



Washington State Legislative Service Project: Registered Lobbyists **Executive summary - Spring 2010**

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The Washington State Legislative Service Project focuses on preparing student legislative interns, engaging and preparing the next generation for public service and improving legislative bipartisan collaboration. As part of the project both current and past legislative interns, current legislative staff, current and past legislators, news media representatives and registered lobbyists are being surveyed. The lobbyist portion of the Legislative Service Project focuses on individuals who were registered lobbyists during the 2009 legislative session of the Washington State Legislature. Survey questions included the areas of: lobbyist preparation and experiences, legislative interns, legislative process, partisanship, bipartisan collaboration, civility, interaction with legislators, the effect of televising the legislative process, the effect of communication and information technology on the legislative process, and personal background. Of the 720 lobbyists contacted, 112 participated in the research.

Lobbyists feel that their work is highly rewarding in that they are able to move good legislation forward, work and build relationships with interesting people, advance their clients' interests, and "make a difference" in the state. At the same time, lobbyists found a number of challenges associated with being a lobbyist. These challenges included dealing with partisan politics, how they are treated by some legislators and are viewed by the general public, the slow pace of the system, separation from family, dealing with some unethical people, and being asked for campaign donations. The most important qualities of a lobbyist include: communication skills, knowledge of the issues and legislative process, honesty, integrity and credibility. Lobbyists uniformly feel that it is more important to have credibility, to have a relationship with legislators, and possess issue knowledge than to be connected to a special interest group which has a large constituency or is well financed.

A high percentage of the lobbyists taking part in the survey (81%) feel that bipartisan collaboration improves the effectiveness of the legislative process. Lobbyists felt that legislative bipartisan agreement ranged from being virtually nonexistent to being present on most issues. Issues with the greatest bipartisan agreement included: education, transportation and criminal justice. Issues with the least bipartisan agreement included: budget, taxes, and labor vs. business. A common sentiment was that most things should be non-partisan, but if the issue has consequence for important legislators it tends to become a partisan issue. Hindrances to legislative bipartisan collaboration included: party and caucus leadership influence, legislators focusing narrowly on re-election, and ideological differences. Legislative bipartisan collaboration is encouraged by: legislators developing personal relationships with other legislators, legislators maintaining civility and honesty, legislators focusing on what is best for Washington State, times of crisis, when the majority and minority are relatively equal in size, and when constituent pressure is large enough and demands action.

Lobbyists feel very strongly that civility in legislative discourse and debate is important in fostering bipartisanship and producing good policy outcomes. Lobbyists feel that, over the course of their lobbying experience, the level of partisanship has increased and the level of civility has decreased. Lobbyists felt that historically well-crafted and timely legislation has originated from both parties. Lobbyists felt the impact of televising the legislative process has increased the openness and public awareness of the process and slightly increased the ethical conduct of legislators. At the same time, it has slightly decreased the candidness of legislators and their willingness to work in a bipartisan fashion. Lobbyists felt that use of information and communication technology has reduced legislators' attention in meetings and their willingness to work in a bipartisan fashion. It has also increased meeting distractions. This, however, is offset by increases in legislators' access to bill information during debate and lobbyist access to legislators via e-mail and text messaging.