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## The influence industry: Lobbying continues inexorable growth

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Patricia Lynch said the seeming ease with which she has catapulted into the elite of Albany lobbyists belies the difficulty of the ascent.

She started in early 2001 with one assistant. Now her firm, **Patricia Lynch Associates Inc.**, has 15 lobbyists and support staff. In 2005, Patricia Lynch Associates had \$4.2 million in lobbyist compensation, second only to the \$6.9 million earned by perennial kingpin Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP.

"When you start a lobbying business, it's like starting any other business," she said. "You need to have a business model. You need to be able to adapt to changes in the landscape. You need to work 24/7, at least for the first five years. You need to attract and retain the very best staff you can. You've got to meet a payroll just like any other small business."

But getting bigger doesn't mean it is getting easier, Lynch said.

"I wake up every morning with my stomach in knots," she said.

Overall, Albany lobbyists made a record \$149 million in 2005, according to reports filed with the state Lobbying Commission. That was \$5 million more than in 2004. The amount has increased every year since the commission first collected figures in 1978, except for a slight decline in 2000.

"Big numbers," said Lobbying Commission Executive Director David Grandeau of the escalating spending in Albany. "The question is, what will be the big issue this year that will generate money on par with the Jets [in 2005]? Do I think there will be one? There always is."

A proposal to build a domed football stadium on the West Side of Manhattan for the New York Jets and a possible Olympics pushed lobbying spending to new heights last year. Cablevision and its corporate cousins, including Madison Square Garden, spent more than \$18 million to help get the stadium proposal killed by the state Legislature. The Jets poured nearly \$5.5 million into the fight.

### WELL-PAID AND WELL-CONNECTED

Lynch, who charged Cablevision \$300,000 for her services, employs a model for her firm that is now typical of the heavyweights lobbying in Albany. Most have a politically well-connected principal or principals who then seek to acquire further influence and access at the Capitol by hiring other influential lobbyists.

In Lynch's case, she brought easy access to the Democratic majority in the state Assembly that



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she developed during her years as chief spokeswoman and top adviser to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. She left the Assembly in late 2000 and began lobbying early the next year, a sudden transition that government reformers have criticized her for ever since.

Lynch has sought to complement her connections by bringing lobbyists to Patricia Lynch Associates who have similar entrees to other circles of power. Lynch lobbyist Christopher Grimaldi, for instance, was once an assistant counsel to state Senate Republican Majority Leader Joseph Bruno. Another lobbyist is Patrick McCarthy, former executive director of the state Republican Party and one-time patronage chief to Gov. George Pataki.

At the start, Lynch said about three-quarters of her firm's lobbying business concerned matters before the Assembly. Now, she said, only about 10 percent of it involves the Assembly.

"It's bipartisan, both houses, the second floor [Pataki's office] and the agencies," she said.

Criticism that Patricia Lynch Associates continues to thrive off her association with Silver is "simply not true," Lynch said. "It ignores the hours and the days that the staff puts in to service our clients."

Lynch, 48, splits her time between her home in Chappaqua, in Westchester County, and Albany. Her firm is located at 111 Washington Ave.

### SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

The best-known public face of Wilson Elser is Kenneth Shapiro, former counsel to three Democratic state Assembly speakers: Stanley Fink, Mel Miller and Saul Weprin. (Miller himself now serves in the same role for the No. 3 lobbying firm in Albany, Bolton St. Johns Inc.)

Shapiro said political connections only go so far for a lobbyist. Wilson Elser would not have been able to hold onto its spot as the best-paid Albany lobbying firm for a ninth consecutive year in 2005 had it not continued to deliver for its clients, he said.

"You don't maintain it unless the clients who retain you are satisfied with what you do," said Shapiro, who left the Assembly in 1989. "If people are unhappy, that is when they move on."

Wilson Elser's client list includes Albany Medical Center, Carnegie Hall, the Healthcare Association of New York State and Glens Falls Hospital.

Wilson Elser had the most clients of all Albany lobbyists in 2005 with 107, up from 106 the previous year.

But Patricia Lynch Associates had nearly as many, 104 clients, an increase of 28 in just the last year.

Lynch's client roster in 2005 included Albany Law School, BBL Construction Services Inc., M&T Bank, Mohawk Ambulance Service and the New York State Motor Truck Association.

Lynch said she particularly likes to translate for corporate clients what she calls the "total confusion" that exists between the business world and Albany's policy and political world.

"I like the mixture of private industry and [government] policy," she said. "The two worlds exist in parallel universes. One culture doesn't understand the other culture. Nor does either side ... have the time to figure out the other's culture, the process, the deadlines."

Shapiro said, "You have to be impressed" with how Lynch has built the No. 2 lobbying firm in Albany in just five years.

"There are a lot of lobbyists in Albany right now," Shapiro said. "There is enough [business] to go around."

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