Episode Title: The Importance of Government Affairs Engagement -- A Conversation with Mark Washko

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Lynn L. Bergeson (LLB): Hello, and welcome to *All Things Chemical*, a podcast produced by Bergeson & Campbell, P.C. (B&C®), a Washington, D.C., law firm focusing on chemical law, business, and litigation matters. I'm Lynn Bergeson.

This week, I discuss with my colleague Mark Washko, Senior Government Affairs Advisor for B&C and The Acta Group (Acta®), our consulting affiliate, the importance of government affairs engagement in the current political environment. Mark recently joined us, having spent 16 years as Head of Federal Government Affairs for BASF Corporation here in Washington, D.C. Mark has significant experience in engaging with congressional staff and members to ensure his clients' interests are well served. We discuss a few specific examples of how government affairs engagement has helped, [Senator] Lautenberg (D-NJ, 1924-2013) and his work on new chemicals, and how best to prepare for the coming November elections. Now here's my conversation with Mark Washko.

Mark, I'm so thrilled that you're back in the studio today as a member of our team. Yay!

Mark J. Washko (MJW): Thank you. Glad to be here.

LLB: Let's get into it. You came to Washington, D.C., three decades ago and have seen policymaking from different perspectives, all different vantage points. Can you share with our listeners your thoughts on how advocacy and policymaking have changed over the last three decades or so?

MJW: Absolutely. And thank you again for having me, Lynn. I appreciate it.

No, when I first came, straight out of college, it was a time -- it was a different time politically. Democrats had been in charge of the House of Representatives for several decades at that point. I should say, I arrived here in 1990. It was before Republicans took

over the House after the 1994 election. But at that time, it was a little bit different politically.

There were certain policies that were on a bit of a cyclical nature, I'll say, to come to mind immediately: energy policy. Usually about every ten years or so, you'd expect an energy bill. There was a rhythm. People knew in year two, three, four how they would build up to having that done. There were, we called them the highway bills. The transportation bills were about a six-year; you'd get ready for that. There was a certain rhythm to it.

The other thing was, at the time, a lot of members of Congress moved to Washington, moved their families here. They knew each other socially, and so forth. However, after the 1994 election, one of the changes that came was sending members home. It became a bad thing to be captured by Washington.

LLB: Ew. The swamp.

MJW: So whereas members might have had -- yes, they were part of the swamp. They got captured.

There was a time when, -- the D.C. ecosystem -- there's a term that I've used before, and it'll be used again. People knew each other. They went to -- their kids went to school together. They went to church together. But now with members going home more often, they were living back home. Now they fly in for three days and they go back home. The deep-seated relationships you had with everybody else that's in the policy community isn't necessarily there. That's also led to how advocacy has changed, too. It's no longer just, "I see you. I see you at dinner. I walk the halls of Congress," and that's it. It's gotten a little bit more complicated, but that's part of it. There was a rhythm to things.

Also, as I mentioned, one-party control of the House for 40 years led to things being done a certain way. Since then, and since the 1994 election, control of the House of Representatives has changed several times, as has the Senate, so it's no longer steady. But every time there's a turnover in power, members leave, staff turns over. It's not like you have someone who's been with a member's office or a committee staff for 20 years. Those people are rare. They still exist. We know some of them. But there's been more turnover as well, which means there's a lot more interactions needed to make sure the staff understand what the issues are and how they're going on. So that's something else with the turnover. But it's not a bad thing. It just makes it different.

One other change has been, too, that on the Republican side of the aisle, the Republicans imposed term limits on their chairmen. They have six years with the gavel to lead something. But going back to what I said before, whether it was a six-year highway bill or a ten-year energy bill, you can see how those timeframes don't quite match up. Sometimes legislation takes a long time.

The Clean Air Act amendments in 1990 were the result of a ten-year process of meetings, hearings, negotiations. Even the Lautenberg amendments -- and we'll talk a lot more about that, too. But the Lautenberg amendments, that was about a ten-year process of building coalitions, getting industry aligned, getting NGOs [non-governmental organizations] on board, building up the understanding among members of Congress who really didn't understand what this law that was passed in 1976 was all about. Education is a big part of it, and when the players keep changing, there's a lot of effort that goes into that. Those are some of the things, political changes, and I know everyone says it's a lot more partisan.

Congress has always been partisan. It just seems always worse in the present. I'm not going to cast any judgment. It's just an environment; we have to work with it.

LLB: To your point, the building the trust part is -- there's a *50 First Dates* kind of quality to building relationships on the Hill because of the turnover, which really makes building trust and establishing really solid relationships challenging.

MJW: One thing that's still constant, with the exception of the first two years of President Obama's Administration, when there were supermajorities in the House and the Senate, the 60-vote threshold in the Senate still matters. There is a need outside of a couple of years where there were more than 60 votes in one party. You need 60 to get it done. There have been attempts to remove the filibuster and the 60-vote threshold. But what I will say, as someone who has done energy and environmental law and policy for 30-plus years, there's been no environmental law ever passed without bipartisan support.

It gets to something we'll touch on a little bit later, but companies, industry, people want a little bit of certainty. They want durable policy, not something that's going to be here and only last a few short years before they go, because companies have long time planning horizons, which is different than the election horizon of every two years or four years or six years.

LLB: Got it. I noted to our listeners that you were with BASF Corporation for nearly 16 years, where you led the federal government affairs team. Now, looking back at that experience and the wonderful years you spent there, how has the government affairs role evolved? And a follow-up question is perhaps you could give an example or two of how government affairs functionality, how you provided then and do so now, how it provided a discrete, discernible benefit for your client?

MJW: Oh, absolutely. Thank you. I guess I've been around long enough that I no longer think in terms of years, but administrations. Since I got to Washington -- I was hired by BASF during the Bush Administration. Then Obama, Trump, and now Biden. Four administrations working for a large multinational chemical company was definitely interesting.

I was part of the rebirth, if you will, of the government affairs function at BASF. When my former boss hired me, I was for several years until we grew, I *was* the Washington office, which was a lot of ground to cover for a company with so many issues. But over time, we were able to grow, and it wasn't just -- when you're one person covering a lot of ground, there's a lot of triage and what can you focus on? As the team grew and evolved, we were able to do more things.

A couple of things. One, as I mentioned, the Lautenberg Chemical Safety Act, the TSCA [Toxic Substances Control Act] reform bill, that was a large focus of my time, but I also got into other areas, like whether it was energy efficiency, construction, and so forth. But how the government affairs role has evolved was -- there was a view, even within the company, that government affairs was just congressional advocacy. I'll say that was a fair reflection of how it was viewed when I started. By the time I left, just a couple of months ago, there's a realization that government affairs is much broader than that.

Government affairs is -- partly -- can help with economic development. One of the first projects that I worked on was helping the company. This is -- you have to turn the clock back to the economic meltdown that was the 2008, 2009 period. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA, under the Obama Administration. They were giving out

grants to build different plants, not unlike the IRA [Inflation Reduction Act] under the Biden Administration. But one of the things that we did was, my company was interested in building a battery materials plant, so helping secure a license mark on a national lab and then getting some money that was available to help build out a plant. That was one of the things that we had done. Think about economic development. If your company is going to expand, involve the government affairs people. It's important that way.

We already talked about the Lautenberg Chemical Safety Act. That's protecting your license to operate. As a chemical company, chemical regulation is important. That's how your products get to market. I can tell you, a lot of people, a lot of Hill staff, unless they've been around for a while, don't understand how that works. When companies start talking about value chains and supply chains, people's eyes start glazing over, so you've got to start talking in terms of products and brand names that people know, so you talk about that.

But other ways that government affairs can help. We talked about economic development. But it can also help open markets for products. There was an issue that I worked on where products were being -- they weren't being stopped, but they just weren't being approved by FDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration]. It took a few years of a process to get legislation passed to help invigorate a process whereby FDA would evaluate new sunscreen products. That opened up -- potentially opened up markets for new products.

A last thing would be saving money. My former employer was a global company that did a lot of trade in chemistry. And there's a trade bill -- without getting too deep into it -- but the Miscellaneous Tariff Bill helped save the company lots of money on trades for importing products to make finished goods that just weren't available in the United States. The whole theory behind that particular law was, if it's not made here, why put manufacturers in the United States at a disadvantage? Help the company take advantage of that to save significant amounts of money. One thing that I will say that CEOs [chief executive officers], CFOs [chief financial officers] pay attention to is the bottom line, and when the government affairs -- and this is any government affairs practitioner who's listening understands the difficulty of quantifying what you do. When you have something like you can put on a slide that says this bill will save the company *X* millions of dollars over the next three years, people pay attention to that.

LLB: Yes. Money, savings is a very compelling metric.

MJW: Absolutely.

LLB: *E* equals success, right?

MJW: Absolutely.

LLB: Mark, you talked about the importance of government affairs to companies. We represent many, many, many different companies. But in listening to you, it seems like there's just a whole lot of substantive information that goes into that mix. It's very detailed. You mentioned taxes, imports, tariffs, chemical information, FDA, registration issues. It covers a whole lot of real estate. How many people are typically on a government affairs team, and do they often rely upon outside help to be subject matter experts in particular areas on an as-needed basis?

MJW: The answer to the first part of that question is my favorite law school response, which is, "It depends."

LLB: I knew I was going to hear that.

MJW: You knew that was coming.

LLB: I knew that was coming.

MJW: It really depends. Different companies have different sizes. It depends on the size of the company, the number of issues they have, and so forth. I will tell you, the vast majority of companies that do have government affairs operations also rely on outside assistance, whether it could be specialized assistance in the tax and trade area, or it could be in specific regulatory areas. Chemical regulation is a very specific area that -- it's rare you're going to find someone who just knows this coming out, so people will outsource that, because it's just a lot easier to do that. You won't have many people that have the depth of experience in some of those issues.

Sizes -- even within the chemical industry -- size of government affairs shops range from one, with, again, outside help, to maybe seven, ten, or a little bit more. But then if you look at the lobbying disclosures and see how many people are actually helping them when you count up all the outside firms, some of the companies might have several dozen people actually helping their advocacy efforts. But that's internal and external combined.

LLB: Right. That's both.

MJW: Right. Again, it's really -- I will say one of the things that *has* changed over time is the importance of having company people engage in Washington. There was a time -- and that's not downplaying lobbying firms, etc., but having an actual company employee there really matters and resonates, because, again, with members of Congress spending more time at home, they want to know their actual constituents. There's a chance for a good blend of having your company people, as well as the D.C. professionals.

LLB: I like to think that we are as passionate and as advocacy oriented as our clients, sometimes, sadly, more so. I think we often care more than they do. But I take your point and have always been a strong believer in having the CEO or the VP [vice president] for EHS [environment, health, and safety], or the sustainability officer front and center to be the advocate for the company, along with us experts in the area to help -- we make a good team. That's a really good way of getting that this is *real*. We are a constituent in *your* district, and you should care as much as we do.

MJW: Absolutely. Having those people, whether it's events on -- there used to be, pre-COVID and hopefully they're coming back -- but staff briefings on specific issues where you have an EHS expert come in and talk about how things work in the company. It's one thing for the subject matter experts who are based in Washington to talk about, but hearing from the people at the plant, in the state, is really important.

LLB: It's huge. Let's pivot to TSCA modernization: Lautenberg, TSCA 2, call it what you will. That was an exceedingly protracted process, full of ups and downs. I'm still waiting for the Netflix ten-part series, because it had so much intrigue to it. It was a very complicated sausage-making process. Maybe you can talk to us a little bit about it.

MJW: Sure. As someone who was in the middle of it for a while, it was an interesting process. Also in the middle of that almost decade-long process, you did have control of Congress changing. The House switched leadership from Democrat to Republican. The Senate

switched from Democrat to Republican, and so with those changes, if there was a chairman who was leading, and all of a sudden they and their staff were out, there was a new power dynamic. It was, "How is this going to work now?" That was helpful to know, but also building coalitions and even getting industry on the same side; you had different interests. The negotiations were interesting, as you know, on certain issues: how were people going to react? How does this part of the industry upstream, downstream, how does it all work together?

Getting those details worked out. Again, the folks who are listening obviously know TSCA and chemical regulation fairly well. But for those of us that were up there trying to talk to congressional staff that many of whom weren't alive when TSCA was enacted in 1976, like, "This is what this statute is. This is what it does. This is the problem they're trying to solve." Some of the things we're seeing now, nearly eight years after enactment, we just didn't know how they were going to play out practically. The thought was, "Hey, we're getting something." The other thing about the legislative process: It's not designed to be quick, or efficient, or pretty, or fun. It's meant to be an iterative process where people negotiate and get the best deal that's possible when all interests are represented. No one -- I don't think anyone was happy 100 percent at the end of the day. But it's like any relationship --

LLB: You can underscore that.

MJW: No, and we're seeing that right now, absolutely, because people are talking about making -- little tweaking some changes eight years later. Nobody got it perfect. But there was a time -- the world had evolved since 1976. And so, by 2016, it was time to do something and bring it a little bit differently. The European Union's (EU) Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) regulation didn't exist when TSCA was enacted. REACH was there. REACH was taking a global foothold. But TSCA was also known for promoting innovation. How did -- how to get new chemicals to market? The United States has amazing IP [intellectual property] protections for new chemicals. It was a great time. How do you balance all that out?

Plus, at the time, when original TSCA grandfathered chemicals in, people were concerned about that. How do you balance evaluating existing chemistries, which would take a long time during the evaluation process, but also replacing them with newer, sometimes more sustainable chemistries? But you have to get products to market. It's all that balance that played out. It was a long time. There were a lot of people involved, and it did work with Republicans, Democrats, and NGOs all working together, sometimes with different points of view. But we ended up with a product.

It was fun to be a part of that. It's been interesting to watch it be implemented. Now, as we're seeing what's coming out of it eight years later, it's interesting to be part of the process of evaluating what kind of job we did.

LLB: I often reflect on the fragility of the process. If Senator Lautenberg had not been in ill health, if Senator Vitter didn't decide to cross the aisle, as it were, would we be having this conversation today, or would we have a different law? Quite different done at a different time rather than June 22, 2016, now eight years ago. That process is fragile and fraught with all kinds of uncertainty.

MJW: But a lot of things come together to make something happen. Legislatively, sometimes it is the sad passing of someone like Senator Lautenberg, who, for multiple Congresses, for almost ten years, had legislation introduced, but it wasn't going anywhere.

LLB: He was fearless.

MJW: What came together and said, "Yes, we should do this, but your proposal isn't really going to work. We have to make some changes, and then maybe it can go." That's part of the process, I think, going back to what the founders had envisioned. It's not just a majority who's in power controls everything, but people have different ideas, and they come in. Sometimes the time is just right. Sometimes it's pressure from the grassroots. Sometimes it's companies saying, "We need something to innovate better"; sometimes, there are external events that you can't control, and sometimes lightning just strikes.

LLB: Right.

MJW: That's how we got there.

LLB: You've mentioned several times, Mark, the importance and value of relationships. Would you mind providing some additional thoughts on that? Because I think the human element here is really, really important.

MJW: I think there's a trademark involved in human elements; let's be clear. Sorry.

Anyway, so besides that -- no, I like to joke with people, in this era of talking about artificial intelligence and who in the workforce can be replaced. What I like to say -- jokingly, mostly -- but people who work in the advocacy arena -- lobbyists, regulatory experts, most of the lobbyists who deal with Congress. We won't be replaced by artificial intelligence, because if politics was linear and logical, then we wouldn't be needed.

LLB: Right, and we'd live in a very different world.

MJW: No, but it's -- politics and policymaking in the United States are driven by political processes. Other countries, they do it 180 degrees from how the United States does it, but our policies are made by political people. That's what drives them. But what helps that is just going back to very, very basic political truths. The first person -- the first job of someone in elected office is to get elected. The second job is to get reelected. What is going to help them do that? It's going to be what motivates the people back in their district or their state to want to go to the polls and vote for that person, or vote against the other person.

We talked about how advocacy has changed over time. People are -- with so much more information, so many more news outlets -- members are very in tune with what their constituents are thinking, so the advocacy has to also move to what's going on at the local and district level. But it's the relationships that matter. It's not just -- in addition to the relationships you have with the policymakers while they're in Washington and their staffs, what relationships do you have at home? Does your plant manager know who the local -- should know who the mayor and chief of police are, but do they know the state and federal representatives and senators? Have they been out to your plant? Do they know what you do there?

They have to -- the policymakers have a lot on their schedule, and their schedules are crazy, especially when they're back in the districts and states. They don't rest much, but they want

to go out and see constituents. Have them into your plants; have them see what's going on so they understand. But those are the relationships. When they know who you are and they know that you're not just a company name, but they can put faces with it --

LLB: -- Right, and voters, and --

MJW: -- and they vote. Come speak to a town hall. Here's 50 or 100 employees. They vote. They want to express what their concerns are. The member wants to hear them. Those are the relationships that really matter. From a lobbying perspective, it's easier to go into congressional offices when I say there's a constituent interest. As a former staffer, one of the first things you look at is, "Company XYZ is coming in to talk to me. Do they operate in my district? Do they operate in my state?" Then the next level down is, "Are they regulated by the committee that I serve on? What's the touch? Why should I care?" That's the question everybody has to think about is "Why should that member care about what your issue is?" Because you might have the same issue and get different receptivity depending on who that member is you're talking to.

LLB: We've already talked a little bit about the year Lautenberg was enacted. That was 2016. It's hard to believe almost eight years have passed. I'm going to put a plug in for our TSCA at Eight, which is June 26 at GW [George Washington University] auditorium next door. We've seen just many, many legal policy science challenges with respect to the implementation of the new law, some of them occasioned by the multiple administrations. We had Obama, and then Trump, and now Biden, which necessarily invites some disarray.

But one of the chemical issues that -- I know you personally, both from a personal perspective, Mark -- I know you care a lot about innovation and new chemicals, not merely because your former employer was deeply embedded in innovation, but I think we should all be invested in innovation, right? We always want to get to a new, better place. But maybe you can talk about some of your work in that new chemical space. What are some of the issues that you've been dealing with, and where do you see it going?

MJW: Where I see it going is -- I'm very excited about this, especially in new chemicals, because you're talking about innovation, you're talking about new products, you're talking about improving existing products, or maybe innovations that haven't existed before and how we get them to market. The holdup has been just how the EPA [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] process has changed since Lautenberg, and I credit the folks at EPA. I think they're doing as good a job as they can with what's going on. But there's new chemistries coming out. There are new and innovative things, and there's a lot that people want to get to market. It's just how do we balance out getting new chemistries to market with the timing and innovation?

Anyone who deals with computers or technology knows that the innovation timeline is so much faster. Back many, many years ago when I did some work for an auto company -- 20, 30 years ago -- the new models would come out every five or six years. Now, new computer chips are coming out so much faster, but the government approval process hasn't really kept up with that, and so delays make it difficult. But there's also the public safety element. We want to make sure that what's getting into commerce is safe and can be used and will not harm human health or the environment. But again, it's a balance, right? My best friend, going back to college, is a professor and was chairing his science department at his university. But academics can study things forever. Companies can't.

Companies research, they develop new products, but they need to get them to market. And problematic chemistries don't make it to the proposal stage. There's a lot of trial and error. How do you get it out there? Just -- focusing just on the new chemical stuff, how do we get it to market? Telling the stories. From my job, and in many, many meetings with members of Congress and staff, people are very receptive to, "There are innovative chemistries that are waiting. These things are new. They're better. They're more sustainable; they're greener." Whatever way you're looking at things. And then the downstream folks, the consumer products companies, the automotive companies, the chip makers, they all want to avail themselves of these new chemistries, and they want to say -- tell their customers, "We have this new thing for you." But it's just getting them to market. We're just trying to figure out how to keep the balance of protecting public health and the environment, but getting things to market in a way that promotes the innovation and keeps it going. That just comes back to having good stories, like we've talked here and people listening to the podcast --

LLB: -- endlessly. Make it relatable!

MJW: Exactly. There was a member of Congress who came up to me after a meeting. People were talking about chemical names and processes and said, "I need stories. Give me stories that I can relate to around a water cooler." I've always taken that, and I think that's excellent advice. Don't talk about XYZ chemical. Talk about here's a product that it goes into. It goes into a detergent, a cleaning thing. It's a new car thing. It's for a chip -- whatever it is. This is effective -- and bring it that way. Those are the things that people need to hear.

But as far as promoting the innovation, whether you're promoting green chemistry or sustainable chemistry, we don't get all these great innovations to market unless they get through the EPA process. And so right now, bringing this back, with so much of the staff turnover since Lautenberg passed, there's just an education effort about, again, just like we did over a decade ago. What is TSCA? How do things get to market? How do innovations happen? We're starting and building that foundation all over again so people understand.

LLB: Yes, and I think for our Coalition for Chemical Innovations, for example, we actually do videos. We take little vignettes of real fact patterns and demonstrate in a very visual way, a very simple way, but a very compelling way why new chemistries need to be nurtured and encouraged. Sometimes the very, very, very, very, very protracted review process is challenging for new chemical innovators.

MJW: No, absolutely. The videos help. I will tell you, for staff, we've encountered staff with decades of experience to people who don't know what TSCA is, and we're like, "Here's a two-minute video. Share it with your friends. Talk about it." It's like, there are real companies and products behind the videos. Just understand them. Once they get to understand, "Oh, this is what's happening," then we can get to another level of explaining, but you can't solve the problem until people understand what it is.

LLB: That is so true. There's a super important election coming in November. We talked a little bit about this during our internal meeting yesterday. How does this affect your work? How do you prepare clients -- or potential clients -- with the uncertainty that November invites?

MJW: That is a great question. We have a historic election coming up between a former president and a current president, and it's who wants a second term for either? I'm not going to sit here and say I have a magic crystal ball. I think people would turn me off if I said that. But how people prepare, whether it's this election or other elections, the mechanisms of government are going to continue. EPA is going to continue to do its job at the staff level.

What may change? If the current president wins reelection, then some of the leadership may change or it may not, depending on who wants to stay for a second term. If there's a change in the White House, then there'll be new leadership coming in, politically appointed leadership in the agencies. Some of that work is just knowing -- getting an idea of who's going to be coming in and getting ready on day one to have them understand what the issues are. A lot of that work is actually done over the coming summer and fall, because it's not like you staff up an administration in the short period of time between the election in November and January 20. There's a lot of discussion and vetting that goes on well before that. People are probably starting to talk about some of those things right now, not getting ahead of themselves, but it would be malpractice not to start getting ready, like who would be serving in an administration.

LLB: No.

MJW: It's hard to game out. This was something that my former employer wanted to know, too, was like, "What happens if this happens? What happens if *this* happens?" We do that at B&C, too. "If it goes this way, here we go. If it goes *this* way." But right now, it's a close call who wins the presidential race. It's a close call who is in charge of the Senate. It's a close call who's in front of the House. And depending on which party controls which of those three entities, the political dynamics for any kind of legislation could swing dramatically.

LLB: Right. And we need to be prepared to hit the ground running no matter what the result.

MJW: Right. It's six months out -- or just under six months out. It's a difficult call to see how it's going to be, but you just have to be ready to go. But just focusing on new chemicals for right now, building awareness about what's going on is an issue that's going to just continue, and we'll just keep hammering that and letting people know, and informing people, and we'll just keep going through no matter what happens. Then after the election, we'll find out which side wins, and we'll start talking with them on November 6.

LLB: We hope that's soon after the election, right?

MJW: Yes, we're not -- let's not hope for another 2000 repeat, where it takes a long time to figure out.

LLB: Right. Mark, this has been great. Very, very informative. Do you have any closing thoughts you wish to share with our listeners? Anything you'd like to say or follow up before we close out?

MJW: Yes, I would. Thank you. Closing thoughts would be it's just very important, even in -- relationships are important. I've said that several times during this interview. The relationships with your elected officials are important. Have those relationships, and build stories. We try to make things very complicated. It's been my experience that sometimes we make things too complicated. Let's just simplify.

Relationships are important, people are important, and building trust with your policymakers. I will pass along what my first boss when I left the Hill said, is "Never make" -- and I think it's good life advice, not just for advocacy here, but just in life. "Never make your first meeting with someone an ask. Have them understand you, who you are, before you ask for something, because they just may think you're purely transactional and don't care about them."

LLB: Yes.

MJW: You may be interested in asking them for something at some point, but it's more productive longer term to remember this is an ongoing relationship business, to build relationships before you're going to go down that road. I will just leave that. For folks and companies that are listening to this, if you haven't had policymakers and their staff out to your plants, please consider doing so. It really helps, especially when you're dealing with issues like -- especially chemical issues, or how you manufacture, or your safety protocols because until you go out to a plant, a chemical plant or other manufacturing plant -- and people don't see your safety protocols, for example, but they're trying to regulate you on them, it makes it difficult. It makes it much better.

For example, my previous employer, we had a member of Congress who wanted to come in and visit one of the labs but didn't want to put on PPE [personal protective equipment]. The lab director called me in a panic, like, "What do we do? This is a senior member." I was like, "You don't let the person in, because it sets a bad --.

LLB: Right. Follow the rules.

MJW: We take safety seriously, and if you don't take it, we don't bend it. These are the things that you see when you do it firsthand. I would just say have those relationships and build them. Just remember that policymakers are people, too. We're imperfect beings, but I think everyone who is working in this space wants the best outcome as they see it.

LLB: Yes.

MJW: We'll have the robust discussion, and I welcome it.

LLB: Great advice. Words to live by. I love the "don't make your first meeting an ask"; it's just not cool. Right. Mark, this has been great. Thank you so much for joining me in the studio today. We have one perfect, and you are the perfect government affairs guy. You do a great job, and your advice is really, really sound. Thank you for being here.

MJW: Thank you, Lynn. I really appreciate it. Hope to come back again.

LLB: You bet.

My thanks again to Mark for speaking with me today about the importance of government affairs engagement at all times, but especially in the current political environment.

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