

# Inside Bono's Washington Effort

By Eamon Javers, CQ Staff

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The two lobbyists - Hatch, a Republican, and Sheridan, a Democrat - are the for-profit arm-twisters hired by Bono's foundation called DATA, which is headquartered at 14th and I Streets, just off the K Street lobbying corridor and a few blocks from the White House.

A visitor to DATA's office immediately sees that it isn't a typical Washington wonketeria. For one thing, the receptionist is on the phone with a caller who's desperate to get in touch with Bono. For another, pictures of Bono line the walls where the usual D.C. office would have politicians gripping and grinning. And framed in the entryway is a cover of Time magazine with the singer's saintly image and the headline: "Can Bono Save the World?"

The DATA office is here to do just that, and its strategy of uniting liberals and social conservatives is one that only a global pop star whose music is infused with religious imagery could pull off.

Bono founded DATA in 2002, and the acronym stands for Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa, which pretty neatly sums up what the rocker wants from the politicians in Washington. But the non-profit foundation has gone a step further than most, hiring influence peddlers Hatch and Sheridan to help spread Bono's message. So why the lobbyists?

"The poorest people on Earth need the same sort of representation in Washington that any other special interest receives," says Tom Hart, DATA's government relations director, a former lobbyist for the Episcopal Church. "We're making decisions that affect millions of lives here. Bono realized that he needed to play by the rules of Washington, and that's what we're doing."

Hatch is the former executive director of the National Republican Congressional Committee and a former aide to House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas. Sheridan, who founded his own lobbying firm in 1991 and is a former staffer of the AIDS Action Council, is politically connected to Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., whose nephew Bobby Shriver is co-founder and chairman of DATA.

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**BONO'S K STREET CONNECTION**

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All that spending is making itself felt on Capitol Hill. "I see Tom and Scott quite a bit," says Pennsylvania Republican Sen. Rick Santorum. "And I usually see Bono when he comes to town, too." Santorum recently tacked on an amendment to the Senate-passed fiscal 2006 budget resolution that would add \$500 million in multilateral funding for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. And he says Bono's personal lobbying of lawmakers helps get attention to the issues. "You bring in the president of the Life Insurance Association, and it's a little different," the senator says with a laugh. "He doesn't have the glasses or the funky clothes." But Santorum says Bono stands out from the other celebrities who hit the Hill because he comes to meetings prepared - and follows up.



**A SORT OF HOMECOMING:** Bono is no stranger to Washington, regularly meeting with top officials.

In 2002, Bono told *Time* magazine that he'd given up on music as a political force but was determined to make a difference on a practical level: "It's, like, let's only have goals that we can go after. U2 is about the impossible. Politics is the art of the possible. They're very different, and I'm resigned to that now."

So what are Bono's politics?

He wants to eliminate poverty in Africa by focusing on debt relief, development assistance, fair trade policies and AIDS. His interest in the continent dates back to the 1984 LiveAID concert to feed the hungry in Africa, but he began his evolution into a policy wonk in 2000, when he lobbied Congress and the Clinton administration hard for a \$435 million package of debt reduction for Africa. He met with then-Republican Sen. Jesse Helms, and made the North Carolina lawmaker cry with his stories of starving children in Africa. President Bill Clinton signed the measure into law on Election Day 2000. In 2002, Bono launched DATA, which today has about 25 full-time staffers in Washington, London and Los Angeles. DATA's "founding partners" include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Soros' Open Society Institute.

DATA's political strategy of connecting with social conservatives is heavy on Christian themes. As DATA's Seth Amgott points out, debt relief is in the Bible: Both Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 contain references to relieving the debts of the poor. And Santorum says Bono's Christian themes don't hurt in making connections on the Hill: "I looked at his last album and saw quite a few allusions there to faith and the importance of faith," he says. And now DATA is reaching out to the Nashville music community to bring contemporary Christian musicians into DATA's fold.

And although Bono might be thought of as a political liberal, he's made deep inroads into Republican Washington, meeting with White House Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and OMB Director Joshua B. Bolten, among other top Bush administration officials. And you didn't see him among the rock stars, such as Bruce Springsteen, who campaigned for Bush's defeat last year. That lack of partisan edge has helped Bono move federal policy in his direction.

And Bono, whose real name is Paul Hewson, has even become something of an international power broker. Paul Wolfowitz, Bush's nominee to head the World

Bank, called him to chat about how the bank can help reduce poverty. Administration official Kevin Kellems leaked the details of the call to Reuters, which some saw as a way to mollify European leaders critical of the architect of the Iraq war. But the leak surprised the Bono camp: Asked if Bono is playing kingmaker, DATA's Hart says, "Unintentionally so. That was supposed to be an off-the-record conversation."

Meanwhile, DATA and a broad coalition of other non-governmental organizations are rolling out something called the ONE Campaign last year to educate Americans about Africa, and it got a host of bold-faced names involved, including actors Brad Pitt, George Clooney and Jamie Foxx.

All that celebrity power will help drive media attention. But it's not what drives Bono's Washington team. "If there are any [U2] fans on our staff, I don't know about them," says Hart. "Folks here are singularly impressed by Bono because of his effect on the world's poor, not because he's the world's biggest rock star."

Not, of course, that it hurts.