

# ROLL CALL

## Storm or No, Lobbyists Thrive

February 16, 2006

By *Tory Newmyer*

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Despite stormy times for the Washington, D.C., lobbying industry, the top firms in town are reporting steady growth for 2005.

Last year, the top 25 firms collected \$397.9 million in lobbying revenues — a \$36 million jump from the fees reported by the 25 largest shops the previous year.

That's an 8 percent climb from 2004 to 2005 — a solid recovery after a slow presidential election year, though still less than the 15 percent annual growth rates the sector chalked up in prior years.

Officials at top-ranked firms predicted that current rates of growth would continue, though they also sounded a note of caution for the coming year, citing a short legislative calendar and the looming prospect of new restrictions on the lobbying business.

"We are being, because of the political environment we're in at the moment, very selective about any new business we're taking on," said Stewart Van Scoyoc, who runs the fourth-ranked Van Scoyoc Associates. "To us, success is much more important than just growth for growth's sake."

The figures collected by Roll Call come from disclosures required by the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995. Year-end totals had to be filed to Congress by Tuesday.

The figures were obtained directly from the firms, after they had filed their reports but before those reports were made public by the House or Senate.

According to these figures, Patton Boggs continued its reign atop the lobbying heap last year, boosting its annual haul by more than \$6 million. With this increase, the firm added significant distance between itself and its nearest competitor.

A total of \$28.6 million earned the law and lobbying firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld the second spot for the first time in the history of Roll Call's year-end survey. The firm bumped perennial top-finisher Cassidy & Associates to No. 3.

Akin Gump did its most high-profile work for CNOOC, a Chinese-backed oil company that inflamed tensions over the summer between that country and Congress when it mounted a losing bid against Chevron to acquire an American oil company. But

partner Joel Jankowsky said no one client was responsible for the firm's growth. "We were pretty darn busy," all year, he said.

Cassidy lobbyists say while their reported numbers remained mostly flat, the firm was concentrating on expanding other areas of their practice, including their federal marketing practice and their work for foreign clients.

To assemble its final list of 25 largest firms, Roll Call used year-end total revenue figures from the top 50 firms for the first half of 2004, as reported by PoliticalMoneyLine.com. Figures for firms 26 through 50 are not reported in Roll Call's final rankings.

While Patton Boggs reported impressive gains, some of the most significant growth rates appear further down the list.

The all-Republican firm Barbour Griffith & Rogers posted 32 percent growth, boosting its revenue by \$4.6 million to finish the year at the No. 6 slot with \$19 million. Most of that growth occurred in the firm's health care, financial services and appropriations practices, said chief operating officer Loren Monroe. "The strong growth in our firm's LDA numbers is commensurate with our firm's expanded issue expertise," he said.

Rounding out the list were two new entries. Bracewell & Giuliani nearly doubled its lobbying receipts, reporting \$9.85 million to leap into the No. 23 slot. Former Rep. Jim Chapman (D-Texas), a partner with the firm, chalked up the success to work his lobbyists did on energy matters.

Similarly, the Washington, D.C., outpost of Chicago-based law firm Sonnenschien Nath & Rosenthal made its debut on the list only three years after opening its doors here, landing at No. 25 with an \$8.8 million total.

"As one of the fastest-growing public policy practices, we are heartened that we have cracked the list and expect to have continued significant growth in coming years," said Elliot Portnoy, a partner at the firm.

While 2005 was meant to be the year of the all-Republican shop — Republican lobbyists predicted a flood of new business after the GOP retook the White House and strengthened its grip on both chambers of Congress — the reality was more mixed.

Despite BG&R's success, several all-GOP firms finished the year with numbers in line with their bipartisan competition. Another, the Alexander Strategy Group, found itself in the swath of destruction blazed by the scandal surrounding convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff. The firm recently announced it would shutter after losing most of its clients. Year-end totals for the firm could not be obtained.

The scandal continues to reverberate from Congress to K Street, with its impact on the lobbying business still unknown. As Congress mulls overhauling how lobbyists are allowed to interact with lawmakers, lobbyists of different stripes are seeking to make the case that their respective specialties best position them for the post-reform environment.

Those focused on the nuts and bolts of policy argue that reforms to choke off the access of the big-money lobbyists can only boost their stock.

"We market ourselves as having the ability to handle the political and technical issues," said Mike House, managing partner of the eighth-ranked Hogan & Hartson. "Just because you can get in the door doesn't mean you know what to say when you get in, or that you know how to solve the problem."

But Cassidy's Gregg Hartley, who has been in the news recently for his close ties to House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), argued the opposite. He insisted that relationships will continue to carry currency.

"If you're a really smart policy guy or gal and you know the weeds of a legislative issue, that's great. But if you can't get a meeting in an office because of a lack of a relationship," then all that knowledge doesn't matter, he said.

One impact that reforms could have is on the rankings themselves.

Because the Roll Call survey is based on lobbying fees reported to Congress under the 1995 law, it excludes receipts for other types of work, such as grass-roots campaigns and public relations efforts. If new lobbying rules require firms to include fees for that work in their annual reports, the results of Roll Call's 2006 survey could look much different.

**Matt Reynolds contributed to this report.**

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