

Lobby

"Lobbying" is an attempt to influence a legislator's vote on a bill.

Lobbying has been recognized as a legal activity since the earliest days of the United States. The First Amendment to the Constitution says that no law may prevent people from petitioning or requesting the government to change things the people feel are wrong.

It is the right of the people to petition the government that has led to lobbying.

The word "lobby" has been used for almost four hundred years. The large room next to the British House of Commons was called a lobby. It was a public area where private citizens could meet with legislators to make requests. So, people who met in the lobby with legislators were called 'lobbyists.'

During the early years of the United States, lobbyists had a bad name. there were many cases of lobbyists buying the votes of lawmakers. Lobbyists were seen by the public as dishonest persons who influenced legislation illegally for their own private gain.

In later years, Congress and state legislatures passed laws to restrict dishonest lobbying activities. And the legislators and the public began to recognize the value of the job done by honest lobbyists.

Lobbyists and lobby groups have an active part in making laws. Lobbyists help inform Congress and the public about problems and issues. Lobbyists provide technical information about legislative proposals. And lobbyists let lawmakers know whom a bill would help and whom it would hurt.

As the federal government has expanded, so has the number of special interest groups affected by federal policy. Thus, all kinds of groups—industries, labor unions, racial groups, professional organizations, citizens groups, and representatives of foreign interests—lobby Congress. A lobbyist represents a group and tries to advance its interests. When a bill is proposed that affects that group, a lobbyist meets with the lawmakers to explain the group's position.

Some experts say at least 10,000 lobbyists are in Washington during a year. There are so many lobbyists that almost every side of an issue is represented.

White elephant

A "white elephant" is something which will cost you money, perhaps an increasing amount of money over time, and in the end, have no value. It may be something that costs too much to fix or too much to use.

A "white elephant" could be a car, a boat, a house, or even a business which demands more and more of your money without bringing in enough profit in return.

In the words of the poet, John Cheever Goodwin:

"For that elephant ate all night
And that elephant ate all day
Do what he could to furnish him food,
The cry was still 'more hay;'"

This is true of all elephants, white or dark. As we all know, the elephant is the largest land mammal, and perhaps the heaviest of eaters.

There have never been many albino or "white" elephants. White elephants are considered to be holy or sacred in parts of Asia. Writers William and Mary Morris give this explanation for our present use of the expression, "white elephant."

Hundreds of years ago there were so few white elephants that everyone was taken by the king. And because they were sacred, it was unlawful to put any of them to work.

The king used a white elephant to punish any of his officials who displeased him. He gave the man the elephant as a gift. Then, the king just waited. He knew that, in time, the official would spend all his money feeding the elephant. And, because the elephant could not do any work, the official could not use him to make any money. So, the gift of a white elephant resulted in ruin.