

## PEOPLE

## Plugged In

BY CORAL DAVENPORT

The crowd at last week's White House oil spill commission hearing was a who's who of energy industry players. There were CEOs and lobbyists from BP, Halliburton, Transocean, Shell, ExxonMobil, and plenty more. Of course, Frank Maisano was there, working the room.

"Hey, guys, what's going on?" he said, approaching the press table with veteran energy reporters. Maisano, who works for the firm Bracewell & Giuliani, which represents some of the country's biggest oil, gas, and coal companies, knows everyone there. He pulls someone aside. "I've got something to tell you," he says, passing on a nugget of information that fits a story a reporter has been working on.

Another reporter approaches him. "I'm hearing enviros are upset because Bartlit used to work for the firm representing BP. Do you know anything about that?" asks the reporter, referring to Fred Bartlit, the spill panel's chief counsel. "I don't know, but I can find out for you," says Maisano. Later that day, he e-mails with another tip and a fresh lead.

This is not standard practice in the world of big energy. Big oil and coal companies are deeply wary of reporters. Calls to press shops of companies like Shell and BP are usually met with bland official statements, sometimes delivered as late as 24 hours after the request for comment—essentially useless for journalists on daily deadlines.

Maisano has spent the last decade working as a combination of spokesman and sometime lobbyist for firms that represent companies like Duke Energy, Arch Coal, and the Texas oil companies Tesoro and Valero. He is hailed by industries, reporters, and environmentalists as singular in the field of energy communications—a term that can sound like an oxymoron.

His impact, they say, has been profound: By getting journalists access to often elusive oil, gas, and other industry insiders within minutes of breaking news (and often before, since



Maisano makes it his business to find out about news before it breaks), people on all sides of the debate say that he has fundamentally changed the public discourse about energy, in both the mainstream and Beltway media.

At first blush, Maisano looks like an industry lobbyist out of central casting: a slicked-back, jet-black mini-pompadour, pastel shirts with contrasting white collars, cufflinks, razor-sharp suits, and glossy loafers. He's a fixture at every congressional hearing that could have an impact on the fossil fuel industry, and he spends most of his time schmoozing with reporters—trading information, offering heads-ups, and forging connections between journalists and his insider industry clients.

"Frank is a unique entity in this town," says Frank O'Donnell, president of the group Clean Air Watch, who often finds himself on opposite sides of the debate with Maisano. (The two are sometimes known as "Clean Air Frank" and "Dirty Air Frank.") "Unlike most spokespeople for big organizations, he seems unencumbered by the layer upon layer of bureaucratic nonsense most companies make you go through. He's able to go out and offer perspective instantly—giving him unparalleled

access to both major and specialized media."

Maisano says he actually took his cue from environmentalists. "Environmentalists are happy to talk to reporters. They love to tell reporters their story. And for years, industry has been very bad at that," he told *National Journal* (for whom he has long been a key source).

"I know that we need to feed the reporter machine to stay at a level playing field. If we don't, the enviros will."

One of his signature tools for feeding the reporter machine is a weekly newsletter and tip sheet, which Maisano has been sending out to reporters and industry sources in an e-mail blast every Monday for years. It includes a look ahead to the week's energy events, his own quick take on the top energy news, a gossip roundup of comings and goings on the energy policy scene, the latest hockey scores, and often a smattering of heavy metal lyrics.

(The hockey scores are no accident. Maisano has been a referee for school and youth league hockey games for a dozen years, an offshoot of his 20-year career as a referee at high school football games. "It helps you make solid decisions, helps your focus, and certainly prepares you to deal with critics," he noted.)

Maisano usually follows up his newsletters with custom media outreach. Over the summer, as one reporter struggled to find new metaphors to describe the demise of the Senate cap-and-trade bill, Maisano e-mailed lyrics from different Iron Maiden songs, such as "Dance of Death," for inclusion in coverage.

More than one observer has noted that the tip sheet, read by many non-energy reporters as well, seems itself to have influenced the evolution of media in this town.

"These morning tip sheets which are all the rage right now ... Frank's Monday morning tip sheet started almost 10 years ago, and now practically every publication has the same thing," said Bill Wicker, communications director for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. "He's a pioneer."

## SENATE LEADERSHIP

## Veteran Leadership Aide Leaving Reid's Office

BY SUSAN DAVIS

Veteran Senate Democratic aide Jim Manley is leaving Capitol Hill after more than two decades of service, most recently as the chief spokesman for Senate Majority Leader **Harry Reid** of Nevada.

"After more than 20 years in the Senate,

including one full six-year cycle with Senator Reid, it's about time for me to try something new," Manley confirmed in an e-mail. "To where, and to do what, is still undecided. I love the Senate and really liked working for Senator Reid but I need a change. Next stop unknown," he wrote. Manley's departure is the latest move in a staff shake-up at the lead-

er's office. On Wednesday, Reid announced that he would appoint Chief of Staff Gary Myrick to be secretary for the Senate Democratic caucus, while David Krone would take over as the leader's chief of staff.

Manley formerly worked for former Democratic Sens. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and George Mitchell of Maine.