

## Lobbying: To Do or Not To Do

by Luis F. Riquelme

Feelings of anxiety, fear and intimidation come to many of us upon the thought of lobbying in Albany. We wonder how we'll know what to say, how we'll know all the issues, why would a legislator or staff person listen to us, and how will we follow appropriate political protocol. Yes, anxiety, fear and intimidation still come to mind. **Until you lobby once, you will not conquer these feelings.**

Let's first think about *lobbying*. What's it all about? Basically, in simple terms, lobbying entails contacting legislators and informing them of our views on "the issue(s)." Legislators need input from their constituents (the people from their districts; you know, the ones that vote for them) in order to make appropriate decisions. Yes, you may say this my naïve approach to politics, but approach it is. Contacting legislators is completed via letter writing (conventional mail, facsimile or electronic mail) or personal visits to their home or Albany offices.

Sounds easy so far. It's almost like having a small cocktail party and sipping a few Cosmopolitans with your closest friends... *Wrong!* First of all, don't sip a few Cosmopolitans before any of these meetings, and secondly, don't sit and chat.

To lobby effectively, let me share a few simple "rules of the game" with you. You should:

- Truly believe in the issue(s) you are addressing
- Be as knowledgeable as possible about them, including background and opposing views
- Present the issue(s) clearly and briefly
- Be prepared to answer questions

Not too bad – is it?

My first lobbying experience in Albany was certainly filled with anxiety, fear and intimidation. Although I had written letters to legislators in the past, this was my first "face to face" appearance at the Legislative Office Building (LOB) in Albany. Elevators, long hallways, dark suits, multiple offices... This was my first view. Luckily, I was in the company of NYSSLHA's lobbyist, Peter Mannella from Carr Public Affairs; NYSSLHA's Past President, Linda S. Tepperman; and NYSSLHA's then President, Joe Montano. Watching them at work was great. Meeting after meeting, they presented the issues, answered the questions and discussed "strategy" in the hallways. After but a few of these meetings, I was turning into more of a participant, than an observer. In the Lobby Days that have followed, I have been quite involved, not to mention, NYSSLHA's sophistication and recognizability on "the Hill" (Albany lingo) have increased. It is truly an honor

to go to Albany now and say, "I'm here representing the New York State Speech-Language-Hearing Association!"

As you know by now, NYSSLHA will be sponsoring another **Lobby Day** this coming Tuesday, May 25<sup>th</sup>. This is open to all NYSSLHA members, and we are certainly hoping many of you will join us! There will be a Training Session on Monday evening, May 24<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00pm. This will be the opportunity to "get your feet wet" with the issues NYSSLHA has been addressing, and also a chance to ask questions about content and protocol. Once you register (see the announcement on pg. 5), we'll schedule appointments for you, so as to meet with specific legislators. We are going to do our best to match "newcomers" with more seasoned (not older!) colleagues. During the Training Session, we'll also have packets for everyone to distribute during their meetings. Basically these will be the NYSSLHA position statements/talking points on each bill we'll be addressing.

I do hope you'll consider joining us in Albany on Lobby Day this May 25<sup>th</sup>. It is our chance to advance our legislative agenda, make our needs and those of our consumers known, and make sure legislators have all the facts. Advancing these bills (see a complete listing and description in the most recent issue of the NYSSLHA Legislative & Governmental Affairs newsletter) is the best way to continue to ensure our professions are well represented at all levels of legislation, reimbursement and best practices.

We owe it to ourselves and to our patients/clients or students. Please feel free to contact the NYSSLHA office if you have any questions. As always, I remain available to talk you through any issues...

Please contact me at: [luisslp@aol.com](mailto:luisslp@aol.com), or via that conventional mode: the phone at (718) 783-0760.