

*Steve Silver:* This is an interview with Richard Cook for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project.

*Richard Cook:* Bryce, as successful a lobbyist as he was, probably missed his calling. He was a wonderful actor, grammarian and writer, and spoke eloquently at all times, even when he was relaxed. He spoke not only in words but in gestures. His hands were those of an actor gesticulating in concert with his eyes. So to be sitting down with Bryce, having a conversation about just about anything, he was always on stage. And probably that was one of the reasons he was so successful. One could also call him a born salesman, and he didn't have to use many words either. Bryce was a master of the English language. Where he got that kind of training I'll never know, but in Oklahoma, obviously.

Bryce was also really truly a man of the House of Representatives. Yes, he knew how to handle the Senate, as well, but that wasn't his place. He was comfortable – as many are, including me – much more comfortable in the House for a variety of reasons.

*Steve Silver:* Yes, I was going to ask why you think that is, because I have heard that from other people as well.

*Richard Cook:* Number one, he spent more years there. Many of his formative years were on the House Armed Services Committee. Even before that he was a librarian, right?

*Steve Silver:* Yes.

*Richard Cook:* Was that part of the House Armed Services? I don't know; I never asked him. But he had some obscure job in the House library.

And from there went with Chairman Vinson?

*Steve Silver:* Yes.

*Richard Cook:* He spent how many years there?

*Steve Silver:* Several. I know he started by writing his Master's thesis on Ways and Means.

*Richard Cook:* That's interesting. I didn't recall that.

*Steve Silver:* That's how he actually came to Washington for the very first time right out of college. He was writing a Master's thesis on Ways and Means.

*Richard Cook:* On the Ways and Means Committee?

*Steve Silver:* On the inner workings of it.

*Richard Cook:* I never knew that. I'd like to read it. Does somebody have a copy?

*Steve Silver:* I believe the foundation probably does. I can check that for you.

*Richard Cook:* There are many, many differences between the House and the Senate. And one of them is that the Senate is a club, and it's been called that by zillions of people. There's nothing unique about that, but the essence of a club is that the club protects its own members even from its nincompoops they tend to cover up.

Whereas, the House – it's not that way. If one doesn't have it in the House, they have a way of ignoring you. And before the mike came in, the place had to be gaveled down just about every two minutes for people who couldn't take command of the floor or weren't good speakers. And so Bryce was a superb speaker. He used to tell these tales about listening to the debates in the House and the great debaters and orators. So yes, he had many things in common with the House as an institution as opposed to the Senate. Although, as they say, he learned to deal with the Senate because he had to.

I think Bryce would be appalled if he ever came back today and saw what's happened in the lobby industry. I've been more or less trying to write a book and have been working with Judy Woodruff and Bob Novak for the last two or three years on what was to have been an HBO proposal to do a series on K Street on lobbying.

*Steve Silver:* Right.

*Richard Cook:* The premise of the TV series and the book was that the lobby industry today is the most powerful force in Washington; no question about it. Truly, there are close to 35,000 registered lobbyists in D.C., twice the number there were in 2000, and twenty times number when Bryce started.

Anybody who questions it just doesn't understand. And I've repeated this to several lobby friends of mine, and they look at me a little startled because they're too close to it. They really haven't stepped back and taken a look at what has happened. The lobby industry today is roughly somewhere between a twenty and thirty

billion dollar a year industry. That's not what is reported, but that's what I know is being spent when one includes all the overhead and all the rest. So you're looking at an industry at least many, many times larger than the amount being spent to run the White House and the Congress combined – where the best and the brightest are coming off the Hill at the peak of their careers and going down and joining the lobby industry.

We've always had lobbyists in Washington. And some of them have been extraordinarily powerful, and there have been many big scandals that include lobbying in our nation's history. But never, never has the lobby industry and lobbyists been the most powerful force in Washington as they are today. No question. I think it's happened, it's relatively recent, in the last fifteen or twenty years.

So if Bryce were to come back and see lobbyists going into the Ways and Means Committee room, openly delivering their draft language, he would be shocked. Have lobbyists done that in the past? Sure, on some occasions. Have they influenced the drafting of a bill? Absolutely. But is it as routine as it is today? Never before has it been routine because up to the last ten years, if any lobbyists, industry, or corporation got caught doing that – whoa, man! There'd be an explosion. Today if you're caught doing that, the newspapers don't even write the story.

*Steve Silver:*

Why do you think that is?

*Richard Cook:*

Perhaps because the stakes are so high. The *New York Times* yesterday or the day before ran a front page story declaring that the health industry today is the biggest lobby in town, now surpassing the defense industry. And it pointed out quite convincingly the reasons. The stakes are huge for the drug companies and all that. You're talking about tens of billions, hundreds of billions of dollars that are wrapped around the way a regulation or a piece of legislation is written. Corporations in America will pay anything to gain an advantage. Indeed, if their CEO is caught not paying for the best and the brightest on K Street, they can easily be questioned afterwards and say, "Why didn't you?"

Another thing that's happened that is relatively new to lobbying in D.C. – much of the lobby industry has been gobbled up by global advertising firms, Saatchi and Saatchi and WPP. As a matter of fact I think the first firm to be bought offshore was Timmons & Company, a dozen, fifteen years ago. Now you've got Cassidy and Company. I don't know how many are owned, for the most part,

by foreign – and not all of them foreign, but the biggest share of the leads are from London.

And so when one goes into a major campaign today and walks into the planning session where there might be twenty, thirty or forty people, more often than not a PR person is sitting at the top of the table, presiding. Not always, but I think that lobbying per se has never been so dominated by aspects of public relations, such as spin and, of course, expensive focus groups. You don't do anything anymore without them, and they're very expensive. And these are all aspects of K Street that has taken a huge turn in the last ten or fifteen years. So yes, I don't think Bryce would be very comfortable.

*Steve Silver:* Well, then let me – you brought up some really interesting points. Do you think Bryce ever foresaw lobbying turning into everything that you just mentioned?

*Richard Cook:* I really don't. I often saw Bryce lobby in restaurants or on the street walking key Democratic committee staffers, like Charlie Ferris. I think he was one of the first to understand the power of the staff because that's where he came from. Bryce would be appalled and overwhelmed by the sheer power of the lobby industry today. The best and the brightest on the Hill are leaving at the peak of their careers. Hardly any of them wait until they're sixty or sixty-five and retire and hang around or go home. Don Nickles, one of the best – he's lobbying. Oh, the list is long for the people who are quitting in mid-career. And there are many reasons for it.

I think that primarily among them, the partisanship on the Hill is so oppressive. It's so difficult to get anything done that they feel as though they can get more done on K Street than they can on the Hill and they can have more fun. They can exercise more power without the frustration, killing hours and travel.

*Steve Silver:* Pretty powerful guy, yes.

*Richard Cook:* I guarantee you, Don Nickles, John Breaux, Bob Livingston, and Billy Tauzin today, if you put them under oath, they'd say, "I think we can get more done on K Street than we could on the Hill, and at the same time make ten times more money."

*Steve Silver:* Interesting.

*Richard Cook:* I don't think these people are doing it only for the money. They're doing it because they're experiencing more power and having fun – same thing as being a door-to-door salesman. They can tell when the door closes if they have made a sale or not. They can tally it up. There are tangible things that you can rate yourself on and say, "I had a good day." That's not the case on the Hill. These people go months, years before they can sometimes get anything significant accomplished in legislation.

But there are so many funny stories. Have you gotten this from anybody else – that he would be appalled?

*Steve Silver:* No, I haven't actually.

*Richard Cook:* Really?

*Steve Silver:* So please give me your thoughts on that.

*Richard Cook:* Yes. Well, I'm surprised and a little disappointed that other people haven't pointed this out. But, again, I think the reason is I've been away from there, although, I come back and do an occasional lobbying job. Maybe it's because I'm not there every day; and when you're in the middle of it, these incremental changes are more difficult to see.

But the amount being spent on lobbying is a matter of black and white. It's up to three billion a year reported. I know from when I was running the Lockheed office that somewhere between seventy and eighty percent legally does not have to be reported. How much time does a CEO spend lobbying? Well, most would say, "Well, five percent, ten percent of my time, if that." Yes, but how many people on his staff – his corporate staff? How many lobby – and the ones who report very accurately are the fulltime lobbyists. I'm talking mostly because it's to their benefit to report everything that they do. They want to be seen as the top lobbyist in terms of dollars, in billings, okay? But the corporations don't want that.

I think I ought to talk to my friend Tom Cooper, but I've seen General Electric under their new CEO suddenly take a huge jump up in reported lobbying expenses. I'll wager that Jeff Immelt told somebody, "Hey, we're not counting this. We're not counting my time in our corporate jet. We're not counting the time of the people on my staff in Connecticut who are nearly totally involved in getting me prepared for testimony and for my visits to the Hill. We're not counting any of that stuff. Let's start counting it." But I

think that GE's probably one of the few, and that's to his and GE's credit.

So if you assume that I'm correct, and I know that I am because I've been there, fifteen to twenty billion dollars is a very modest estimate. Then we're talking about something much bigger in terms of spending for talent and for advocacy than is being spent at the White House and the Congress combined.

*Steve Silver:* You hit on something really interesting which is emerging as a theme to our project, so I just want to ask you to get your thoughts on this. Do you think the complexities of lobbying and the longer hours and the more beholden people are to profit margins, do you think that makes it harder for Bryce Harlows of today to exist with all the integrity that he had? Do you think it's just something specific to the way the industry has changed?

*Richard Cook:* I'm not sure. The money these people are making today – I mean, Bryce was, think about it, even in constant dollars, Bryce, his little place in Harper's Ferry which was his hideaway, even in today's dollars and even with the acreage, it's probably not worth a million dollars if that – perhaps half a million. It's right on the Potomac River; who knows? But not much. He lived very modestly in Arlington, Virginia, right?

*Steve Silver:* I believe so.

*Richard Cook:* I dare say, I don't know, but Larry would know what Bryce's net worth was when he died. I doubt whether it was much more than a million dollars. It's an intrusive question, but there are thousands of lobbyists today in Washington, even again in constant dollars, who have net worth's of ten million dollars, who are making a million dollars or more a year.

Hey, one of my best friends who always answers me when I call him is Tom Boggs. People like Tom Boggs net far more than a million a year, with fellow Louisianans Bob Livingston and Billy Tauzin not far behind. And they are probably worth it. Certainly they earn their fees every bit as much as most of these CEOs who check in for ten million a year.

*Steve Silver:* Right.

*Richard Cook:* Then along came Abramoff and Scanlon. They were billing what? Six million a year; I forget what the figure is. It was huge. When that story hit, it barely made the front page. As a matter of fact, if

it weren't for the *Washington Post* and the *National Journal*, it was largely ignored. Thirty years ago, Bobby Baker wasn't even in that league in terms of money, and it was a huge scandal. I mean you couldn't keep it off the front page. It had a life of its own.

But the difference now is the numbers. A month after the invasion of Iraq, we were over there lobbying for business. Lobbying, not in Iraq, but going over there and coming back and lobbying for a big dollar, Halliburton and Company. And I'm a Republican and a friend, not a close friend, of Dick Cheney. Halliburton and Company would've lost money last year had it not been for their contracts in Iraq. That's hardly a front page story. But a hell of a lot of lobbying probably went into that.

*Steve Silver:* I'm sure.

*Richard Cook:* I mean World War I, World War II – that would've been profiteering. I think the town has gotten very hardened to this industry, and it sort of looks the other way and says, "So what, everybody does it." That would shock Bryce. That really would because he would say, "Hey, if everybody does it, I'm out of here because I'm not gonna do it."

*Steve Silver:* Do you think the amount of money that's at stake now makes the media more apt to be critical of the industry?

*Richard Cook:* I think the media is largely absent - AWOL. Hardly, I mean, the *Washington Post* has only one reporter, Jeffrey Birnbaum, totally devoted as a columnist every two weeks to the lobbying industry.

*Steve Silver:* Uh-huh.

*Richard Cook:* It's the biggest industry in Washington. And the *Post*, sitting on this huge industry, doesn't even have a single, fulltime reporter assigned to lobbying. I don't even think the term "lobbyist" has a negative connotation anymore.

I see more and more kids coming out of school – when I was trying to pedal this book, I gave some lectures to high school students down here in Ft. Myers, Canterbury School, and all that – real top kids all on their way up. And I gave them essentially what I've been telling you. I said, "Do you think if there's a book or HBO series on lobbying, do you think you'd be interested in watching it?" All the hands shot up. And I think that with kids going into college or in college, I think they'd love to come out and be a

lobbyist because it's interesting, and there is the possibility of huge rewards.

So I don't think lobbying has gotten a negative connotation by the press, by some writers. I think it's largely ignored because I just don't think there are very many people, particularly press people, who have the time and the patience it takes to sort it out and figure out what's going on.

*Steve Silver:* What was it like back in Bryce Harlow's time, though, with the press coverage of lobbying?

*Richard Cook:* Well, it was very negative and Herb Block pictured the cartoons of fat lobbyists with big cigars and the typical – I don't think lobbyists look that way anymore. I'm seventy-three years old, and I first came to Washington in '51 or so. And the lobbyists did sort of look like how Herb Block drew them to be – sort of big and fat with a lot of money, a lot of cash in those days. And it was sort of out in the open. Everybody knew it was there. I think the lobby profession was held in more disrepute twenty, thirty, or forty years ago than it is today, and the press was all over it all the time.

But that's probably a minority opinion. I don't think you're hearing that from other people you're interviewing, are you?

*Steve Silver:* Not so much. But we have a lot of lobbyists still yet to interview.

*Richard Cook:* Well, it's very difficult to get lobbyists to go on the record – even those who are retired.

*Steve Silver:* Uh-uh.

*Richard Cook:* Even for a project like this, I don't think you're going to hear lobbyists talking, but many of the older ones are sickened by what they see. I think it's very difficult to get many of the best ones to speak very candidly about what's happening in lobbying.

*Steve Silver:* Could you tell us some of the things that you worked with Bryce Harlow on?

*Richard Cook:* You know Bryce is Republican, and I'm a Republican. And Bryce worked for Republican presidents. I don't know what Bryce's real partisan feelings were. Bryce sort of was for hire by whatever Republican president he worked for and his role in life was to get the legislation through. He was a "hired gun" and proud of it.

He worked for moderate Republicans in Eisenhower and Nixon. So in both cases, with the exception of two years, he had a Democratic Congress to work with. So Bryce had to make deals, as I did, working for him. Actually he didn't hire me. Bill Timmons hired me. But Bryce was the guy in charge, and we'd work on things like the Philadelphia Plan. Tom Wicker wrote a book, by the way. That's another source you might want. Wicker wrote a fairly complimentary biography of Nixon, which is very rare. It said that Nixon was more successful than most people give him credit for being, particularly on domestic programs. That's true. Revenue sharing, welfare reform – I mean, he had Pat Moynihan as his domestic advisor.

We swerved back and forth from liberal to conservative so frequently with Nixon that I don't – looking back on it, I'm not sure where Bryce's personal political instincts were, nor mine. We were just trying to get legislation passed that came to us.

I caught Bryce really chewing out Chuck Colson in his office one day. Colson had taken it on his own to do something with the Postmaster General; I forget what it was. I knew that he was gaining a great deal of influence with Nixon. And Harlow – this was his last day in the White House. I was over there talking to him on a Saturday afternoon, and I said, because Colson was under Bryce's control, "When you leave here, Bryce, who's going to control Colson?" And he looked at me with those funny little mirthful eyes of his as if to say, "You've asked a nasty little question, and you don't think I'm going to answer it, do you?" The answer was, nobody controlled Colson after Bryce left. And within a month or two, Colson went to having one person working for him, to nearly thirty.

And that was another story I wanted to tell you. Bryce had so many of his corporate lobbyist friends who didn't know anybody else in the White House. So when Bryce went back in with Nixon, they called him all the time.

I remember him coming into his office late at night, slapping on a tuxedo to go to some dinner. I don't know where he found the stamina to do all this. He would have at least twenty-five or thirty or forty of these pink telephone slips. He didn't know what to do. He just didn't have the hours in the day to return all these calls, but he tried. And from that frustration came the Office of the Public Liaison. That more or less was one of the creations of Harlow. All great people make errors, they don't make small ones. Most

people would disagree with me, but in my opinion, the Office of Public Liaison was a horrendous mistake.

*Steve Silver:* Why do you think that is?

*Richard Cook:* Because it's brought so many problems directly into the Executive Office of the President. Many of them didn't belong there. They belonged back in the agencies and departments, and it just cluttered down with legions of lobbyists. When there's a briefing in the White House for the last twenty or thirty years, you go into the auditorium with three hundred, four hundred seats in it and get briefed and write home to your boss that, "I just had a meeting at the White House today. Blah, blah, blah; and found this out and found that out."

The Office of Public Liaison is a convenience for the Washington lobbying community. And the real solid lobbyists don't bother with it much. They know their way around. They know how to get in places where there's far more influence than somebody straight out of college working in the Office of Public Liaison. No, I don't think it was one of Bryce's better shots to institutionalize it in the Executive Office of the President, that's all I'm saying. One must have to maintain those relationships, but it didn't have to be in the White House proper or in the EOB. That's my opinion, and I think it, again, would be a minority opinion.

The other thing that Bryce originated was the Business Roundtable. In my days in Washington until very recently, I worked for five CEOs at Lockheed, and only one of them was really good on the Hill. That's about the average. And Bryce, knowing this – he was trying to deal with that problem. He was trying to get the corporate front office more aware and more involved in Washington. That's understandable, and I support that, having worked there in sort of the same position as Bryce did for twenty-five years. Until very recently, I don't think that the Business Roundtable's been very influential. I don't think it's been a big force, and I think Bryce would've been disappointed with his baby, but maybe not.

*[BREAK IN THE AUDIO]*

*Steve Silver:* You mentioned the partisanship before and about how Bryce worked so well with Democrats. Do you think there were a lot of partisan Republicans who wished he had been more partisan?

- Richard Cook:* Oh, undoubtedly. But Bryce was so quick with the wit and the word that he could handle that. He just figured that went with the territory, working for a moderate Republican like Nixon. “The president’s my boss, and I’m doing what he wants me to do.” He’d find some way, though, getting back to that conservative Republican and charming him.
- If Larry or some of the others can get some of his writings, though, I mean he was a master writer and grammarian. I don’t know how much of his writing exists. He probably didn’t write very much that they saved.
- Steve Silver:* We’ve got some of what he wrote, but not nearly enough probably.
- Richard Cook:* Uh-huh. You can see it then if you’ve read it.
- Steve Silver:* Yes. Yes we have. Do you think the level of political instinct that he had, just sort of instinctively knowing how issues were going to play on the Hill – do you think that’s something that can really be taught or is that something that just has to come from who he was?
- Richard Cook:* Well, he had a unique education; I mean, the time he spent before he got the top jobs. I don’t know that too many people have that kind of a background when they get up to the White House level. He was fairly young. He wasn’t in charge of lobbying for Eisenhower. General Parsons was, right?
- Steve Silver:* Uh-huh.
- Richard Cook:* But he must have been near the top?
- Steve Silver:* Eventually I think he transitioned into that role.
- Richard Cook:* Yes.
- Yes, I think that – but when Bryce was tooling around at the White House and then after Eisenhower, he went into Procter & Gamble, is that it?
- Steve Silver:* Yes.
- Richard Cook:* For, that would be for what?
- Steve Silver:* For most of the 60’s, and then he came back into the Nixon White House.

- Richard Cook:* Yes. I didn't know him then. I knew of him – in the 60's. Have you spoken to Mel Laird?
- Steve Silver:* We did, actually, last week.
- Richard Cook:* He was a pragmatic politician as well. He's not as conservative as a lot of people think. I bet he had some interesting things to say.
- Steve Silver:* He had some great insights to share. What do you think are some of the more important lessons that Bryce taught that people should learn, either lobbyists today or in the future?
- Richard Cook:* Well, Bryce had a unique talent in addition to his mechanics of the things that I've mentioned. He knew how to listen. That's a very rare commodity. Have you ever been to a fundraiser?
- Steve Silver:* Oh, yeah.
- Richard Cook:* You can't hear. Everybody's talking.
- Steve Silver:* Yep.
- Richard Cook:* And it's really funny because it's in a way like the House of Representatives gets. Everybody's talking and nobody's listening. And I think that Bryce knew how to listen, and that was one of his huge talents. And listening to somebody else even when they don't agree with you is a flattering thing. And Bryce knew how to flatter people by listening very carefully to what they said. And if they were important or if what they said was important, that person knew that they were getting through to the policy makers. And so they treated Bryce with a great deal of respect and spent a lot of time figuring out how best to influence him.
- Bryce was being lobbied every bit as much as he was lobbying them. I think if he had something to impart to anybody today, he'd say, "Well, for God's sake, open your ears, listen, and don't talk so much."
- Steve Silver:* Interesting. Do you think there is just sort of an overall lack of respect for doing what Bryce did nowadays? Do you think that's a problem?
- Richard Cook:* Yes, and you sort of implied by your other question or two that lobbyists are held in low regard.
- Steve Silver:* Uh-huh.

*Richard Cook:* I don't think that's true. I was in a huge lobby fight four or five years ago for PanAmSat and satellite reform against my former company, Lockheed. And the impression I got is not only are they well rewarded, but lobbyists are happy doing what they're doing, and many of them are really good.

Lobbying has become highly specialized. I think the most powerful agency by far in Washington today is the FCC. And the most powerful lobbyists in Washington are the ones who work around the FCC. The subjects that they deal with are so complex they'd make your hair hurt. That's one of the main reasons the press doesn't cover them. Similarly, the press covers the Senate much more than it does the House. Why? Because the Senate's easier to figure out. The House and its rules are very complex.

So I think that lobbying is the place to be today. And if one of my sons were to say, "I'm thinking about going into it," I'd urge him to go into it because not only are rewards there, the power's there, and the fun is there. So I think that lobbying today is at a peak in terms of its power. There will always be that suspicion that you've got to watch this guy or that person. But I don't think the lobby profession needs any help from the outside to say it's better than it really looks like. Are there many lobbyists out there who take shortcuts? Absolutely. I think more than ever before. Again, because the temptations are so great. But sooner or later, without sounding Pollyannaish, I think that over the long pull, the really good ones will dominate. People will know who they are, and they will gravitate to them and want to work with them.

*Steve Silver:* As sort of a final thought, what are some of the more important lessons that you, yourself, learned from working with Bryce and knowing Bryce to be a better lobbyist or just to be more effective in Washington in general? What did you take away from Bryce most of all?

*Richard Cook:* Well, number one, Bryce always had a good time, no matter how hard he was working. And it was always the contest he enjoyed being a part of, and he wanted to win, but not at any cost. He knew how to lose but didn't want to lose. It was the joy of participating and being in a closely fought contest. Bryce wasn't really one of my mentors, although he was a role model. Timmons was more of that because Bryce was not there that long after I went in there. Bryce enjoyed the contest and the joy of competing, and I think that's probably the biggest gift I got from Bryce. We were in a game – I think a very serious game – trying to get policy through

with Congress – but enjoying the characters and circumstances we were dealing with.

He could tell wonderful stories about congressmen, and how he found out all these interesting little highly personal things, probably by listening. But he found them out. People would tell him these stories. And so he painted a picture on every major effort that we had that made it so much more interesting, too. I can't think of a time that I didn't want to go to work nor did I want to go home.

I spent many, many hours down in Harper's Ferry with him when he was dying, and he was entertaining even then.

*Steve Silver:*

Dick Cook, just wanted to thank you again for talking to me.

*[End of Audio]*