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At 90, Lockhart the gold standard in lobbying

By Jim Nowlan

Effective lobbying is absolutely essential to the functioning of a legislative body, where interests clash incessantly.

Full of spit and vinegar at 90, Richard Lockhart has for 55 years been the gold standard in lobbying Illinois government, that is, in getting the right information in the right format to the right people at the right time.

Lockhart has some suggestions for small organizations and individuals with interests in legislation.

A combat infantryman in World War II, Lockhart's anti-tank company was overrun by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge. As a prisoner of war, he suffered frost-bitten feet, which bother him to this day.

In 1954, Dick Lockhart worked on the successful effort to redistrict the Illinois legislature, which hadn't been done since 1901.

A Chicagoan, Dick set up his own lobbying shop in 1958 and has carved out a niche of representing small statewide organizations that lack the big money to contribute heavily to candidates and officials.

His first client was the Mental Health Association of Illinois, and Dick is still their lobbyist.

[In 1969-70 Dick served as a special consultant to the state Constitutional Convention. He convinced Con-Con president Sam Witwer to put the convention product to the voters in a

special election, when only those with an interest one way or the other would vote for it, rather than in a general election, when the question would be weighed down by voters who knew nothing about it.

As a result, the 1970 Constitution was enacted.]

In 1990, Lockhart represented the Clinical Social Workers Association, who wanted third party reimbursement from insurance companies for their services. He was opposed by the insurance companies, the physicians' society and psychiatrists.

It was a David versus Goliaths effort, yet he was successful, in large part because he had the right sponsor, a state senator who wanted to prove he could pass a controversial bill.

Lesson No. 1: Seek the right sponsor for your bill.

For example, Speaker of the House Mike Madigan lets members introduce as many bills as they want, but then he asks them to tell him their top five bill priorities. If your bill is not one of a sponsor's top five, forget about passing it.

Dick reads all 7,000 bills that are introduced each session, to see if a bill affects one of his 8-10 clients.

First thing each session day ("I've been in the Capitol every session day since 1959," Dick says proudly), he goes to the bill rooms in the House and Senate to pick up bills and amendments introduced that day. The stack may be a foot high.

[This job is almost impossible. Speaker Madigan has, for example, introduced 400 shell bills this session. These are bills that contain no substance but can be moved along the process, to be amended with real import late in the session.

Lockhart rarely testifies on legislation. Better, he thinks, to have a representative of the interest group do so.]

The biggest change Lockhart has seen is that the process is more costly. He shows me a file folder filled with invitations to party leadership and candidate fundraisers, where the tariff generally starts at \$250 per ticket, with expectations of \$1,000 to \$10,000 from big interests.

So Lockhart lobbies with one hand tied behind his back, because his small groups can't play the big money game.

Lockhart's antidote to money lies in his members and their passion for their bills.

Lesson 2: Each statewide group is likely to have members in each legislative district, who matter to each lawmaker. Make use of them.

Dick operates Project 59, where the school psychologists' association, for example, identifies each of its members in each of the 59 state senate districts. Then contact is made between a lawmaker and his own constituents.

Lesson 3: Be tolerant and understanding of legislators. Most want to do right by their constituents (218,000 for Senate districts; half that many for House members), and they take a lot of abuse from angry constituents in the process.

Lesson 4: Don't think the virtue of your position will carry the day. Each interest tends to have an opposing interest. If nurses want to expand their practices, doctors will likely oppose, and so it goes for almost every issue.

You have to be passionate in communicating with lawmakers to carry your issue. Form letters and emails won't do.

Lesson 5: Get to know and show your appreciation to the generally young staff members who oversee the issues you are interested in. They are smart and almost always willing to be helpful, and they are important.

Lesson 6: There's a legislative district office just down the road. Visit your legislator during the off session, when he or she is somewhat at ease.

They won't bite. In fact, they will almost always appreciate that you took the time. And you can explain your case one on one.

Dick Lockhart is returning for his 56<sup>th</sup> year of legislative activity. He is an important, key cog in the machinery of government and politics. We need more like him.