

Washington State Legislative Service Project: Lobbyists 2013

Executive Summary – Spring 2014

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Acknowledgments: Governor Jay Inslee and Secretary of State Kim Wyman

Sponsors: William D. Ruckelshaus Center and Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy & Public Service

*The Washington State **Legislative Service Project** examines the views of key individuals involved in the legislative process to determine how changes to this process have affected legislative civility. Study participants include legislative and state agency staff, registered lobbyists and legislators who served during the 1990 to 2013 legislative sessions. The lobbyist portion of the **Legislative Service Project** focuses on persons who were working as registered lobbyists during the 2013 legislative session of the Washington State Legislature. Survey questions included the specific areas of: legislative public image and effectiveness, civility and working relationships, campaigns, leadership/management styles, and work/sleep/performance dynamics.*

Lobbyists participating in the survey, as well as might be expected, have considerable experience with the legislative process. An overwhelming majority (94%) of survey respondents have been involved with the legislative process for at least 5 years, and 60% have at least 20 years of experience. Almost 2/3s of the participants were male. About half of the lobbyists identified more closely with the Democratic Party, with the other half primarily describing their partisan attachments as independents. Lobbyists uniformly characterize their work as highly meaningful and satisfying. Their prior formal education, their community and political activism, and their prior legislative process experience were identified as factors that best prepared them for their work as a registered lobbyist.

Ranking of previous *Legislative Service Project* recommendations

How to improve legislative public image:

Greatest effectiveness: work for the good-of-the-state and not personal/partisan agendas
Easiest to implement: improve communication to citizens
Best overall: improve communication to citizens

How to improve legislative effectiveness:

Greatest effectiveness: party leaders encourage working cooperatively across the aisle
Easiest to implement: limiting how many committees on which a legislator can serve
Best overall: party leaders encourage working cooperatively across the aisle

How to improve legislative civility:

Greatest effectiveness: show respect for other people and their opinions
Easiest to implement: hold social functions which are limited to legislators
eat meals with other legislators
Best overall: work with legislators from the other party on joint projects

How to improve legislative campaigns:

Greatest effectiveness: avoid being hostile
Easiest to implement: hold joint freshman orientations which involve both parties
Best overall: hold joint freshman orientations which involve both parties

Participants in the lobbyists survey tend to attribute the high number of legislative special sessions to an inability of legislators to work together, reduced state revenue, and lack of meaningful incentives to finish legislative work in the allotted time. In order for work to be completed during the regular session lobbyists generally believe that the best actions would be for legislators to focus more heavily on top priority issues of greatest public concern, limit the number of bills granted hearings, and increase cooperation overall.

Lobbyists tend to believe that enhanced use of new technology could improve the legislative process through increased constituent interactions, more provision for remote testimony, and greater use of live video conferencing. This communication technology can also be used to improve communication with constituents by increasing communication channels and language options available to citizens. Remote testimony is seen by many lobbyists as a way to broaden the diversity of citizen participation and increase access, but its use also raises genuine concerns related to meeting time management, potentially reduced quality of testimony, and reduced face-to-face contact between legislators and citizens.

Lobbyists indicated that during the course of the legislative session there is a decline in their productivity, quality of work, personal and work relationships, quality of sleep, and personal and work satisfaction. The greatest decreases in productivity and job satisfaction are experienced during the compressed calendar and very long days of the legislative session. With regard to productivity, lobbyists measure productivity for themselves based on the amount of work/bills they are able to manage, availability of time to envision strategies and plan actions, and client satisfaction.