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## **After resisting for months, Trump hires top pollster**

Veteran pollster and strategist Tony Fabrizio is coming on board.

By **MARC CAPUTO** | 05/16/16 11:28 PM EDT

After calling pollsters a waste of money, Donald Trump's presidential campaign reversed course and signed up veteran political strategist and pollster Tony Fabrizio, sources tell POLITICO.

Fabrizio has worked on numerous presidential elections. He is also a top strategist for the Florida U.S. Senate campaign of Rep. Ron DeSantis, masterminded Gov. Rick Scott's improbable Florida win in 2010 and was pollster for Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin in his 2015 win. Scott and Bevin share a common bond with Trump: They were both outsider businessmen who bucked the establishment.

Rumored for more than a month, Fabrizio's hiring still came as a surprise to those who have listened to Trump boast that he doesn't employ pollsters. Trump has questioned the value of paying for them when so many polls are published each day in the media — and framed that as part of his outsider appeal.

"I don't have pollsters. I don't want to waste money on pollsters," he told "Meet the Press" host Chuck Todd last August, adding, "I don't want to be unreal. I want to be me. I have to be me."

But Fabrizio, who couldn't be reached for comment, is more than a pollster, according to those who have worked with him and marveled at the accuracy of his surveys and messaging. Steve Schale, a longtime Florida strategist and Obama campaign adviser, says Fabrizio's a bad hire — for Democrats.

"Tony is flat-out one of the smartest dudes I know. He proved it with Rick Scott — much to my personal detriment, he knows how to take a deeply flawed candidate and sell them to the voters," Schale said. "If I was a Republican running for president or dogcatcher, I'd want him in my corner."



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## Why Rubio hasn't endorsed Cruz

By MARC CAPUTO

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In hiring Fabrizio, a Fort Lauderdale resident, Trump has access to Florida's most sought-after Republican pollster and adviser. If Trump loses Florida, he more than likely loses his shot at the White House. Considering the high stakes and high quality of Fabrizio's work, his hiring by the Trump campaign was seen as a no-brainer.

"This is the best deal Trump ever made," said Chip Englander, former campaign manager for Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul's presidential campaign, for which Fabrizio polled earlier this

year. “Tony is a superstar.”

Unlike many Republicans, Fabrizio refrained from taking direct personal shots at Trump during the primary.

Still, when he worked for Paul in August 2015, he poked fun at Trump’s bad numbers with Hispanics and chided statistics guru Nate Silver on Twitter by saying: “How dare you question the power of the great Donald of Oz???” He also praised a George Will column in The Washington Post that bashed Trump.

After Paul dropped out, Fabrizio began advocating Trump’s candidacy on Twitter.

Like Trump, Fabrizio knows how to leverage controversy by playing rough. He was one of the masterminds behind the infamous Willie Horton ad that portrayed Democrat Michael Dukakis as soft on crime in the 1988 presidential election against George H.W. Bush.

“We knew people would go crazy,” Fabrizio told the Miami Herald and Tampa Bay Times in a 2011 interview. “The networks had wanted to throw us off air, but we already paid them \$1 million to run the ad. How many hundreds of millions of [dollars in] free air time did we get?”

In a twist, Fabrizio in 2011 told Trump he wouldn’t work on his presidential campaign if he ran in 2012. Fabrizio, courted by other campaigns, worked for Texas Gov. Rick Perry’s presidential campaign instead.

Over the decades, Fabrizio has worked for presidential candidates Bob Dole, Pat Buchanan, Perry and Paul; for former Sens. Connie Mack of Florida, Alfonse D’Amato of New York and Bob Bennett of Utah; and for former Govs. Bob Riley of Alabama, Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota and Mike Foster of Louisiana. He has also advised the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and numerous political committees.

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## **Dead cat at heart of Florida election controversy**

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A Brooklyn native, Fabrizio grew up on Long Island and now lives near another transplanted New Yorker, fellow political operative Roger Stone, a top Trump associate and backer whom Fabrizio met in 1978. Through Stone, Fabrizio met Trump adviser Paul Manafort in the 1990s, and the two have worked together on numerous projects. Manafort began advocating Fabrizio’s hiring soon after he joined Trump’s campaign in March.

As Manafort was hired, Stone was coming back into the Trump campaign's good graces. In August, Stone parted ways with the campaign when it refused to hire a pollster. Trump didn't need a pollster after all; however, the tycoon's general-election prospects have necessitated beefing up his team.

While working for Trump, Fabrizio will stay on DeSantis' Senate campaign, according to DeSantis' Senate campaign manager, Brad Herold, who called Fabrizio "one of the smartest minds in Republican politics." Brian Hughes, campaign manager for one of DeSantis' rivals, Todd Wilcox, said the impact of Fabrizio shouldn't be underestimated by Democrats.

"The addition of Tony Fabrizio demonstrates a level of gravitas and political sophistication that should make Democrats lose sleep," Hughes said. "Tony's strategic expertise will yield a state-by-state plan that wins the White House and defends the down-ballot races. If you doubt it, go read the archives in Florida from 2010."