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Lobbyist and geologist, ex-aide to Reid is oil-exploration expert

By [Susan Crabtree](#)

Kai Anderson, a former senior aide to Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), is getting a tad offended. It's the day after Sen. Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) was rushed to the emergency room after suffering a brain hemorrhage, and Anderson is annoyed by media reports suggesting that Reid's multiple visits to Johnson's bedside were motivated by concern for Democrats' new one-vote majority status in the Senate, rather than concern for his colleague.

"[Reid] would have done the same thing if it happened to [Sen. John] Ensign (R-Nev.)," Anderson remarks. "That's just the way he is."

Anderson has been through similar experiences before. Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) died in a plane crash in October 2002 just days before his potential reelection in a hard-fought race crucial to maintaining Democratic control of the Senate. Reid had his own scare when he suffered a mild stroke in August 2005.

"People seem to be fixated on the Senate 'hanging in the balance,'" Anderson said. "There's so much speculation that's just irresponsible and unproductive because we just don't know that much right now ... and it's none of our business. Right now is a time for his family to know the details."

Anderson argued that people should take a longer view on the upper chamber, a place where party control is less important because individual senators can block bills. These days Anderson is less beholden to party politics, having moved to K Street after six years of service in Reid's office, culminating in a deputy chief of staff position. Cassidy and Associates hired him to form a natural resources and environmental practice two years ago.

In fact, it's difficult to pin down exactly where Anderson fits on the political spectrum.

Anderson grew up in La Grande, Ore., population 12,000. His father had career attention deficit disorder, he said, and at various times played in a rock 'n' roll band, worked as a logger, ran a restaurant and wrote a children's book.

"When I was 2, I used to sleep in my dad's guitar case when he took me on the road," Anderson recalled.

His parents split up when he was a young child, and the divorce was hard on the family finances.

"I have an appreciation for the good food stamps can do," he said.

At the same time, Anderson doesn't consider himself a big-government liberal. As a senior adviser to Reid, at various times his legislative docket included issues regarding mining, oil and gas, nuclear energy, renewable energy, electricity, the environment, agriculture, water, public lands, gun rights, higher education, rural development and appropriations.

Not your typical lobbyist, Anderson is a sedimentary geologist who spent the better part of five years working on a thesis for a Ph.D. in geological and environmental sciences at Stanford University.

In fact, Anderson still regards himself as a scientist first and foremost, and seems most at home talking about the differences between still-slip and strike-slip fault lines and plate tectonics. When asked to explain how Western mountain ranges were formed, Anderson extends a metal pointer and conducts a spontaneous geology lesson complete with visuals — the mammoth topographical maps of Nevada, Wyoming, Arizona and North America as a whole hanging in his office.

His doctoral dissertation, "Facies Architecture of Sand-Rich Deep-Marine Systems, Paleogene Lodo and Merle Formations, Southern Diablo and Santa Lucia Ranges, California," focused on three-dimensional distribution of mud in sandstone and shale and was partially funded by an industrial affiliates consortium comprised of more than 10 of the world's leading oil and gas exploration-and-development firms. It's an ancient example of an area similar to the oil and gas reservoirs in the Gulf of Mexico and the North Sea in the petroleum-rich area off the Coast of Angola. And even though Democrats have berated oil companies for raking in record profits when gas prices are sky-high, Anderson said he would have no problem representing some petroleum companies.

"We all use oil and gas — but I really think the companies that invest in the next big [alternative] are the ones who are going to benefit most in the long run," he said.

His scientific background helped when he went to Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska, the only privately sponsored trip he took during his Senate career.

Because of the relatively modest petroleum preserves found in ANWR, Anderson argues that it's much better to drill in the Gulf of Mexico.

"If you make a mark [in ANWR], it takes a very long time to heal it there," he says.

Anderson enjoyed the team-oriented atmosphere he found on Capitol Hill — you had to rely on other people in order to get things done, he said. Such was the case when Nevada sportsmen reacted angrily to a federal law imposing the uniform distribution of hunting tags from state to state, based on the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution. Anderson worked closely with a sportsmen group, the Nevada Bighorns Unlimited, earning their trust and friendship in the process.

In the end, Reid attached a bill reaffirming states' authority to regulate hunting licenses and tags as an amendment to an emergency supplemental appropriations bill, which among other things funded the war in Iraq.

But Anderson also enjoys the independence of working for just one client's interests.

"I get to work for clients I believe in," he said. "And I've never told a client I could change Harry Reid's

mind on anything.”

Anderson said he would have no problem advocating for drilling in the Gulf of Mexico because people use that fuel to “heat their houses and produce chemicals and plastics and a whole variety of things — and that’s important.

“At the end of the day, a one-dimensional policy is not a healthy energy policy. We also need to move in the direction of other things we can use — whether it be geo-thermal, solar, wind or biomass or energy-efficiency programs. If anyone tells you that one of these particular fuels is going to solve our energy problems, they’re selling you a bill of goods.”