

REMARKS OF BRYCE N. HARLOW

BEFORE THE CALIFORNIA BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION AND SCHOOLS OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 1972

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN ----

I have 34 years in your Nation's capitol, partly in business, as you have heard, but mostly on your payroll, in the government service. This morning every bit of it is yours for whatever you would like to do with it -- an offer I wouldn't dare make in Washington.

Well, let's stir a few thoughts around to fructify your celebrations.

First, let's decide what a business lobbyist really is -- or ought to be -- in Washington today.

Second, let's examine how he does his work, or at least how he ought to do it.

To begin, let's identify a prototype lobbyist for business. The one trouble with that is, there isn't any. There is no one type of person, no one type of responsibility, that typifies these activities in Washington. We are speaking of very specialized, individualized functions that are molded precisely to particular companies and particular associations. There is an added singularity -- personality. Some of these people are like Dita Beard -- hard-driving, no-holds-barred types. Others are like her boss, Bill Merriam -- soft-spoken and deliberately low key. And there are all varieties in between. I even know one teetotaler lobbyist, which is comparable to a misanthropic politician.

At any given moment, many hundreds of people are racing up and down Constitution Avenue in Washington lobbying the Congress. Columnist Anderson says we number 5000, others say half that many. And we go at it in so many different ways, and for such diverse purposes, that it is impossible to isolate out a composite individual or responsibility.

Some of these people work with Congress and do only that. Some, with jumpy managements, are forbidden even to get near Congress and consort only with Executive Branch officials or the regulatory agencies, but others are barred from even that. These types are

ambulatory periscopes, gliding unobtrusively about Washington, ferreting out notable happenings of interest to their home offices.

Some business lobbying is elaborate, some primitive, some virtually invisible one-man operations, with wife as secretary. I know of more than one major corporation whose representatives furtively operate out of their homes. Some of the largest companies flamboyantly occupy entire floors of large Washington buildings. Ordinarily these are sales organizations whose prime customers are federal contractors. The aerospace industry is a good example. Some firms such as automobiles and electronics have large operations, very detailed, functionally aligned to executive departments. They may, for example, have several men concentrated on the Defense Department or on one procurement area in one part of the Pentagon, expertly selling equipment or weaponry. Other companies have highly specialized Congressional structures, with several lobbyists for the House and several for the Senate.

So, in this work variety is the only constant. Business may have a one-man office, a two-man office, a 30-man office, or no office at all. It all depends upon how a company or association views its needs. And our company ties are no less different. Some of us are on retainer, some full-time employees, and some consultants. Not a few of even the largest companies refuse to have anyone directly identified with them in Washington, preferring to shroud their silhouettes by retaining law firms or public relations organizations or by using trade associations to pursue their interests.

Now, what kind of person does best as a business representative? There is perpetual argument over this. Should he be an experienced company man, sent to Washington to learn government, or should he be seasoned in government and learn business? Either way there are advantages. My view is that business fares better having a federal sophisticate, then team him

what he needs to know about the business, backstopping him as necessary with technical experts. Of course, that's my own situation. You can hardly expect me to see it differently.

Quite a few of us in recent times have become Vice Presidents in our corporations, which says something about the growing role of government in business. Opaque titles for these positions abound, such as "Manager of the Washington Office" and "Director of Governmental Relations." A high proportion are lawyers who approach lobbying as an inherently legal task, but many are free-wheeling generalists, allowed full rein by their managements. Those among us who slip about merely sopping up information are ordinarily ciphers both in Washington and in their companies. But they do have one advantage -- they don't get in the papers like others of us do, for the simple reason that they do nothing worth writing about.

Speaking of that, most people I know who maneuver about in this minefield are really quite professional, and are dead honest and forthright. They are extremely busy people, very knowledgeable about the nation's capitol, its officialdom and their ways. It is only comparatively recently, however, that the area has become so professional, impelled in considerable measure by the vast upsurge of governmental activity during the New Frontier and Great Society days. Not only are these people, on average, sophisticated in their work, but they are also articulate and personable. They had better be, because Washington, the political cockpit of America, is controlled by extroverts who make a business of human relations.

The top lobbyists, whether they like it or not, have to be omniverous readers, for their jobs inundate them with newspapers, magazines, trade reports, political analyses and government hand-outs, not to mention that unending political novel, a mix of The Scriptures and Playboy -- the daily Congressional Record. The really successful ones develop an immunity to frustration, for the ways of the federal government often require not simply patience but also forbearance,

which is to say, the short-fused in this work are usually short-lived. A gift for gentle persuasion, the sly Ivy League technique of understatement rather than the hard-sell -- these are the enduring arts in the lobbying trade.

Now then, what exactly is the lobbying job? Well, it again depends on what one's company is, and whether or not the representative is full-time, part-time, or a torpedoboat launched only in crisis. If full-time, he will likely range the gamut of government, probing virtually every precinct of Congress, the Executive Branch and the regulatory agencies. If on retainer his talents will be sporadically catapulted into specialized areas. If the company is nation-wide or multinational, its Washington man must become in effect a microcosm of the White House staff, because a major company's involvements with government today are so pervasive at home and abroad as to encompass the arena overseen by assistants to the President of the United States.

How does one do this work? Well, like other tough assignments, it can often be more of a grind than glamorous. There is nothing novel about it and, despite the garish stories you may have read, there is nothing tawdry or mysterious. One labors with the various federal elements in precisely the same manner that you people work here on state, community and business problems -- by letter, telephone, personal contacts, social activities, meetings, breakfasts, lunches and dinners, using one's own relationships, using a friend's relationships, using company ties, trade associations, other companies, and where necessary using friends' friends. Often this comes down to conducting what in effect are political campaigns inside Washington, quite like what both parties do nation-wide and like Members of Congress do in advancing their schemes inside Congress. And if one knows some thing about that technique, there is no limit to the time

and effort to be invested. An 18-hour day is customarily too short to do it all. One cannot endlessly sustain this pace, but some I know come close to it.

Finally, in measuring the work of these business ambassadors to the federal apparatus I would isolate certain personal qualities that over the years I have come to believe are essential. Far out front is trustworthiness. It is the controlling element in American politics, an often maligned profession but one in which you don't have to sign a contract to seal an agreement but only give your word. Integrity and honesty -- trite as that may sound -- are the only solid currency of the inordinately suspicious, warring Washington community. You must be straight as a die to make it in the nation's capitol, and even one dereliction is not recoupable.

Second, for a Washington lobbyist personal humility is not only helpful but unavoidable. Association with the bigs in America can be exciting, and some lobbyists tend to confuse themselves with the splendor of their spectacular clients. But in dealing with the great a good way to steady yourself is to recollect what a political professional sees as you approach. The real pol doesn't see you at all -- very disconcertingly he stares right through you to what you represent. If you represent real power he contemplates its proportions, and while you inform him and hopefully persuade, very shrewdly he calculates your capability to help or harm. Awareness of one's transparency in these situations cannot but keep a bounding ego in bounds.

Diligence -- an attentiveness to detail -- is also a hallmark of effectiveness, because of the complexity and endlessness of these tasks. Unfiltered access to the company's top leaders is also essential in order to guarantee swift action in crisis situations. Affability, tolerance, an instinct to reconcile instead of to demand -- these attributes the able lobbyist must acquire if he doesn't have them at the outset. Finally, a clear understanding of how government actually works and of

the needs and motivations of governmental people -- these are characteristics of good representation.

A word now about government -- the Congressional and Executive Branch groupings important to the private sector. Taking Congress first, bear in mind that any major legislative issue in Congress may directly involve some 60 to 80 Members. If your project also embraces appropriations, some 100 Congressmen may be crucial. Of that group, however, often one-fourth or fewer are decisive on lesser issues. Sometimes one Member, or a handful, or a fourth of the total will control a minor issue, with others unconcernedly following along. But on issues that count one must usually deal with 25 to 60 Congressmen, plus their coteries of staff aides, which is why this work takes a bit of doing and a bit of time.

In downtown Washington are the sprawling Executive Branch and Speaker Sam Rayburn's progeny -- the regulatory agencies. These come to some 350,000 people and a veritable jumble of offices, bureaus, divisions and agencies as confusing as they are numerous. Happily, however, the art of government is in good measure a question of timing. So, while this huge aggregation of people in Congress and the Executive Branch may seem to be overwhelming, the implacable, unchanging cycle of government is a saving grace. Ordinarily the massive federal apparatus has great trouble moving at all, and never does it move all at once. In late fall each year, for example, the crisis stage for major issues is in the Executive Departments, not in Congress, because the issues are then being bureaucratically extruded for the coming year, and Congress has likely adjourned. Next, the issues escalate to the White House for Presidential determination of what he wants Congress to do. It's a test of one's ingenuity to keep his eye and hand on problems in this season in which new programs are surreptitiously evolving. It requires a rather acute appreciation of how government functions internally, which

is why previous government experience can be an asset. The trick is to detect incipient initiatives as they stir in the bureaucratic womb, somehow locating them, somehow following them as they progress, and clinging tightly to them until ultimately they pass away, are enacted into law, or emerge as executive orders.

One final observation.

Two-thirds of my third of a century in Washington has been spent in public service, half of that in the White House. For one-third of those years I have represented a major corporation. As a result, I have been a lobbyist twice as long as lobbyist, and have lobbied for government twice as long as for business. Conceivably that lets me lay claim to some objectivity and perspective.

For years political scientists and political practitioners have wrangled over whether or not the army of lobbyists is a baleful or benign influence in national affairs. I find the answer a mix -- in some instances unwholesome; in others, indispensable to good government. That ambivalence applies quite as much, by the way, to governmental lobbyists as to lobbyists for private interests. I most ardently assure you that the mere fact of public employment is no guarantee of either virtue or infallibility.

As suggested earlier, the lobbying I have personally observed in Washington, in and out of government, is altogether honorable and professional. Yet there are bound to be rascallions in every human endeavor. There are always a few who believe influence is properly a substitute for merit and who regard public officials as weak or venal or both. Sleazy types of this kind rarely survive for long, for they quickly discover that virtually all public officials have at least as much probity as you or I or anyone else.

Let's also understand that, just as all things in life are relative, so also is the effectiveness of lobbying whether by business or any other group. The breadth and intensity of competing pressures on officials in Congress and the Executive Branch are very difficult for outsiders to grasp. For example, by far the most costly, most influential lobby in Washington is not any private group. It is the Executive Branch of the federal government, all of it supported by your own taxes. The next most effective, at least with Congress, is in my view the Labor lobby which excels not only financially but also in practical politicking at the grassroots level. The business effort, extensive as it also is, eternally suffers from internal conflicts, so much so that it is a near miracle when any major part of business coalesces for or against anything. So, gauging the various business lobbies against other lobbies, I would have to say they are badly outgunned by the federal lobby, tend usually to come out second best with the Labor lobby, and now begin to fare poorly with the various so-called citizen lobbies. Maybe, like Avis, we shall have to try harder. And maybe, like Labor, we shall have to come together more frequently and more effectively than we do or can today.

To round this out, my own view is that responsible lobbying abets responsible government. I am convinced that the fierce competition of political, official and private pressures in Washington, while a terrible drain on the time and energy of our elected officials, is the only process whereby our free system can intelligently and fairly formulate the policies and rules we need for a healthy society.