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## The Right Wing's Casting Agency, and Its Agent

Noam Scheiber

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Over the last year, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, a Milwaukee group that has financed decades of research into curbing the power of public sector unions, hired three new staff members: a fund-raiser, an administrative aide and a program officer.

It enlisted a recruiting outfit called Talent Market, which helps staff free-market advocacy groups, think tanks and foundations. In two of those cases, the Bradley Foundation, whose efforts Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin drew on, hired candidates whom Talent Market's executive director, Claire Kittle Dixon, had recommended.

"She has a personal knowledge of the conservative movement and lots and lots of contacts," said Michael W. Grebe, who is stepping down as the foundation's president this year. Such is the foundation's confidence in Ms. Kittle Dixon that it asked her to assist in finding Mr. Grebe's successor.

Unlike many long-established job placement services on the right and the left, which devote most of their efforts to posting ads or advising job-seekers, Talent Market is essentially a full-time recruiting operation.

In the case of the Bradley Foundation, Mr. Grebe said, Ms. Kittle Dixon was involved at every step, from writing the job description to unearthing candidates and encouraging them to apply. She is, in effect, the visible hand for those who worship the invisible hand.

Libertarian groups and activists backed by deep-pocketed conservative donors have been successful in recent years in pushing beyond Washington into dozens of states. They have provided the intellectual and political muscle for elected officials who have rolled back regulations, cut taxes and tried to remake public education.

Perhaps most significantly, they have helped pass anti-union legislation in once heavily unionized states and embarked on well-organized campaigns to discourage workers from paying union dues and fees in liberal bastions like Washington State.

"At the state level, some of these so-called think tanks are beginning to do the real organizing work against unions," said Steve Rosenthal, a former A.F.L.-C.I.O. political director who now tracks the flow of conservative money into anti-union efforts.

The strategy depends on a cadre of committed recruits, which is where Ms. Kittle Dixon and Talent Market come in. The firm's reason for being, according to its website, is to ensure that the "free-market nonprofit sector has the talent it needs to defend liberty."

In this vein, Talent Market says it has helped over 160 organizations find personnel since its founding in 2009, including prominent ones like the Cato Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Charles Koch Foundation.

But it has also been active among more obscure players, ensuring a level of quality control and ideological cohesion at free-market groups across the country. In many ways, Ms. Kittle Dixon is the casting director for the so-called liberty movement.

"The infrastructure for the collectivist left is massive, between academia, government, unions, higher ed, and K-12," said Jon Caldara, president of the Independence Institute in Denver, another client. "For those of us who want to counter that, it's harder to find exactly the right people."

Talent Market, he said, "helps take a lot of the mystery out of hiring."

Ms. Kittle Dixon, who declined to be interviewed, is impeccably credentialed for the role. A protégée of Whitney Ball, a prominent figure in free-market philanthropy, she has toiled for years in the liberty movement.

After earning a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown, she worked on talent development at the Koch Foundation in suburban Virginia, where she ran an internship program along with a fellowship known as the Koch Associate Program. She later became research director of a free-market think tank in Ohio. She has crossed paths with hundreds of libertarian wonks and activists over the years and stayed in touch with many of them.

"She is a known quantity, 'persona grata,' " said Jonathan Rick, who runs a public relations firm and met Ms. Kittle Dixon when he interviewed for the Koch Associate Program in 2006.

Job-matching networks that serve a particular ideological niche have been around since at least the 1980s, when the Heritage Foundation created what became a widely trafficked database of jobs with conservative organizations and politicians. Another group called the Leadership Institute has long hosted a job bank and advised young conservatives on how to find entry- to middle-level positions.

The left has created a similar infrastructure, with a variety of email lists and message boards connecting activists and operatives with prospective employers. One, called JobsthatareLEFT, started in 2002 "as a way to help a few unemployed campaign staffers seek lefty jobs," according to its Google group page. It says it has shared over 20,000 positions with 25,000 members since then.

Another group, called Inclusv, has helped progressives of color land jobs.

Paul Oyer, a labor economist at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, said there are two characteristics that make niche matchmaking services successful: If the niche can claim a lot of members, and if not being in the niche is a "deal breaker" for those who are in it.

Talent Market gives every indication of serving such a niche. To upload a résumé or sign up for the site's newsletter, a candidate must first answer three questions on "the best way to solve societal problems," "the proper function of government," and the prospect's "view of how markets function." (Sample option: "Free markets almost always lead to the most efficient allocation of resources.")

Like most of the organizations it advises, Talent Market is a nonprofit. It charges clients no fee, subsisting instead on contributions from donors, foundations and other nonprofits.

It appears to be a bargain. Talent Market received at least \$120,000 a year from 2011 to 2013 from DonorsTrust, a so-called donor-advised fund provider that helps wealthy people contribute anonymously to free-market causes, according to Internal Revenue Service filings. Other conservative and free-market groups, like the State Policy Network and the Vernon K. Kriebel Foundation, have contributed over the years.

Clients say Talent Market excels at finding hard-to-attract fund-raising staff members and at time-consuming searches for senior officials. But its greatest value may be in connecting far-flung organizations with talent they might not otherwise find.

"Washington, D.C., is one giant high school campus — everybody knows each other," Mr. Caldara, the Denver activist, said. "But those of us fighting for limited government in the states are spread apart. Sometimes the best person for a job is not someone in our current state."

Mr. Caldara said his organization recently hired a fund-raiser from the Washington area whom Talent Market brought to its attention.

By contrast, Sherry Ettleson, a full-time recruiter for progressive nonprofits who may be the closest counterpart of Ms. Kittle Dixon on the left, says her efforts focus almost entirely on Washington, New York and San Francisco. Ms. Ettleson says this is because she does not have connections outside those cities, and because the network of progressive think tanks and advocacy groups is not as well developed in other regions as it is on the right.

"The left was slow to that game," she said.

There is almost no corner of the country where Ms. Kittle Dixon has not dispatched conservative crusaders. Since late 2014, according to its monthly newsletter, Talent Market has placed people at the Freedom Foundation in Olympia, Wash.; the Beacon Center of Tennessee in Nashville; the James Madison Institute in Tallahassee, Fla.; and the Ashbrook Center in Ashland, Ohio.

Until recently, Michael Schaus lived in Colorado, where he was a freelance writer and the host of a local talk-radio show. Last autumn, he contacted Ms. Kittle Dixon, who encouraged him to pursue his interests in the policy world.

Ms. Kittle Dixon, he said, alerted him whenever she came across an opening that fit his ambitions and skills. After the first interview she brokered, Ms. Kittle Dixon contacted him again to see how it had gone and whether she could refine the search further.

But in this case, it was unnecessary. The Nevada Policy Research Institute offered him a job as its communications director, and he accepted, attracted by the organization's focus on taxes and education reform. The whole process lasted roughly one month.

"She was good at what she does," Mr. Schaus said. "I love the job. I'm doing the type of stuff I like. It's been a good success."