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Today's topic is Influences that Shape California Legislation.

Influencing legislation is a pretty complicated business, and there isn't any particular model to basically predict whether a bill that is introduced in the California legislature will become law, and if so, what sort of form it would actually take. What we do know, that there are a number of different influences that impact and shape legislation in the state of California.

Our discussion today is looking at some of those factors that are worthy of our consideration, especially in light of developing any sort of legislative advocacy strategies.

When capital observers look at whether legislation will make it through the process, they look at a couple of initial questions. What is current law? Which is obviously a legal question, what should be the law, which could be both a policy and/or a fiscal question, and then naturally, what are the politics of that situation that will impact the legislation? That's naturally a political question.

All of these will have an influence on the shape of the legislation but there are a half a dozen or so particular factors that could impact and form legislation.

The first is the political party. It's certainly one of the biggest influences and most often a very reliable predictor of how legislation will fare.

Particularly in the California legislature, where currently both houses of the legislature -- the Assembly and the Senate -- have a super majority, more than two-thirds of the membership of both houses are made up of Democratic legislators.

Certainly, how a legislator is likely to vote will be largely influenced by his or her political party affiliation. That, of course, is the party apparatus within the legislature.

Legislators typically inquire of lobbyists, "What's the position of our party caucus?" In other words, what is the recommendation of the Democratic Party caucus, or the Republican Party caucus?

The second impact is the legislator's district. It's, of course, crucial for a legislator to take into consideration the needs and the interests of both his or her district and the constituents of that legislative district.

We often ask, "Is the legislator voting his or her district? Is this a district bill? How will the legislative district be impacted by the legislation?" Of course, the fundamental concern here is, what is that impact, and is it positive or is it negative?

Legislators often face a difficult choice when the views of his or her legislative district are at odds with either the political party he or she is from, or the legislative leadership,

which leads us to a third factor to consider, and that's the legislative leadership -- the leaders in either the Assembly, and/or the State Senate.

Perhaps no individual will have a greater influence on an Assembly member than the Assembly Speaker if of the majority party, and in the Senate, of the Senate President Pro Tem. Sometimes, the legislative leader's support or opposition for a bill will carry the day with members of his or her caucus, but certainly not always.

There are other times, of course, where a legislator might be persuaded by some other factor, but consider this -- the views of the legislative leader will be very significant. Of course, legislative leaders have different styles of management, and how they place demands on their caucus members.

Another factor is interest groups, the so-called "special interests." A legislator might be particularly friendly, or for that matter, unfriendly with one or more key interest groups. The legislator may have a personal trust with a particular group, or certain political realities may influence that legislator.

As you can imagine, legislators often ask of their staff, "Who is in support of this bill? Who is in opposition to this bill?" Knowing that will be very influential as well with particular legislators.

They'll also want to know, is this bill of importance to a particular interest group, either in support or in opposition to this bill? In other words, is the bill a priority, or has the group simply taken a position of support in opposition but are not particularly concerned?

The next factor to consider is the legislator's personal philosophy.

How will the legislator view a particular public policy issue might be dependent upon his or her own personal beliefs -- their political ideology, their governing ideology, perhaps religion, gender, race, ethnicity, geographic or regional issues. All of these could impact a legislator and so could his or her personal or professional experiences in life.

Those all need to be taken into consideration because they all have an influence on the legislator's personal philosophy.

Another factor is the colleagues, his or her legislative colleagues. How a legislator views another member of his or her chamber or caucus, or the other chamber could also impact on how he or she will vote on a piece of legislation.

Is the legislator carrying the bill of the same political party? From the same geographic region? From the same house? Do they have a particular expertise in the subject matter? Are they a committee chair? All of these questions could influence how that particular legislator views his or her colleague.

For example, do they have a particularly good personal working relationship? That might help facilitate compromise, or a bad relationship might create hurdles to overcome.

Another factor is the rules -- the rules of the house, the rules of both houses, and certainly constitutional or statutory rules. For example, what are the vote requirements?

In California tax increases, bills that have an urgency clause to take effect immediately, for example, require a supermajority or a two-thirds majority of each house of the legislature, versus the normal vote requirement of a simple majority in either house of the legislature. That could impact how a legislator might view a particular bill.

For example, does a large voting block of each house have to influence that legislator?

The governor, of course, is a big influence. Since the governor can sign or veto all bills sent to the governor's desk, how he or she views a particular bill will certainly impact legislators and their view.

Sometimes, legislators might have the best of both worlds. They might know that the governor will veto a bill, and so the legislator might vote for it, so that he or she doesn't alienate an interest group or a colleague, knowing that in the end, the governor won't sign the bill and it won't become law.

Of course, fundamentally, the fact that the governor supports or opposes a particular bill can be very influential, particularly if the governor is of the same political party as that of the particular legislator, but oftentimes, governors don't stake out a public position on a particular bill or issue, so sometimes, it's a shot in the dark.

The last factor to consider, but there are many others, is public opinion. In other words, is there any public opinion out there, perhaps in a poll? Has the media addressed this issue? How about in the blogosphere? Is social media concerned about a particular bill or issue? Have op-eds been published particularly in the local newspaper?

How the public is at least perceived to view an issue in a legislator's district could very well impact him or her in their decisions.

As you can hear, there are often numerous factors that might influence how a legislator may or may not vote on a particular bill. All these different factors, and many more beyond those that we've talked about just now could impact a legislator's vote. It's, of course, difficult to determine which particular factor might influence the most.

In different instances, political party may be the deciding factor. In other instances, a legislator's colleague might be the main influencer -- they certainly ebb and flow.

Anyways, these factors could have more or less influence with different legislators at different times, but an effective advocate is going to consider these and other factors to determine how to shape California legislation.

Thanks so much for joining. Looking forward to talking with you again.