

Excerpt from “Lobbying in the Land of Enchantment: Special Interests and their Hired Guns,” a 2013 report from Common Cause New Mexico.

The Revolving Door and Blood Ties

Many lobbyists are former legislators or are related to current or former lawmakers. In 2013, there were at least 13 former senators and 13 former representatives, many of them former leaders, among the lobbyist corps. The senator-lobbyists included former President Pro Tempore Richard Romero, former Majority Leaders Tito Chavez and Tom Rutherford, and former committee chairs Roman Maes and Otis Echols, who died this year. Former senators Bobby McBride (also deceased) , Walter Bradley, Arthur Rodarte, Diane Snyder, Kent Cravens, Christine Donisthorpe, Les Houston, Mickey Barnett, Maurice Hobson and Clint Harden also lobby for various clients. Former representatives now lobbying include Speaker Raymond Sanchez, Tom Horan, John Lee Thompson, Hoyt Pattison, Andrew Barreras, Joe Nestor Chavez, Michael Olguin, Dan Silva, Joe Thompson, Dick Minzner, John Underwood, Al Park and Andy Nunez. And the ranks of former legislators who become lobbyists swell after each election.

Legislative experience gives these lobbyists a leg up not just in terms of their personal relationship with their former colleagues, but also because they know the legislative history of an issue, e.g. who was opposed to it ten years ago, whether it was vetoed and why, or whether a measure is even constitutional.

If the fact that some of the top lobbyists in Santa Fe are former legislators seems a little incestuous, it is only part of the family atmosphere that exists in the Roundhouse. A good number of lobbyists are related to legislators. Mark Saavedra, the chief lobbyist for the University of New Mexico, is the son of House Appropriations Chairman Kiki Saavedra, as is Randy Saavedra who lobbies for New Mexico Tech. Allison Smith, lobbyist for the Restaurant Association, is the daughter of Sen. President Pro Tem Mary Kay Papen, of Las Cruces. Vanessa Alarid, who lobbies for a number of clients, is married to House Majority Whip Antonio “Mo” Maestas. The most well-known example is former Speaker Raymond Sanchez, the brother of Senate Majority Leader Michael Sanchez. During most sessions the former speaker (who is the older brother) is camped out in the majority leader’s office.

Lobbying as a family business also makes sense. When you have a big roster of clients, you need help. Who better than your son, daughter or sibling to help you monitor the activities of various committees, write reports back to your clients, or socialize with the people with whom they grew up? Former Representative Tom Horan, whose father was a legislator and then a lobbyist for the City of Albuquerque, now works with his son Larry and hopes to bring another son into the business soon. Tom Rutherford, whose father was also both a legislator and then a lobbyist, now works with his son Jeremy. Long-time lobbyist from Silver City, Tony Trujillo, introduced his sons Ty and T. J. to the business. Both now have multiple clients. Dan Weeks, a former legislative and gubernatorial staffer, lobbies with his wife Marla Shoats, and more recently his son Jason. Sam Ray, longtime utility lobbyist introduced his daughter Matejka to the business. She now has a number of clients. Siblings Randy and Mark Saavedra each have their own clients as do Adela and Mark Duran.

Although these lobbyists have their own clients and most technically operate independently, they help each other when needed.

The family atmosphere at the Roundhouse is a friendly one, most comforting to those in the in-crowd, which, during each session, expands to include other family members as attendants, analysts, or staffers. This is, after all, New Mexico, a small state where everyone knows each other and is somehow related.

But personal relationships are not everything. Legislators also respect technical expertise from lobbyists, particularly in medical and scientific fields. Here the past experience of a lobbyist in hydrology or epidemiology may have some effect. There are a number of former administration officials lobbying. Dick Minzner and Jim O'Neill bring expertise in taxation policy. Others, like Brent Moore, know about insurance issues. Others are experts on health or water issues by virtue of their backgrounds.

It should be noted that many, if not most, of the full-time lobbyists in Santa Fe are lawyers, who are familiar with NM statutes and case law. They pride themselves on telling the truth—and it is rare indeed for a lobbyist to tell an outright lie. Since they return to the legislature year after year, their credibility is at stake.