

Norris: Have you hugged your lobbyist today? They're the experts.

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IN PRACTICE
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The Indiana General Assembly has reconvened for the 2026 legislative session, during which lawmakers will tackle issues ranging from property taxes to utility costs to the possibility of the breaded tenderloin being declared the official state sandwich.

And even though this year will be a “short” legislative session that is scheduled to conclude by the end of February, there have been more than 500 bills and countless amendments drafted that could impact your personal and professional lives.

With so many important issues being considered in such a condensed time frame, isn’t it comforting to know that a trained governmental affairs professional is watching your back?

That’s right! Whether you realize it or not, you have a lobbyist roaming the halls of the Statehouse to protect your interests and advocate on your behalf. In fact, you probably have multiple lobbyists looking out for you.

Every profession is represented by a trade association that hires a lobbyist, either on staff or under contract.

It’s worth noting that the advocates for the Indiana State Bar Association are exceptional in representing the views and concerns of the legal profession.

Do you have children in school? The teachers and the administrators have lobbyists.

Maybe you think there’s too much government and you pay too much in taxes. Yep, organizations representing those views also hire governmental affairs professionals.

Enjoy the outdoors? You have lobbyists advocating on your behalf. Several of them. Lobbyists are those unseen guardian angels, advancing your interests.

Why so many? Because lobbyists play an integral part in the legislative process. No, seriously. Hear me out.

Granted, most people don't conjure the most flattering image of a lobbyist when that term gets mentioned.

If you want a good laugh, just do an internet search for "what does a lobbyist do" and look at the images.

My personal favorite is the one that shows six different images based on what my clients, the public, my mom, etc., think I do for a living. And of course, the only time the public hears about lobbyists is when there's a negative news story.

But truly, governmental affairs professionals are key to developing good policy, largely because of the technical expertise we provide on behalf of our clients.

While this applies across all levels of government, it's especially important with our part-time state Legislature. Legislators who have responsibilities outside of the Statehouse can't be experts on all issues that come before them. And while legislative employees are talented, the staffs are small, leaving gaps that government affairs professionals fill.

When an issue is presented, the lobby community will provide input on how that proposal will impact our clients, providing detail and nuance that may not be readily understood at the outset. We can offer helpful suggestions about how to improve the bill, or in some cases, why the bill might not be in the best interest of the state (and our clients).

Often, the competing interests engaged on an issue, while working at odds with one another, collectively can achieve a positive outcome for all parties. The give and take in the negotiation process between dedicated professionals hopefully leads to a balanced outcome that satisfies all stakeholders.

There's also a mutual respect among the lobby community that allows us to zealously represent our clients on the opposite side of an issue while maintaining professionalism and decorum. After all, because of the multitude of issues that come before the Legislature, it's likely that lobbyists will be on opposing sides on one particular issue but aligned on the next item being considered.

The lobby crowd at the Statehouse consists of dedicated professionals that represent our clients to the end of promoting good public policy. And whether you realize it or not, we are representing your interests on a whole host of issues.

So the next time you encounter a lobbyist, shake their hand, say thank you and offer to buy *them* lunch for a change!•

Norris is a partner at Krieg DeVault. Opinions expressed are those of the author.