

# US/Europe

## Tactics on either side of the Atlantic still differ radically

The Europeans and the Americans take markedly different approaches to lobbying, and probably will do so for the foreseeable future. Kellen Europe and Kellen Company in the US spoke about these differences to *The Healthcare Lobbyist*.

Lobbying legislators is something of a last resort for Kellen. "We believe, on behalf of our association members, that it is best to exhaust all the possibilities for a solution to a problem with the regulator first if the regulators have the authority to act," says Richard Cristol, executive vice president of Washington-based Kellen Company. "A lot of people run straight to Capitol Hill and force it through a Congressman", he says. Kellen's philosophy, Mr Cristol said, is rather to go to Capitol Hill only if they fail to get the resolution they need from the federal agencies.

Once resolved to approach legislators in Europe or the US, Kellen advise people to go in early and talk with them. This may mean, as maybe the case in Europe, that the respective politician is not of your own nationality. But the days when lobbyists only approached MEPs from their own country is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

MEPs, as with anyone, respond best to their mother tongue. "Clearly it helps to speak to the people in their own language," says Alfons Westgeest, a managing partner at Brussels-based Kellen Europe, who heads a multi-national team. In the European Parliament, national language and culture is still more important to MEPs than

the European Commission, he says. The real trick, however, is getting the opportunity to speak to them in the first place.

Languages are not a problem in the US, although Mr Cristol, who has a southern US accent, jokes: "It seems as though I was much more effective when Jimmy Carter was there. People do like to identify with someone familiar."

Whilst the European Union and its lobbyists are busy embracing more countries, lobbyists in the US are seeing public relations going hand-in-hand with public affairs. The media campaigns are helping to create the climate for the political lobbying.

The UK is also embracing this approach and, in an expanded European Union, there are more media outlets covering activities in Brussels, and therefore more opportunities for publicising political campaigns. The number of think-tanks in Brussels is also on the increase, providing more opportunity for "soft lobbying".

The lead, then, is being taken by the US, where Mr Cristol observes "a more precise use of people and techniques". Lobbyist Carol A McDaid recently told the *New York Times* that lobbying had become so sophisticated that, in preparation for a critical vote, a big healthcare or pharmaceutical company will hire a different firm to lobby each key member of an important committee (*The Healthcare Lobbyist*, Issue 4, page 2).

Lobbying is more developed in Washington partly, Mr Cristol believes, because the US has a large government structure firmly in place, whilst Europe is

still getting one together.

America is also not too shy about employing its former Congressmen and women as lobbyists, although it remains the subject of heated debate (*The Healthcare Lobbyist*, Issue 3, page 3). In the US there is a very clear route for such a career change. However, in Europe, having been an MEP for a number of years would not necessarily put a person in good stead to work for a private lobbying company, although some do.

In the US, two former Congressmen – Billy Tauzin and Jim Greenwood – head up two of the healthcare sector's biggest lobbying organizations: respectively the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) and the BioIndustry Association (BIO).

Ex-Congressmen are highly valued by lobbying organizations in the US for the expertise they bring. "When they were in office serving in the House and Senate they were used to hammering the federal agencies," Mr Cristol said. Cooling-off periods are imposed to avoid conflicts of interest they leave office to start in the private sector.

But it was not always the case that the Congressmen would become lobbyists. "20 years ago, elected federal officials finished their term and went home," Mr Cristol said. "Now it is an accepted practice to go to K Street. Many of those people now have such means that they

buy homes in Washington and rent apartments. Lobbying is a very lucrative business in the US. There is a lot of prestige attached to working in the US Congress, compared to blending back in with the folks at home."

Mr Cristol describes US associations as "extremely professional". "Politics is also more polarized than it has ever been before in the US," he said. "The partisanship is fierce, which a lobbyist has to take account of," he said.

Europe is already making moves to catch up with the US. "In Europe you do find that the associations have to professionalise and we at Kellen Europe help to professionalise them," Mr Westgeest said. Berlin consultants FischerAppelt recently warned that German associations must modernize if they want to retain their influence (*The Healthcare Lobbyist*, Issue 4, page 5).

But Europe does not have such partisanship that one witnesses in the US. "When it is voting time, an MEP may go with the party, the country or the constituency, or even a personal option," Mr Westgeest said.

A further difference between the two political blocs is money. In the US, political action committees are a traditional way of raising money for a politician's campaigns. "That's simply not done in Europe, and I don't see that coming over to Europe," Mr Westgeest said. ■

## Byrne appointed patron

Health First Europe, a lobby group made up of industry, patients, healthcare workers and academics, has secured former EU Commissioner for health, David Byrne, as their patron.

Health First Europe promotes greater use of innovative medical technology to meet the challenge of an ageing society.

Mr Byrne said the formation of the group, in March 2004, was well-timed.

"The combined impacts of enlargement, demographics and medical innovation require policy developments and legal solutions to ensure that patients' access to health is promoted and protected", Mr Byrne said on his appointment. ■