

YET MORE STRAIGHT TALK TO LOBBYISTS

In its report on the latest lobbyist to join the McCain team, the Politico focuses on how John Green will help McCain coordinate his messaging with votes in Congress.

With two senators in the race – McCain for the Republicans, and either Hillary Rodham Clinton or Barack Obama for the Democrats – Senate leaders have a unique opportunity to create both opportunities and pitfalls for their parties' candidates by forcing votes on taxes, national security, health care and energy.

"The future basically revolves around our candidate for president, who will be principal messenger for where Republicans think America ought to go in the next four years," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). "What we do on the proactive side – the offense, if you will – needs to be closely coordinated with our candidate for president, without ... turning the Senate floor into a sparring match between the two candidates."

But, as John Kerry points out, the minority party doesn't really get to coordinate timing for actions **in Congress**.

Although Kerry credited Daschle and Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) with trying to coordinate with his presidential campaign, he said then-Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist was "always maneuvering to schedule votes and set a debate that amplified the Bush-Cheney campaign's attacks."

"There was a lot of counter-scheduling," Kerry said. "I remember flying all night

back from New Mexico for a vote that Bill Frist canceled as soon as we got back. You bet it matters who runs the Senate when you're out on the trail."

So I wonder whether the Politico actually misunderstands what Green's role (who, after all, is described for his ties with Trent Lott, not any currently-serving GOP leader) will be. Consider the following description.

Presumptive Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain has engaged a leading GOP lobbyist to **coordinate his message and travel schedule with congressional Republicans** – the most concrete sign yet that the biggest battleground in the 2008 presidential race may not be Pennsylvania or Ohio or Florida's I-4 corridor but rather the floor of the United States Senate.

And then consider what the GOP meant—in the previous several election cycles—when they discussed coordinating message and travel.

Thirteen months before President Bush was reelected, chief strategist Karl Rove summoned political appointees from around the government to the Old Executive Office Building. The subject of the Oct. 1, 2003, meeting was "asset deployment," and the message was clear:

The staging of official announcements, high-visibility trips and declarations of federal grants had to be carefully coordinated with the White House political affairs office to ensure the maximum promotion of Bush's reelection agenda and the Republicans in Congress who supported him, according to documents and some of those involved in the effort.

"The White House determines which members need visits," said an internal

e-mail about the previously undisclosed Rove "deployment" team, "and where we need to be strategically placing our assets."

That is, coordinating message and travel schedule is not about making sure McCain doesn't have to make inconvenient trips back to DC (not least because Harry Reid will be in charge of that). At least in the past several campaigns, it meant turning every piece of pork into a campaign event—pairing the presidential candidate with threatened incumbents. I suspect John Green's role will be to coordinate these campaign events as much as votes in DC.

Which makes it interesting that McCain has chosen a lobbyist for the role. Is he going to set up events at which McCain (purportedly an opponent of pork) can boast about the pork the Republicans are barbecuing for their allies? Or will they be events at which McCain's sty full of lobbyists brag at how responsive Republicans have been to other lobbyists?