

- Steve Silver:* We are talking with Ms. Anne Wexler for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Thank you again for talking to us for the project about Bryce.
- Anne Wexler:* Pleasure.
- Steve Silver:* Let's start by having you tell us some of your impressions of Bryce Harlow the few times that you did meet him.
- Anne Wexler:* Well we only met very informally, so shake hands and so forth and of course I know who he was, but I don't really – he's just a charming lovely guy. But I didn't know him really so it's hard to--
- Steve Silver:* Sure. Could you talk about sort of what you think he means to the field of lobbying today?
- Anne Wexler:* Well I think Bryce set the standard for basically two things. One is quality and the other is integrity. And I think no one has ever quite measured the insistent standards that Bryce set. And I think he set a fine example for lobbyists in the future, which has been embodied in the Bryce Harlow award.
- Steve Silver:* Could you talk a little bit about how the field of lobbying has changed from when Bryce first started doing it in the early sixties?
- Anne Wexler:* It's completely changed. It's changed essentially in two ways. One, it's gotten gigantic; enormous and in some ways. It's fractured. There's a lot more specialists lobbying than there used to be. Tax lobbyists, health lobbyists, people who just do one issue; lobbyists and the entire field of lobbying has been transformed by the insistent demands of fundraising, which has really changed the whole picture, not always for the better, I might add.
- Steve Silver:* Bryce Harlow was known for having good working relationships with Democrats and across party lines. My question is do you think that the lobbying profession has become as polarized as the rest of Washington?
- Anne Wexler:* No.
- Steve Silver:* No?
- Anne Wexler:* For the most part, most lobbying firms are bipartisan. Secondly, most lobbying firms in the great Bryce Harlow tradition are made up of people with prior government experience, either on Capitol

Hill or in the administration who have relationships. And if the issue is of a concern to a Member, it's really not that important whether that Member is talking to a Republican or Democrat because it's the issues that they really need to educate themselves about and learn about and vote on. So for the most part if you're talking to a congressman who has a constituent in his district who has an issue it doesn't matter if the lobbyist is representing him as a Democrat or a Republican.

I think that there's probably more emphasis because of the pressure from the Republican leadership to hire Republicans, which I think is immoral, than there ever has been before. We're in an atmosphere now that, I think, in terms of the lobbying profession, where lobbyist have to work very hard to maintain their integrity, their honesty, the quality of the work that they do; their familiarity with the issues and the temptation as we've seen in some of the scandals that are presently exist for corruption, which I think is rampant in this town. So, that's the honest answer. Bryce Harlow would be rolling in his grave if he could view some of the stuff that goes on in this town today.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think that the press is more apt to cover those lobbyists that are involved in controversy rather than the good guys, so to speak?

*Anne Wexler:* The trade press does a good job. Influence does a good job. Roll Call and The Hill does a good job. Jeff Birnbaum, who writes a column every Monday in the Washington Post about lobbying, does a good job. So if there's a story about a corrupt person, especially one who is as blatantly corrupt as present Abramoff scandal, it's going to be covered in the press. But in general I think the most important thing that lobbyists can do in terms of their relationships with the press is sort of educate them about what they do. I mean, when practiced in the great tradition of Bryce Harlow, it is a really important profession.

*Steve Silver:* How is Bryce Harlow seen today in the lobbying community? Do the younger lobbyists know who he is?

*Anne Wexler:* They haven't got a clue.

*Steve Silver:* Really?

*Anne Wexler:* No. They have no idea. I mean if you ask the young people in this firm who Bryce Harlow is they'd look at you; they have no idea.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think the longer hours – I guess you kind of hinted at this before, the greater complexities of the job, do you think that makes it difficult for the Bryce Harlows to function with the integrity or not? Do you think that's just---

*Anne Wexler:* No, I don't. The only thing that is important to the reputation of the lobbyists is their ability to essentially express when they're an advocate what their point of view as an advocate with as much expertise as they can possibly command and to find people who can expand that if they can't do it. But never trim; never exaggerate; never do anything that isn't totally factual in terms of the people that they're dealing with, because that's the way you develop relationships and trust. And a good part – I mean Bryce had strong relationships. It was a totally different era.

When I started – even when I started in this business 25 years ago – your relationships were both the administration. The executive branch and the Hill were based essentially on public policy issues. Then, the reason that you had these relationships, whether it was Democrat or Republican – it didn't matter – was on, essentially, a mutual discussion on a policy question, which was important to people on the other side of the desk because they either had to regulate it, or vote on it, or develop it as policy. Today there's another layer in there, which is called money, which makes it a lot harder because we constantly find ourselves in situations where often if you call a Member's office and ask for an appointment for a client the response often comes back by the way you haven't given a contribution to my boss.

*Steve Silver:* Really?

*Anne Wexler:* Oh yeah, it happens all the time.

So it's a different world than it used to be in terms of the kinds of stuff that I think Bryce would have found a part of his everyday existence. But, on the other hand, working the public policy field and working on policy issues is still always changing and always interesting.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think is it less close-knit by virtue of the size of the profession than it was back then?

*Anne Wexler:* Yeah, it's not close-knit at all.

*Steve Silver:* People don't know each other as much as they used to?

*Anne Wexler:* No.

*Steve Silver:* Yeah. As turning to the final thought, what do you think are some of the most important lessons that young lobbyists, as you said might not know about Bryce Harlow, that we can learn?

*Anne Wexler:* Well as I said, I think the most important lesson is essentially do your homework, know the issues on both sides, understand that having civil relationships – which is a cornerstone of what Bryce Harlow was like – having civil relationships is very important, understanding where your adversary today may be your ally tomorrow. I said before, probably the two most important qualities – one is integrity. People trust you, understand you. Having a relationship that's based on mutual respect on the one hand and on the other hand the quality that goes along with your ability to work with the other side of the desk is really what counts. It's hard to sort of run through a laundry list, but you know, as I said, I think the most important things are understanding the issues well enough to articulate them properly and having – oh, and the other thing I think Bryce Harlow taught a lot of people, even if they didn't know him directly, was the importance of working with staff so that the people that you're relating to were not only members of Congress or senators, but people who work with them.

*Steve Silver:* Work for them as well. Anne Wexler thanks a lot for talking to us. Appreciate it.

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