

Every Montanan is a lobbyist, strictly speaking

Question: During the election season, the word, “lobbyist,” gets thrown around with many negative connotations. Yet, lobbyist is not a four-letter word. Many legitimate, consumer-oriented organizations like ACRE of the electric cooperatives use lobbying techniques to be heard on Capitol Hill. What are the policies and practices of your office in dealing with lobbyists trying to tell the stories of their constituents?



By Senator Max Baucus

defines lobbyist as someone “conduct(ing) activities aimed at influencing public officials and especially members of a legislative body on legislation.” All Montanans can serve as “lobbyists” on behalf of the Big Sky state. I need to hear about your needs so I can do my part in making our state an even better place to live, work and raise a family.

To do the best job I can for Montana, I need to hear from all my 900,000 bosses. I want to meet, talk and correspond with all of you. Whether you’re a student, parent, farmer, rancher, business person, teacher, doctor or lawyer, I want to hear from you. I need to

know what you’re thinking; I want to know your concerns.

Also, I have staff all across our great state who are eager and willing to talk with you. They want to lend a helping hand wherever they can.

The best way I can serve all of you is for you to get in touch with me. Please e-mail me at max@baucus.senate.gov or call me at 800-332-6106 or write me a letter.

If you’re ever in Washington, please come by my office. Every Wednesday morning that the Senate is in session, I invite all Montanans to stop by for coffee. Please come on by at 8:15 a.m. I hope to see you there.

The sign on my Senate desk says it all “Montana Comes First.” And I can assure you that everything I do, I do with Montana in mind. The word, lobbyist, can have negative connotations, but it doesn’t have to. The Merriam-Webster’s dictionary



By Senator Conrad Burns

For example, earlier this summer, I proposed an amendment to the immigration reform bill that would prohibit the decennial census from counting illegal aliens. This amendment would have resulted in restoring Montana’s second Congressional seat we lost in 1992. The idea for this proposal came from a Montanan who wrote a letter to my office.

In the strictest sense of the word, that could be considered lobbying. I wouldn’t consider it that, but someone could.

In fact, I’ve instructed my staff to always make a concerted effort to discuss legislative proposals with as many Montanans as possible before any legislation is introduced that will affect those citizens.

If there’s an issue that’s concerning you, or you need help navigating the federal waters, my office stands by to try to assist anyone who asks. I have offices in Glendive, Billings,

Bozeman, Butte, Helena, Great Falls, Missoula and Kalispell. We can also be reached by calling 1-800-344-1513 or stopping by my Web site at <http://burns.senate.gov> <<http://burns.senate.gov>> and clicking on “email me” near the top of the page.

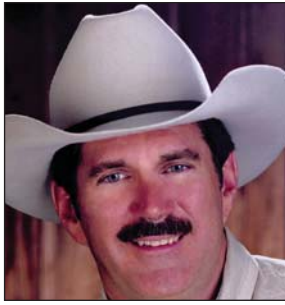
I don’t want Montanans to ever feel like they can’t stop by my office to see me, say hello or ask for help with issues with their government. I work for them, they are my number one priority, and my door is always open for my bosses. As for everyone else, lobbyist or not, I’ll listen to them, but I’ll always do what I think is right for Montana and what is right for the United States, regardless of what anyone else may want.

My job is to represent Montanans in Washington, and I take that responsibility seriously. Please don’t hesitate to contact my office if you think I can be of assistance.

You always hear people talking about how in Washington the only way to have your concerns heard by your government is to be a lobbyist. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I can’t speak for other members of Congress, but I have Montanans dropping by my office all the time. They come in, say hello and let me know what’s on their mind.

One thing I love about Montanans is they always have an opinion and are willing and wanting to tell you what’s on their minds. I hear their concerns and work to alleviate them.



By Representative Denny Rehberg

There's no doubt that the most important part of my job as Montana's Congressman is making sure the concerns and voices of everyday Montanans are being heard loud and clear in the nation's capitol. Fortunately, there are a lot of ways to accomplish this goal.

One of my favorite parts of being Montana's lone member in the House of Representatives is my tour of all of the state's 56 counties, which I conduct every Congressional term. I can't think of a better way to listen, learn and seek advice from Montanans than to meet with them and hear their concerns face-to-face. My appearances at local cafes, veterans halls and other meeting places serve a two-fold purpose: I get to hear what's on the minds

of Montanans and they get to have their voices heard when I take that input back to Washington.

Montanans also have a voice through organizations such as the rural electric co-ops. The state's co-ops come to Washington to meet with me regularly. These meetings help me articulate the unique living costs and special concerns of Montana's rural communities, dispel the government subsidization myths and inform my urban colleagues on how investor-owned utilities receive far more federal assistance than co-ops.

There are other ways for individual Montanans to have their voices heard. I will again be conducting listening sessions on a variety of topics throughout the state during the year. With a new Farm Bill ready to come before Congress in 2007, I've already conducted one listening session on agriculture in Plentywood earlier this year and I have several more planned.

In April I conducted a listening session in Chester, where I listened to concerns ranging from energy to health care to taxes. I also have several field

representatives working for me throughout the state who conduct traveling office hours. After meeting with you, the field reps report back to me and get right to work on helping with you. Already this year we've helped hundreds of Montanans with casework ranging from problems with Medicare to the Internal Revenue Service.

I also encourage all of my constituents to visit my Web site at <http://www.house.gov/rehberg/>. There you can sign up for my e-newsletter, which is great way to get regular updates on what I'm doing for Montana in Washington.

My Web site is also a great resource for Montanans to learn about the services my office provides. This is another, hassle-free way for you to be sure your voice is being heard. You can also call me toll free at 888-232-2626.

The way I see it, there are over 900,000 people in Montana, so I've got 900,000 bosses to represent, and each of them has the right to have their voice heard in Congress. I wouldn't have it any other way.

How much juice in your cuppa java?

by Jeanne Barnard

How much juice can you get out of a cup of coffee?

Take a look at the electricity value you receive for the cost of a gourmet espresso.

Perhaps you have read about the Montana Energy Challenge.

This challenge is to demonstrate the value consumers are receiving in energy cost. Consumers in July tried to win \$1,000 by submitting a bid saying how long they would be willing to go without power.

The highest bidder gets the chance to prove it beginning Aug. 8.

Even if you did not bid, how long do you think you would be willing to go without power?

It's a provocative ques-

tion, isn't it? Now, for some real-life specifics on the value you receive for the price of a kilowatt-hour, whether you entered the Challenge or not.

The average residence at Big Flat Electric consumes about 1,029 kWh per month. Divided by the hours in a month, that comes to 1.38 kWhrs per hour or 1,380 Watts. The cost per kWhr for that hour (1.38 kWhr) would be close to 11 cents.

So what can you get for the price of one kilowatt of energy?

At Big Flat Electric's present rates, for the cost of a plain coffee, let's say \$2, you can wash 3.5 loads of laundry.

For the cost of a double-almond, mocha latte at \$3.50, you can curl your hair 2,215 times with an 85-watt curling iron.

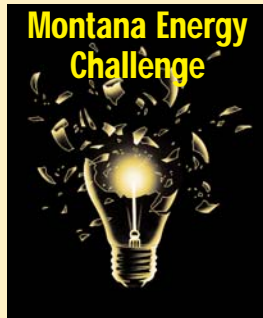
For the price of a \$4.50 frappuccino, you can mix up and bake 14 batches of chocolate chip cookies in an electric oven.

Your radio can be on 12 hours a day for 50 days for the cost of a \$3.50 strawberry banana smoothie.

Your dishwasher can wash 15 loads of dishes (if you don't run the heated dry cycle) for the cost of one \$2.50 16 oz. cherry-chocolate latte.

Say you use the microwave a half hour to cook a meal — you could cook 87 meals for the same price of one gourmet, double-shot espresso at \$3.50.

The moral of this story is: for the price of a coffee drink that lasts 15 minutes, you can do a lot with the value you get for one kWhr of electricity at your electric cooperative.



Jeanne Barnard is manager of Big Flat Electric. She wrote this piece, edited here for space, for her co-op newsletter