

Lobbying By the Numbers

Contributed by Bob Masullo
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A former state worker turns to a new career: teaching others how to lobby

by Bob Masullo

Inside East Sacramento

Some think lobbyists are vying with lawyers, medical insurers and used-car salesmen to see whose profession is admired the least. But Ray LeBov doesn't believe lobbyists are bad at all. He thinks lobbying is respectable work, and he's helping to make more lobbyists.

In fact, the retired lobbyist teaches classes called Lobbying 101 and Lobbying 201. One of each is offered approximately every two months.

The next will take place this month: 101 on August 30, 201 on August 31. LeBov (pronounced luh-BOW-vah) feels the low esteem many people have for the craft he's practiced for three decades "is due to Jack Abramoff and few others like him." (Abramoff, a high-level Washington lobbyist who last year pled guilty to defrauding Indian gambling interests and corrupting public officials, is now in prison.) "Every profession has a few bad apples," says LeBov. "They are not at all representative.

Most lobbyists I have known are highly ethical." He quickly reminds me that the right to lobby was guaranteed by the Founding Fathers in the First Amendment ("Congress shall make no law respecting . . . the right of the people . . . to petition the government . . .") and that he believes modern day lawmakers would not be able to function without them. Lobbying's bad press has not scared people away from LeBov's classes. So far, 200 people have taken the classes, and the response has been so positive LeBov plans to institute a Lobbying 301 class this fall.

The sessions are not cheap: Each four-hour class costs \$225. At the end of June, I sat in on a 101 session in the U.S. Bank building along with 13 students and subsequently talked with people who attended both 101 and 201 classes. A session is like a high school civics class on steroids. Students learn how laws are really made or unmade. They learn the language of the legislative process and how, when and where to use it. Yet LeBov's soft-spoken, thoughtful instructing style makes the process seem, if not easy, rather pleasant. The session I attended struck me as little more than a friendly bull session, with lawmaking its focal point and LeBov its facilitator. But when I looked at my notes later, I saw we had covered an enormous amount of ground.

"The classes gave me a really good understanding of the life of a bill and the different options that can be taken to affect it," says Tara Haas, director of government relations for the Engineering and Utilities Contracting Association, who has taken both 101 and 201. "Now I know where the land mines are." Many students have a tangential connection with lobbying before taking the first class. Some would like to become lobbyists. Others already are lobbyists but would like to become better ones.

But not all are connected. Take, for example, Dorothy Leland. She became interested in lobbying because of a family tragedy: After her 15-year-old daughter, Rachel, came down with Lyme disease 2 1/2 years ago, she became involved

with the California Lyme Disease Association. "CALDA's areas of concern include public awareness of Lyme, prevention strategies, how the medical establishment diagnoses and treats Lyme, and the role of insurance companies," Leland says. "Some of these issues might be addressed by future legislation. I took Lobbying 101 and 201 to better understand how the process works and find ways that I could help." She adds: "I learned a lot and would recommend the classes to anyone interested in getting a sense of how the legislative process works. Furthermore, I think I will take 301 when it is offered."

LeBov is well-qualified. After earning a B.A. from Yale and a law degree from the University of Southern California, he spent 30 years with the state legislature, first as counsel to the Joint Committee on the Structure of the Judiciary, later as counsel to the Assembly Committee on Judiciary and finally as director of the Council's Office of Governmental Affairs. "I retired from the state in 2004 and felt I would like to teach lobbying because I had learned so much over the years.

I thought I had a lot to pass on. But I didn't think it would happen because I didn't have any interest in the business of setting up and administering the classes." Then he hooked up with Ken Mandler, former publisher of Capitol Weekly, who now teaches classes in how to land state jobs. Mandler's operation, Capitol Seminars, was willing to handle the business end of the lobbying classes, which LeBov began teaching in May 2006. "I'm very glad they did," says Tim Reese, executive director of the California/Nevada Community Action Partnership (an advocacy group for low-income and homeless people), who has taken both Lobbying 101 and 201. "I've used what I learned to train members of our board and to guide our education advocacy and legislative committees.

That knowledge has made a tremendous difference."