

Lobbyists bear varied credentials

Law degrees are helpful but not necessary



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University of Nebraska lobbyist Ron Withem, left, speaks with State Senator DIAnna Schimek of Lincoln at the Statehouse while other lobbyists press their issues in the background.

Ruth-Mueller-Robak

Registered clients: 46

Major clients: First Data Corp., Nebraska State Bar Association, Nebraska Association of Commercial Property Owners.

Projected fees for 2005: \$1.15 million. **

Partners: Larry Ruth, Bill Mueller and Kim Robak. All are lawyers. Mueller and Robak are married to one another.

Background:

Ruth was the first to lobby, going to work with C. Arlen Beam after returning to Nebraska in 1974 after law school and a stint in the Navy. He is a former legislative page (1967) and worked for former U.S. Rep. Robert V. Denney and former U.S. Sen. Roman Hruska. Beam, now a senior judge with the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, left lobbying in 1976.

Mueller, then an associate with the Omaha law firm of Sodoro, Daly & Sodoro, joined with Ruth in 1984. Before joining the lobbying firm last year, Robak served as lieutenant governor from 1993 to 1999. She then became a University of Nebraska vice president and was a finalist for NU president. "Lawyers typically apply the law and spend a lot of time interpreting the law," Ruth said. "We're helping to make the law."

Radcliffe & Associates

Registered clients: 37

Major clients: INTRALOT USA, Coast Casinos, UST Public Affairs Inc., Media of Nebraska.

Projected fees for 2005: \$795,000**

Sole proprietor: Walt Radcliffe, with Korby Gilbertson and Justin Brady working as full-time lobbyists.

Background:

Radcliffe, a one-time legislative page and former legal counsel to the Legislature's Banking and Judiciary Committees, began working with Dave Tews, one of Nebraska's first full-time lobbyists, in 1977. He later bought Tews out.

Gilbertson began working for Radcliffe in 1989 and became a lobbyist after getting a law degree in 1996. Radcliffe hired Brady, then a college student working at the Hillcrest Country Club pro shop, in 1998. Brady earned his law degree in 2003.

Radcliffe is known for his long-time representation of gambling, alcohol and tobacco interests. Last year, he successfully lobbied for a constitutional amendment to use lottery revenues to support the Nebraska State Fair — an effort he handled for free.

"I like politics and I like government," Radcliffe said. "Lobbying was a way to be a sole practitioner and also earn a good living. It's one of the few ways you can earn a living in politics in Nebraska."

Cutshall & Associates

Registered clients: 26

Major clients: Union Pacific, Nebraska Public Power District, Nebraska State College Systems Board of Trustees.

Projected 2005 fees: \$404,690**

Partners: Bruce Cutshall and Trent Nowka

Background:

Cutshall, a law school classmate of fellow lobbyist Walt Radcliffe, worked as the Legislature's chief bill drafter from 1974 before becoming a lobbyist in 1980.

As a law student, he worked part-time as executive director of the Legislature's Conflict of Interest Committee, precursor to the state Accountability and Disclosure Commission.

He began with mostly agricultural and water clients but diversified after the ag crisis of the early 1980s. His client list still skews toward rural interests, including the Nebraska Cattlemen, the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association and the Nebraska Water Coalition.

Nowka, former counsel to Gov. Ben Nelson, joined Cutshall's firm in 1997.

Although up-to-the-minute legislative records are available on the Internet, Cutshall still keeps a "black book" on the progress of every bill. He says it forces him to keep track of what's happening on each measure.

"We get a comfort level with most of our clients and believe in their causes," he said. "I enjoy doing things for the betterment of Nebraska."

O'Hara, Lindsay & Associates

Registered clients: 24

Major clients: Nebraska Association of Trial Attorneys, Omaha Public Schools, Kinder Morgan

Projected fees for 2005: \$673,000**

Partners: Paul O'Hara and John Lindsay

Background:

O'Hara joined Nebraska's lobby 36 years ago, as the first executive director of the Nebraska Catholic Conference. Unlike many of Nebraska's top lobbyists, he is not a lawyer.

An Atlantic City, N.J., native, O'Hara first came to Nebraska in 1963 as an officer at Offutt Air Force Base. He liked Nebraska and enrolled in the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where he studied political science and English and got a B.A.

He became former U.S. Rep. John Cavanaugh's chief of staff in 1976. After two years in Washington, he returned to Nebraska and started lobbying.

Lindsay joined O'Hara in 1997, after two terms in the Legislature. He and his wife have four sons, ranging from 7 to 15 years old. Though he loved being a state senator, Lindsay said he needed more time for his young family.

O'Hara is deeply interested in public policy, but said he never wants to run for office.

"I have a defective public service gland," he said. "I don't want to get calls in the middle of the night, that someone's cat is stuck in a tree and what am I going to do about it."

****Projected fees**

Projected fees were calculated based upon lobbyists' reports in filings with the Clerk of the Legislature. Monthly fee amounts were multiplied by five and quarterly fee amounts were multiplied by two to cover the length of time the Legislature will be in session. Yearly fee amounts were included in full.