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Fight night: Brook Byers vs. Obama

Ron Leuty 6/30/10

Forget Ali-Frazier or Louis-Schmeling, Tuesday night's showdown was Byers-Obama: heavyweight venture capitalist versus heavyweight politician.

The only problem with the tilt: President Obama wasn't at the QB3-BayBio open house where Brook Byers, the legendary Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers principal, was part of a panel discussion.

"In my view the (administration's) policy's going in the wrong direction," said Byers, who said he supported Obama's election.

Byers noted a proposal to increase the taxation rate on capital gains. "Other countries must be chuckling that this is being considered," he said.

But Obama was far from Byers' only target in a nearly five-minute rant that started with a question about a [recent column by The New York Times' Thomas Friedman about the Obama administration's policies meant to encourage innovation](#). Others catching Byers' wrath: the media (apparently Byers hasn't read my colleague Patrick Hoge's coverage of the social media boom South of Market) and the FDA, whose attitude Byers described as the "worst I've seen in my career."

On a positive note, Byers noted that there's "a huge amount of activity going on out there. A lot of it is just data that isn't right in front of you." Then, he added, the media either ignores those companies or its reporting misses the mark.

In our second clip, Byers talks about some innovative companies and notes that an international company — otherwise unidentified by him — is interested in space in the same Mission Bay biotech enclave where the event was held. "So I think this is all about to come about."

The panel, which also included University of California, San Francisco, Chancellor Susan Desmond-Hellmann, Pfizer Inc. external R&D chief Uwe Schoenbeck, QB3 director Reg Kelly and BayBio President Gail Maderis, really focused on the event's greater theme: how academia and the private sector can work together to turn innovations into products that reach patients more quickly.

But the panel discussion was just part of the QB3-BayBio event. We've also pulled out a couple of the poster presentations — one with Anne Findlay from the Biomagnetic Imaging Lab, the other with Adam Renslo, who is part of the team in Jim Wells' Small Molecule Discovery Center.

The center recently [signed a potential \\$13 million deal with Genentech Inc.](#)

But back to the panel. Desmond-Hellmann brought the focus back to ways the life sciences industry and academia can meet, exchange data and collaborate.

The key, the chancellor said, is finding new ways — like social media — to "bring people together who are looking for innovation and people who have it" — or how to make innovation "resonate for industry."