

Lobbyists: Of mercenaries and saints, private versus public interests

by Greg Porter
Features Editor

Lobbyists comprise a segment of the political spectrum for which the press has traditionally suffered a blindspot. Private interest lobbyists are paid politicians, mercenaries, who politick not for exposure of glory, but for legislative results and monetary compensation—in that order. These wraiths float through the legislative corridors daily, playing politics as a profession, dealing the massive influence of private corporations and interest groups from 9 to 5, never to suffer a flashbulb or an interview. Traditionally theirs has been a presence of great impact and of little exposure, for they deal from strength, from political power—which is best sequestered from the public eye.

Yet the Nader era of public interest has modified the once-unshakeable axiom of behind-the-scenes lobbying. The public interest lobbyists have descended on legislatures in every state in small numbers but with great fanfare. While the traditional private interest lobbyist adroitly avoids the press, the public interest lobbyist seeks the press with religious fervor. Projecting the image of St. George rescuing the modern damsel in distress—the lady in the supermarket, the man on the street, the consumer—the public interest lobbyist wields press exposure as his greatest weapon.

Thus the public interest lobbyist is a new animal in the political arena. Of the more than 300 lobbyists registered at the

N.C. Legislature, only six are public interest lobbyists. One of those six legislative crusaders for the young but much heralded consumer movement (and possibly the legislative lobbyist in the state with the most press exposure), is Lillian Woo, the head of her own N.C. Consumer Center and a former assistant to the Attorney General for consumer affairs. Woo has gained notoriety in North Carolina as a vociferous consumer advocate and an outspoken member of the Milk Commission.

my third session to build a kind of credibility with the men in this building."

Private interest lobbyists in the legislature are paid handsomely and can easily identify for legislators the people and the dollars they represent. Lillian Woo, like most public interest lobbyists, can boast neither of these advantages. Thus, her motivation is often questioned. That challenge to the legitimacy of her representation of the people elicits from Woo a rare

interest lobby.

"In the two hundred years of American history, we have gone from the town meeting which was basically a democratic process to one in which the person, the individual citizen, has very little voice if any, anywhere, in the market, at city hall, in the courts," she said. Woo, a graduate of Vassar and Columbia graduate school, clenched the reins of a black pocketbook in one hand, a handkerchief in the other.

"This loss of voice in government has been partially by default because people have not participated fully. They have all been very busy earning their own livings, minding their own business. Meanwhile, where the decisions are being made, those professed interests have been there full-time, very vigilantly, very expertly manipulating the system for their own advantage... In an extended fashion, the consumer movement is an attempt to revitalize citizen concern and participation in that process."

Woo clenched tighter on the handkerchief.

"There is this need because basically you've got large government, large labor, large industry that worked to the exclusion of the individual citizen who feels helpless in this enormous universe where there are giants of all kinds and descriptions."

Whatever the differences between public and private interest lobbyists, Woo is a consummate politician in the vein of the traditional private interest lobbyist. Asked four times in different fashion whether the profit margin which utility companies enjoy is fair, Woo hedged, digressing to the subject of utility rate increases, avoiding profit margins altogether. Apparently Woo thinks rate increases can be dealt with while established profit margins are untouchable. Lillian Woo, who brims over with idealism in her justification for consumer lobby, knows that left-wing ideals are useless in the halls of the North Carolina legislature. She has learned when to play idealism for press exposure and to sacrifice it for practical legislative concerns. Lillian Woo is indeed a lobbyist.

America has gone from the town meeting, basically a democratic process, to one in which the individual citizen has very little voice, if any, anywhere...

Although Woo's term on the Milk Commission has expired, she continues her forays into state government as a full-time proponent of what she considers the people's interest.

"In the past, only private interests have been represented here," said Mrs. Woo as she waited to testify before a House committee. "It used to be nobody ever heard of a public interest lobbyist. What fool was going to come down here totally unpaid or on a very small salary to lobby on behalf of the public? Very few. So its taken us a few years — this is

emotional response—a response that stands out among her other more calculated replies.

"Nobody, as far as I know, in this movement has gained personally from it. One's motives are always suspect as many cynical people are apt to think: 'Why does anybody do this (lobby) for the principle or ideal of it?' I can only reply by saying if I decided to save all the wildflowers of North Carolina, or if I was going to save all the stray cats and dogs, no one would question what kinds of motives we had. But because we are dealing with human suffering, deprivation and we're trying to improve that lot, all of a sudden people say 'why are you doing it?'. That is a sad commentary on society today. Nobody can imagine that anybody can do anything for principle's sake."

Woo, a thin woman in a staid blue-plaid business suit, stood amidst a milling crowd in the lobby, orchestrating a protest against the food tax and preparing for her committee testimony. She was more definitive and calculated in her justification of public

Try the

town hall deli

★ 11 a.m.—12 midnight ★

*Our sandwiches are thicker
'cause we use more meat!*

Look for
daily
specials

The prices are low,
and the air conditioning works!

GOOD NEWS FROM THE UNION:

The Carolina Union hours have been extended for first session:

Sunday 12:00 noon-11:00 p.m.
Saturday 10:00 a.m.-11:00 p.m.
Weekdays 7:30 a.m.-11:00 p.m.

Union management greatly appreciates the cooperation of Student Government that has provided opinion input for this experimental revision of hours.

SPECIAL SUMMER BOWLING RATES
55¢ per game

or
\$1.75 per hour per lane (1 hour minimum)*

*limit 5 per lane

Need a summer home??

Chateau Apartments has short term leases available.

Chateau Apartments feature:

- one bedroom units
- two tennis courts
- two swimming pools
- ample parking
- basketball court
- two laundromats
- water included
- natural setting

Drop by and look us over!

Chateau Apartments

54 By-Pass/Weaver Road/Carrboro
929-7126

Classifieds

1972 Yamaha 100cc Street bike. 10,000 miles. New chain and drive sprockets. Runs great. \$275. Call 929-6903 anytime.

SILVA MIND CONTROL — FREE SEMINAR JUNE 11th, 8:00 p.m., Wednesday, Rm 217 Student Union.

Wanted: female roommate. June-Aug. 14, University Gardens. Close to campus, on bus route. Pool. Rent \$50-60/mo. Negotiable. Call 929-6429.

NEED RIDER to Vermont, Conn., N.H. area. Leaving June 20 or 21 for Norwich U. Russian School, Northfield, Vt. Call Melinda at 929-9816.

Room for rent: room for rent to male graduate student in quiet house adjoining campus. Phone 942-3680.

Buying?
Selling?

The Tar Heel is distributed throughout Chapel Hill each week and it can effectively meet your marketing needs. Come by the office in the Union building to place a classified ad in next week's edition.