

November 18, 2003

The Tuesday Profile

Ex-Blunt aide spreads wings on K St.

Gregg Hartley's stellar contacts set him apart

By [Josephine Hearn](#)



Cassidy & Associates lobbyist Gregg Hartley has been called a "consummate professional" by those who have worked with him on the Hill.

Capitol Hill reporters take note: The easiest, fastest way to get the cell and home phone numbers of top Republican staffers and lobbyists is to mention that you are writing a profile of Gregg Hartley, the former chief of staff to House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.).

Sources were beating a path to The Hill's door to offer glowing reports on Hartley, who left the whip's office in June to join lobbying firm Cassidy & Associates.

"Gregg Hartley was one of the most savvy chiefs of staff to a leadership member that I've known in 30 years," said lobbyist Dan Mattoon, co-founder of Podesta Mattoon and a longtime adviser to House Republican leadership.

"Gregg hits the trifecta for success in the legislative arena," echoed Karl Gallant, a lobbyist at Alexander Strategy Group who served as executive director of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's (R-Texas) political action committee. Hartley has access to lawmakers, legislative experience and "a keenly aggressive political mind."

"You enjoyed working with him every day. Because he was such a hard worker, you expected more of yourself," said Amy Field, chief of staff in Blunt's congressional office.

Hartley's pep squad of friends and former colleagues gave breathless descriptions of a cheerful and effective hard-worker, using such words as "a consummate professional"

who “never slept” and was “approachable,” “likable” and “inspiring.” Had they gone on, they may well have compared him to the late Mother Teresa.

In person, Hartley, 50, is warm, affable and low-key about his success. He has spent much of the past 18 years working with Blunt, first in Missouri politics in the '80s and early '90s, then on Blunt's 1996 congressional campaign and most recently as Blunt's top staffer, before leaving to earn more money. He has three teenagers nearing college age.

At Cassidy, he has moved quickly out of the starting block and snagged the four top television networks as clients. He is helping them fend off multiple efforts in Congress to block the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) new rules on media ownership. He also represents Baby Bells Verizon, BellSouth and SBC Communications; Freddie Mac; and the Richard Nixon Library.

He concedes that coming from the whip's office is an enormous advantage.

“Out of 229 members of the Republican conference, there are 228 I know and know me. There are at least 150 to 160 with whom I've had a close working relationship,” he said. The one member he does not know is Rep. Randy Neugebauer (R-Texas) who replaced retiring Rep. Larry Combest (R) after a special election earlier this year.

“I'm working with a group of people I know. I know how they look at things, how it affects them in their district, what their voting is, are they likely to be supportive of this issue or not,” he said.

And he is hoping that they will not be supportive of an initiative led by Reps. Maurice Hinchey (D-N.Y.) and Bernard Sanders (I-Vt.) to reverse new FCC rules that scale back restrictions on media ownership.

The Senate already has passed a resolution that would block the rules, which critics say would allow too much consolidation among media companies. And Hinchey and Sanders are leading a group of 205 members who have urged House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) to allow a vote on the Senate resolution.

Rep. David Obey (Wis.), ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, has succeeded in including an amendment to the spending bill for the Commerce, Justice and State Departments aimed at blocking a portion of the new rules.

“It does make me a little nervous ... but I don't think I want to comment,” Hartley said when asked about the progress of his opposition. “It would be like a lawyer talking about his strategy in the courtroom.”

The issue may be the first major test of Hartley in his new position on K Street.

Cassidy's founder, Gerry Cassidy, and its president, former Rep. Marty Russo (D-Ill.), brought Hartley on board as chief operating officer to boost the firm's bipartisan image

and to expand its communications and media practice.

Hartley in turn recruited Jared Craighead, a former staffer in Blunt's office who has most recently worked for SBC, to work with him on the FCC rules.

"This firm has been seen as the largest player in terms of government affairs ... but by and large has been seen as a traditionally Democratic firm even though facts are largely to the contrary," Hartley said. "We're focusing on having people understand this is a bipartisan shop."

With his background working with House leadership and his current position in the trio leading one of Washington's best-known lobbying firms, one might think that a hefty ring on Hartley's right hand that reads "League of Leaders" is a reference to his Capitol Hill experience.

But the beefy diamond-studded band hearkens back to his roots in Missouri. His father received it in the '50s after completing his first 15 years as a Chevrolet salesman. He sold cars in central Missouri for 46 years, switching to used cars after retiring because he found it "less stressful."

"On his death, that was my inheritance, and I wear it every day," Hartley said. Missouri is where Hartley was raised and it is where he met Blunt back when he was a county clerk in southwest Missouri. In the mid-'80s, another handy friend, then Gov. John Ashcroft (R), brought Hartley and then Secretary of State Blunt together to work on a project looking at the future of state healthcare, education and employment.

Hartley ran Blunt's unsuccessful bid for governor in 1992 and tasted victory four years later when Blunt ran for Congress. He spent four years in the chief deputy whip's office and then stayed on a mere four months in the majority whip's office before responding to the call of the lobbying world. His wife and children, he said, had been patient for a long time with the long hours and relatively low salary of a congressional staff job.

His eldest daughter, Hallie, 19, works as a receptionist at rival lobbying firm, the Alexander Strategy Group.

"We're branching out into lobbying across town," he joked.

Hartley said he still sees Blunt. "I don't see Roy very often, probably once a week." He is barred from lobbying leadership offices until June 1 of next year.

Then he will join the elite group of former high-ranking leadership aides — including Edwin Buckham at Alexander Strategy Group and Susan Hirshmann at Williams & Jensen, both former top DeLay staffers — who occupy powerful Republican lobbying positions.

The path down that road, however, is not assured.

“I don’t think it’s made for [just] anyone. You have to work hard for clients and customers,” Mattoon said. “[But] I don’t see any grass growing under Gregg’s feet.”