



**FORMIDABLE TASK:** Paul Miller is working to burnish the image of lobbying both inside and outside Washington. Given his relatively low profile, some critics wonder if he can be an effective advocate. *(Photo by Roberto Westbrook)*

## **K Street Silence Gives Miller Speaking Part Head of the only lobbying advocacy group in Washington must defend the profession ? but does he have the juice?**

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Paul Miller came to Capitol Hill a couple of weeks ago to praise lobbying, not to bury it.

Miller, who is president of the American League of Lobbyists, an organization of roughly 700 members, offered an impassioned defense of the multibillion-dollar industry, which is beset by scandal and public condemnation. His summation? Lobbyists too are honorable men.

Jack Abramoff? “Not the norm in our profession,” said Miller in testimony before the U.S. Senate’s [Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs](#). Lobbying is about access and money? “No,” insisted Miller, arguing instead that lobbying, when practiced ethically, “is as American as mom and apple pie to this country.”

Mom and apple pie? Given the circumstances, it was an audacious endorsement of the K Street tribe and, curiously, not one made by a lobbying titan like Tom Boggs, who is an adviser to the group.

Instead the job fell to Miller, a 36-year-old Racine, Wis., native who heads government affairs for the Independent Office Products and Furniture Dealers Association. When asked why the committee chose Miller to testify, a staffer replied, “We wanted someone who represented the lobbying community,” before noting that others were invited to appear but declined.

It was a telling caveat. In its 27-year history the league has never really assumed a prominent role in the lobbying community. Some might argue that, despite Miller’s appearance, it is not even representative of the lobbying world. Its 700 members are a pittance when compared with the more than 32,000 registered lobbyists who roam the nation’s capital. More to the point, many of Washington’s top-shelf lobbying firms haven’t bothered to join the league.

“I’m not a member and never have been a member,” says Joel Jankowsky, a 62-year-old

lobbyist with Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld. He declined to elaborate on why. And Jack Quinn, president of Cassidy & Associates and one of the most prominent lobbyists on the league's board, wouldn't talk about his association with the group.

Miller says he's heard the complaints: The league doesn't have enough members, and the membership is too young and lacks gravitas. "I'm pretty happy with the participation level," he says.

Of course, lobbyists by nature are not pack animals. But with the industry facing a growing crisis, the lack of voices to defend lobbying as an institution has been noteworthy. A handful of individuals, such as R. Bruce Josten at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and John Engler, the head of the National Association of Manufacturers, have tried to convince a skeptical public that lobbying is a good thing.

But it's fallen on Miller, as the head of the sole lobbying association in town, to carry the standard into battle. The current controversy represents a chance for him to soar or fall. If he can demonstrate the necessary political deftness to thwart sweeping reforms that many believe would cripple the industry, he'll be a hero. If not, the widely held image of him and the league as inconsequential will be confirmed.

"Paul is a very nice guy and I have a lot of respect for Paul, but Paul is no heavyweight around town," says an observer of the lobbying environment. "And there are people who have standing and credibility [such as Tom Boggs and J.D. Williams], and those people ought to be mobilized on behalf of a set of reform proposals that represent the real interests of the lobbying profession."

Another problem for Miller is that he practices some of the tactics many now want to outlaw or curtail. He has, like most lobbyists, sometimes used political donations to curry favor with lawmakers. For example, in 2002, 2003, and 2005 he gave money to Rep. Nydia Velazquez (N.Y.), the ranking Democratic member of the House Small Business Committee, who in turn spoke before Miller's furniture group in early 2004. Velazquez has been a frequent critic of projects that Miller opposes, notably the Federal Prison Industries, which employs federal inmates to manufacture office furniture and other goods. She has argued that while the program may have good intentions to rehabilitate prisoners, it now has a monopoly on federal contracts, thereby hurting small businesses.

## **COVERING THE BASES**

If Miller does ultimately fail to head off legislation K Street opposes, it won't be because of a lack of effort. He energetically made the media rounds after the Abramoff scandal broke. He is advocating a strengthening of current congressional rules, not wholesale reform. The league is also spearheading a Lobbying Certification Program with [George Mason University's New Century College](#) and has sponsored a voluntary code of ethics that its members can sign. Additionally, Miller says membership has increased by about 150 since last year.

Miller says he also met with staffers from the offices of Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Rep. David Dreier (R-Calif.) in January about potential lobbying reform. It's unclear, however, whom else the group has sat down with. A staffer for Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), who introduced lobbying legislation several weeks ago, says his office has yet to meet with Miller.

"In most cases we are the only ones out there," says Miller. "We have had a history of being silent on many issues, but we are the only ones representing the lobbying community. You have the [U.S.] Chamber out there saying things . . . there are a bunch of groups out there, but people are looking for us to take the lead."

But in taking the lead, Miller does not seem to have rallied many allies to his cause, at least according to Josten, executive vice president of government affairs for the chamber.

"I don't know Paul Miller," says Josten. "He mentioned [in news articles] that he's going to contact us, but I haven't heard from him."

Some lobbyists say the league's true function is mainly to draw a fine line between ethical lobbying and the now-fixed image of fedoras and federal courthouses.

"As a group, it can have an educational advantage, but any political clout, you can forget about it," says former AFL-CIO lobbyist Robert McGlotten, who once served as the league's president. "It's a group of lobbyists who represent lobbying as such, but it's the members that police themselves. Anything they do . . . it's going to be very difficult to feather their own nests. They [the league] are limited. As lobbyists, they come together because of the profession."

Founded in 1979, the league was originally designed primarily as a networking vehicle for lobbyists, and it continues to serve that function today. It was only in the mid-1990s, when Congress passed the Lobbying Disclosure Act, that the group became politically active. And the league was largely unsuccessful in affecting that legislation, concedes former President Elaine Acevedo, who presided over the group when the LDA was passed.

"We were not able to make that case adequately, in my view," recalls Acevedo. "We held talks with some of the groups that represented other government lobbyists, but it just got to be every constituency group for itself. I don't think that any one group can speak for lobbyists. The league will do a good job pointing out the problems in not regulating all lobbyists the same. But short of that, they can't advocate one solution."

Some in the industry have taken issue with the lack of "grayhairs" at the league, which is composed primarily of young "worker bees," as Miller puts it.

Still, Miller argues that despite that youth, there is a fair amount of experience at the league, citing as examples the involvement of its legal counsel, Jerris Leonard of The Leonard Group, as well as that of Dick Kimberly of Kimberly Consulting and former

Rep. Robert Walker (R-Pa.) of Wexler & Walker Public Policy Associates. But even Walker says the group could afford to have more senior people on board.

“I think they could [become a stronger voice defending the lobbying industry] under the right circumstances,” says Walker, a former board member who has spoken to Miller about lobby reform. “Until recently, it has not been an organization most lobbyists are familiar with, despite efforts to have a broader representation.”

But while the league’s lack of grayhairs has been a point of contention for some, others say it may be a plus.

“If Paul and other current leaders do a good job in this current environment, there will be an attraction to the league that you won’t need the grayhairs [to defend the profession],” says William Althen, the group’s former general counsel.

Whether Miller can use this moment to transform the league, and himself, into a true political powerhouse remains an open question. But for the moment, it is one of Washington’s odd ironies that a profession that makes its living lobbying for others has no one to make the case for itself.