

ICH BIN EIN LOBBYIST



“Lobbyists are in many cases expert technicians and capable of explaining complex and difficult subjects in a clear, understandable fashion. They engage in personal discussions with members of Congress in which they can explain in detail the reasons for positions they advocate”; **Senator John F. Kennedy in the New York Times, 1956.**

I have just had the pleasure of reading an article from John F. Kennedy in the New York Times, 19 February 1956; *“To Keep the Lobbyist Within Bounds”*. Kennedy looks at the inadequacy of the governing lobbyist legislation that had apparently first been federally adopted in **1946**. I found this fascinating as it’s only been in the **last decade** in Australia that there has been any form of lobbyist legislation, or indeed a registrar of lobbyists in each jurisdiction. Sixty years later!

In an article penned when Malcolm Turnbull was in nappies and before the birth of either Tony Abbott or Julia Gillard, JFK spoke of what he called the “new lobby”; what he defined as being lobbying driven by “constructive political, technical and communication skills coming to the fore, rather than the old style of what was essentially corruption”.

Decades later this sentiment has great contemporary Australian relevance. We are bombarded with criticisms of the “swamp (and the need to drain it)”; of “insiders” v “outsiders” and of the distaste the electorate has developed for our polity.

There are many ingredients to effective lobbying, but none more important than trust, integrity and transparency. Indeed the best way to get a good reception from a minister is not through dark-side conduct, but rather because they know what you have to say, no matter how persuasively framed, is built on truthful foundations and that what you are likely to propose is something within the bounds of plausibility and political reality. Indeed briefings from “outsiders” that haven’t got “trust-runs” on the board and lack such grounded reality and framing have the potential to offer problems, not solutions.

I will leave the last words to JFK, again from the Grey Lady:

“Competent lobbyists can present the most persuasive arguments in support of their positions. Indeed there is no more effective manner of learning all important arguments and facts on a controversial issue than to have the opposing lobbyists present their cases.”

Amen to that Mr President.

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