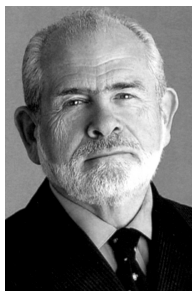


Patriots in the world of lobbying

By Gerald S.J. Cassidy

It was an unseasonably warm September morning that America was awakened with horror to the frightening reality that we live in a world where our Main Streets are no longer immune from the terror that lurks around the world.

Since that awful morning, our nation has been strengthened by the kindness and generosity that is uniquely



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American. This disturbing time has brought a sense of renewal in what all of us do both personally and professionally to help our neighbors.

More than ever, we are asking ourselves, "Are we making a difference?"

For nearly 30 years, I have been fortunate to work in a profession I believe is an integral stitch in the fabric of our nation. A profession that does make a difference. I am not ashamed to tell people I am a lobbyist. The concept of a government open to its people is the living cornerstone of our democracy. In fact, our Founding Fathers thought the act of lobbying our government was such a vital part of our democracy they sought to protect it in our Constitution under the freedom to petition.

Unfortunately, as far as integrity and trust, most Americans rank a lobbyist

rather low. Some of that perception is warranted from past transgressions. But the lobbying profession has made great strides in cleaning up its way of conducting business in the last 20 years.

We are certainly a far cry from the days of questionable deals made in a haze of smoky backrooms on Capitol Hill. Today, we live in a world where public policymaking is thoroughly scrutinized by the news media, which no longer operate on 12- or 24-hour news cycles, but function instead in real time, at the speed of the Internet. This compression of distance and time puts the onus on us, as lobbyists, to be counselors who are more substantive and trustworthy than ever.

In this uncertain time of terrorism, war and economic woes, Americans are searching for accomplishments in their lives that in some way fulfill our patriotic legacy. I would argue today's lobbyist stands ready to help in this effort. There are not many professions that continually advocate on behalf of the people and the issues that affect their lives each and every day.

Those who opine that the "special interests" have taken over Washington should reexamine their rhetoric. For those "interests" are the interests of the people. The types of interests that seek to strengthen our healthcare system through access and new high-tech equipment; enhance our nation's education for everyone; make critical

improvements and repairs to our massive infrastructure; and promote growth in the economy through new jobs and new technology.

Should we be concerned if those interests are represented in Washington?

A successful lobbyist is a well-prepared professional who hurdles all party lines to advocate or raise awareness of an issue. Our profession dutifully assists the legislative process by providing substantive and reliable information. Decision-makers are too sophisticated to fall for smoke and mirrors, an invitation here and there or a free slice of pizza. To suggest otherwise is just absurd.

I am reminded of the words Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke at his fourth inaugural address in the midst of World War II. He inspired all Americans to "perform a service of historic importance." The call today is no less important for America. This solemn responsibility is shared by all of us. Over the next two years, lobbyists will play an important role in raising awareness and providing information to lawmakers that may help them craft national policies that could impact the world for years to come.

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