



"Brownstein's lobbying efforts helped secure compensation on behalf of the terrorism victims and their families in the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis. "

Creating a Path for Compensation on Behalf of the Former American Hostages in Tehran

Client: 1979 Iranian Embassy Hostages

After the passage of more than three decades, the 1979–1981 Iran Hostage Crisis remains a familiar event to most Americans—partially due to its recent depiction in the Oscar-winning movie *Argo*. Even so, many might be unaware that the 53 Americans held hostage in Tehran for 444 days didn't receive compensation from the Iranian government for the ordeal—until 2015.

As a precondition for their release, the U.S. State Department negotiated an agreement known as the 1981 Algiers Accords, which barred the hostages from taking court actions against the Iranian government. After losing several court battles, the hostages turned to the U.S. Congress for relief. Brownstein's government relations team, working with the law firm representing the victims and their families, helped create a legal process for compensation in the 2015 Omnibus appropriations bill.

This complicated advocacy effort, led by Manny Ortiz, Robert Flock and Will Moschella, required bipartisan cooperation in the Senate and House as well as a nuanced understanding of international relations and compensation policy. Intense pressure on the State Department and the White House was also a key to the success.

"Our work was complicated twofold by the precondition against securing a judgement in court requesting a lien on Iranian assets and the fact that the administration did not have diplomatic communication with Iran," said Manny. "Few times in a career one is offered an opportunity like this—working on behalf of this class of victims was a privilege. It is unfortunate that they had to wait so long for justice."

Brownstein began working on a lobbying strategy for the Iranian hostage victims a year and half before the Omnibus passed, starting with a bill co-sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and in the House by Reps. Sean Duffy (R-Wis.) and Gerry Connolly (D-Va.). This legislation, the "United States Victims of State Sponsors of Terrorism Fund," included in the Omnibus appropriations bill, sets up a \$1 billion trust set aside for the victims that is composed of the money paid by

corporations that have violated U.S. sanctions on doing business with Iran. The trust will be administrated independently to determine the priority of victim classes on an ongoing basis, meaning the classes of victims or surviving family members continue to receive payment as more money is paid.

Brownstein is developing a track record in successfully representing victims to obtain restitution in transnational cases. Previously, Marc Lampkin and Manny Ortiz successfully represented the U.S. victims in the Lockerbie bombing and Brownstein's Lee Crawford Boyd and Rajika Shah successfully recovered artifacts plundered during the Armenian Genocide and also represented Libyan terrorist hijacking victims before the U.S. Foreign Claims Settlement Commission. Brownstein's Washington, D.C., team also lobbied on behalf of Libyan victims for restitution legislation, and the legislation that assists the Iranian hostages creates a path for victims of other state-sponsored terrorism incidents to claim compensation funds. Brownstein attorneys and professionals firmwide have also assisted on a pro bono basis in the creation of an online database that catalogs the scope of restitution and compensation legislation globally.

Meet The Team

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