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## Fewer Political Fundraisers are Reaching for Their Pocketbooks

Big-money bundlers for Obama aren't in a rush because he doesn't have a Democratic primary challenger. And GOP supporters seem to be waiting to see if there are late presidential entrants.

By Matea Gold, Melanie Mason and Kim Geiger, Washington Bureau

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Reporting from Washington

The vast majority of big-money bundlers who power political fundraising are sitting out the 2012 presidential contest so far, a reflection of persistent dissatisfaction with the Republican field and a lack of urgency and engagement felt by past supporters of President Obama.

An analysis by the Los Angeles Times of campaign finance reports found that only about 100 of the 560 fundraisers who collected money for Obama from friends and colleagues during the 2008 campaign have raised funds for the president's reelection effort.

Many contacted by The Times said they still planned to get involved, noting it was still early — particularly because the president does not have a Democratic primary challenger. But several also said that the economic malaise, the absence of a clear Republican opponent and some disenchantment with the administration's

policies have made fundraising more difficult than during Obama's passion-filled 2008 bid.

"There will be a mix of people who initially are more reticent because they feel a little bit disappointed, but over time they will come back to support the president like they did in 2007 and 2008," said Thomas Lesser, an attorney from Northampton, Mass., who is organizing a fundraiser for Obama on Martha's Vineyard in mid-August.

On the GOP side, The Times determined that fewer than 1 in 5 major fundraisers have personally contributed to the current crop of candidates. Among the nearly 1,000 "Pioneers" and "Rangers" who raised substantial sums of money for George W. Bush's two campaigns, fewer than 150 have given to the presidential hopefuls this year. Of the roughly 530 who helped Sen. John McCain's presidential bid in 2008, about 130 have made contributions this year. (The number of past GOP fundraisers who have gone a step further and bundled others' donations this year is not known; Obama has released a list of his bundlers, but Republican candidates have not.)

Many Republicans said they're holding out to see if there are late presidential entrants — particularly Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who is expected to decide by the end of the summer. As he weighs the decision, Perry has been meeting with donors around the country to gauge his fundraising potential. He swung through San Francisco, Silicon Valley and Los Angeles last week, and is scheduled to host major GOP donors at two

dinners next week in Austin, Texas.

"If Perry elects to run, you would find a substantial and serious cadre of Republican bundlers who would pretty seriously rally to his cause," said Dirk Van Dongen, a longtime GOP fundraiser who has not yet signed up with a candidate.

Jim Neale, president of Quorum Energy, a Dallas-based oil and gas exploration company, is one of them.

"He has a real appeal to the evangelical side of the Republican Party, and they are the ones who actually vote in the primary," said Neale, a former Bush Pioneer who said he is underwhelmed by the current field. "I don't think any of the candidates at this time possess that kind of tough leadership that we need."

The discontent has led some deep-pocketed Republicans to forward their resources elsewhere. Former Univision Chairman A. Jerrold Perenchio, a major Bush and McCain fundraiser, has yet to show up as a donor to any of the current GOP contenders. But in April, he gave \$2 million through a trust he controls to American Crossroads, a "super PAC" that supports conservative candidates.

Amid moves like that, the Republican presidential candidates reported a lackluster haul in the three months that ended June 30, the first significant fundraising quarter of the 2012 race. Together, seven contenders who filed reports raised a little more than \$34 million, a figure dwarfed by the \$86.7 million Obama raised.

(The Republican total does not include \$4.1 million reportedly raised by former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr., who is not required

to file a report until the fall because of his late entry into the race. Nor is it known whether he has won the backing of past GOP bundlers.)

Although about 4 out of 5 past Obama bundlers did not raise money for him in the last quarter — including well-known figures such as producer David Geffen and "CSI:NY" star Hill Harper — 244 individuals or couples helped steer \$39 million into the Obama Victory Fund. That committee is run jointly with the national Democratic Party and can accept individual contributions up to \$35,800, far more than the \$5,000 per individual that candidates can raise directly.

The president was boosted by a cadre of about 150 new fundraisers. They have helped replenish the ranks of at least 59 Obama fundraisers, who together brought in more than \$13 million in 2008, who cannot raise money this time because they received ambassadorships or other political appointments after his election.

Obama also needs to offset 2008 backers who may decide to stay out because of discontent with administration policies, particularly in the financial sector. David Voelker, an investor from New Orleans, said he anticipated his fundraising efforts in the business community would be more difficult this time around.

"First time [he ran], Barack Obama was like a dream come true, but Republicans have spent the last four years painting him as a villain," Voelker said. "It will truly be a race of who have they got on the other side."

Still, there are indications that Obama has plenty of deep reserves left to tap. So far, about 300,000 of the nearly 4 million people

who gave him money in 2008 have donated this time. In interviews, more than a dozen past Obama bundlers who have not begun raising money for him this year said they planned to do so.

"I am confident that once there is a front-runner, if not a nominee, on the Republican side, that the fundraising people who may be less active right now will be fully engaged," said Joseph Steinfield, a Boston attorney and early supporter of Obama. "The absence of a primary campaign undoubtedly affects how at least some people look at this undertaking."

Ann Marie Wilkins, a Cambridge, Mass.-based music manager, said it was more pressing to get involved early in the 2008 race.

"That was a different time when nobody knew his name," she said of Obama. "It required a lot of heavy lifting.

"Absolutely we will be there for him," she added. "He can count on us."

Similarly, many longtime Republican bundlers said they would eventually train

their energy on the presidential contenders.

"It's like betting on the Kentucky Derby when you know there are a couple of thoroughbreds who haven't entered yet," said Alan Novak, a former chairman of the Pennsylvania Republican Party who is considering backing former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, but is also intrigued by Perry.

Terry Neese, an Oklahoma City-based advocate for female business owners and a former Bush Ranger, said she was waiting for the contenders to demonstrate an understanding of Main Street.

"I'm waiting for the white knight," Neese added. "And that could be a male or a female."

*Times staff writers Maloy Moore, Sandra Poindexter and Doug Smith in Los Angeles contributed to this report.*

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