

Lawyers Key in Nunn Campaign

If recently leaked campaign strategy memos are to be believed, U.S. Senate candidate Michelle Nunn is looking to Georgia lawyers as a pillar of her bid for Congress.

Names of lawyers from various practice areas are sprinkled throughout the 144-page bundle, which contain documents from staff and consultants outlining the Democrat's campaign planning, structure, finance and talking points. Some are suggested as expert advisers on various subjects, from immigration to the budget, and others are listed as leaders of constituency outreach groups tasked with recruiting supporters and contributors. There is also a section that delves into creating a "voter protection" team of volunteer lawyers who would advise the campaign on election laws and respond to reports of voting problems on election days.

The memos drew attention because they highlight not just talking points but also areas of perceived weakness in the candidate. Nunn's camp has dismissed the memos as outdated and containing merely suggestions for ways to run the race, rather than serving as a blueprint. Nunn is running against Republican nominee David Perdue, a business executive.

Jim Butler, a plaintiffs lawyer at Butler Wooten Cheeley & Peak in Columbus and Nunn supporter, said he hasn't read the memos but characterized them as "meaningless."

"Someone sent it to me, but I've got way too much to do to spend time reading an old draft memo written by someone I don't know whose qualifications are at best dubious based on what I've heard," Butler said.

Not all of the memos are dated, although one is labeled Dec. 9, 2013, and at least one is labeled as coming from The Feldman Group, a campaign analysis and strategy firm in Washington.

Butler, whose daughter works for the campaign as a fundraiser, said it's obvious why lawyers are called upon to be involved in campaigns. What's more, he added, lawyers should feel a duty to be involved.

"What happens in Congress is so important to lawyers, legislatively to state the obvious, but also in the Senate because that chamber confirms federal judges," Butler said. "Lawyers in litigation spend their lives before judges."

B.J. Bernstein, who practices in civil and criminal litigation, was listed as an expert for the campaign on crime and guns. Bernstein confirmed she is a Nunn supporter but said she doesn't have any official role with the campaign.

"My understanding is that her campaign was reaching out to people in all areas who have boots on the ground and know what's going on," said Bernstein, who declined to go into detail about what she discussed with the campaign.

"I'm a citizen with knowledge of an area rather than someone who is out there as a big campaigner. I'm not a regular operative type," Bernstein said.

Bill Clark, a lawyer and chief lobbyist for the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association, is another lawyer listed as an expert in the Nunn memos. Clark said GTLA is not actively involved with either campaign, although it often is asked to brief candidates.

"As one of the more politically engaged legal organizations in Georgia, we are frequently asked by candidates from both political parties to educate them about issues relating to the civil justice system and the importance of the constitutional right to trial by jury," Clark said. "So we were willing to provide that kind of information when asked to do so by the Nunn campaign last year. And we would be happy to do so for the Perdue campaign or any other campaign that makes such a request."

Clark also said that lawyers likely have been involved in campaigns in Georgia "ever since Oglethorpe landed in Savannah."

"So there certainly is nothing unique about lawyers' involvement in the Nunn campaign or the Perdue campaign," he said.

Nunn's reliance on support from the legal community is also financial. One of the leaked memos, labeled Campaign Finance Plan, sets a goal of collecting \$500,000 from "trial lawyers and law firms." It lists Butler, Ken Canfield and Gordon Giffin, her campaign chairman, as anchors for fundraising.

Canfield, a plaintiffs lawyer at Doffermeyre Shields Canfield & Knowles, would not comment on the memos but confirmed he is a campaign supporter and contributor.

"If you were to look at the financial disclosure reports for candidates over the years, you'd find that lawyers of all types and all different parts of the profession are significant contributors," Canfield said.

"It's not an issue of self-interest," he added. "I think the kind of people who become lawyers are the kind of people who care about public policy."

In a tally of giving to Nunn's campaign by company employees and political action committees, nine of the top 22 represented are law firms, according to The Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks federal campaign spending:

- King & Spalding, \$46,550
- McKenna, Long & Aldridge, \$26,500
- Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, \$25,050
- Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan, \$20,400
- Alston & Bird, \$18,200
- Troutman Sanders, \$15,750
- Kilpatrick, Townsend & Stockton, \$14,500
- Barnes Law Group, \$13,400

- Munger, Tolles & Olson, \$12,200

There are no law firms listed among the top companies whose employees or PACs donated to Perdue. Perdue's campaign counsel, **Josh Belinfante**, a partner at **Robbins Ross Alloy Belinfante Littlefield**, said the campaign is working to build a legal coalition.

"Republican lawyers across the spectrum were divided between camps [prior to the primary]," Belinfante said. "We are in the process of consolidating folks."

Belinfante, who was executive counsel to Gov. Sonny Perdue—David Perdue's cousin—also noted that the campaign's natural fundraising base is not among attorneys. "Perdue comes from the business world," he said.

Nunn's courting of lawyers' donations and support is not unexpected. Her father, former Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, is a retired partner at King & Spalding. Her chief of staff, Kent Alexander, also had a practice at King & Spalding that bookended his three years as a federal prosecutor. Alexander interned for Sam Nunn, where he met Giffin, who at the time was a legislative aide. Giffin, a former ambassador to Canada, is now a partner at McKenna.

"Lawyers tend to be more active in terms of political campaigns than other professionals, like accountants, because public policy and law is what lawyers study and work with. So it makes a lot of sense," said Giffin.