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Lester Milbrath's 'The Washington Lobbyists', Fifty Years On: An Enduring Legacy

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Abstract:	Published in 1963, Lester Milbrath's <i>The Washington Lobbyists</i> has become indispensable for understanding how lobbying operates and the societal benefits it brings. Milbrath there presented the first detailed survey of lobbying activities, and his findings have been generally affirmed by a range of later studies, although his conviction that lobbying was an essentially benign force which exerted relatively little impact on policy has been more contested. Milbrath's theoretical model of lobbying as a communication process has enduring value to scholars and practitioners alike, and the definition of lobbying which he formulated continues to be useful. This article seeks explicitly to celebrate Milbrath's outstanding research on lobbyists, more than 50 years after his book was published, and highlights some elements of Milbrath's work which have not yet been fully explored by scholars.



**LESTER MILBRATH'S *THE WASHINGTON LOBBYISTS*, FIFTY YEARS ON:
AN ENDURING LEGACY**

1963 saw the publication of Lester Milbrath's *The Washington Lobbyists* – a landmark piece of research which utterly redefined the field of interest group studies. It is therefore somewhat surprising to realize that this is not even what Milbrath is most remembered for today. His book on political participation ran to two editions and had 3,624 citations on Google Scholar as of 29 October 2016 (Milbrath, 1965; Milbrath and Goel, 1977). A series of books and articles established Milbrath as an early leading thinker about environmentalism and sustainable development (Milbrath, 1979, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1996) – and earned Milbrath a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997 from the American Political Science Association (APSA). These other works represent monumental achievements in their own right.

Here I seek explicitly to celebrate Milbrath's outstanding research on lobbyists, over 50 years after his book was published. Its appearance was a genuine and rare landmark in the progression of interest group research, and the book continues to exert a significant impact on contemporary inquiry. Milbrath's work was not without its critics. Notably, Heinz Eulau (who would later serve as APSA president) published a lengthy review of *The Washington Lobbyists*, the general tenor of which is evident from its provocative title, 'Lobbyists: The Wasted Profession'. Eulau (1964) regarded Milbrath's data as 'tedious and pedantic described in dreary detail' (p. 29); and was unable to 'find any indication of what the communication model contributes to our understanding of lobby impact on decision making' (p. 37). Most readers, though, have lauded the book's contribution. Salisbury *et al* (1989, p. 176) described *The Washington Lobbyists* as a 'pioneering study'; Rosenthal (2001, p. 17) calls it 'one of the seminal studies' in the field; and Tichenor and Harris (2005, p. 252) include it as one of a few works which 'transformed interest group studies'.

Continuity and Change in Washington Lobbying

Whether Milbrath's analysis of lobbying in the late 1950s remains relevant to today's scholars and practitioners is a reasonable question (indeed, one raised by this journal's anonymous reviewers). Some argue, for instance, that Milbrath's is an unrealistic and overly benign view –

even at the time, and certainly of the contemporary Washington lobbying scene. Loomis and Cigler say that he ‘painted a Boy Scout-like picture of Washington lobbyists, depicting them as patient contributors to policy making. Rarely stepping over the limits of propriety, lobbyists had only a marginal impact at best’ (2012, p. 27). Similarly, Gray and Lowery (2000), Hayes (1981), and Parker (1996), amongst others, suggest that Milbrath failed to show the full extent of lobbyists’ influence over public policy. This may be an example of judging the past not on its own terms but rather against modern norms.

It is absolutely true that much has changed since Milbrath’s book was published. The sheer scale of the lobbying industry now is different from 1963, when there were around 1,000 lobbyists in Washington; today over 10,000 registered lobbyists operate alongside thousands more who avoid registration. Technological innovations mean that lobbyists’ daily working lives and their means of communication are very much changed. The inexorably increasing cost of elections imposes more demanding fundraising requirements on politicians and fundraising pressures on lobbyists. Many more interest groups now have permanent offices and staff in Washington; there has been a dramatic rise in the number of single-issue interest groups; and lobbying has become an increasingly partisan activity. We now have laws which regulate the behavior of lobbyists; universities offer courses in lobbying and advocacy; the revolving door swings ever-faster; and political parties are inexorably weakened as ideologically-based interest groups become more dominant. As Andres (2009, pp. 4-5) notes, the Washington lobbying environment has changed dramatically in the last four decades: ‘disruptions in the political equilibrium of organized interests – such as the growth, fragmentation and activism of government, new technology, and political polarization – have caused changed and evolution over the past several decades in the institution of advocacy’. At first glance, the lobbying industry of 2016 appears quite different from that of Milbrath’s day.

And yet beneath all that change, much remains the same or similar, even since 1963 (McGrath and Harris, 2008). Change in any field tends to be visible, measurable and worthy of attention, while underlying continuity goes relatively unremarked. Petracca (1992, p. xix) suggests that, ‘the essential structure of the interest group system is much as it was at the beginning of the “modern” system of interest representation back in 1946’. Milbrath’s lobbyists would easily recognize the tactics and activities pursued by today’s inhabitants of K Street: direct advocacy, coalitions ~~and~~, grassroots campaigns, congressional testimony, the provision of expert

policy and political information, -have all been the staple ingredients of lobbying for the last century or more. Messages may be sent from a lobbyist to a policymaker by email, or from a lobbyist to grassroots members by Twitter, but the fundamentals of the lobbying process remain. Lobbying still relies on access and information rather than on the coarse exercise of pressure. Lobbyists still vie for access largely on the basis on the detailed policy expertise and political insight they can provide to officials. Even – perhaps, specially – within a changing environment, what Levine describes as the art of effective lobbying remains relatively constant: his analogy between a lobbyist and a fine chef is apt. As Levine suggests (2009, p. 239), there are few rare ingredients available to a lobbyist, so what fundamentally matters is the ‘choice of those ingredients, preparation, blending, timing, pulling together, and presentation of the final product.... [The master lobbyist] pays great attention to the essentials of his art form’.

Lobbying in 2016, just as in 1963, is existentially concerned with articulating the interests of people. As Milbrath observed (1963, p. 342), ‘the influence of groups is derived from the fact that members of groups are citizens and the political system is designed to respond to the influence of their votes’. He went on to insist that, ‘power at the polls is the greatest power in lobbying’ (1963, p. 348). It still is. Most importantly, as we see below, Milbrath’s conceptualization of lobbying as a communication process continues to explain the essence of lobbying. It is this idea above all else that defines Milbrath’s contribution to our understanding of the modern industry.

An Overview of *The Washington Lobbyists*

Two general points about this book are worth making, as they can easily be overlooked yet are crucial to the book’s significance. First, *The Washington Lobbyists* is strikingly different from most scholarly texts in its sheer accessibility and readability. Milbrath includes substantial survey data in his book, but presents this clearly and simply. Most scholars replicating Milbrath’s work today would feel obliged to subject the data to sophisticated statistical manipulation, thereby rendering the findings comprehensible only to other scholars interested in such analysis. Milbrath was acutely aware of this dilemma, observing that ‘academicians may regret the exclusion of full reports of statistical tests and levels of significance in the interest of readability’ (1963, p. vii). Given the severe criticism by Quinney (1964, p. 512) that *The Washington*

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Lobbyists is 'marred by unconvincing writing, a strained attempt at scientific sophistication [and] an abundance of cross-tabulation tables', it is worth noting that Lester Milbrath was highly dexterous methodologically as is apparent in some of his other work (Milbrath, 1968; Milbrath and Klein, 1962; Cataldo *et al*, 1970).

Milbrath positively chose to present his research beyond the academy: not by oversimplifying the material, but by refusing to over-complicate it. *The Washington Lobbyists* stands as a model for contemporary scholars who wish to communicate their work to the relevant professional community. Indeed, one study attests to the accessibility of Milbrath's book. It found that lobbyists regarded political science scholarship as too theoretical to have practical applicability. However, when presented with a list of 11 books by academics, more of the lobbyists surveyed cited *The Washington Lobbyists* as being of some value than any of the other choices. The authors suggest that it is not coincidental that the four most-regarded books,

were not highly theoretical or technical. The intended audience for these works seemed broader than the academic political scientist. In fact, Milbrath's book would seem to have a special appeal to our political actors which the others lack insofar as it purports to describe them. It is altogether possible that a number of respondents were actually interviewed by Professor Milbrath when he conducted his survey (Newman *et al*, 1975, p. 192).

Secondly, we can too easily forget that what Milbrath presents in *The Washington Lobbyists* was actually the 'first large-scale systematic survey of interest groups based in Washington, DC' (Alexander, 2002, p. 27). It was a tremendous methodological advance in the field, and stimulated further surveys which have generally supported Milbrath's original findings (Berry, 1977; Heinz *et al*, 1993; Hrebenar and Thomas, 1987, 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Nownes and DeAlejandro, 2009; Schlozman and Tierney, 1986; Walker, 1991; Zeigler and Baer, 1968, 1969). Discussing these later surveys, Baumgartner and Leech (1998, pp. 148-149) note that, 'the vast bulk of findings from this set of surveys about lobbying activities have proven remarkably robust. This is in sharp contrast to the literature on lobbying based on narrow case studies'.

Moreover, we should keep in mind how impressive was the scale of Milbrath's research. There were 614 registered lobbyists with Washington addresses in the first half of 1956; of these, Milbrath obtained full results from 101 and partial results from another 13. His respondents thus represented 18.6% of his study population. To put this into context, 10,462 lobbyists were

registered with the Secretary of the US Senate on 28 October 2016 – so, for a researcher today to match Milbrath’s penetration of the industry, she would need to survey 1,946 lobbyists. The interviews Milbrath conducted yielded huge amounts of both quantitative and qualitative data, and his book reports much more of this material than is the case in most other academic surveys of lobbyists. On a personal note, having been a lobbyist in the UK myself before entering academia, I well recall the impact which *The Washington Lobbyists* had at my first reading. On these pages, across the distances of time and geography, I encountered the unmistakably authentic voices of my predecessors, talking about elements of their work which were recognizable features of my work. Milbrath’s academic analysis chimed clearly with my own practical experience. For me, the most notable omission in many scholarly monographs about lobbying is the lobbyist: academics commonly seek to explain lobbying behavior without actually speaking to any lobbyists. It is this gap between reality and theory, and the lack of understanding of the role of the individual lobbyist, as I perceive it, which few academics handle so assuredly as Lester Milbrath (McGrath, 2009).

Milbrath on Communication, Information, and Influence

Milbrath’s conceptualization of lobbying as a communication process is unquestionably his single most important contribution to the development of lobbying theory. He begins by laying out the basis for his thinking:

First, lobbying relates only to governmental decision-making.... Second, all lobbying is motivated by a desire to influence governmental decisions.... Third, lobbying implies the presence of an intermediary or representative as a communication link between citizens and governmental decision-makers.... Fourth, all lobbying involves communication (Milbrath, 1963, pp. 7-8).

This then leads to a concrete formulation: ‘Broadly defined, then, lobbying is *the stimulation and transmission of a communication, by someone other than a citizen acting on his own behalf, directed to a governmental decision-maker with the hope of influencing his decision.* Though this definition does not identify persons called “lobbyists,” it does spell out the essence of the lobbying process’ (Milbrath, 1963, p. 8). This insight was entirely novel, fundamentally shifting our understanding of lobbying and interest groups. Wise (2007, p. 359) describes this as ‘the first

scholarly attempt to define [lobbying]', and many authors continue to draw on it (Baines and Viney, 2010; Koepl, 2001; McGrath, 2005, 2007). Austen-Smith and Wright (1994, p. 26), for instance, acknowledge that Milbrath's communication model has been 'one of the dominant approaches to understanding lobbying'. A decade after *The Washington Lobbyists* appeared, Wilson observed that, 'It is now well understood that what an organizational representative does in furthering his group's interests before government has more to do with his management of a communications system than with his exercise of influence' (1973, p. 316).

Milbrath had introduced the idea of the communicative nature of lobbying and offered an empirical basis for this in an earlier journal article (1960a), but in the book he set out more thoroughly the theoretical foundation. He visualized the relationships between political actors as a network of communications, with messages flowing through the system in many directions. Some messages are exchanged directly and personally between a lobbyist and a policymaker (Bacheller, 1977; Patterson, 1970) while others are transmitted somewhat circuitously; some are explicit while others are more subtle. All lobbying messages, though, are potentially influential:

A decision by any given official at any given moment will be consonant with his perception of his political world.... The only way to influence a decision, then, is to influence the perceptions of official decision-makers. Communication is the only means of influencing or changing a perception; the lobbying process, therefore, is totally a communication process (Milbrath, 1963, pp. 184-185).

In other words, lobbying is not only about communication; rather, lobbying is concerned with persuasive communication. No material provided by a lobbyist can be regarded as solely factual as it is part of their overriding narrative designed to influence public policy. Even the provision of straightforward information can be assumed to boost the lobbyist's credibility and thus help increase her opportunity to persuade at a later date. In Berry's words (1977, p. 11), 'A communication itself does not have to be overtly persuasive in nature; it can be technical information or a research report. It is the inferred intent of the communicator that is crucial to the definition'. It is therefore unfortunate that some nations' lobbying regulation – such as Ireland – exempt from disclosure lobbying communications which are said to be merely factual or technical in nature.

At its most basic, communication theory relates to the transmission and reception of messages, sent through a variety of channels, and subject to distortion or noise; when a message

is sent and received, there will generally be provision for a feedback loop. Applied to lobbying, the lobbyist can be seen as the sender of a message, and the targeted policymaker as that message's recipient. The message itself is the position being supported by the lobbyist. Communication channels can be kept open or closed as the policymaker wishes, simply by granting or denying access to the lobbyist. And noise occurs in lobbying as a result of the constant cacophony generated by other lobbyists trying to access the same policymaker. Here, lobbying clearly shares some of the attributes of other forms of commercial, persuasive, communication such as advertising and marketing. Milbrath works through these factors to assert that, 'It is the lobbyist's job to create messages and choose means of transmission which are most likely to insure clear and favorable reception of the message by the intended receiver' (1963, p. 189).

This basic framework leads to one of Milbrath's best-known findings: that lobbyists will naturally focus their efforts on policymakers who are likely to agree with them in an effort to reinforce their existing views: 'Most lobbyists do not bother to communicate with those they know are opposed; this is both painful and thought to be a waste of time' (1963, p. 217). Messages sent by a lobbyist along a channel which has been closed by a policymaker withdrawing access will have no effect, and those which are distorted by a recipient's existing predispositions may even be counter-productive, thus the lobbyist will generally seek to communicate with those policymakers most likely to be receptive to the message (Hojnacki and Kimball, 1999; Holyoke, 2011; Potters and Sloof, 1996). A policymaker's predispositions are described by Milbrath (1960a, p. 34) as constituting a 'perceptual screen' which can block out messages he or she is not willing to hear. Milbrath's view stood as the conventional wisdom until the 1980s, since when it has become more contested (Ainsworth, 1993; Kollman, 1997; Schlozman and Tierney, 1986; Smith, 1984). Austen-Smith and Wright, in particular, developed the notion of counteractive lobbying (1994, 1996), according to which lobbyists will seek to change a legislator's policy preference in certain circumstances.

This debate is an important one, as it has considerable implications for the actual or perceived influence of lobbyists and interest groups over policy decisions. Milbrath's survey findings led him to the conviction that lobbying was an essentially positive force which exerted relatively little influence (Presthus, 1974; Zeigler, 1969). Others profoundly disagree in principle, asserting that corporate lobbying is malign, damaging the integrity of the democratic

process. What cannot be questioned, however, are the facts that by asking lobbyists how they rated the effectiveness of various activities, and by also conducting 38 interviews with Members of Congress and their staff, Milbrath was again an early innovator. As Guth puts it (2001, p. 43): 'A great advance occurred when political scientists decided to interview both lobbyists and legislators to assess the influence of the former'.

At the heart of Milbrath's communication process is the idea that what a lobbyist essentially brings to policymaking is information. It is to Milbrath (and to Bauer *et al*, 1963) that we owe the conception, by now commonplace, of lobbyists as suppliers of information to policymakers. This view has been widely taken up by scholars, even those who believe it to be only a partial truth. Again Milbrath concludes that lobbying is fundamentally benign, with the lobbyist serving the policymaker's needs, almost acting as an extension of the policymaker's staff (Galnoor, 1975; Hall and Deardorff, 2006; Loomis, 2002; Naurin, 2007). For the lobbyists Milbrath surveyed, access/contacts were less important than policy/political expertise – in other words, what they knew mattered more than who they knew (Parker, 2008; Heinz *et al*, 1993).

Milbrath was additionally interested in other types of information. He saw that lobbyists devoted significant attention to maintaining contacts and sharing information with other lobbyists. It is through such connections that a lobbyist can gain early indications of the strategy and tactics being pursued by their colleagues/competitors. As Milbrath said, 'Only by being well informed about each other's activities can each organization function adequately in pursuit of its own interests' (1963, p. 207). Indeed, Milbrath materially improved our understanding of lobbying through the distinction he drew (1963, p. 41) between tactics and strategy (Alexander, 2002; Berry, 1977; Binderkrantz and Kroyer, 2012).

As well as information flows from lobbyist to policymaker, and amongst lobbyists, Milbrath was also conscious of communication within an interest group such as from a lobbyist to a mass membership. Ainsworth (2002) suggests that Milbrath may have been the first scholar to use the phrase 'farming the membership' (1963, p. 39), by which he means an interest group's internal communication with its grassroots members. Such efforts by lobbyists help to ensure that rank-and-file members can be involved in the group's issue agenda, gain a sense of personal responsibility for the group's effectiveness, are motivated to donate funds, and tend to support the group's leadership – especially when, as is common, the publications sent to members emphasize or exaggerate the threats faced by the group from its powerful opponents (Browne,

1977, 1990; Greenwald, 1977; Sabatier *et al*, 1987). As Milbrath observes, 'many lobbyists find opponents useful; without opposition, the lobbyists might be unemployed' (1963, p. 52).

Milbrath's 'Hidden Gems'

It has been said, correctly, that, 'The pioneering work of Lester Milbrath provided the foundation for a bountiful research agenda that scholars have since undertaken' (Alexander, 2002, p. 27). Much of the work citing Milbrath's book tends to concentrate on its overarching themes of communication, information and influence, or on Milbrath's survey findings. Milbrath still offers considerable insight not yet fully mined. Here I suggest a number of areas which could potentially be fruitful:

- *Political Marketing*: While lobbying scholars generally recognize the value of Milbrath's conceptualization of lobbying as communication, his theoretical foundations for this have not yet penetrated into the political marketing literature to anything like the extent they should have. The vast majority of political marketing literature to date is bounded entirely by discussion of party strategies and voter behavior during elections. A review of political marketing literature by Scammell (1999), for instance, makes no direct mention of interest groups. Very little research has been undertaken to date on how (political) marketing theory can explain lobbyists' policy-influencing activities (Harris and McGrath, 2012). Much is still to be done, using Milbrath's thinking as a basis for drawing out the academic and professional connections between lobbying and marketing, for connecting the literatures on interest groups and political marketing.
- *Storytelling*: Milbrath recognizes that the effective lobbyist must be skilled at shaping the priorities of policymakers, through the persuasive presentation of information (Larocca, 2004). Agenda setting may be where a lobbyist is most influential in the policymaking process (King *et al*, 2005). One way in which lobbyists can achieve this is through the use of 'storytelling', the articulation of an (emotionally charged) narrative aimed at encouraging policymakers to support a particular position. One of the items Milbrath and Klein (1962, p. 60) tested 88 lobbyists for was their agreement with the statement: 'I tend to dramatize a story I am telling'. In a similar vein, an experienced Irish lobbyist advises

that an essential step in a successful lobbying campaign is to ‘dramatise the issue’ (Tierney, 2002, p. 14). While we have the beginnings of a literature in this area (Hansford and Smalley, 2004; Heugens, 2002; Kiel and Nownes, 1994; Polletta, 2006; Terry, 2001), much work remains to be done in the production of a typology of lobbying stories, how they can be crafted and communicated, and their effectiveness.

- *The Individual Lobbyist as the Unit of Analysis*: Lobbying has been the subject of popular discourse for the last 200 years, and of sustained academic attention for the last century. Lobbyists, though, as individual actors in the political arena rather than simply as those people who operate interest groups, have received much less attention. The first scholar to recognize the importance of the lobbyist’s personal profile was Lester Milbrath. He raises this issue in *The Washington Lobbyists*, observing that, ‘No scholar has systematically studied the Washington lobbyist as an individual before’ (Milbrath, 1963, p. 17). Political science may have moved from relatively descriptive assertions about group behavior towards more empirical and systematic analysis of group mobilization and influence, but the study of lobbying remains firmly rooted in the group as the primary unit of investigation. Indeed, Schiff *et al* (2015, p. 225) go so far as to assert that, ‘lobbyists *per se* have now largely vanished as interesting actors in studies of interest representation’. I do not wish to suggest that nothing has previously been written about lobbyists as individuals, for that is manifestly not the case. There are many biographies of and autobiographies by lobbyists, all of which naturally offer some insight into them as people. Participant observation techniques have been very successfully used with respect to lobbyists (Benoit, 2007; Birnbaum, 1992; Kersh, 2002; McFarland, 1984; McHale, 2004; Schlesinger *et al*, 2001). And we do gain useful insights into lobbyists in the developing principal-agent literature (Lowery and Marchetti, 2012; Schiff *et al*, 2015; Stephenson and Jackson, 2010). However, it is true that the academic literature on lobbyists is less extensive and much less systematic than that on lobbying. In consequence, we know more about Milbrath’s lobbyists as people than we do about today’s Washington lobbyists: what, for instance, is the current age profile of DC lobbyists? What is their educational background? Or their gender profile? Or the pattern of their professional careers? What do they regard as the most and least appealing features of their work? In this regard, Wooton could bemoan (1985, p. 192) that, ‘There

is no Milbrath for the early eighties as there was for the late fifties'. Lamentably, this is also true today.

- *Lobbyists' Personalities*: In *The Washington Lobbyists*, Milbrath considers the personal characteristics of lobbyists (1963, pp. 97-108) and finds both that their history of political involvement is important in their decision to become a lobbyist and that their personality then affects 'the style with which a lobbyist goes about his job' (1963, p. 108). This relationship between personality and political participation recurs in other of his writings (Milbrath, 1956, 1960b; Ruedin, 2007). Of the 101 lobbyists he interviewed for his book, 89 additionally completed a 100-item personality test (Prewitt, 1965). Among the traits which *The Washington Lobbyists* analyzed were dominance, self-control, sociability, intellectual efficiency, self-acceptance, esteem, and tolerance of frustration. Milbrath and Klein (1962, p. 63) conclude that, 'Lobbyists are not very typical of the general population', and Milbrath (1958, 1962) examines personality traits as explanatory factors in lobbyists' partisan identification and activism (Kolasa, 1971) – but we are still lacking a coherent and systematic literature in this area.

Conclusion

In *The Washington Lobbyists*, Lester Milbrath sets out a classic statement of the pluralist rationale for interest articulation. He sees in the clash of ideas between interest groups a collective dynamism: 'nearly every vigorous push in one direction stimulates an opponent or coalition of opponents to push in the opposite direction. This natural self-balancing factor comes into play so often that it almost amounts to a law' (Milbrath, 1963, p. 345). Indeed, John Wright – who notes that Milbrath was the first to observe this tendency, and who finds much evidence from other studies to support the general claim – uses 'Milbrath's tendency' (2007, p. 17) as the basis for a reformulation which he regards as (probably) 'the one thing we should know about interest groups' (2007, p. 18). While Milbrath acknowledges concerns that this lobbying 'balance of power' is skewed in favor of those groups which are relatively well resourced, nonetheless he insists on its fundamental truth, seeing the sheer scale and diversity of the interest group population as indicative of a responsive and informed policymaking process. Even though he knows that lobbying can be an inefficient and burdensome system, Milbrath absolutely insists on

its ultimate virtue: ‘There is no substitute for one service – the clash of viewpoints. The creative function this serves in alerting decision-makers to all possible alternatives outweighs all the waste and frustration involved in lobbying’ (1963, p. 313).

The Washington Lobbyists has been praised by one group of authors who asserted that it ‘remains the *locus classicus* within the field The most comprehensive analysis’ (Nelson *et al.*, 1987, p. 143), and Nownes (2006, p. 25) views the book as ‘a pioneering study’. A truly stunning achievement, this book is indispensable in understanding how lobbying operates and the benefits it brings to policymaking. It remains increasingly valuable to scholars and practitioners alike over half a century since its publication precisely because Milbrath shows us more vividly than any other author how and why the fundamental art of lobbying is relatively constant even within radically different lobbying environments. -In *The Washington Lobbyists*, Lester Milbrath sets out a number of key contributions which lobbying makes to the political system. Lobbying, he affirms, provides information to policymakers; moreover, the pluralistic articulation of competing interests helps to ensure that as wide a range as possible of policy alternatives are brought to policymakers’ attention. He suggests that lobbying communications mean that Congress is not overly dependent on the Executive for policy information. Further, interest groups perform both ‘integrative’ and ‘disjunctive’ functions (Milbrath, 1963, p. 357): integrative in the sense that an interest group (or a coalition of groups) aggregates the policy desires of their members, avoiding the cacophony which would result from each individual lobbying on the same issue; and disjunctive because interest groups are better able than political parties to represent multiple, narrow, interests. To conclude with Milbrath’s closing words, ‘If we had no lobby groups and lobbyists we would probably have to invent them to improve the functioning of the system’ (1963, p. 358).

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