

Hired Guns

Their weapons now are BlackBerries and cell phones. But connections, savvy, and fundraising clout are still the keys to the influence wielded by the city's 50 top lobbyists.

AFTER A LUCRATIVE 12-year run on Capitol Hill, it hasn't been the best of times for Washington lobbyists, especially Republicans.

One of the most prominent lobbyists, Jack Abramoff, now resides in Cumberland, Maryland, a guest of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. His prosecution on charges of giving illegal gifts and meals to lawmakers and defrauding clients cast a pall over a profession that, fairly or not, didn't have the best reputation to begin with.

For Republicans who thought things couldn't get worse, they did. Democrats won both houses of Congress in the 2006 elections, returning some old bulls—among them Barney Frank, Charles Rangel, John Conyers, John Dingell, and Henry Waxman—to power.

Twelve years earlier, new Republican majority leader Tom DeLay instituted the K Street Project, by which loyal friends of the 1994 Republican revolution were to be rewarded. Big business was none too subtly informed that friends and aides of the victors should reap the spoils.

Democratic powers like Thomas Hale Boggs Jr. began talking about retirement. Republican staffers and even members

By Kim Isaac Eisler

Photograph by Gary Landsman



of Congress, eager to cash in, left the Hill and began recruiting clients who could benefit from their contacts and influence.

Abramoff was just one lobbyist who became a hot property. In 1998, when we last picked Washington's 50 top lobbyists, Abramoff ranked 22nd. Shortly thereafter he was wooed away from one firm by another, whose revenues skyrocketed—and whose partners apparently didn't look closely at how he operated.

The amount of money generated by people claiming to have influence that can affect legislation, appropriations, and agency decisions is big. Laws now require lobbyists to file financial-disclosure forms when they make contact with a legislator. Those forms reveal the minimum that lobbyists can make. Much more money still legally goes unreported—for organizing grassroots lobbying campaigns, advising clients on how they can lobby, making speeches, contacting regulatory agencies, and creating public-relations campaigns.

A MAJOR GROUP of clients is public universities, hospitals, and municipalities, which spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year to win appropriations, often in the form of earmarks—language designating that funds go to a specific project or institution—that their elected representatives don't have the time or power to get.

“Congressional staffs are extremely busy, and often there aren't enough staffers to do everything,” says a lobbyist who specializes in representing cities. “Our job is to facilitate communication, package priorities, and make sure that requests for funding meet deadlines and get included in legislation.”

This has created an odd situation on Capitol Hill. Members of the House of Representatives make \$165,200 a year. Former congressmen like Bill Paxon of New York and Bob Livingston of Louisiana make that much representing a single university, hospital, or water district. Livingston's lobby group took in \$16 million last year, much of it from government institutions in Louisiana that he formerly represented.

Two of the biggest lobby firms in Washington, Cassidy & Associates and Van Scoyoc Associates, specialize in earmarks.

“Public institutions are starved for facilities,” says Stewart Van Scoyoc, who counts dozens of colleges among his clients. “They can't go to their states because the legislatures claim they have no

money, so they come to us.”

Depending on the size of the project and the target funding, lobbying fees can range from \$700,000 to \$1,000,000 a year, on the high side. There are no guarantees—lobbyists are not allowed to work on contingency. If the project is not included in an appropriations bill, there is nothing to do but try, try again the next year, perhaps with a more influential lobbyist.

Earmarks are profitable, but many lobbyists look down their noses at that practice area. Says tax lobbyist John Raffaelli, “We don't play in that world. Our firm is more involved in creating strategies for policies that my clients are advocating.”

CRUELY DISTILLED INTO three words, practitioners say, the lobbying game boils down

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to “finding, grinding, and minding.”

You find a client with a need, and then you have to go into the system and find a way to get what the client wants done. That's the grinding. The minding is making sure that your language or your earmark stays in the bill until it is signed by the President and isn't axed, thanks to a rival lobbyist, at the last minute. The minding, lobbyists say, continues even after your legislation is passed.

In 2006 a mysterious last-minute provision that had the effect of prohibiting online poker made its way into a port-security bill. Martin Gold, the lobbyist responsible for making it happen, is with Covington & Burling, which represents the National Football League. The NFL was not really interested in poker, but many online gambling sites also allow betting on football games. The NFL wants to stamp out gambling on its games. It doesn't like that online gambling sites make money off its product without paying the NFL for the privilege. Online poker got caught in the crossfire when Gold's provision made it much more difficult to transfer cash from American banks to online casinos.

After the new Congress took power in 2007, House Finance Committee chair Barney Frank announced that he would revisit the ban on Internet gaming and hoped to rescind the measure the NFL paid for. That, lobbyists say, is where

the minding comes in. Even after a bill is passed and signed, it is subject to reversal. The good lobbyist can't let his or her guard down.

IN THE WAKE of the Abramoff scandal, questions were raised, as they periodically are, about the need for a layer of lobbyists between corporate America or municipal America and the United States Congress. Lobbyists, almost to a person, write Abramoff off as the bad apple in the barrel rather than acknowledging that the barrel itself might be the problem. A few lobby firms have appointed ethics officers; most say they aren't needed. But even good ones sometimes work in the shadows. As one prominent lobbyist observes, “My greatest success every year is getting something done

without having my fingerprints on it.”

On the surface, the lobbying industry seems to be highly competitive. *Legal Times* recently listed 50 firms with revenues of more than \$7 million a year. The highest-grossing of the 50, the law firm Akin Gump, reported \$76 million in lobbying fees last year.

Law firms, owned by their partners, are quite competitive. But in recent years private lobby shops, operating outside the strictures of bar-association codes, have proliferated. A little secret of Washington lobbying is that three large international advertising companies own most of the powerful lobby companies. They are Omnicom, based in New York, and two London corporations, WPP and Interpublic Group.

Vin Weber, a former Minnesota congressman now perceived as one of the most influential Republican lobbyists, works for a relatively obscure consulting firm called Clark & Weinstock. But Clark & Weinstock is owned by Omnicom. Omnicom also owns Ketchum, a large PR firm, which owns the Washington Group, whose CEO is former congresswoman Susan Molinari. Omnicom also owns the giant PR firm Fleishman-Hillard as well as the Washington lobby company Porter Novelli.

British-based WPP owns three giant PR companies—Ogilvy, Burson-Marsteller, and Hill & Knowlton. With-

in that framework, the British now own such powerful lobby firms as Quinn Gillespie & Associates, Timmons & Company, and Wexler & Walker. Interpublic is the owner of one of Washington's biggest lobby shops, Cassidy & Associates.

Wayne Berman, whose homegrown Federalist Group turned into Ogilvy Government Relations, owned by WPP, is typical in claiming that the foreign ownership is no problem: "It gives us a larger canvas and offices all over the world."

I asked another lobbyist how people would feel if a Chinese company rather than a British one owned five of the most influential lobbying firms in America with many former members of Congress on the payroll.

"I never thought of it that way," he replied. "I guess that might be a problem."

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL lobbyists do more than represent their clients' interests. They also raise money from clients for the politicians whose favors they seek. And some of their millions of dollars in fees goes to the wining and dining of legislators, though much of the ostensible graft has been taken out of the system with restrictions on free meals, game tickets, and the like.

With Republican rule at an end for now and Democrats back on top in Congress, there naturally are changes in who's on top in the lobby world. But Republicans are not completely out of luck. The 51-49 makeup of the Senate is tenuous. As one GOP-oriented lobbyist says, "We are down but not out. The Democrats can't get anything done in the Senate without us."

After culling the lobby disclosure reports and checking on who has gotten things done, who is likely to get things done in the next few years, and who has the best connections and influence, we present Washington's 50 top lobbyists.

1. Thomas Hale Boggs, Patton Boggs. His father was Democratic House majority leader. His mother succeeded her husband



in Congress after his death in a plane crash. His sister is a leading Washington journalist. Another sister was a New Jersey mayor. But this son of Washington power, never elected to political office, surpasses them all in influence.

It was thought, after Republicans took power in the 1990s, that Boggs's influence would wane. He talked about retiring to his Eastern Shore farm, where he liked to take House committee chairmen on weekend hunting trips. Now, with close friends like John Dingell, Henry Waxman, and Barney Frank back on top, Boggs's law firm, Patton Boggs, makes \$70 million a year from more than 350 lobbying clients.

His biggest and best-known client, Mars, pays him \$2 million a year. In return Boggs has for years made sure that every US serviceman and woman gets a Snickers bar or pack of M&Ms in his or her rations almost every day.

2. Robert Dole, Alston & Bird. The onetime presidential candidate and Republican Senate majority leader let it be known after leaving office that he was willing to promote anything from Viagra to Visa to Dunkin' Donuts. Sure enough, of all the US senators turned lobbyists, Bob Dole is at the top.

When many people expressed outrage that the management of our vital seaports was being outsourced to an Arab-owned company, Dubai Ports World, Dole signed on to build public support for the takeover. Dole's fee from Dubai was \$320,000 in 2006. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in April that Dole had accepted a \$560,000 fee to help a controversial Russian billionaire under suspicion in Russia for bribery obtain a visa to the United States. Dole, who says he doesn't lobby his wife or other members of the Senate, persuaded the State Department to grant the visa.

At 83, Dole is described by colleagues as an unreconstructed workaholic who has never been happier—and certainly not more prosperous.

3. Tony Podesta, Podesta Group. A Chicago native who came to Washington in 1970 to work for Common Cause, Tony Podesta has a practice that's changed in recent years. Once associated with high-tech and media clients, he recently was hired by British Petroleum, whose pipeline problems and refinery fires have created regulatory and public-relations issues. Podesta has quietly been guiding BP through congressional hearings.

He also represents Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics, trying to sell Congress and the Pentagon on another version of their Stryker troop-transport vehicle. During the Clinton administration, it didn't hurt that brother John

was White House chief of staff.

When Republicans came to power, the former Ted Kennedy aide deftly partnered with Republican strategist Dan Mattoon, a pal of then-Speaker Dennis Hastert's. Mattoon hired Hastert's son to work with him. With Nancy Pelosi now Speaker, Mattoon, the younger Hastert, and Podesta split up earlier this year. Podesta and his team of 23 lobbyists are said to collect \$12 million to \$15 million in annual billings.

4. Jack Quinn, Quinn Gillespie & Associates. A former White House counsel to President Clinton and confidant



of Al Gore's, Jack Quinn has jumped to the top of the heap of former Democratic bigwigs. His firm lists revenues of some \$18 million a year and

is growing at 15 percent a year. His client fees include \$560,000 annually from the Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care, and he pulls in millions more from public accountants, drug companies, banks, and telecommunications companies.

Quinn and his partner, Republican strategist Ed Gillespie, sold ownership of their business several years ago to London-based WPP. The sale no doubt netted Quinn millions. His greatest lobbying coup remains his most notorious—winning a presidential pardon for international financing fugitive Marc Rich as President Clinton was leaving the White House.

5. Vin Weber, Clark & Weinstock. The past 12 years have been good ones for Minnesota ex-congressman Vin Weber, once a neighbor of Newt Gingrich's in Arlington. Rather than join the Gingrich revolution, Weber decided to take advantage of it. He became the Washington face of a once-obscure New York law firm and built it into a ten-person, \$9-million lobbying practice.

Weber has received more than \$2 million in recent years from BNP Paribas, a French bank involved in the controversial United Nations oil-for-food program under which Saddam Hussein is said to have pocketed some \$10 billion. Weber steered bank executives through a gauntlet of congressional hearings and explanations to the White House and State Department, and BNP Paribas emerged

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40. Kenneth Kies, Clark Consulting Federal Policy Group. Probably the leading pure tax lobbyist in Washington, Kies once was chair of the tax practice at the Washington office of white-shoe law firm Baker & Hostetler. He is a former chief counsel of the House Ways and Means Committee and later was chief of staff for the House-Senate Joint Committee on Taxation.

He joined Illinois-based Clark Consulting in 2002. His blue-chip client list on tax issues there is the best in town. Caterpillar, Michelin, and Microsoft all count on Kies to keep their taxes low in a political atmosphere that could require all of Kies's contacts and experience.

41. Howard Vine, Dickstein Shapiro. A graduate of American University and George Mason law school, Vine began lobbying with the National Association of Manufacturers three decades ago and eventually was hired by Miami-based Greenberg Traurig to open its Washington office. He left Greenberg Traurig in 2003 because of his discomfort over the lobbying of former partner Jack Abramoff, now in federal prison after pleading guilty to fraud. If every Washington scandal has a hero, Vine is a nominee.

In addition to a full plate of work on behalf of energy companies trying to get research appropriations and tax benefits for more-efficient energy projects, Vine does pro bono work for groups promoting gay marriage and for the proposed National Music Center at DC's old Carnegie Library.

42. Susan Molinari, the Washington Group. This bubbly former congresswoman pursued several career paths, including a stint as anchor for *CBS News Saturday Morning*, before finding her calling as a lobbyist. Molinari has been tapped by the worldwide PR agency Ketchum to be the top person in Washington for its lobbying subsidiary, where she is half of a lobbying duo with former Tom Daschle aide Rita Lewis.

Molinari and Lewis helped land the \$4.6-billion appropriation for Hurricane Katrina relief on behalf of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. Molinari also carries the flag of the Republic of Panama. With several projects in the works there, including the widening of the canal, she should have no shortage of work. She lives with her husband, Akin Gump lobbyist Bill Paxton—they have never worked on a project together—in Alexandria and is working on the presidential campaign of Rudolph Giuliani.



43. Charles Brain, Capitol Hill Strategies. A former aide to once-powerful congressman Dan Rostenkowski, Brain saw his lobbying career going down when his boss and mentor went up the river for fraud and embezzlement. Brain left lobbying and joined the Clinton administration as a congressional liaison. When George W. Bush became president, Brain went to work for New York congressman Charles Rangel, now chair of Rostenkowski's old committee, Ways and Means.

Back in business as a lobbyist, Brain is once again sought by corporations that want to get a hearing with the chair. Citigroup, Wachovia Bank, and Prudential are just three that shelled out more than \$100,000 each in 2006 for Brain's help.

44. Florence Prioleau, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman. Prioleau was an assistant for domestic policy in the Carter administration, but her cachet now, like that of Charles Brain, is her longstanding association with Ways and Means chair Charles Rangel. Prioleau worked with Rangel from 1975 to 1979. After 20 years at Patton Boggs, this year Prioleau is suddenly a hot property.

The Goucher College and Georgetown law grad is married to sports agent Bill Strickland, who guided the early career of Andre Agassi. As part of her practice representing cities, Prioleau helps coordinate appropriations requests from clients such as Atlanta and Cleveland.

45/46. Bruce Mehlman and David Castagnetti, Mehlman Vogel Castagnetti. University of Virginia law grad Bruce Mehlman was once telecommunications-policy counsel for Cisco Systems, the big high-tech company. He went to the Commerce Department after that, and now he is one of the undisputed experts on high-tech issues. With strong GOP connections in the House of Representatives, where he has also worked, Mehlman attracts \$322,000 a year from IBM and \$240,000 from Hewlett-Packard—just two of some 30 regular clients.

The change to a Democratic Congress shouldn't slow this firm much: Mehlman's principal partner, David Castagnetti, was chief of staff for Senator Max Baucus, now chair of the Finance Committee, which oversees Social Security and related health programs. His clients include drug and pharmaceutical companies.

47. Heather Podesta, Heather Podesta

& Partners. A former aide to Democratic Senator Bill Bradley and a graduate of the University of Virginia Law School, Podesta is well known as a patron of the arts. She and lobbyist husband Tony Podesta collect contemporary art and keep a home in Venice, Italy. After several years lobbying with a Philadelphia law firm, Podesta is on her own.

To say she has panache is an understatement. A *Wall Street Journal* profile revealed that she once had four female chefs from Seattle flown in for a fundraiser for Washington senator Maria Cantwell. In her first week on the job, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was seen giving Podesta a hug and a kiss. Since then, Podesta has signed up more than \$100,000 a month in business, and more is likely on the way.

48. J.C. Watts, J.C. Watts Companies. Twice the most valuable player in the Orange Bowl, the former Oklahoma Sooners quarterback has parlayed his leadership skills into a six-company organization. Elected to Congress in 1994, he left in 2002 to go into lobbying.

He received \$120,000 from the Bowl Championship Series last year and the same amount to represent the NASCAR auto-racing circuit. Watts has been sought out by traditionally black colleges and universities including Grambling and Mississippi Valley State. His personality, high profile, and ability to get along with allies and opponents alike put him in good position to continue to do well no matter who is in power.

49. Steven Elmendorf, Elmendorf Strategies. For this veteran Democratic operative, his party's return to power signals lots of work. Elmendorf was senior adviser to former Democratic House majority leader Richard Gephardt, and he maintains close links with most of the House leaders and committee chairs. In 2006 Elmendorf was registered for only about \$60,000 worth of business, but he is said to have tripled his client roster this year. He's now working on a pension-reform bill for Northwest Airlines.

50. John Edward Porter, Hogan & Hartson. An Illinois congressman for 21 years, Porter helped write many laws on Social Security and public-health issues. Today he is considered one of the most knowledgeable lobbyists for clients like the American Red Cross, from whom he receives \$160,000 a year. Porter also represents several colleges and takes an \$80,000 fee to help get funding for Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo.

National editor Kim Eisler has been writing about Washington lawyers and lobbyists for more than 20 years. Some figures in this article are from the Center for Responsive Politics and Legal Times.

Staler: courtesy of Patton Boggs; Molinari: courtesy of the Washington Group; Prioleau: courtesy of Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman