



## **SHORELINES – April 2010**

### **Lobbying for an Interview**

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Whether we like to admit it or not, some sort of federal policy affects just about everything we do – regardless if you're the hardest of core beach enthusiast, coastal manager, or somewhere in between. There's the constant battle for scant appropriation dollars, resource and habitat conservation issues, environmental mandates, permitting considerations, management of federal lands, flood insurance, endangered species, energy exploration and production, ocean observations, and the list can go on and on.

For almost the past 10 years, the County (mostly via the Beach Commission) has retained the services of Marlowe & Co., a governmental affairs consultant based in Washington, D.C., to represent us in our efforts to secure millions of dollars for dredging and beach nourishment and to advance coastal policies that make the most sense for residents and visitors of the County's beaches and waterways. Most federal policy makers are located in the Nation's Capitol and having a presence in D.C. has proved invaluable in communicating with these individuals, regardless if they work for a government agency, serve as Congressional staff, or are a card-carrying member of the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives.

Also in case you haven't guessed by now, the term "governmental affairs consultant" is essentially a euphemism for the word lobbyist. And while it's no secret that lobbyists have received a lot of criticism lately, they do have an important and useful function in American politics if done ethically. So to gain a perspective of the good, the bad, and the ugly about the word and the profession of a lobbyist, we interviewed Howard Marlowe this month – president and founder of Marlowe & Co. Howard worked on the Hill for over a decade preceding the formation of Marlowe of Co. in 1984. His experience covers almost four decades, and he has unique insight to the inner workings of D.C.

***Shore Protection Office (SPO):*** *So what exactly does a lobbyist do?*

***Howard Marlowe (HM):*** Well one (1), we help our clients prioritize their interests in terms of what they want from Congress, and two (2) we help articulate our clients' needs into the right words and context so they are understood by members of Congress. The next step at least for our firm, because we have so many municipal clients, is to support and maximize their visit to D.C. We also use our network, relationships, and our understanding of Congress, appropriation staff, and other legislative staff to achieve our clients' goals. Of course we also work closely with federal agency staff – sometimes that proves to be even a more difficult task because they aren't elected and it takes more to cut through the red tape.

***SPO:*** *Fair enough – so why has the profession received negative criticism lately?*

***HM:*** We had Jack Aramoff, who gained National attention and is in jail. However, many of those illegal things involved members of Congress, and there are more members of Congress in jail than lobbyists. Golf course memberships, plane rides, etc. were symbolisms of those circumstances and the President in addition to other members of Congress have been using that to score political points. The things I always believe lobbyists need to do is to weed out the bad apples, perhaps by insisting that existing lobbying registration rules are enforced. Basically when I walk into Congress, no one knows whether I'm a lobbyist or not – we've lost 2,000 registrations last year. Most of these

registrations are simply folks who have given up their registration and are doing the same thing anyhow, but now they don't have to follow the same rules (or no one knows if they are following the rules). Regardless, the ethics issue for lobbyists, Congress, and staff is incredibly important – we take it seriously.

It would also be beneficial to limit the amount of monetary contributions – I can't buy a Congressional staffer a can soda, but if I pay a couple hundred or thousands dollars; I can see that same staff member at a fundraising event. If I coordinate that fundraiser, then my access to that Congressperson will likely be better. However, that really doesn't get the media attention – the other stuff does.

**SPO:** *How has that impacted your job in serving municipal clients like us?*

**HM:** We're just as effective as we were before because the level of transparency local governments expect and we deliver has been up to par and then some since day one. The rules pertaining to appropriation listings on the web, etc. have created more work for Congressional staff. Then the appropriation staff have to vet all the requests without any additional staff anyone had before.

**SPO:** *On a related note, what have been some of the biggest changes in government functionality you have noticed in D.C. in the past few decades (good and/or bad)?*

**HM:** (answers without hesitation) There two things – government is not working well at all now – it was better before (not perfect or great, but better than now). This has been largely driven by the fact that everyone has learned from the 1994 elections and the Newt Gingrich era that if you point the finger and blame the other party – you tend to win elections. The other issue is one of money – it's always been there but now it's overwhelming. The line between the legislative and the political process has become dangerously blurred quite honestly.

**SPO:** *But hasn't the finger-pointing been pervasive in Congress since the early 1800s? What's the difference nowadays?*

**HM:** Well, members of Congress have always been very vociferous on the floor, but they always, always worked things out behind closed doors (at least what used to be closed doors). Today what you see on the House and Senate floors is what you see behind open doors that no longer close. Ironically all the reforms of opening Congress up to the public have given members the opportunity to show how great they are, how the other party is bad, and they are angry and not going to take it anymore – all live on TV. Nothing gets done anymore. That's a major change.

**SPO:** *Interesting. Changing gears a little here - What's more difficult - working with an agency or elected representatives? Why?*

**HM:** There are good people at the agencies but the bureaucratic mind works very differently than the rest of ours do. They don't have to respond to anyone except the next bureaucrat up the food chain from them. Eventually someone has to be responsible to a political appointee, but getting to that point is difficult.

**SPO:** *This is the zinger question to make you feel uncomfortable (sorry can't resist). If you had to choose, do you think NGOs (non-governmental organizations) or corporations have more presence/pull in D.C. at the moment? Granted it depends upon the issue at hand.*

**HM:** (without hesitation again) Corporations do – and I'm a business person and I'm not knocking other business people. A large part of that is due to the political contributions. The counter to that is the increasing ability of the NGOs to get the grassroots going, which has been increasing since the 1980s.

**SPO:** Thanks Howard – we will see you soon.