

AD-VANTAGE WASHINGTON

Talking with the American Association of Advertising Agencies Lawyer

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Adonis Hoffman was only supposed to stay in Washington for a season. That was 26 years ago. When he moved to DC from Los Angeles in 1980, it was to work with a newly-elected Congressman from California, and to study law at Georgetown. Hoffman was being groomed for a career in elective politics. According to his political mentors, he was supposed to return home, run for the California Legislature and prepare for a run at Congress.

"Advertising today is so ubiquitous, dynamic and interactive that companies have to balance their inherent rights with the desire of the consuming public for information privacy, choice and the right sometimes to be left alone. I mean, for example, just because companies can advertise to kids on the school bus doesn't mean they should—it simply is not right and Americans won't accept it."

"If I can have any impact in this industry whatsoever, I want to champion the practice of responsible advertising, where there is a palpable balance between commercial speech on the one hand, and commercial innovation on the other."

--Adonis Hoffman



But that was not to be. After five years as a senior Congressional staffer doing mostly foreign policy work during the first term of the Reagan Administration, he got hooked on world politics. "The early 1980s were heady days for foreign policy wonks. We were in the last days of the Cold War, trade issues were high on the agenda, and America was ascendant after Jimmy Carter's period of *Pax Humanitas*. Plus, once I saw the family and financial strains that Congress puts on its members up close and personal, I decided to do something different" said Hoffman.

When he left Capitol Hill in 1984, Hoffman landed at the hottest lobbying and public relations firm in Washington at the time—Gray and Company. There he helped guide the Capitol Hill lobbying for a host of A-list clients including the governments of Japan, Korea, Turkey and the Cayman Islands, and a bunch of *Fortune* 100 companies. "I learned how to put together high profile media, communications and lobbying efforts start-to-finish from Bob Gray and Neil Livingstone, two of the best in the business" noted Hoffman.

The *gravitas* of international law and business lured Hoffman to a Washington law firm where, for the next six years, he represented American and foreign companies on legislative and regulatory affairs. But public service called again in 1990 when Hoffman's former boss took over as chairman of a powerful congressional subcommittee and asked him to serve as legal counsel and staff director. Hoffman notes: "The promise of democratic reform was all the rage. We traveled to over 50 developing countries throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle East, meeting with heads of state, government leaders and democracy activists in remote regions of the world."

Fresh from the Hill, Hoffman joined the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a leading Washington think tank, where he headed up a project on international law and developing countries. He also taught at The New School and later became a fellow at the World Policy Institute in New York. He showed up frequently as a talking head expert on *CNN*, *NBC*, and *MSNBC*, and published regular commentary in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Post*, *Foreign Policy* and *Los Angeles Times*.

So in 1997 when the newly-appointed chairman of the FCC, Bill Kennard, wanted to start a program to encourage telecommunications reform in developing countries, he asked Hoffman to head up the effort. Kennard later appointed Hoffman to be Deputy Chief of the FCC's Cable Bureau, where, under Bureau Chief Deborah Lathen, he shepherded several major telecom mergers and authored a report on broadband deployment. It was at the FCC where Hoffman first engaged the advertising industry, serving as head of the Chairman's Interagency Task Force on Advertising Practices.

When he left the FCC in 2000, the American Association of Advertising Agencies ("AAAA" or "the 4-As") named Hoffman its Senior Vice President and Legal Counsel, where he continues today as one of the advertising industry's lead lawyers and spokesmen. "Our association represents all of the major advertising holding companies, agencies and media buying firms—Madison Avenue if you will—who together account for 75-80 percent of the print and broadcast commercials in the U.S."

Of the challenges facing advertising, Hoffman says: "Our business is deeply tied to the First Amendment of the Constitution and its court-upheld protections for commercial speech. And while that may present some thorny issues from time to time, the notion of freedom of speech for both individual and commercial expression was so fundamental that the Framers consciously put it first."

ADONIS HOFFMAN

Sr. Vice President & Counsel
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Education:

Princeton University, A.B. Politics, 1976
Georgetown University Law Center, J.D. 1986

Personal:

Born--October 2, 1954, New Orleans, LA
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