



ATTORNEY SEARCH

By Kenneth Davis

Richard Costigan of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips Rose to the Challenge as One of Governor Schwarzenegger's Top Aides



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.

"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."

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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."

"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.

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.

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"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.

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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.

On the Net

Manatt, Phelps & Phillips
www.manatt.com

Cumberland School of Law
cumberland.samford.edu/cumberland1.asp?ID=2

California Chamber of Commerce
www.calchamber.com

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