

Hello I'm Jeff Birnbaum, this year's chairman of the Bryce Harlow Foundation and president of BGR Public Relations. Welcome to the 35th annual dinner inspired by the late Bryce Harlow, a pioneer of corporate lobbying. Let me start by thanking Dinner Chair Kevin Burke of Airports Council International. He and the rest of the board tonight raised a record nearly \$530,000 to fund Bryce Harlow scholarships. Congratulations on this amazing achievement.

Lobbying is integral to the legislative process and, as a result, almost every interest has a lobbyist. There are lobbyists for peanuts and lobbyists for peanut butter and they often disagree. It's a very sticky situation.

That joke explains a lot. For example, people who complain about lobbyists and the so-called special interests often are lobbyists themselves who represent interests that happen to benefit from making the special-interest argument.

And that's what lobbyists do. They make arguments. They marshal facts and present their employers' cases in policy debates. At this dinner over

the years, lawmakers from both parties have said that without facts provided by lobbyists they couldn't do their jobs. The Bryce Harlow Foundation is dedicated to training the next generation of lobbyists to do that job with integrity.

The standard argument in favor of lobbying has been expressed many times from this podium. And here it is: The first amendment to the Constitution guarantees the ability to lobby – to petition the Government for a redress of grievances, a right that goes back to the Magna Carta in 1215.

That's true, but it lacks real-world context, which is this: Citizens of many countries can only dream of lobbying, and they do! Their governments don't much care what their citizens think and don't permit open dissent. In other places, government decisions are outright bought and sold. An official at an embassy here once asked a friend of mine why he didn't just pay journalists to write stories. My friend answered that in this country it doesn't work that way and that he was proud of that fact. We need to remember that the freedoms to lobby and to make arguments to the public

are fundamental to democracy and, even to this day, are rare. The right to lobby is precious and should never be taken for granted.

As for money, it has its advantages, of course. But it doesn't determine the outcome of legislative battles despite what we hear from presidential candidates and other critics. Many other factors are just as important.

If money were all that mattered, most of us in this room would have won fights that we lost and the other way around. As difficult as that makes our day-to-day lives, we should be grateful for the burden.

The latest winners of Bryce Harlow fellowships, most of whom are here tonight, understand this. Thanks to the graduate school educations the foundation helps pay for, they learn how complex the world is and how wrong stereotypes can be, especially about their profession. Lobbyists represent all sorts of clashing interests: business and labor, high tech and low tech, peanuts and peanut butter. Some are shoe-leather lobbyists, some focus on the grass roots and some talk to reporters and the public.

But none of them controls anything. Washington is possibly the world's largest collection of control freaks where no one's actually in charge. And that's something that should be admired. Democracy is messy by design. As our founding fathers understood, lobbying is a vital part of democracy, not its nemesis.

The free competition of ideas is at the heart of what lobbying is and what the Bryce Harlow Foundation stands for. Thank you for supporting the foundation, and thank you for being a lobbyist and helping democracy work.

Now, onto the rest of the program. It's my pleasure to introduce Barbara Faculjak, president of the Bryce Harlow Foundation.