Lobbying

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Lobbying

Introduction

Lobbying is a profession that many do not fully understand or appreciate. Lobbyists play a very essential part in our democratic process and they can be extremely impactful. Not only is it important to understand what lobbyists do, but also to understand the many misconceptions about them. They often get a bad reputation because of people's assumptions of how lobbying works, but it is actually a very ethical and lawful practice. Lobbying is also something that anyone can get involved in on an individual level by advocating and contacting your representatives.

Question 1: What do lobbyists do?

Lobbyists are those who work to influence political decisions and often have a deep understanding of how the government works. The goal for these professionals is to see the proposal of new legislation, or an amendment to existing legislation, on the issue they are lobbying. A major part of lobbying is providing information to lawmakers. They can lobby on behalf of an organization, a government entity, or another individual. Lobbyists advocate on behalf of a wide array of topics. Some of the top industries include pharmaceuticals, insurance, and business associations. In their attempt to sway political decisions, lobbyists provide decision makers with information they do not have access to. They share their expertise on a topic in hopes to help decision makers better understand the issue within that area.

Although lobbyists are often maligned, they are an important part of the governmental process. Virtually every public policy has lobbyists advocating from a multitude of perspectives. They provide a form of representation for Americans across the political spectrum. When lobbyists draw attention to a particular issue that they are advocating for, it can help sort out competing interests. In doing so, they are bringing power to the public.

Question 2: Debunking misconceptions about lobbying

Many people are very skeptical of lobbyists because there are many misconceptions that surround this profession. Some believe that lobbying is an unethical practice because of bribery and secret deals. However, lobbying is a legal and helpful practice. Lobbyists have strict regulations about their interactions with public representatives. Lobbyists strive to be transparent about all their encounters and they are just trying to portray their position to elected officials. Also due to lobbyist regulations, bribery is not common within lobbyists. Politicians and lobbyists ensure that there is no bribery or secret deals when a lobbyist is trying to persuade a politician. Typically a lobbyist's main influence is to provide information—not money—to policymakers.

Another major misconception is that lobbying is illegal. This is not true, in fact, lobbying can be extremely important to our democracy. Many large corporations and small businesses use lobbyists to advocate on their behalf. This is a legal and effective way for groups and businesses to have their voices heard. This is also true for public interest groups, civic groups,
and nonprofits. Lobbying is a way to make a difference within our government system. There are so many misconceptions that surround lobbyists which have made many people question the profession, but many of them are not true.

**Question 3: How can we all be lobbyists on the individual level?**

While lobbying is often viewed as a profession that requires expertise, it is important to recognize that we can all lobby on the individual level. When there is a topic that one feels passionately about, there are ways to ensure their voice is heard. One of these ways is to contact one’s representatives on the local, state, and federal level. This communication can take place in several forms. An individual can contact their representatives directly through a letter, an email, or a phone call. In addition, it is becoming increasingly common to reach out via social media.

In addition to contacting a representative, individual level lobbying can happen through attending a town hall meeting. This is a way for an individual’s voice to be heard in the moment and in a public setting. An individual can also donate to an organization that supports the issue they wish to advocate for. All of the previously mentioned techniques can be used to spread awareness for the issue a person is passionate about. However, when lobbying, one should always remember to provide an improvement on legislation, not simply point out the issue. This makes the job of decision makers much easier and they will be more likely to consider the reform.

**Conclusion**

Being informed about the role of a lobbyist can be important to all types of people. Lobbyists can help a wide range of companies and organizations. Using lobbyists to have your voice heard can be extremely helpful because they have such a deep understanding of the political process. Without lobbyists many important legislation would have never been passed, they truly do help our legislative system progress.