

What is Lobbying?

Although lobbying is an ancient art — as old as government itself — it is still frequently viewed with suspicion. It is, in fact, a legitimate activity protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution:

"Congress shall make no law....abridging the freedom of speech...or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

The term "lobbyist" came into usage early in the 19th century, although stories of its origin vary. One account describes "lobby-agents" as the petitioners in the lobby of the New York State Capitol waiting to address legislators. Another version of the story describes the lobby of the Willard Hotel as the meeting site for both legislators and favor-seekers during the early 1800s. Either way, by 1835 the term had been shortened to "lobbyist" and was in wide usage in the U.S. Capitol, though frequently pejoratively.

The caricature is as familiar as the name: portly, cigar-smoking men who wine and dine lawmakers while slipping money into their pockets. Because the lobbying profession is so little understood, it is often viewed as a sinister function, yet every "mom and apple pie" interest in the United States uses lobbyists — a fact little known by the general public.

Simply put, lobbying is advocacy of a point of view, either by groups or individuals. A special interest is nothing more than an identified group expressing a point of view — be it colleges and universities, churches, charities, public interest or environmental groups, senior citizens organizations, even state, local or foreign governments. While most people think of lobbyists only as paid professionals, there are also many independent, volunteer lobbyists — all of whom are protected by the same First Amendment.

Lobbying involves much more than persuading legislators. Its principal elements include researching and analyzing legislation or regulatory proposals; monitoring and reporting on developments; attending congressional or regulatory hearings; working with coalitions interested in the same issues; and then educating not only government officials but also employees and corporate officers as to the implications of various changes. What most lay people regard as lobbying — the actual communication with government officials — represents the smallest portion of a lobbyist's time; a far greater proportion is devoted to the other aspects of preparation, information and communication.

Lobbying is a legitimate and necessary part of our democratic political process. Government decisions affect both people and organizations, and information must be provided in order to produce informed decisions. Public officials cannot make fair and informed decisions without considering

information from a broad range of interested parties. All sides of an issue must be explored in order to produce equitable government policies.

Adapted from The American League of Lobbyists website
<http://www.alldc.org/publicresources/lobbying.cfm>