



KNOWING ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS: An Effective Advocacy Tool

BE PROMPT AND BE PREPARED – Legislators have hectic schedules, so you don't have a great deal of time. Be at the office on time and take a few minutes beforehand to prepare what you want to say.

KEEP YOUR INTRODUCTIONS BRIEF – Don't let individual introductions consume the time you have to discuss your priorities. If you are meeting as part of a group, make sure to identify a leader to start the meeting and decide who among the group will speak. Allow your leader to briefly introduce participants. Have each person's business card available to leave behind after the meeting.

BE DIRECT, BRIEF AND STAY ON "MESSAGE" – Be clear about what you want from your legislator: What action is needed? Explain why you need your lawmaker's support. If there is legislation, refer to it by bill number or specifically by name. Don't get distracted. Even when your lawmaker strays off topic, listen politely, then quickly move the discussion back to your message.

LISTEN AND LOCALIZE – Give your lawmaker and staff the chance to ask questions--even when they do not agree. (This helps you learn the specific concerns you must address to win his/her support.) Bring the issue "home." Tell your lawmaker how your position affects his/her district or state. Use local case examples that humanize and put a public face on your issue. Supply facts that are relevant to the district or state to back up your position.

SUMMARIZE – Recap the key points of the meeting and the action (if any) that your lawmaker has agreed to take. Leave behind a one-page fact sheet for your lawmaker and staff summarizing your position and your request. Always end the meeting by thanking your lawmaker and staff for their time.

FOLLOW UP AND THANK YOUR LEGISLATOR IN WRITING – Write and thank your legislator and staff for their time. Once again, summarize the key points of your meeting. Provide any additional information that was requested including information addressing concerns raised by your lawmaker or staff at the meeting. If your lawmaker agreed to take action on your behalf, ask for the status of that activity.

MEETING SCENARIOS: WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

AGREES – Thank them for their support. Do not "preach to the choir," instead, find out what your legislator and staff are hearing from others in Washington or "back home." Ask your legislator and staff what they feel can be done to broaden support for your issue. Report this information on your de-briefing form—this intelligence can be useful in formulating strategies to build support.

NON-COMMITTAL – TRY to draw out any specific concerns your lawmaker and staff may have on your issue. Ask if others have approached them either in favor or against your position. If staff

is unfamiliar with the issue, use this opportunity to establish yourself as a key contact with the knowledge and resources to help them when needed. Tell your lawmaker and staff you will follow up later about where they stand.

DISAGREES – Listen. Find out why your legislator and staff oppose your issue. Be respectful in your responses when you address their concerns. Ask if there is any information you can provide that would change their mind. Respond with facts and examples and offer to provide additional information as needed. When the situation becomes hostile, remain professional, but try to close the meeting as politely and quickly as possible.