The people who joined this campaign 20 months ago could not have known he was going to win, because Barack considered it unlikely himself."

Collecting donations for Obama in L.A., especially early on, required a delicate balance of enthusiasm, persuasion and timing. Practice helped, too. Jamie Denenberg, director of marketing for Overture Films, had a paid position as California finance director of John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign and tapped into that network when she began fundraising for Obama two years ago. "In the beginning, some people didn't know if they'd be with Hillary or Obama or Edwards, and it was about working those relationships and staying in touch and pleading the case for Obama," says Denenberg, who raised \$100,000 for the campaign. "You're essentially pitching your product, and that product is Obama."

After the primaries wrapped, pitching that product to disappointed Hillary Clinton backers in order to gain a new crop of support became imperative. Nicole Avant, also a cochair of Obama's California finance committee, helped throw a non-fundraiser "unity event" at former Paramount head Sherry Lansing's house, to which mostly female Clinton supporters were invited. "We wanted to get to know each other. The whole point of it was, if we're Democrats then we're all one team and we're going to have to come together," recalls Avant. "We needed to focus on the women, and I believe that it really did help."

Plenty of actors lent their support to Obama, but few had the impact of *CSI:NY* star Hill Harper, who attended Harvard Law School with the president-elect. Harper not only raised more than \$200,000 for the campaign, but also spent a good portion of the last year traveling across America, speaking on behalf of his friend and securing the single most valuable commodity to a presidential nominee—votes. "It's like night and day," explains Harper of his work in small cities and towns outside of Los Angeles. "Most of the people I came into contact with were struggling to pay their mortgages and keep their jobs, and they wanted to know how they could be helped."

While some pundits predicted that Obama's celebrity endorsements and show-business fundraising might turn off some voters, those theories turned out to have been overblown. "There are industries far more unpopular than Hollywood," says Ritsch. "Hollywood takes its licks in every election from the right, but in this election, the bogeymen were on Wall Street and in the oil and gas industries." ■