

# KiFS Special Feature Article

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## Importance of Lobbying in US Politics

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### What is a lobbyist?

The concept of lobbying goes back to AD 1215, when King John granted the barons of England the right to petition him to protest any violation of their new rights under the Magna Carta. More than five hundred years later, American colonists rebelled against King George III and specifically confirmed this right in both the Declaration of Independence and in the First Amendment to the Constitution – the right “to petition the government for redress of grievances” – remains the basis for lobbying in the US today.

### What does a lobbyist do?

My job is to represent the best interests of my clients. In a world where a national legislator is making decisions as diverse as war in Iraq, the federal budget deficit, pension benefits, global climate change and nuclear waste disposal, it is my job to make my client’s issue a priority. In any organization, if an important task is assigned to nobody, will it get accomplished? The same happens when advocating in Washington with the federal government. Citizens are under the misperception that because they have met with their representative and expressed their views that “something” is going to get done. And sometimes it does, but most often than not, it gets filed in the drawer of “to dos.” The following is a list of reasons the people I represent choose to maintain an active presence in Washington, D.C.

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1) I am a fourth generation American of Korean ancestry. My Great Grandfather, Keum Wan Chang arrived in Hawaii in 1904. Several years ago, he was honored by the Korean Government as a Patriot and he and my Great Grandmother’s remains, Do Yun Hong, were brought back to Korea and buried in Dae-jun National Cemetery in 2002. I was proud to discover that his work helping the Korean Government by fundraising to help during the War against Japan, closely mirrors the public service I have chosen to pursue in Washington, D.C. After serving in the Senate under U.S. Senator John Glenn, the former astronaut, and author of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and then gaining experience working in the U.S. House on the Committee staff of a Member of Congress, I embarked on my career of becoming a registered lobbyist. I was proud to be a part of the effort to bring recognition to the issue of the Korean Comfort Women and to help establish the Korean American Coalition’s Washington-DC Chapter, a group that supports the civil rights of Koreans and Korean Americans, and the founding of the Asian American Action Fund, a political action committee designed to help elect Americans of Asian descent.

**Education.** Lobbyists provide a valuable service to Members of Congress, educating them on a specific entity's or industry's problems or concerns. The group that has established relationships with Members of Congress has a distinct advantage over those that do not.

**Opportunities.** Lobbyists have the ability to match opportunities within appropriations bills or agency grant programs with a client's unique strengths. My team understands the strategies needed to successfully seize upon these opportunities.

**Access.** Constituents can contact their Congressman and Senators; however, they join a long line of other constituents seeking help.

**Priority.** Members are besieged with numerous requests for assistance and must prioritize those problems, requests, and issues. A constant presence in Washington, D.C. is essential for keeping the group's issues before Members.

**Defense.** There are numerous industries that have lobbyists on retainer. Hiring your own lobbyists can act as a defensive measure against other lobbyists.

**Trust.** Members establish relationships with lobbyists they trust. My firm has decades of experience working on and with Capitol Hill, i.e., with Members of the House and Senate. Our CEO, former Congressman Jack Fields, a Republican, served in Congress for 16 years. Other Members respect him and know that he can be trusted. I work mostly with Democrats, who now control the House and Senate. Many of my relationships go back to 1992.

The Korean government should consider having a presence in Washington on a regular basis. Relationships are important and cannot possibly have any depth if just conducted once a year. At my meeting with the Korean Institute for Future Strategies, there was a strong desire to have more trade and partnering opportunities. This cannot happen if there is not a solid relationship, which is not possible to achieve with sporadic interactions.

There are many issues that Korean citizens would like to have addressed with the US Government. There is a reluctance to hire professional consultants although many Koreans would not think twice about hiring a Korean-speaking tour guide to show them America. With something as complex as foreign relations, it seems counter-intuitive not to seek help from professionals whose job is to educate, communicate and market to Congress and the White House. Oftentimes I have found that although my issues are something a Member would like to advocate on, they are so caught up in the accumulation of issues on a daily basis, that oftentimes attention is given to the matter that is in front of them often. It is merely a consequence of having an extremely busy and hectic schedule and not a lack of interest, although that is usually the case.

I also usually compare working with legislative policy as a chess game. Depending on the issue, members can be viewed as chess pieces – they can move a certain way based on their party affiliation, their Committee assignment, that Committee's jurisdiction, their position on the Committee, their position in their political party, where they are from and the ideals they hold dear. The Leadership is like the King – they move slowly but they can win the game for you. There is a strategy for moving your pieces forward. Oftentimes, I will discover that an opponent is actually playing checkers – they are all over the place with no real understanding how the process works. Korea needs to start playing chess. If one is not in the game, one cannot hope to have important issues considered with the attention and relevance that is deserved.

## **Q & A with KiFS**

**Q:** We'd like it to be more specific. For example, on the beef issue, how should Korea use lobbyists to protect their interests or use it as a bargaining chip?

**A:** Please keep in mind that lobbying is but one tool in an overall arsenal that is used as part of the Korean government's public policy agenda. There are also public relations with both the Korean and American public and diplomatic and legal efforts in relation to Korean beef. As a tool, our firm or hopefully any other firm that you worked with would outline a strategic blueprint to advance any strategy to impact a decision on Korean beef imports.

**Q:** We'd like it if it explained a little more about the current Korean lobbying practice (if there is one to speak of), or how you evaluate/assess it from a professional lobbyists' point of view?

**A:** My understanding is that Korea does not have an active presence on Capitol Hill, but has recently hired a lobbyist, at a modest monthly retainer for lobbying services. According to the filings there have been a few inconsequential relationships with a few firms. One unlucky relationship was with the Alexander Strategy Group, a firm operated by the former Tom DeLay staffer, Ed Buckham.

**Q:** Are there specific areas related to Korean industries or government where hiring professional lobbyists would really succeed, where there's a window of opportunity (perhaps due to political calendar/timing?)

**A:** There are so many issues that Congress deals with on a daily basis that have an impact on Korean industries and the Korean Government – taxes, trade, tariffs, and visas are just a few. By establishing a presence in Washington, D.C., Korea can continually work to educate Members and staff on their issues and to build long-term relationships. By creating a foundation of support, rather than relying on sporadic interactions, you enhance your chances of getting your issues out there when there is a small window of opportunity. Additionally, there is such an overload of information in American society and Members of Congress are victims of this overload at the highest levels – a recent psychological study shows that because people are insensitive to where they hear things, if one quack repeats the same information to a person five times, its nearly as effective as hearing the sound bite from five different reputable sources.

**Q:** How do lobbyists compromise their interests (or their firms' interests) and their clients' interests?

**A:** There are many sensationalized stories of lobbyists gone bad, the most recent example being the Jack Abramoff scandal. In this particular case, Mr. Abramoff chose to put financial gain ahead of integrity and respect for the process. At my Group, we pride ourselves on our reputation and on doing it “right.” We have worked very hard to build relationships with legislators and their staff that have proven invaluable to our clients. But make no mistake; those relationships are built upon trust and mutual respect. When our client is given an audience with a Member, it does not equate to an agreement by the

Member of their position. It simply provides our client with an opportunity to present their issue and engage in a respectful dialog with the Congressperson and their staff. By engaging all parties, both pro and con, on an issue, it allows for a better understanding of everyone's position, which can allow for an acceptable solution for all involved.

**Q:** Is there guarantee that the hired lobbyist(s) will succeed in getting the issue (or whatever it may be) pushed all the way to the senate and have it legislated?

**A:** We really don't know much about lobbying in Korea (even those who study US domestic politics). I think some more explanation on the inner-workings of lobbyists would help us understand. The only guarantee afforded in politics is that there are NO guarantees. Anyone who proffers any absolutes that an issue will be resolved and legislated upon is not giving a truthful picture to their client. When you contract with my firm, you are actually paying for the creation and implementation of a strategic plan, not a guaranteed result. So many factors play into the political landscape and oftentimes crop up at a moment's notice. Partisan agendas, a Member's perceived vulnerability in an election year, Presidential politics, new scandals – they all have a way of derailing even the least volatile issue.

As lobbyists, our job is to prioritize your issue(s) among Members. This is achieved by building relationships and educating Members on your position. When those outside factors come into play, threatening to bring a halt to our progress, we then look for ways to preserve your position within a particular piece of legislation or we will look for an alternate vehicle.

**Q:** How do countries that are so distant from the US (of course, there's embassy presence, etc. but) review and monitor to verify if the activities of their hired lobbyists are meeting their demands?

**A:** We have regular communication with our clients – daily, weekly, monthly and sometimes hourly. It all depends upon what is happening with their issue and the progress of the strategic plan. At any point in time, our clients know exactly what activities are taking place whether it is meeting with Members and/or Executive Branch officials, attending a hearing, participating in a news conference, reviewing documents, etc., all of this being undertaken on behalf of the client. We put the gun in your hand, but you pull the trigger or direct us to on your behalf.

**Q:** Can you elaborate a little more on the need to defend against other lobbyists? Does this mean that if a potential client doesn't maintain regular presence on the Hill that their chance of getting their mission accomplished will be crushed by these other lobbyists that represent the potential client's contenders?

**A:** Maintaining a presence in Washington helps to ensure that your side of the story is told. If you have no presence on Capitol Hill it allows someone else to shape the agenda and steer the dialog on an issue. By educating Members on your group and on your position, by establishing a respectful relationship with them, you become an informational resource when Congress debates issues that affect you. When you have continued, open and honest discussions with people who agree with you and who oppose you, you begin to earn their trust and respect and, eventually, you earn a place at the table.■

## About the Author

*Jocelyn R. Hong, Principal, Vice President for Corporate Development, has worked in Washington since 1986 and has extensive legislative experience. She was instrumental in the passage of a landmark Federal law to clean up radioactive materials, which passed in a record three days. Ms. Hong was part of President Clinton's 1992 presidential transition team. She has been involved in numerous Presidential and Congressional campaigns. As an advisor to the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus Institute, she worked very closely with Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. Her congressional experience includes working as a legislative aide to both U.S. Senator John Glenn and Congressman Dennis E. Eckart. For Congressman Eckart, she worked on passage of the 1992 Energy Policy Act and on the staff of the Small Business Subcommittee on Privatization and the Impact of Deregulation, which he chaired. Born and raised in Honolulu, she has cultivated her organizational and management abilities as a leader in several national charitable organizations representing Asian American and women's interests. She was spokesperson for a coalition of Korean merchants victimized by violent crime in the nation's capital, she is a founding board member of the Asian American Action Fund which is dedicated to supporting Asian Americans for elected office. She has also served as a board member of the Washington Coalition on Comfort Women Issues as well as a founding board member of the Korean American Coalition, Washington, D.C. Chapter.*

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