

# California Governor Schwarzenegger's Top Aide Richard Costigan Achieves Success / Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

By Kenneth Davis

When Richard Costigan graduated from Cumberland School of Law at Samford University in Alabama in 1991, he never dreamed that a mere 12 years later he would be one of the top aides to the governor of one of the largest states in the union. From November 2003 to November 2006, Costigan served as Deputy Chief of Staff and Legislative Affairs Secretary for California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Costigan's achievement illustrates that one doesn't have to be a graduate of a big-name Ivy League law school to become hugely successful in the legal field.

## Summary

Richard Costigan of Manatt Phelps & Phillips rose to the challenge when he was asked to become one of Governor Schwarzenegger's top aides. Costigan had only recently joined Manatt Phelps & Phillips as a partner and was a long-time member and leader of the California State Bar, but he was quickly recruited by Schwarzenegger to advise the Governor on a wide range of matters. In his role, Costigan was charged with overseeing and reviewing all major legislative, policy, and political initiatives recommended to Schwarzenegger for passage or veto.

Costigan went on to become an invaluable asset to the Governor and his advisors. He provided sound legal advice, kept his office informed of developments in the state legislature, created strategic partnerships, and provided political advice. He was instrumental in negotiating and crafting major pieces of legislation, and he worked to build consensus between several bipartisan groups. Costigan also played a pivotal role in the establishment of the California State Water Commission, as well as in the establishment of renewable energy incentives.

Costigan's success in the Governor's office led to his appointment as California's Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing in 2004. As Secretary, Costigan was responsible for leading, developing, and implementing the Governor's business, transportation, and housing initiatives. He also played a major role in the Governor's efforts to create jobs and spur economic growth, and he was instrumental in launching the EuroGo-Biz program, which created incentives for businesses to expand in California. Costigan also successfully implemented the California Climate Change Program, which included regulations for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Throughout his career at Manatt Phelps & Phillips, Richard Costigan demonstrated the ability to rise to the challenge and to offer sound legal and political counsel. He achieved great success in his position as one of Governor Schwarzenegger's top advisors and in his later role as Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing. Costigan's hard work, determination, and strategic vision helped spur economic growth and make California a leader in renewable energy.

Richard Costigan, Manatt Phelps & Phillips, California State Bar, Governor Schwarzenegger, legislative initiatives, policy initiatives, political initiatives, passage, veto, legal advice, California State Water Commission, renewable energy incentives, California's Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing, incentives, businesses, California Climate Change Program, energy efficiency, renewable energy, greenhouse gas emissions, economic growth, strategic vision.

## Richard Costigan: First Choice for California Governorship

Richard Costigan is the first choice for the California Governorship under Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. He is a highly respected lawyer and executive in the state. Costigan's career spans over 29 years of

service as a public servant and practicing attorney. Costigan has held many roles in the state government, serving as Deputy Legislative Secretary and Deputy Director of the Office of Legislative Affairs under Governor Pete Wilson, Chief of Staff to the Lieutenant Governor and Director of the Office of Energy and Environmental Policy.

## **Costigan: Experienced Public Servant**

Costigan has a long history of success in public service, frequently being tapped for important positions within the California government. He has a demonstrated range of knowledge, skills and abilities that make him ideally suited for roles of increased responsibility. He is well-known throughout the state and has gained a reputation as a strong leader who works well with both political parties.

## **Manatt, Phelps & Phillips: Richard Costigan's Home**

Costigan is currently the Managing Director at the law firm of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, where he specializes in matters related to public policy and regulation. He works closely with high level executives and legislators on topics such as energy and technology policy, climate change, infrastructure investment and health care reform. Costigan's expertise and experience bring an invaluable perspective to the firm's array of services.

## **Rose to the Challenge: Arnold Schwarzenegger's Chief of Staff**

In 2009, Governor Schwarzenegger appointed Costigan to serve as his Chief of Staff. In this position, Richard was responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the Governor's Office, including oversight of the Governor's policy agenda and appointment process. He was well-respected by members of both parties, and was instrumental in helping to keep the state government functioning through some of its most difficult times.

## **Richard Costigan: Influence on California Politics**

Costigan's influence extends far beyond his current role as Managing Director at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips. Throughout his career, he has had an expansive impact on California politics, working with both parties on a wide range of issues. His experience and insight as a public servant and an attorney has been integral in helping shape the political landscape of the Golden State.

### [Richard Costigan](#)

"People are always somewhat fascinated that I went to a small law school in Alabama and then [rose] to a pretty good range out here in California," Costigan said.

In November, Costigan left Schwarzenegger's administration and rejoined **Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP**, in its Sacramento office on December 18. He had previously worked at the firm in 2002.

Costigan explained why he decided to leave Schwarzenegger's camp and return to Manatt Phelps:

"It was a 24/7, 365 grind working in the governor's office," he said. "Governor Schwarzenegger is a different governor; he's very hands-on and proactive, and we were always under the microscope. And I loved working with him, but my family was suffering. When I went to a soccer game, I was always on the BlackBerry. So what caused me to leave was after three years, I told the governor I would stay through the term and do everything I could to help him get reelected, and once that goal was achieved, it was time to get my family back."

Costigan had been with Schwarzenegger since he was first elected governor in 2003 as a result of the special recall election to replace then-governor Gray Davis, and he was a part of Schwarzenegger's transition team when he took office. As Deputy Chief of Staff and Legislative Affairs Secretary, Costigan served as Schwarzenegger's principal liaison to the legislature. He said during his tenure in the governor's office, he oversaw all of Schwarzenegger's legislation and "tracked three to four thousand bills." In addition, he worked on a wide range of policy areas, including infrastructure, healthcare, environment, education, and economic issues.

Costigan discussed what it was like working with Schwarzenegger:

"He's incredible," Costigan said. "I mean, I was very lucky; I got to spend a lot of time with him. It took me about four or five looks to get past the awe factor. You sit in a meeting and get one of those looks from a movie. It was always funny to watch people come in. I don't care if they were a CEO of a company or a mayor of a large city; the first couple of meetings, it was like 'Wow, that's the Terminator, isn't it?' But he was so down-to-earth."

Before joining Schwarzenegger's administration, Costigan was Vice President of Government Relations and Chief Lobbyist for the California Chamber of Commerce.

"When I started with the chamber in 2003, the California economy was sort of going downward," he said. "There were companies leaving, and I had the privilege of leading a couple of major coalitions, including the coalition against SB2, which was a mandatory employer-paid healthcare in California."

After the California Chamber of Commerce endorsed Schwarzenegger in his bid for the governor's office, Costigan said he spent a significant amount of time going up and down the state talking to the media, attending events, and "talking about how bad the business climate was in California."

#### **About Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP**

Established in 1965, Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, is a highly influential professional services firm. It offers fully integrated legal and strategic consulting services to U.S. and international clients across a wide range of industries, including healthcare; entertainment, advertising, marketing, and media; financial services; technology, venture capital, and e-commerce; real estate and land use; and energy and natural resources. 300 professionals combine powerful national-litigation and sophisticated transactional capabilities with government access and a range of specialized resources to provide clients with complete legal, strategic, and policy solutions. The firm has eight offices across the U.S.

"And through that and given my background--having worked in the legislature, been a trade association lobbyist, worked at a private firm--I was approached by folks in the transition team" Costigan said. "And they asked me if I was interested in coming to work for Governor Schwarzenegger."

Costigan said that he and Schwarzenegger hit it off, and he signed up in early November of 2003 to come on board as part of the transition team and then join Schwarzenegger's administration when he took office on November 17, 2003.

He said that working in the governor's office was both challenging and rewarding:

"I had both highlights and lows last year," he said. "The low of it was when I couldn't get the governor's \$68-

billion package through the legislature in March. I was frustrated and disappointed, but the governor said, 'Don't worry about it. The first time I started lifting a lot of heavy weights, I couldn't do it. You keep doing it; you keep going forward and keep trying.' And then when we came back in May, we passed over \$38 billion in bonds that went to the voters, and then they overwhelmingly approved it in November. And there's a lot of satisfaction in that."

Costigan studied history and political science as an undergrad at the University of Georgia, graduating in 1988. He entered Cumberland School of Law at Samford University in Birmingham, AL, in September of 1988 and graduated in 1991.

He explained what attracted him to law:

"I guess I tend to be very people-oriented and client-oriented and [...] service-oriented," Costigan said. "And I always enjoyed working out complex problems and trying to solve them."

After graduating from law school, he began working for Meacham, Flowers and Early, a small, four-person law firm in Columbus, GA. Costigan said that at the firm he did family law and creditor bankruptcy work--"just a general practice."

Costigan remained at Meacham Flowers for 18 months and then moved to a boutique firm in Atlanta called Harmon, Smith, Bridges & Wilbanks. He said that at Harmon Smith, he handled a lot of domestic violence litigation.

Costigan left Harmon Smith after 15 months to join Deming, Born, Parker & Hoffman, which he said was slightly bigger than the previous firms in which he had worked with 30 to 35 people. Deming Born is located in Norcross, GA.

"I did a lot of litigation [at Deming Born], which is what I enjoyed," he said. "I like being in court [...] and I did a lot of defense litigation, a lot of hearings. And then [...] I worked with one of the partners on some domestic violence, and I did some family law, big divorces, and then just a couple of medical malpractice defense cases."

Costigan had only been at Deming Born for about five months when he learned that his mother had been diagnosed with breast cancer and might only have a year to live. When he received that news, he decided to move to Sacramento to be closer to his parents; that was in 1996. His mother ended up living 10 more years, and he remained in California, thriving on its political scene.

When Costigan first got to Sacramento, he began working for the legislature. "I was the majority consultant to the Assembly Budget Committee on the Environment," he said. "And seven months after I got here, the Republicans lost the majority, and so I ended up a minority consultant to the Assembly Budget Appropriations Committee. And then I ended up as Director of Policy for the Assembly Republican Caucus, and then, from there, I became the Chief of Staff and oversaw all the operations for the Republicans in the state assembly."

In January 2002, Costigan joined Manatt Phelps in its Sacramento office. He was a lobbyist at the firm and appeared before legislative committees on behalf of some of the firm's clients. Costigan also advised clients on legislation. His title at the firm was Senior Advisor.

Costigan left Manatt Phelps in December of 2002 and joined the California Chamber of Commerce in January of 2003. Later that year, he became part of Schwarzenegger's administration, remained there through his reelection on November 7, 2006, and rejoined Manatt Phelps in December.

Costigan's current title at the firm is Senior Director of State and Government Affairs. He provides strategic advice for clients on how to deal with the legislative branch.

"A lot of what I'm going to do is work with our clients and advise them," he said. "Like, 'Here's a piece of legislation; here's what the governor signed; here's how it's going to be implemented.'"

Costigan has spoken to law students at **USC College of Law** and UC Hastings College of Law. He said he speaks to law students about **the importance of learning** about how a law is created instead of just studying its application.

"I give my little standard speech and ask, 'How many people have actually learned how the law you're studying in a book was established or created?,'" he said. "Very few people actually understand the front end [...] I always tell people don't always look at the back end of the law; look at the front end and see it as a great opportunity."

He advised law students who are interested in getting involved in the political side of law to volunteer.

"Get involved with your local legislatures," he said. "Understand what's going on. There are people making policy decisions that if you don't input or you don't know about and are not engaged, then you're being reactive instead of being proactive; there are folks, if they're law students, that want to get out there and say, 'I want to write the law.' There are **plenty of opportunities**, whether it's getting involved in volunteering in a district office of a legislator or a county supervisor or even a local elected city official."

Costigan was born in Norfolk, VA. He's been married for 16 years and has three kids: two boys (12 and four) and a 10-year-old girl. In his free time, he likes to go dirt biking with them.