Bush Turns to House for Help

By Chris Cillizza

The nomination of California Rep. Christopher Cox (R) to be the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission last week brought the number of House Republicans tapped to serve in the Bush administration in the past nine months to three, a dramatic reversal from the president’s first term.

If confirmed by the Senate — as seems likely — Cox will join former Ohio Rep. Rob Portman and former Florida Rep. Porter Goss in the administration. Goss is the Central Intelligence Agency director; Portman was confirmed as the United States trade representative in April.

Through the first three and a half years of Bush’s term, he named just one sitting House Member, then Ohio Democratic Rep. Tony Hall, to a high-profile political job.

Cox was nominated for a federal judgeship by Bush in 2001 but saw his chances of confirmation dashed when Democrats took control of the Senate in May of that year.

White House spokeswoman Erin popular donors at the Belle Haven Club despite the fact that Shays regularly makes the Speaker’s life difficult. It is not easy to be Speaker of the House, and there will be some of you makes the Speaker’s life difficult. Particularly makes the Speaker’s life difficult. Club despite the fact that Shays regularly makes the Speaker’s life difficult.

roll call 50th anniversary

A Frequent Critic Gets Hastert’s Aid

By Ben Pershing

GREENWICH, Conn. — Just before noon on a gloomy, gray day last week, Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) joined the most outspoken leadership critic in the GOP Conference at a yacht club here and respectfully agreed to disagree.

The occasion was a $1,000-a-plate luncheon for 4th district Rep. Christopher Shays, a vocal, occasionally quirky moderate who perennially appears on Democratic target lists. Hastert accepted Shays’ invitation to join him and about 90 affluent donors at the Belle Haven Club despite the fact that Shays regularly makes the Speaker’s life difficult.

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Growth in Lobbying Has Been ‘Positive’

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global political and economic affairs; partly through advancements in technology; and partly due to the increasing sophistication and participation of our citizens in politics and policy issues.

The result has been the growth and influence of in-house corporate lobbyists, trade associations, law firm policy groups, polling organizations and public relations companies, to name a few. The last half century has seen American participatory democracy redefined. Community organizations, issue advocates, non-governmental organizations, think tanks and individual citizens at the “grass roots” are influencing government decisions like at no prior time in our history, and in a manner every bit as sophisticated as the so-called hired guns in Washington.

Federal policy advocacy also has become increasingly complex. Lobbyists in the 21st century often function like operatives in a political campaign, simultaneously coordinating substantive policy messages, coalitions and stakeholder groups, media relations, grassroots and survey research in furtherance of policy initiatives narrow and broad alike. Follow any noteworthy legislation before Congress and you will find all manner of lobbying campaigns under way.

Of course, technology has changed the manner of lobbying as much as any other factor. Email can provide instantaneous access to policymakers and facilitate the rapid dissemination of information and exchange of ideas. “Blogging” is now a cottage industry and a fixture in how our politicians receive information and share positions. And the Internet is the new

Akin Gump’s Robert Strauss
town hall, providing access to government action as well as a means of participating in policy making as never before. The 2004 election certainly demonstrated the importance of the Internet as a conduit for political participation, particularly for fundraising.

For the most part, the growth of lobbying has been a healthy process with positive results. Our officials are receiving more input from citizens from all walks of life affected by governmental policies. I agree with Thomas Jefferson’s argument that “democracy is cumbersome, slow and inefficient, but in due time the voice of the people will be heard and their latent wisdom will prevail.”

But lobbying cannot be divorced from either the political process or the functioning of government. If I were to define two curses of our political system today, they would be its over-reliance on money and the partisanship which now infects Washington. And lobbying plays a role in both of these phenomena.

Today, money plays too prominent a role in shaping the policy process. There is no doubt that Members of Congress spend too much time raising money. As a result, lobbyists are often turned into fundraisers. This is a cycle that can breed impropriety and scandal. That said, while the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law has not stopped the flow of money into campaign accounts on Capitol Hill — nor was it intended to — it is an important reform. Likewise, I would count the transparency and disclosure in our campaign finance system among the most positive developments in political participation in the past 50 years.

Partisanship is another phenomenon, both integral to our nation’s history and at times off-putting in its manifestations. The pursuit of political gain in the name of party loyalty too often destroys the pragmatic compromise that can make our system work so well.

In the modern lobbying context, I have seen elected officials use partisanship in an attempt to influence the manner in which companies and associations hire advocates. This is cynical and wrong, and beyond the scope of the responsibilities of elected officials. It also prompts appropriate criticism of a lobbying community that would bend to such pressure. I do not think it naive or old fashioned to suggest that merit, intellect and ability, rather than one’s party affiliation or history of financial contributions, should remain paramount in such decisions. To act otherwise undermines the potential for more enlightened participation in federal policymaking from the private sector.

I am a Democrat who has served in both the Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush administrations. I also founded the law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, where attorneys of diverse backgrounds and political affiliations work side-by-side to serve client interests with distinction. In fact, Akin Gump’s two lobbying groups, located in our Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas, offices, are made up of both Republicans and Democrats. I mention this only to emphasize that the healthy professional exchange of partisan ideas can coexist with bipartisan advocacy.

In my many years in private practice, representing and serving on the boards of major corporations and as a public official, I have seen the entrepreneurial genius, commercial creativity and public benefit provided by companies of all varieties participating in the political process. Their contributions extend to the formulation of our nation’s laws and policies, to which companies often dedicate substantial time, expertise, and resources that might not otherwise be available to our nation’s policymakers.

Those of us who both participate in and understand well how our political process and government work owe it to those beyond the Beltway whom we may assist to act responsibly, ethically and with a good deal of common sense. The health of our democracy depends on it.

Robert S. Strauss is a senior executive partner at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP.

Ready for Her Close-Up

A friend fixes the hair of Mildred Fay Jefferson (center) as she gets a hug from Geline Williams, chairwoman of the board of the National Right to Life Committee, during an awards luncheon held Thursday by Black Americans for Life. Jefferson, president of the Right to Life Crusade, was one of three movement leaders honored at the luncheon.

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