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## Both Sides Hire U.S. Help for U.K. 'Brexit' Vote

*Campaigners will try to secure their bases, compete to win over the estimated 20% of undecided British voters*

By NICHOLAS WINNING

LONDON—Seasoned U.S. political campaigners are squaring off to play advisory roles on both sides of the campaign for the U.K.'s June referendum on whether to stay in the European Union.

President Barack Obama's election guru Jim Messina is an ad hoc adviser to the main group fighting to stay in the EU, called Britain Stronger in Europe, according to people familiar with the matter. Mr. Messina helped Prime Minister David Cameron secure victory and a second term in office in last year's general election. He is currently co-chairman of Priorities USA Action, the super PAC backing Hillary Clinton for president.

Meanwhile, one of the main groups lobbying for Britain to leave has hired referendum specialist Gerry Gunster, managing partner of Washington-based public-relations firm Goddard Gunster Inc.

The group, called Leave.EU, has also signed up U.S. data-driven campaign firm Cambridge Analytica LLC, which will use data gathering and audience-targeting methods in the U.K. similar to those it has used to support Sen. Ted Cruz's presidential bid. Cambridge Analytica is the U.S. affiliate of U.K.'s SCL Group.

Mr. Cameron on Saturday announced the referendum would be held on June 23, triggering a marked step-up in campaigning on both sides.

In a speech Tuesday, Mr. Cameron said the U.K. would be better off in economic and national-security terms by remaining in the EU and made a direct appeal to undecided members of the public.

"To anyone who is finding it hard to make up your mind...I would say come down on the side of security and safety and certainty," said Mr. Cameron, speaking to employees of cellphone operator O2 in Slough, a London suburb.

The prime minister also explicitly addressed for the first time the decision by London Mayor Boris Johnson, a fellow Conservative lawmaker, to support Britain's exit. Mr. Cameron said he had great respect for Mr. Johnson as a politician "but on this issue, I think he's wrong."

In addition to trying to secure their respective bases, Messrs. Messina and Gunster will be competing to win over what some analysts say is the roughly 20% of British voters who say they have yet to make up their minds.



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## Both Sides Hire U.S. Help for U.K. 'Brexit' Vote (Continued)

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Among key issues for voters are immigration, the economy and whether important decisions affecting the U.K. should be made in Brussels or London.

Polls show a divided public, with most suggesting more people are in favor of staying in the EU. Phone surveys have tended to show the pro-EU camp in the lead, while some online polls in recent months have shown the “no” camp ahead.

Targeting voters through social media and online is likely to be an important campaign tool as turnout will be a key factor. Young people tend to be more pro-EU but less likely to vote, while older generations are more euroskeptic but tend to vote more.

Mr. Messina, who is expected to keep a low public profile during the campaign, is helping shape the overall campaign strategy and messaging for Britain Stronger in Europe, according to one of the people familiar with the matter.

Headed by a former chief executive of retail chain Marks & Spencer Group PLC, the group is looking to Mr. Messina to bring the expertise in analyzing voter data and precision campaigning that he deployed for Mr. Cameron's Conservative Party in last year's general election, people familiar with the matter said. In that contest, he was pitted against former Obama White House adviser David Axelrod, who advised the main opposition Labour Party.

The group has also hired the two men who directed the Conservatives' digital campaign for the general election, which claimed to have reached over 17 million people a week with highly targeted online communications.

Mr. Messina and others hired by the “yes” campaign have shown themselves to be good at identifying “the people who are going to vote for you and then contacting them in such a way as to inspire them to actually come out and do that,” said Tim Bale, a politics professor at Queen Mary University of London.

Leave.EU, led by British businessman and political donor Arron Banks, hired Mr. Gunster in October to advise on running the campaign. Mr. Gunster has worked on a long string of successful ballot measures in the U.S., including blocking the introduction of taxes on sugary drinks in San Francisco in 2014 and Telluride, Colo., in 2013.

In a presentation in London earlier this month, Mr. Gunster said the “leave” camp faces the inherent disadvantage that people tend to support the status quo in referendums. Because there is no candidate for voters to focus on as in elections, referendums require a different campaign approach, he said.

“It's not Donald Trump with his crazy hair, Hillary [Clinton], or anybody else...so the job of running a campaign is somehow to bring some personality into those words on the piece of paper,” he said. He said his strategy for reaching voters is to find several “ordinary” professional people, including a former border control officer, a nurse and a professor, to represent the campaign. Leave. EU has found the people and is giving them media training, a spokesman said.

Cambridge Analytica is surveying tens of thousands of Britons across the country on issues including partisanship, personality, and their concerns about EU membership. The company will then fuse those findings with other publicly available data on voters to produce advice for how Leave. EU should target their messaging more specifically through multiple channels. Mr. Gunster said voters tend to make up their minds later in referendum campaigns than during candidate elections, sometimes leading to swings in polls and making the final two weeks of campaigning critical.

“This is a total roller-coaster ride—we will be up, we will be down,” he said. “It is absolutely god-awful gut-wrenching.”