

Gerald Cassidy: businessman, lobbyist, blogger

By Jim Snyder

The blogosphere can be a tough place for a lobbyist. A new blog launched today begins with the headline “Cleaning up K Street,” which implies Washington’s famous lobbying corridor is a dirty place to do business.

The twist here, however, is that the entry was written by a lobbyist. And not just any lobbyist — the lobbyist often held responsible for encouraging the growth of congressional earmarks, those special budget directives that have led to a lot of the criticism surrounding K Street’s relationship with Congress.

But Gerald Cassidy, a former aide to ex-Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) who has built one of the biggest lobbying operations on K Street, believes that much of the public perception about what lobbyists do is wrong. Hence the blog.

The blog, for which he and other Cassidy & Associates lobbyists will write, is a way to combat the misperception that lobbyists simply go into members’ offices and “peddle influence.”

“This journal,” Cassidy blogs, will “contribute to a dialogue that will hopefully get us back to the day when information is better currency than money in Washington.”

“There are 18,000 lobbyists in Washington. But for the last couple of years we’ve been talking about one lobbyist,” Cassidy says, referring to Jack Abramoff, the former super-lobbyist who has pled guilty to conspiracy charges.

“I don’t think Washington would work very well without lobbyists because they are the source of much of the information so many members rely on,” Cassidy told The Hill.

But, as the headline on the initial entry suggests, Cassidy’s first blog entry voices his support for congressional efforts to clean up the perception that K Street is dirty, even if that isn’t the reality.

“Unfortunately, the terms ‘lobbyist’ and ‘K Street’ conjure up such negative feelings and stereotypes that the achievements of our profession’s advocacy have been lost amongst recent scandals,” he writes.

“Our profession is at a critical point where we can either embrace the constructive changes and reforms by Congress or we can seek out loopholes and continue the slippery slide into infamy alongside the ranks of snake-oil salesmen.”

Cassidy says his blog entries won’t back specific policies favored by his clients. He instead plans to share his opinions on larger

political issues. He says he intends to push for public financing of political campaigns to rebuild public trust in government and for more government oversight of hedge funds.

The blog, which can be seen at www.cassidy.com, starts with Cassidy’s personal reminiscences of helping migrant farm workers as a young aide to McGovern.

He also acknowledges his own mistake in hiring Abramoff as a consultant after Greenberg Traurig fired him following a negative Washington Post report about Abramoff’s questionable billing practices of his Indian tribe clients.

In the blog, Cassidy doesn’t name Abramoff. But he writes that he fell for “the smoke and mirrors of the man at the center of the worst violation of our profession.”

In an interview Cassidy added that the firm “made a mistake in our due diligence.” He said he bought into the perception that Abramoff had been treated poorly by Greenberg. When more information came out, Cassidy said he ended the firm’s relationship with Abramoff.

That scandal puts additional onus on lobbyists “to be counselors who are more substantive and trustworthy than ever,” Cassidy writes.