



The Star-Ledger

Newark's Booker tries novel fundraiser

Mayor joining forces with D.C. counterpart

Friday, March 06, 2009

BY RALPH R. ORTEGA

Star-Ledger Staff

Newark Mayor Cory Booker and Adrian Fenty, his counterpart in the nation's capital, are teaming up next week for a joint fundraiser -- an unusual pairing that could prove to be a lucrative boost to the 2010 re-election campaigns of both men.

Members of Congress from different states typically hold joint fundraisers in Washington, D.C. But for mayors to do it, "I think it's a clever fundraising strategy," said John Weingart, of the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

"Both mayors are dealing with very serious, difficult challenges, and to the extent these (fundraising) events indicate, they may be trying to learn from each other's experiences," said Weingart, associate director of the Rutgers University center. "That can only be a good thing for both cities."

Both mayors are young, political celebrities, especially in the Obama-era of the new African-American politician.

They are quoted frequently in national publications, appear at events with celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Colombian songstress Shakira and are regular guests on national political and talk shows. Booker is scheduled to appear tonight on "Real Time with Bill Maher" on HBO.

Weingart said the combination of Booker and Fenty on Wednesday could push supporters to a new level of giving.

"It's sort of like musical superstars getting together and going on tour, and sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That may be the case here in terms of fundraising," Weingart said.

Booker credited Washington attorney Eric Broyles for brokering the joint appearance with Fenty -- one of several urban mayors Booker, in an interview this week, said had effected social change in America.

"Adrian Fenty is that kind of mayor, he's just a tremendous leader who's making a great change in Washington, D.C., and he's been somebody I've known since I was on city council. We have a whole bunch of mutual friends who raised money for his mayoral race and raised money for my mayoral race," Booker said.

Broyles saw the event as a follow up to a 2001 Washington fundraiser thrown for then-Councilman Booker. Fenty, a councilman in Washington then, also was in attendance. With the two serving as mayors, Broyles decided a joint fundraiser was in order.

The RSVP on a Facebook invite for the event being held at Local 16, a bar and restaurant on U Street, urges invitees to respond quickly, before the event reaches capacity. The minimum for supporters coming in at the guest level is \$250 -- a \$125 donation to each mayor's re-election bid in 2010. The cost is \$500 to each campaign for those attending at the VIP level.

So far, the "Booker Team for Newark" has collected \$2.4 million since Booker took office in 2006, according to his latest campaign and contributions report filed with the state Election Law Enforcement Commission. In addition to funding Booker's re-election run next year, the money is expected to help at least nine candidates who will run with Booker's support.

The team umbrella gives Booker the ability to raise more funds. As an individual, he would be limited to

accepting \$2,600 donations from individuals and \$7,200 from political committees. Under state law, a nine-member team can accept donations of up to \$23,400 from individuals.

Fenty has raised more than \$2 million for his re-election campaign, according to his latest report filed with the Washington, D.C., office of campaign finance.

The Booker-Fenty fundraiser will likely note the similarities between the two mayors. Both are Democrats who preside over poor, urban communities, yet tap into a national base for support. Both have a flair for making uplifting and poetic remarks about their towns. Fenty is 38. Booker is 39. They even share the same trademark shaved head.

Booker said his campaign is actively raising money and plans to officially announce his re-election in March or April 2010. His re-election campaign hopes to raise \$5 million. He believes that amount is possible because previous large fundraisers have yielded as much as \$500,000.

He said next week's joint fundraiser won't be his last in Fenty's backyard.

"We will be doing some major D.C. fundraisers, closer to the campaign," Booker said.

Ralph R. Ortega may be reached at rortega@starledger.com or (973) 951-3816.

©2009 Star Ledger

© 2009 NJ.com All Rights Reserved.