Influence of lobbyists actually waning

06/26/2006 05:27:17

Despite renewed fretting, the influence of individual lobbyists actually has been waning in Arizona.

Thirty years ago, when I was a political pup, there were about a dozen lobbyists who truly had oversized influence. They functioned, in many respects, as a de facto legislative caucus.

No lobbyist has that kind of influence today, regardless of how large his or her entertainment expense account.

There are a couple of reasons for the decline in the influence of individual lobbyists.

The first is competition. The number of lobbyists, and organized interests with representation, has mushroomed. On most issues, there are organized lobby groups on both sides.

The second is reform. Public campaign financing and term limits have diluted the influence of individual lobbyists and lobbying in general.

With respect to term limits, this is contrary to conventional wisdom. CV has it that term limits have increased the influence of lobbyists, since they are forever and can now take advantage of the naifs getting freshly elected.

That, however, isn't how lobbyists most influence public policy outcomes. The maximum effect comes from cozying up to a long-term legislator who has gained disproportionate influence on a particular topic.

There was always a lot of turnover in the Arizona Legislature, even before term limits. So, there was always a fresh supply of naifs.

Term limits, however, have reduced the number of legislators serving long terms and gaining disproportionate influence over particular matters.

The proof of this contrarian analysis lies with the lobbyists themselves. They are keenly capable of discerning and acting on self-interest. And they pretty universally oppose term limits.

The effect of public financing of campaigns is less disputed. Legislators, particularly Republicans, used to be highly dependent on lobbyists to round up the money they needed to run effective campaigns.

Now, they still rely on interest groups, to some extent, to collect the $5 contributions necessary to qualify for public financing. For most legislators these days, however, the bulk of their campaign money comes from the state treasury.

This attenuates what historically has been the chief source of influence for lobbyists, other than a compelling argument and grassroots support.

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Comments:
Comment from: Bren

06/26/06 @ 19:32

Tom Tancredo will be on Lou Dobbs tomorrow.

Lou Dobbs is on CNN at 3PM. I am going to tape it.

For those who do not believe/understand the North American Union, Super Highway, and SPP, try to watch it. I am pretty sure that he will be addressing these issues while on the show.

Comment from: mike3720

06/26/06 @ 19:42

Excellent observations and honest conclusions.You always write something monthly that makes me read you,despite disagreeing with you most of the time.Since you have been around so long,are you surprised at the vitriol on these blogs.I sometimes wonder if Ol'Gene P. isn't harvesting some of the seeds he planted?

Comment from: Bren

06/27/06 @ 06:10

On Lou Dobbs today:

Immigration Showdown

The issue of illegal immigration is at the forefront of the Utah congressional primary election. We'll have a special report live from the Utah polls.

Then, Colorado Rep. Tom Tancredo has written a new book, "In Mortal Danger," on the crisis America is facing over its broken borders. He joins us.

Comment from: Harold260

06/27/06 @ 20:36
I was watching a piece on PBS about the lobbyist influence in America, and I was totally taken aback to find out that Arizona is considered a model of good lobbyist pratices.

I have to admit that since hearing that piece, I have been watching the Arizona Legislature with more interest.

There was a companion note to the good news about our legislature, they said that the conservative era in Arizona is probably up for a change to a more balanced political landscape what with all the California types invading the Grand Canyon state.

No sign that I can see.