

A WASHINGTON PERSPECTIVE...



By THOMAS M. REES

The ten-dollar trick

Recently passed Proposition 9 contained one of the most far-reaching restrictions ever conceived — a limitation of \$10 per month on the amount a lobbyist can spend on any member of the Legislature. How is anyone going to communicate in Sacramento? Ten dollars will barely get you a bourbon, a steak, and a beer.

Despite the suspicions of such groups as Common Cause, picking up the bill for a drink and a meal for a legislator really does not place the legislator under the thumb of some "ruthless" lobbyist. For laws to be written there has to be communication among all parties — lawmaker, constituents, colleagues, and people or interests affected by a change in law. Effective laws cannot be legislated in a vacuum, and sometimes it is easier to communicate at Posey's and Frank Fat's than in committee rooms or on the floor of the Legislature.

The overwhelming feeling I experienced on coming to Congress after my years in the state Assembly and state Senate was isolation. In Washington, we legislate in a vacuum much of the time; Capitol Hill is so terribly removed from the rest of the city and the rest of the country.

I served on the House Banking and Currency Committee for five years before meeting a lobbyist from the American Bankers Association. How can we draft or vote on complicated bills dealing with banks if we never talk with bankers or their representatives? I might not agree with them, but at least I can inquire about how a bank runs.

Congressmen can serve on only two committees — a major one and a minor one. If we rarely see a lobbyist who is supposed to be covering the committees we serve on, we *never* see a lobbyist who covers a committee we are *not* on.

Last fall, for the first time since I came to Congress in 1966, an oil lobbyist visited my office. He was concerned about how I might vote on an environmental-impact-study waiver on the Alaska Pipeline bill. I could have hugged him — with the energy crisis there were many bills before Congress affecting the petroleum industry, and I didn't know any oil lobbyists to talk to about their views. My lobbyist friend was from Los Angeles; I had known him from Sacramento days, and he lived in my congressional district. That's why he dropped by my office. (Incidentally, I didn't vote his way.)

Even though I'm doing a great deal of work in petroleum-pricing, I still have to hunt down oil lobbyists for information I need for the process of legislating.

In Sacramento, on the other hand, there were lots of oil lobbyists. We knew who they were, and when they had a problem they knew they could talk to us. Actually, they spent most of their time fighting each other: the majors against the independents, the importers against the domestic producers, and the producers against the vertically integrated companies. When they had a bat-

tle, we all learned about the oil business — good and bad.

When I was in the California Legislature, lunch was the most important communication time, and my week shaped up like this:

◦ *Monday* I had lunch with the Los Angeles County lobbyist; this was important, since I represented the whole county in the Senate.

◦ *Tuesday* was Derby Club at Posey's. The "third house" picked up the tab, and the members, all of whom wore derbies (the only prerequisite) included legislators, lobbyists, and some state officials. At times I got more bills through at Derby Club than in a dozen committee rooms. The Regional Planning Act was a Derby Club special. In a ten-minute period crunched against the bar in Posey's back room, I was able to get together the lobbyists from the League of Cities and the County Supervisors Association, the governor's legislative secretary, and the chairman of the Senate Governmental Efficiency Committee, and get them to agree on a compromise. Until then, the bill had been stuck in committee for two and a half years.

◦ *Wednesday* was Clam and Choral at the El Mirador. This gathering, sponsored by the Public Health League, which is the lobbying organization for the California Medical Association, was for senators only. (While I didn't give the CMA many votes, I loved clams.) It was a good, quiet time to line up some of my bills for Senate committee hearings and also to lobby for the pack of Los Angeles County bills I had discovered at Monday's lunch.

◦ *Thursday* was the biggest lunch of all — Moose Milk. This was an open-bar buffet for all 120 members of the Legislature. I did most of my Assembly lobbying here, setting up the next week for any of my bills before Assembly committees, and checking with Los Angeles County assemblymen on any bills they had coming to the Senate.

It was communication. It was effective. And I wonder how the great noon tradition of Derby Club, Clam and Choral, and Moose Milk will survive under Proposition 9. Will people carry punch cards around and start paying cash when they reach the \$10 limit?

Of course, when I served in Sacramento, the salary was \$6,000 a year. On today's salary, legislators might buy their own lunches, just as we do in Congress, and still communicate.

But the important thing will be to keep the legislative branch in Sacramento from becoming isolated from itself and from the world, as is the case in Washington.

The author, who has served in both chambers of the California Legislature, now represents the 26th Congressional District (Los Angeles County).

Attention, recent subscribers . . .

Back issues of *California Journal* can provide information on virtually every aspect of California government and politics. These cost \$1.50 per copy, \$15 for each complete year (with index), and \$50 for the *Journal's* first four years (1970-1973 with indexes). Here are some subjects covered in recent issues:

September 1974 — The inside story of the fall of Ed Reinecke; how key legislators rate the state's top 20 lobbyists; the local-government loopholes in California's new political reform act.

August 1974 — The plans of Assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy; the anatomy of the Legislature's \$25-million-a-year staff; the be-

liefs and personalities of the gubernatorial candidates, Jerry Brown and Hugh Flournoy.

July 1974 — Analysis of the prison-reform movement; revising the state's rape laws; the new energy act and how it should work; how McCarthy won the speakership.

June 1974 — Native Americans: the first and last Californians; rise of the militant civil servant; crime laws and contemporary morality.

May 1974 — The image-makers: A guide to California's most successful campaign-management firms.

April 1974 — The California Supreme Court: How the justices sit on the political spectrum; the

protest over California's utility-rate structure; the rise and fall of C. Arnholt Smith, "Mr. San Diego".

March 1974 — Women in politics.

January 1974 — Governing Los Angeles: Mayor Bradley's quest for leadership; why everyone wants to be supervisor.

December 1973 — The unfinished business of constitutional revision.

October 1973 — What Los Angeles can learn from BART; why the state hasn't cleared the air.

(Note: The November 1973 and February 1974 issues are out of print.)

Interests, not people, are represented in California The California Legislature, indeed, closely resembles the "chamber of corporations" under Italian fascism.

Carey McWilliams (1949)