

CHAPTER SIX

Special Interests at the State Capitol

Political parties have historically served as the principal organizing forces in Connecticut politics. Through a strong two-party system, the residents of Connecticut have been able to directly participate in the state and local political process. Moreover, public policies enacted by the Connecticut state legislature have often reflected political party teamwork, and political party leaders have in multiple ways structured the outcome of local, state, and federal election campaigns. Political parties, in essence, have been the “connecting tissue” throughout the many dimensions of Connecticut politics.

With the decline of parties as political linkage mechanisms, a large vacuum has emerged that, in turn, has allowed alternative forms of political organization to influence and shape the contours of Connecticut politics. The most obvious development in this respect has been the rise of special interest groups and lobbyists. Indeed, studies conducted by political scientists have documented a strong inverse correlation between the strength of a state’s party system and the level of leverage enjoyed by interest groups.¹ In those states where parties tend to be strong and vibrant, special interest groups tend to be weak and non-influential. Conversely, in states where parties are weak and atrophied, special interest groups tend to have more power in the public policy process. Thus, it should come as no surprise that one result of a diminished two-party system in Connecticut politics has been the

concomitant rise of special interests and the many lobbyists who work on their behalf.

In this chapter, we will explore the current activity of interest groups in Connecticut politics. The primary objectives will be to describe the extent to which interest groups have penetrated the political process, the various strategies employed by special interest groups for the purpose of exerting influence, and the predominant types of interest group lobbying that currently takes place at the Connecticut state Capitol.

A Competitive but Regulated Process

With the devolution of power to state governments over the course of the last two decades, scores of special interest groups have redirected their energy and efforts from the nation's Capitol to state Capitols across the land. It appears as if every conceivable interest in Connecticut is now represented in the Connecticut General Assembly. Special interest groups and the hired lobbyists who communicate interest group concerns have clearly become integral actors within the context of the lawmaking process.

It is important to note, however, that while special interests have become prominent in Connecticut politics, the activity of special interest groups is nevertheless a closely monitored and well-regulated affair. Data on special interest activity is carefully compiled by the State Ethics Commission, a commission established to serve as a "watchdog" over the conduct of lobbying activity. Lobbyists who intend to persuade legislators and executive branch officials must, according to state law, register with the State Ethics Commission and disclose a significant amount of information relevant to their specific lobbying efforts. Such information must include the name of the client organization represented by the lobbyist, the name or names of the individual lobbyists employed by the client, the name of the lobbyist's organization or committee, the issue or issues that are the focus of the lobbying effort, and the remuneration agreement between the lobbyist and the client. Such data are routinely compiled by the Ethics Commission and are made available to the general public upon request.

There are two categories of registered lobbyists at the Connecticut state Capitol. One category is known as the "client lobbyist." Client lobbyists are those persons in the employ of a particular organization and who serve coterminously as the organization's lobbyist. A long standing employer/employee relationship between the lobbyist and the organization normally exists within this very traditional form of lobbying.

The second category of lobbyist is known as the "contract lobbyist." A contract lobbyist normally operates a lobbying firm and will contract with several different clients during the course of a legislative session. The contract lobbyist is a professional, independent lobbyist who works on behalf of multiple interests. In Connecticut, contract lobbying has become one of the most prevalent methods of communicating the concerns of interest groups. Table 18 presents the top ten contract lobbying firms in 1994 within the state of Connecticut, as well as their fees and expenses.

Table 18
Connecticut's Top 10 Contract Lobbying Firms: 1994

Firms	Fees and Expenses
Gaffney, Bennett and Assoc.	\$1,735,622
Robinson and Cole	1,350,658
Sullivan and LeShane	1,254,831
Updike, Kelly and Spellacy	729,371
Public Affairs Consulting Assoc.	650,582
Tobin, Levin, Carberry & O'Malley	543,716
Rome, Frankel & Kennelly	495,120
Linda Kowalski	308,438
Connsensus Government Consulting	262,098
Clement J. Roy Associates	252,623

Source: State Ethics Commission. Data compiled and presented in the *Hartford Courant*, February 24, 1995, p. A12. Reprinted with permission.

As the data suggest, contract lobbyists command from clients substantial fees for their professional services. Contract lobbyists

have extensive expertise and vast knowledge of the inner workings of state government, and they know the voting patterns and perspective of practically all state lawmakers. It is understandable, therefore, that contract lobbying firms are in the employ of organizations that have a direct stake in the outcome of pending legislation. It is also understandable that contract lobbying firms are handsomely paid. To some extent, contract lobbyists are the "hired guns" of Connecticut politics.

Millions of dollars are spent by client organizations for lobbying services. The amount of money spent by client organizations for lobbying services is clear proof that the stakes are great and that decisions reached by state lawmakers have a profound impact on the economic interests of organizations. Table 19 reveals the top ten organizations (clients) that spent the most money for lobbying services in 1994.

Table 19
Top 10 Clients: 1994

Clients	Fees Paid to Lobbyists
Connecticut Business and Industry Association	\$850,156
Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council	463,887
Wheelabrator Technologies	400,973
Connecticut Business Education Coalition	377,817
New City Development Inc.	357,879
Connecticut Bankers Association	304,788
Connecticut Pari-Mutuel Association	270,165
Connecticut State Medical Society	253,180
Southern New England Telecommunications	216,500
Connecticut Hospital Association	211,779

Source: State Ethics Commission. Data compiled and presented in the *Hartford Courant*, February 24, 1995, p. A12. Reprinted with permission.

To further document the extraordinary explosion of special interest activity at the Connecticut state Capitol, data were obtained from the State Ethics Commission concerning those

groups and organizations that were registered at the state Capitol as client organizations and that had hired lobbyists to work on their behalf. The data extended over a two year period, ending on December 31, 2000. The interests registered during this period were then broadly categorized into economic and non-economic interest groups. The groups were then organized under more specific subcategories. Table 20 demonstrates that a multitude of special interests currently constitute a strong and visible presence at the Connecticut state Capitol.

Nine hundred and twenty-nine separate interests were engaged in lobbying activity at the Connecticut state Capitol from 1999 to 2000. While this is a snapshot of interest group activity, it does reveal the extent to which economic as well as non-economic organizations have gravitated to the state legislature for the purpose of advancing a wide range of economic, social, and ideological issues.

The proliferation of interest group activity at the state Capitol most certainly raises the question about the extent to which state lawmakers are in fact persuaded by lobbyists. Do the laws passed by the Connecticut state legislature reflect the goals and objectives of special interest groups? Has Connecticut's system of representative democracy been compromised or perhaps undermined by the activity of special interest groups and their handsomely paid lobbyists? Does interest group politics in any way threaten the long tradition of republican government in the Constitution State? Although these are rhetorical questions, the massive infusion of special interest groups should nevertheless alarm every Connecticut resident who believes that the power of state government is supposed to be rooted in the will of the people, and that state lawmakers are representatives of the mass public rather than agents of lobbyists and special interests.

The Connecticut Public is Alarmed

Do the residents of Connecticut care about the growth and rising power of special interest groups? Based on the results of public opinion polling, the answer to this question appears to be an emphatic yes. Consider the following responses to a series of

Table 20
Special Interest Activity at the Connecticut State Capitol: 1999-2000

<i>Economic Interest Groups</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Business	460	AT&T, Sprint, Mashantucket Pequot/Foxwoods, Mobil Oil Corporation
Labor	20	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Connecticut State Police Union
Agriculture	4	Lorillard Tobacco Company
Other Associations	359	Connecticut Car Wash Association, Connecticut Judges Association, New England Patriots Association
<i>Noneconomic Interest Groups</i>		
Public Interests	6	Connecticut Coalition Against Gun Violence, Sierra Club
Single Issue	31	Connecticut Coalition to End the Homeless, Connecticut Anti-Hunger Coalition, Save the Sound
Ideological	6	Connecticut Civil Liberties Union
Governmental	22	Town of Stratford, City of Groton, City of Bridgeport/Mayor's Office
Educational	21	American School for the Deaf, Cheshire Public Schools, University of Phoenix

Source: State Ethics Commission.

Connecticut Poll questions designed to tap public perceptions toward lobbying activity at the state Capitol. Such questions probe the perspectives of Connecticut residents in a variety of ways. To the question, "Some people think lobbyists can be a good source of information for legislators about how laws would actually work. Do you think lobbyists can be useful to government, or would we be better off in all respects if there were no lobbyists?" 50 percent of persons polled replied that lobbyists "can be useful," while 40 percent replied "better done away with."² Although not a majority, there is nevertheless a substantial segment of the Connecticut public that perceives the growth of lobbying activity as a negative rather than a positive development. One can infer that many Connecticut residents perceive lobbying as an activity that is harmful to the quality of Connecticut's political process.

Public concern over the growth of lobbying activity is further revealed in several additional responses regarding the same topic. When asked, "Do you think state legislators should be allowed to vote on bills that affect people in their line of work—like teachers voting on laws about teachers, bankers on laws about banks and so on—or should this be against the law?" 51 percent of persons polled replied "allowed" while 40 percent believed that such activity "should be against the law."³ This of course is a broad and somewhat ambiguous question as it relates to interest group activity, although such a response does suggest that a large portion of Connecticut residents look askance at professional ties between state lawmakers and occupational interest groups with narrow agendas.

The Connecticut public also expresses considerable displeasure over the influx of financial contributions from lobbyists to state legislative candidates. In response to the question, "Would you favor or oppose a law making it illegal for state legislators to accept campaign contributions from lobbyists?" 64 percent of respondents stated that they "favor" such reform legislation, while 29 percent replied that they "oppose" such measures.⁴ Campaign contributions from lobbyists are apparently not perceived by the Connecticut public as a positive force in state legislative elections.

Beyond the issue of campaign contributions, the public is also opposed to the many special benefits provided by lobbyists to

lawmakers. In response to this question, "Lobbyists often try to give elected representatives things like free meals, trips, or other gifts. Do you think this is always wrong, usually wrong, only sometimes wrong, or not wrong at all?" 43 percent of persons polled replied "always wrong," 27 percent replied "usually wrong," while 25 percent replied "sometimes wrong." When collapsed, one discovers that 95 percent of all persons polled expressed the view that it is "wrong" in various degrees for lobbyists to provide special favors and gifts to state lawmakers. A mere 3 percent of persons polled replied that it is "not wrong at all" for this activity to occur.⁵

Lobbying Strategies

To be an effective lobbyist at the Connecticut state Capitol, or any state Capitol, one must be skilled in the art of political communication. Effectively communicating policy positions to state lawmakers and executive branch officials requires well-developed and refined communicative skills. Most lobbyists are effective communicators.

Research on lobbying activity has discovered what essentially can be described as the fundamental "norms" associated with successful lobbying.⁶ To be an effective and persuasive lobbyist, one must conform to an established set of norms that collectively enhance the prospect of legislative success. For example, a successful lobbyist at the Connecticut state Capitol must clearly define the issue or issues supported by the organization he or she is representing. Moreover, the lobbyist must know precisely which legislative committees and which committee members to communicate with. Clarity of communication and specific targeting of the message are thus considered critical for lobbying success.

A lobbyist must also have the ability to frame the interest group's issue within the context of the public's interest. When lobbying a lawmaker, the lobbyist must present the group's concern as having a far reaching and possibly profound impact on the general public. The issue therefore cannot be presented as affecting only a narrow segment of the Connecticut population.

A skillful lobbyist must also understand how to enlist the support of additional lobbyists and how to forge a legislative coalition on behalf of the organization's issue. When attempting to pass or block a proposed bill, it is always considered advantageous to acquire the support of additional lobbyists and to rally as many lawmakers as possible in support of the organization's position. A lobbyist must convince a sometimes disparate number of lobbyists and lawmakers that working for or against a particular legislative proposal is in their political interest. The lawmaking process is frequently determined by which side has the broadest and most united coalition of lawmakers and lobbyists.

In addition to such persuasive techniques, a successful lobbyist must always keep abreast of developments within the state legislature and at all times know how to conduct oneself in a civil and non-threatening manner when discussing issues with lawmakers, legislative staff workers, and executive branch officials.⁷

The most successful lobbyists at the Connecticut state Capitol, state Capitols across the land, and in the nation's Capitol, understand and have mastered the strategies of effective lobbying. In doing so, they have effectively and to some extent subtly penetrated the inner sanctums of the policy making process. With respect to lobbying in Connecticut, it appears that lobbyists have become an extraordinary presence at the state Capitol. Indeed, lobbyists and interest groups are now integral components within the context of the lawmaking process. Lobbyists and interest groups are not at the fringes of the legislative process, but instead are at the center of it. It now seems as if every facet of the lawmaking process in Connecticut is somehow and in some way subject to the influence of lobbyists. This includes the origination of many legislative proposals, committee decisions, floor votes, gubernatorial action, as well as the implementation phase of the policy process.

Interest Groups and Electoral Politics

In addition to a plethora of lobbyists operating at the state Capitol, the pervasiveness of lobbying and special interest activity in Connecticut can also be observed in electoral politics. Special interests issue formal endorsements of candidates for public office

and provide volunteers to assist candidates with the task of voter mobilization. Such assistance includes phoning potential voters, distributing campaign literature at shopping plazas, and canvassing neighborhoods. In some respects, grassroots electoral activity organized by special interest groups on behalf of legislative and statewide candidates is practically identical to that performed by local party organizations during election campaigns. Indeed, at times the voter mobilization efforts of interest groups in Connecticut seem more visible and intense compared to the efforts of party organizations.

Special interest groups also provide campaign assistance to political candidates in the form of financial contributions. The mechanism for funneling special interest dollars into campaigns is the political action committee, or PAC. PACs are the fundraising arms of interest groups. PAC activity is currently rampant in both national and state level electoral contests. Federal law governs PAC activity in congressional, senate, and presidential contests. At the state level, each individual state has established its own specific set of campaign finance laws concerning PAC contributions. With regard to the state of Connecticut, PAC contributions are subject to legal limitations. Connecticut campaign finance law reads as follows:

Sec. 9-333q. Limits on contributions made by political committees established by organizations. (a) No political committee established by an organization shall make contribution or contributions to, or for the benefit of, any candidate's campaign for nomination at a primary or for election to the office of: (1) Governor, in excess of two thousand five hundred dollars; (2) Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of the State, Treasurer, Comptroller or Attorney General, in excess of one thousand five hundred dollars; (3) sheriff or chief executive officer of a town, city or borough, in excess of one thousand dollars; or (5) state senator or probate judge, in excess of five hundred dollars; or (5) state representative or any other office of a municipality not previously included in this subsection, in excess of two hundred fifty dollars.

It should also be noted that aggregate contributions to the above-mentioned offices are limited to fifty thousand dollars. Moreover, PAC contributions to a candidate's exploratory committee are limited to two hundred and fifty dollars, while PAC contributions to a political party's state central committee are limited to five thousand dollars. Contributions to a town party committee are limited to one thousand dollars. Aggregate contributions to party committees during one calendar year cannot exceed fifteen thousand dollars. PACs can, however, make unlimited contributions to committees formed for the purpose of aiding or defeating a referendum question.

Although subject to regulation and limitation, PAC money has nevertheless become quite prevalent in Connecticut election campaigns, and as of November 23, 1999, 488 PACs were registered with the Secretary of State's Office. A review of registered PACs discovers that PACs operating in Connecticut exist in many different forms. A sizeable number of PACs represent mainstream economic and occupational organizations. Examples include the Aetna Life and Casualty Co. PAC, BANKPAC (Connecticut Bankers Association), and the Carpenters Local #43 PAC. A number of PACs are also organized around specific political issues and causes, such as the Connecticut Armenian PAC, the Justice PAC, the Lesbian and Gay Rights Coalition PAC, and the Connecticut N.O.W. (National Organization for Women) PAC. Another body of PACs have been formed to support partisan causes, such as Action Democrats, Brass City Democrats, Connecticut Republican Leadership Council, and the Naugatuck Republican Victory Fund.

One also discovers the presence of PACs that are inextricably intertwined with the General Assembly, suggesting how integral PAC activity has become within Connecticut politics. More specifically, one discovers political action committees formed by state legislative leaders for the purposes of raising funds to support their own reelection efforts, as well as for helping with the reelection efforts of legislative allies. Legislative Leadership PACs (LLPs), as they are called, are the newest form of PAC activity in Connecticut politics, and demonstrate in no uncertain terms how individualistic and fragmented the Connecticut General Assembly

has become. State lawmakers not only receive contributions from outside PACs, but, are now operating their very own self-serving PACs.

The relationship between campaign dollars received from PACs and legislative voting behavior is of course difficult to precisely ascertain. Although no state lawmaker would admit to being influenced by PAC contributions, common sense suggests that PAC activity must have an effect on the outcome of the lawmaking process. The volume of PAC activity alone suggests that PAC contributions must be having an effect on legislative behavior. Would PAC activity be so pervasive if PAC contributions did not produce results? At the very least, one can be sure that PAC contributions are allowing interest groups and their lobbyists to have access to the offices of state lawmakers. PAC dollars most certainly facilitate meetings between legislators and lobbyists. State lawmakers who are the recipients of PAC contributions will more than likely listen, evaluate, and possibly respond favorably to the demands and concerns of organizations with active and well-connected PACs.

Public Attitudes Toward Special Interest Contributions

The growing activity of special interest groups, lobbyists, and PACs has captured the attention of the general public in Connecticut. Many Connecticut residents believe that special interest money has become a corrosive force at the state Capitol and believe that the time has arrived to reform Connecticut's system of campaign finance. The results of a Quinnipiac Poll of 1,170 Connecticut voters conducted from October 5-11, 1999 are quite revealing.

When presented with the following question, "In order to eliminate the funding of campaigns by large private donations and organized interest groups, do you favor or oppose the state government creating a special fund to pay for the campaigns of all candidates?" 52 percent of persons polled responded that they favored a special state-supported fund, while 39 percent of voters expressed opposition. Compared to a March 1997 poll concerning the same issue, this represents a 5 point increase in support for public financing.

It should also be noted that the 1999 Quinnipiac Poll discovered considerable variation between Republican and Democratic respondents regarding the issue of public finance for election campaigns. Forty-four percent of Republicans supported the idea of a special government fund for the purpose of funding state election campaigns, while 58 percent of Democratic voters expressed support for this concept. Democrats seem to be more alarmed over the rising power of special interest money in Connecticut politics; a 14 point difference is certainly substantial. Republicans are generally more affluent compared to Democrats, and hence it should come as little surprise that Republican identifiers express less support for public funding of election campaigns: public financing of election campaigns would diminish the influence of wealthy contributors and wealthy interest groups.

The public's awareness of and concern about special interest power is further documented in responses to two additional questions asked in the 1999 Quinnipiac Poll: "Suppose private contributions to political campaigns were eliminated and the government funded political campaigns. How effective do you think such a system would be in reducing the influence of special interests in politics?" To this question, 28 percent of persons polled responded "very effective," while 42 percent replied "somewhat effective." When combined, such responses suggest that 70 percent of Connecticut residents believe that a system of public finance would in various degrees diminish the influence of special interest money in electoral politics. Sixteen percent of respondents selected the "not very effective" category, while only 11 percent replied "not effective at all."⁸ It should also be noted that in a Quinnipiac Poll conducted in March 1997, only 19 percent of persons polled responded "very effective." Over the course of only two years, there has been a 9 point increase in the percentage of Connecticut residents who find great value in a system of public finance.

Public trepidation among Connecticut residents toward special interest groups and a perception that special interest dollars result in an unfair advantage for select groups of people is also evident in the responses to this question: "How much do you think large campaign contributions influence the policies supported by elected

officials?” To this clear and unambiguous question, 68 percent of persons polled replied a “great deal,” while 27 percent replied a “moderate amount.”⁹ Such findings from the 1999 Quinnipiac Poll leave little doubt that Connecticut voters currently perceive special interests as having far too much power in Connecticut politics. Moreover, the high level of support expressed by voters for a system of state-supported campaign finance indicates that the electorate views special interest money as a negative force in Connecticut politics, and that legislative reforms that diminish special interest money are needed. The Connecticut public is a well-educated, thoughtful, and discerning public. State lawmakers should therefore give serious consideration to the results of public opinion polls. The public is alarmed and supports campaign finance reform.

The connections between special interest organizations, lobbyists, and lawmakers raise serious questions pertaining to the quality of representative democracy in Connecticut government. Interest groups have become so embedded in the state lawmaking process that legitimate questions can and should be raised regarding the extent to which the will of the citizenry is currently represented in the Connecticut General Assembly. Do the policy concerns of special interest groups supersede the concerns of the state’s citizenry? Do the agendas of special interest groups receive a higher priority compared to those of the general public? How pervasive will special interest groups and lobbying be in the decades that lie ahead?

In the following interview, contract lobbyist Patty LeShane offers rich and penetrating insight into the complex art of lobbying. The perspective of this very skilled and veteran lobbyist also sheds light on the virtues of special interest activity in Connecticut politics, thus providing balance to the larger subject of interest group politics.

Profile and Perspective

Patty LeShane
Sullivan and LeShane (Contract lobbying firm)
Phone interview, July 10, 2000

What is your background, and how did you become involved in lobbying?

In high school, I was always interested in cities and people, and how they worked together, so I went to Springfield College in Massachusetts to concentrate in the field of Urban Studies. I originally wanted to be an urban planner. While at Springfield, I did an internship in the Planning Department of the City of Springfield and got involved in the politics of the city. Watching a building demolished to build the Springfield Civic Center proved to be a learning experience. The next year, I had a full year internship in conjunction with a program in Middletown, Connecticut. This was funded by a joint grant from Wesleyan University, the Chamber of Commerce, and the YMCA. From there, I went to work with the 4-H Program and did team leadership programming for Hartford County. I was subsequently recruited by the Easter Seals Society of Connecticut to do community relations and advocacy for people with disabilities. I served as a lobbyist for Easter Seals at the state Capitol. I also worked with a coalition of groups in helping to pass an amendment to the state constitution protecting persons with disabilities. By then I had worked with several other lobbyists, including business lobbyists. Pat Sullivan, who at the time was representing beer wholesalers, wanted to start an independent company. This was at the time that the Reagan administration was returning more and more power to the states, ranging from funding, regulation of the environment, hospitals, etc., and Pat thought there was a market for an independent lobbying group in Connecticut. So after several months, he convinced me that I should join him in a firm. I had a lot of contacts by now,

especially in the social services and the health care arenas, while Pat had a number of contacts within the state legislature, especially among the leadership and the committee chairs. So, in 1983, we formed Sullivan and LeShane.

Sullivan and LeShane is classified as a "contract lobbying firm." Could you explain how a "contract lobbyist" is different from a "client lobbyist?"

Connecticut laws related to ethics statutes differentiate between a contract and a client lobbyist. A client lobbyist is someone who is employed by an organization, or could be an officer of a trade association, who is reimbursed to spend his or her time at the Capitol lobbying on behalf of that organization. A client lobbyist is therefore connected directly to a single organization, and has a compensation arrangement with that organization. A contract lobbyist is anyone that an organization hires to do its lobbying at the state Capitol, yet is not an employee of that organization. Sullivan and LeShane have a variety of contracts. On an average, we have 40-50 contracts per year with individual organizations, businesses, professional, and trade groups.

Is contract lobbying the wave of the future in Connecticut?

I think more and more organizations see the need to hire someone who has day-to-day contact with decision makers. The field of lobbying is growing by leaps and bounds, and there are a large number of lobbyists out there, many of whom have worked for an organization as the Director of Government Relations, and now they feel it is time for a change. These people will go out and market themselves as a contract lobbyist. There are still organizations, like large trade associations, who still need to have an inside, in-house client lobbyist because this person can communicate directly with the organization's membership. In-house lobbyists will do a lot of maintenance, priority setting, and trend watching, and they will look for problems affecting their industry that will need regulatory or legislative relief. Sometimes, the client lobbyist will bring their problems to a contract lobbyist to help figure out what the appropriate way is to approach a problem. The contract lobbyist might then assist by following the

problem through the regulatory, administrative or legislative process.

Where do you as a lobbyist direct most of your energy? Is it among legislative leaders, committee chairs, executive branch officials, the governor?

Each issue has a different set of priorities, so one of the very first things you have to do as a lobbyist is to figure out who the key audiences are. Often it occurs in phases. For example, we represented a large generator of electricity this past year. For the first month of our contract, we spent most of our time with our client exploring the issue, what the solutions were, what they were willing and not willing to do to create a solution, and how they wanted to position themselves within the marketplace because they were new to Connecticut. We then spent a large amount of time working with the legislative leadership, followed by a focus on the committee chairmen. I was the lead lobbyist on this account, so I, along with another member from my office, spent most of the time working with the legislative leadership. We have seven members of our firm, so other individuals from our office worked with rank-and-file lawmakers. We are fortunate to be a large enough lobbying firm where we can focus on two levels at the same time. On some issues that are relatively focused, such as public health, you can work directly with one committee, such as the public health committee. The leadership will listen to the committee and go along with the committee's recommendation. On other issues—for example, managed care, which is a huge public issue—you have to involve the political leadership. Managed care involved the patient community, physicians, and the whole issue of reimbursement. Many interests were involved and thus the approach had to be different.

Are lawmakers in Connecticut dependent on lobbyists for information?

Lawmakers are aware that lobbyists have information that they themselves may not have. At the same time, there are legislators serving on certain committees who are experts in the field. These legislators are more likely to run scenarios by lobbyists and listen to their reactions. They know that we have done our homework

on these issues. For example, on the issue of student financial aid, a legislator might ask: "If we only gave you one million dollars for financial aid, instead of a higher amount, how might this impact students?" They like to ask our opinions. A legislator's dependence on lobbyists for information varies according to how much expertise the legislator has in that particular policy area. If they know that our client group is the expert in the field, then they will listen very carefully to what we have to say, because they know that we are relaying reliable information. An example here would be taxing policy. When it comes to tax bills, the lawmakers are very much interested in listening to lobbyists who represent CPAs. You also need to realize that lobbyists have a lot more impact on the system when they have a reputation for integrity. After integrity comes expertise. Lawmakers will listen to the information presented by lobbyists as long as the lobbyist has a good reputation for both integrity and substantive expertise.

How relevant is the financial power of an interest group? Are lawmakers more likely to listen to lobbyists who represent wealthy organizations?

The dollars contributed by interest groups in a campaign in Connecticut are proportionately small. An individual group that puts together a PAC can contribute up to two hundred and fifty dollars to a House campaign. A House campaign is normally a twenty to thirty thousand dollar investment because campaigns are now done by radio, television, and direct mail. A state Senate campaign will cost way over fifty thousand dollars and the law only allows a PAC to give up to five hundred dollars. So in reality, an individual PAC might give 1 percent of the money in a House or Senate campaign. More important than the money is the endorsement a legislator might get when he or she runs for reelection. An endorsement is far more valuable than receiving a campaign contribution of two hundred and fifty dollars or five hundred dollars.

What are the personal skills that are needed to be a successful lobbyist? Knowing how to work with people and good "people skills" are the most important. Legislators come in all sizes, shapes, beliefs,

and thoughts, and as a lobbyist you have to know how to find something in each legislator that allows you to relate effectively to that person, so that you can develop a trusting working relationship. You spend a lot of time at the Capitol as a lobbyist, so you have to know how to work with people and enjoy working with people. You also have to know how to give legislators room to think on their own, and you have to know how to respect different opinions.

Textbooks often present lobbying as detrimental to the democratic process. What are your thoughts on this?

I think the media has created the impression that decisions are made behind closed doors, and that nothing good can come from lobbying. The irony is that the media retain lobbyists and engage in lobbying as well. Newspaper companies, for example, lobbied against recycling laws, claiming that costs would increase and that the law would never work. When someone wanted to tax advertising space, the media outlets all joined a coalition to stop the advertising tax.

But do you still think we have government by and for the people?

Our firm, for example, represents 7,000 physicians who practice medicine on a daily basis. That's what these people do for a living, and they are not familiar with the legislative process. They don't have the time to come to the Capitol and sit for seven hours and talk to a legislator. We even run "Capitol Day" at the state Capitol, where we bring our clients to the Capitol to meet with lawmakers face-to-face and to have coffee with them. The large corporations that we represent involve three sets of people: employees, customers, and shareholders (providing it is a for-profit corporation). Thus, the work we do as lobbyists represents many people, not just the management of certain enterprises.

Compared to when you first started lobbying, what major changes have you observed with regard to the legislative process and the Connecticut General Assembly?

I think it is a more open process and a more deliberative process. At one time, the leadership really controlled the agenda and the

internal lawmaking process, but over the years it seems as if rank-and-file lawmakers are having more say in the process. The process has opened up considerably. The leadership has been forced to take more seriously what their caucuses have to say about issues. Rank and file lawmakers and the legislative leadership seem to collaborate more in the passing of legislation than in the past. The process is also more open than it once was. The public can now get almost any piece of information on the Internet and on the web pages of individual legislators. The public can also access any lawmaker by way of e-mail, and there are many more initiatives and issues that emerge from the grassroots. The legislative process is much more open than it once was.

Is there anything else that you would like to expand on?

Lobbying is much more of a profession now. It's not critical what academic degree you have, but to be a lobbyist you have to have a sense of curiosity, you have to want to learn new things, you have to want to problem-solve and put pieces of the puzzle together so that everyone wins. Lobbying is a great way to change society and to make the world a better place.