

## ***Lansing State Journal***

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### **Take 5 with Steve Young, director, Government Consultant Services Inc.**

Five questions. Five answers.

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A lot has changed in the quarter-century lobbyists from Government Consultant Services Inc. have been putting their clients' issues in front of lawmakers and other state officials.

Former Democratic speaker of the House Bobby Crim and former Republican Sen. Robert VanderLaan teamed to start GCSI in 1983.

The age of term limits means the group of elected and appointed officials in Lansing is ever-changing.

That's meant good business for many Lansing lobbying firms with clients jockeying to be heard.

"But we've all had to work much harder to make sure our clients' points of view are adequately heard and conveyed," said Steve Young, one of four partners at GCSI.

GCSI's team of 23, including partners Mike Hawks, Kirk Profit and Nell Kuhnmuench, must be doing something right. State politics newsletter Michigan Information & Research Service, or MIRS, named the firm Michigan's most effective lobbyist in the state Legislature in 2007.

#### **What made you want to become a lobbyist?**

I always have had an interest in state government since I was in high school and just followed that career path. It turned into lobbying, I didn't necessarily begin with that, but just ultimately ended up in this end of the business versus being in state government.

#### **How has being a lobbyist changed since you started?**

The biggest change has been the impact of term limits. It's drastically changed the way Lansing operates and the way you need to operate in Lansing. It's created a high turnover every two years. For instance, this year the Michigan House is up for election and out of 110 members, 44 will be termed out and there's one more running for another office. Then, looking ahead to 2010, out of 38 senators, we have 30 who are going to be termed out.

#### **Does that mean you've got to be introducing yourself and your issues more often?**

Absolutely. Back in the day, in the early '90s, you would establish long-term relationships with people who had been here for many years. There's a lot of trust built up over the course of those relationships that you can only develop over the long term. With term limits, you have people who serve two to six years. It's very difficult to operate in that environment. We represent over 100 clients; to make people aware of all the issues we've been dealing with takes a lot of work.

**Some folks think lobbyists now have too much power. What are your thoughts on that?**

I know there are some that adhere to that school of thought. I tend to disagree. It really has kind of leveled the playing field, if you will, in terms of influence. If you go back to the day where you had people who had established these very long-term relationships, by picking up the phone they could make a couple of calls and take care of business. That just doesn't happen any more. You have to work all 110 members of the House and 38 members of the Senate to get things done now.

**Republicans and Democrats in the Legislature don't seem to be doing well at working together and getting things done. What think they need to do to find middle ground?**

There have always been problems with state government and democracy is a very messy thing. I really don't know any of those problems is any different. I think people are more aware of these things than they used to be back in the '70s. I do think, however, that term limits has exacerbated that. But I'm not sure it's something that's a result of term limits.