Ike's Lobbyists

Administration Enlarges Staff Assigned to Sell Programs to Congress

Liaison Men Write Speeches, Answer Questions, Set Up Trips, Push Party Loyalty

Annual Costs: $3.5 Million

By LESTER TANZER
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON—The White House official leaned over the desk of the Midwestern Republican Congressman who had voted for an Administration-opposed rural electrification bill. "We need your vote to sustain the President's veto," the Eisenhower aide argued. "This bill in itself isn't important, but the Democrats have chosen it to see if they can establish a pattern of overriding the President's vetoes. If they can win, they'll be in a better position to override the vetoes of the big spending bills later on."

At the Old House Office Building, in a tiny third-floor room that once was a ladies' powder room, sit Navy Capt. G. S. Bullen, and Marine Lt. Col. William Oliver, answering phone calls or dictating letters. The two affable officers get a steady stream of requests from lawmakers on how to handle mail from their constituents—dealing with such touchy topics as a Marine sergeant who treats junior too harshly; the failure of the Navy to serve milk to an offspring four times a day; or a sailor who wants to come home to support his financially hard-pressed family.

Twenty-four hours before one of the Federal housing agencies publicly announces a grant or loan for "urban renewal," college housing or some other Government-aided housing program, William Henry Harrison, a former Wyoming Congressman and grandson of the 23rd President, may pass the word along to interested legislators. That way, the lawmakers can tip off recipients and gain some good will back home.

A Growing Corps

The White House aide, the Naval officers and Mr. Harrison all have something in common. They're part of a sizable though little-publicized corps of officials, spread through almost every Federal agency, whose full-time job it is to make Congressional friends and influence legislation. Already some 500 people, many with Capitol Hill experience of their own, are engaged, at an annual cost of $3.5 million, in the Federal endeavor known as "Congressional liaison"—and their numbers are growing steadily.

Behind the rise of this breed of Federal employe, largely a post-World War II phenomenon, lies the growth and complexity of modern Federal Government. As just one sign of that underlying fact, Congress last year enacted 1,063 new laws, compared with 940 in 1940 and less than 500 in the 66th Congress of 1919-20. "Every time Congress adds a facet to our operation," says Robert Forsythe, chief liaison officer for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, "the volume of our business increases."

Though it can't be measured precisely, the work of the Administration's "lobbyists" plainly has an impact on the current struggle between President Eisenhower and the Democratic Congress. The envoys to Capitol Hill help shape their agencies' programs at the start of each session. They aid in preparing testimony for Administration witnesses at Congressional hearings. They sound out lawmakers' reactions to specific proposals and try to sell their views to fence-sitters, usually employing facts and reason or, if the target is a Republican, an appeal to party loyalty.

Some Help Map Strategy

The Congressional ambassadors also help write speeches or furnish information for sympathetic lawmakers who want to speak out for an Administration measure. They may help map Administration strategy once a bill nears floor action, perhaps working out compromises with key legislators when a measure is in trouble. Not long ago, one Executive agency's top liaison official saw to it that enough Republican members stayed away from a Senate committee's meeting to prevent a quorum—thus delaying a vote on a particular measure until the Administration could swing more support for the bill.

Not all the liaison forces' efforts are focused so directly on specific legislation. Often, these influence men drum up support for their department's policies, rather than for a particular bill. The Pentagon's Congressional envoys, for example, arranged 221 air trips for one or more lawmakers in 1958 to Cape Canaveral, the Strategic Air Command's Omaha headquarters and to other U.S. military installations around the world.

"The more we get them out," reasons Brig. Gen. William Fisher, head of the Air Force's legislative liaison division, "the better educated decisions Congress will make."

Much of the liaison workers' time is taken up with tasks less directly linked to legislation: Answering legislators' complaints and queries, usually spurred by mail from constituents, and otherwise building good will among lawmakers. The lobbyists dig up answers for hundreds of thousands of letters that legislators pass on to the Executive agencies each year, perhaps asking for advice on how to take advantage of a Federal program or griping about some Government activity.

Itineraries Arranged for Lawmakers

To keep lawmakers happy, the State Department's liaison staff works out complete itineraries, handling all necessary reservations, for legislators who want to travel abroad, for pleasure or business. General Services Administration officials recently came up with a two-decades-old Federal Government license plate to fill a hole in a Congressman's collection. One young lady at G.S.A. spends most of her time calling up lawmakers to give them progress reports on Government buildings under construction in their districts. The Post Office Department's Congressional envoys ask legislators for their personal views on the three top prospects, as determined by Civil Service exams, for postmaster jobs in their districts.

Such little aids for Congress, to be sure,

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would be furnished even if Federal lobbyists never lifted a finger for an Administration bill. Nevertheless, there's a distinct connection between providing these services and influencing legislation. "You do a good job handling the personal problems and requests of a Congressman," a White House official figures, "and you have an easier time convincing him to back your program."

Actually, the heaviest wooing of lawmakers on behalf of Administration programs is probably done by Cabinet members and other high officials, rather than the full-time lobbyists. Liaison men often call in their superiors when an especially influential legislator complains about something or a rank-and-file lawmaker raises a major policy question. Comments an Interior Department liaison official, "It's more discreet to send somebody on the policy level than one of us from the working gang."

Besides his weekly meetings with G.O.P. leaders, the President meets privately on occasion with key lawmakers of both parties to make a more personal appeal for a particular program. On the eve of a big vote, he'll place a number of private phone calls to try to sway undecided legislators. Cabinet members, too, phone fence-sitters before a bill comes to a vote, even if the issue doesn't involve their own field; usually, the Cabinet officials concentrate on legislators from their home states or those they know well.

Anderson's Luncheons

Just about every Cabinet member makes a practice of meeting informally from time to time with lawmakers who deal in legislation they're concerned with. Treasury Secretary Anderson held a series of four buffet luncheons in his private dining room earlier this year—at his own expense—to explain the Treasury's debt management problems to freshman legislators and members of the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance committees. Mr. Eisenhower recently invited Republican members of the House Commerce Committee for late-afternoon drinks at the White House to express his personal apprecation for trimming a Democratic-sponsored airport construction measure.

For all this high-level lobbying, it's the regular Congressional liaison officials who cement the Administration's day-to-day relations with Capitol Hill. In many cases, it's the liaison workers who spot the targets for their superiors and advise them how to handle lawmakers. William Macomber, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, for instance, may remind Secretary of State Herter he'll be seeing a key lawmaker at an evening social affair and suggest something to tell him; Mr. Macomber is sure to set up private briefings by Mr. Herter for members of the House and Senate Foreign Affairs committees when the Secretary of State returns from the foreign ministers' conference in Geneva.

Attempts by the Executive branch of Government to influence Congress, of course, are as old as the country itself; back in 1781, General "Mad Anthony" Wayne's Pennsylvania regiments started marching on Congress in Philadelphia until the lawmakers agreed to make up the soldiers' back pay and discharge troops who had served their full three-year enlistment terms. But until rather recently, "Congressional liaison" was just another job of Administration officials—often the general counsel of a department—who had many other duties as well. This meant the wooing of Congress usually was handled haphazardly or in routine fashion.

But in recent years, Congressional liaison has become more and more formal. In 1949, for example, Congress officially created the post of Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations; Mr. Macomber, who now occupies that spot, has a 22-man staff that does nothing but deal with Congress. Before 1949, the department's top officers had personal aides who handled their bosses' relations with Congress as well as other chores, without necessarily coordinating their efforts—"homeless wanderers," one official calls them.

Larger Liaison Staffs

As the Federal Government has grown, the size of liaison staffs has increased. At the outset of World War II, the Army, which then included the Air Force, employed only five full-time lobbyists. By the end of the war, the number had soared to 65. At last count, the Army and Air Force together employed 238 legislative liaison workers. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman, who were their own chief lobbyists, had only one or two White House aides whose sole job it was to sway Congress. Mr. Eisenhower now has six full-time envoys to Capitol Hill plus Gen. Wilton (Jerry) Persons, his chief of staff who spends much of his time dealing with lawmakers.

The total number of people trying to improve the Administration's relations with Congress is still going up. The Pentagon's legislative liaison force, the biggest in Government at 330, is scheduled to expand by a dozen or more in the next year; spending will increase from $2.6 million in the fiscal year coming to an end June 30 to $2.9 million in fiscal 1960. The three-member staff at the recently-created National Aeronautics and Space Administration will shortly go up to six. Just the other day, the staid old Interstate Commerce Commission set up the first Congressional liaison office in its 72-year history.

The apparently irresistible impulse to expand doesn't stem just from the Administration's desire to sway Congress. The lawmakers themselves have had a considerable hand in the steady growth of legislative liaison, with their persistent demands for information or help in handling their mail. "When Congress becomes aware of the existence of a legislative liaison office," notes an Administration lobbyist, "it's amazing the way your work load increases."

Congress played a major role in the recent creation of the I.C.C.'s three-member liaison staff. After the recent House investigation of pressures on regulatory agencies, according to one high official, many lawmakers became leery of direct contact with I.C.C. commissioners, even on routine questions from constituents on matters pending before the commission. So the legislators prodded the commission into creating a sort of "middle man" to handle such matters, and thus forestall possible complaints that they were trying to influence the I.C.C. improperly.

Congress' own urge to have Executive-branch liaison workers handy probably accounts in large measure for the lawmakers' generous interpretation of laws designed to prevent use of appropriations "directly or indirectly" for Administration lobbying.

But the lawmakers do occasionally snap back at the Executive branch. Last year Congress forced a cutback to 330 from 360 in the number of Pentagon liaison staffers, out of resentment against the services' intensive lobbying on the Administration's Defense Department reorganization bill. But the size of the Pentagon staff is creeping back up again. And the lawmakers show little disposition to question the liaison activities of other Federal agencies.

No two Administration agencies handle their Congressional liaison exactly alike. In size, the Executive Departments' lobbying forces range from the Treasury's lone liaison hand—former Columbia College football all-American, Gene Rossides—to the Pentagon's seven platoons of manpower. Some agencies with large staffs, including the Army, Navy and Air Force, the Veterans Administration and the Civil Service Commission, have offices right on Capitol Hill—paid for by Congress—to provide quick access to lawmakers.

For all the diversity, a pattern of operation is clearly discernible throughout the Administration. The ranks of the lobbyists abound with men with Congressional experience. They include former lawmakers, such as the White House's Jack Z. Anderson, onetime G.O.P. Representative from California; old Congressional committee hands, including George Moore, once chief counsel of the House Post Office panel, and a large number of people who used to work for one lawmaker or another. Lawyers without such political background are numerous, too. Less typically, there's even a car dealer among the Administration's legislative contact men—George Vaughan, who ran a Buick agency in Los Angeles before taking over the Defense Department's legislative affairs office earlier this year.

Personality, as well as experience, is a major factor in selecting a man for liaison work. "We run a low-key operation with no high-pressure types or brash personalities," claims a White House lobbyist. The Air Force's Brig. Gen. Fisher describes a typical liaison aide this way: "He has a combat record, which inspires confidence among Congressmen. He needs good judgment in dealing with people and a friendly personality, so he can handle difficult situations. He's got to be able to say 'no' pleasantly."

Object: A Friendly Atmosphere

The idea, of course, is to create a friendly atmosphere between the Administration and Congress; at the least, that can make the basic tools of the liaison staffers work more effectively. The lobbyists' chief tools: Facts "presented in the right manner and at the right time," according to one Administration student of the art, and party loyalty. When it comes to efforts to influence legislation, liaison workers deal mostly, though not exclusively, with Republicans, leaving largely to higher officials the job of selling Administration programs to Democratic leaders.

"You tell the Congressman, 'Look, here's a good bill,' and you make your detailed case for the bill," explains one Administration lobbyist. "You tell him the President is quite anxious to get his vote. Unless he's under strong local pressures in his district, he'll go along with you. If he sits on the fence, well, you find people who know him best or you get the Republican Party leadership to work him over."

There are, of course, various ways of getting facts across to a legislator. "Your approach varies with the individual," notes a liaison official now trying to get the House to toughen the Senate-passed labor reform measure. Listen to his distinctions: "If you're talking to an old Eisenhower Republican, who may be somewhat liberal, you ask for support of the President rather than your legislation. If it's a real conservative, who wants an even stronger bill, you point out what your bill has that he wants and play down Eisenhower. If you find a guy 100% for you, then you use him to keep open your lines of communication with both extremes in case you have to work out a compromise."

The State Department, for one, likes to be sure it knows how various lawmakers feel about issues it's involved in. So a lady on the agency's 22-member liaison staff spends almost

all her time keeping an up-to-date file on legislators, clipping newspaper reports of their votes on diplomatic issues and all their speeches, in Congress and out, on foreign matters.

Localizing Arguments

Whenever they can, Administration influence men like to bring their facts home to their targets. A case that is regarded as a classic among Administration lobbyists was the Commerce Department's breakdown of what last year's reciprocal trade extension bill meant to individual states and districts. Such reports were furnished to 170 lawmakers who requested them; they showed, among other things, the firms in a given area and the number of their employes making goods sold abroad—all of whom would supposedly benefit from extension of the trade act.

From all the outward signs, there's little evidence that any high-pressure tactics are employed—at least by the liaison men. "You occasionally hear rumors of deals to get a key man on your side," admits one Congressional contact man, "but if that happens, it's handled at a higher level than mine."

Nevertheless, a lawmaker's desire to get a friend a Federal job or get a military base built in his district is often a help to the liaison man. "I never went up to a guy and said, 'Vote this way and get a job for your constituent,' " says an Administration lobbyist, adding, "But you've got the basic laws of human nature on your side. If the fellow wants a favor, he's likely to vote your way just in case he thinks it might do him good."

Even if crude force is not employed, the Administration's envoys to Congress find subtler ways to apply pressure: The more important the selling job, the higher ranking the officials who will be put into service. The top liaison men for the Army, Navy and Air Force are almost invariably of at least one-star rank, with impressive records; the Army's Lt. Gen. John Michaelis is a much-decorated Korean War hero. "You can't help but be impressed," concedes a Midwest Republican, "when a big-name general sits down to answer your questions."

The mere presence of a White House lobbyist on behalf of a bill stamps it as a major issue; Mr. Eisenhower's own ambassadors to Congress step in on only the most vital measures—including almost all the major spending bills this year. "There are lots and lots of bills before Congress," comments an Eisenhower aide, "and the Administration has a position on all of them. But when the White House steps in, you're letting the Congressmen know the President really cares."

Degrees of Pressure

Liaison officials sometimes call in assistant secretaries or even department heads to sway a reluctant lawmaker. "You can entreat with various degrees of intensity," notes a veteran Administration lobbyist. "If the Cabinet member can't swing it, you may bring in the President himself. And you can apply different degrees of pressure by sending the Congressman a letter, phoning him or talking to him in person."

Though the liaison men themselves largely confine the selling end of their business to Republicans, their public relations and personal service work is pretty much bipartisan. All lawmakers get letters at the start of each session, telling them whom to get in touch with at the Executive agencies for information on legislation, help in answering constituents' requests and other such aid. The Air Force figures it gets 2,000 letters a week from Congress, plus about as many phone calls.

Prompt, courteous replies are a rule in most agencies. But the agencies can't always deliver. Take the case of the House member who, after receiving a heart-rending letter from a serviceman's wife about her financial plight, went to work to obtain a hardship discharge for the soldier. The Army was anxious to cooperate, too, until it got a terse note from the soldier: "I joined the Army to get away from that woman. . . . Now leave me alone."