

10 Tips for an Effective Congressional Meeting



What to Know Before You Go

- ALL politics are local
- One constituent letter represents ten voters
- One constituent visit represents 100
- Your visit is what you make of it.
 - Talk to your friends when you get home.
 - Follow up on your meeting with a letter/email

What to Know Before you Go (con't)

- Most politicians are experts at making people “feel” heard.
 - Their objective – get through the meeting without having to agree to anything at all.
- YOUR objective – a concrete commitment to take SPECIFIC ACTION.

1) Select a spokesperson

- Choose one to do most of the talking.
- If more than one person is going to talk, make sure you know who is going to say what.

2) Be prepared

- Have your talking points handy
- Know ahead of time what is your specific “ASK” and don’t leave unsure of their position
- Bring business cards

3) Be prompt

- Always be a few minutes early so you have time:
 - to collect your thoughts
 - go to the restroom
 - dry off from the heat or rain, and
 - be available in the unlikely event the Member/Staffer is early.

4) Be patient

- Chances are that although you are early, the Member/Staffer is late.
 - Congressional Offices have grueling schedules
 - Member Schedules are broken several times a day by important and unimportant things completely outside of their control. Staffers have to flow with their boss, as well.

5) Be realistic

- It's no easy task to change a law in this country. Our democracy was created that way on purpose.
 - If they haven't co-sponsored, they should
 - If they have:
 - Thank them.
 - Then ask them what more they might do:
 - Co-sign a Dear Colleague
 - Talk to their colleagues
 - Work with XX and XX to get the bill through committee.

6) Be concise

- It is highly unlikely that a Member of Congress has scheduled more than ten minutes for a constituent meeting.
- Be sure you can get your point across in five or less, with the expectation that they will ask questions.

7) Be positive

- Sometimes, a Member of Congress will tell you they can't support your position. If they do, they mean it.
 - Don't debate them
 - Be positive and look for common ground.
 - Be clear, specific and polite.
 - Leave the door open to the Member coming around – **(Bipartisanship is back in style)**

8) Staffers Matter – a Lot

- Yes, they look like they just graduated college, and they probably did. BUT:
 - In 90 percent of a Representative's decisions, they are the first and last voice he or she hears.
 - They always appreciate being treated with respect.
- Often, the Member of Congress cannot make the meeting; the staffer may meet with you instead:
 - This is not a bad thing.
 - You may just get more time with a person who will be your advocate after you are gone.

9) Leave it in writing

- Make sure you have a “leave-behind” with your talking points, supporting materials, contact info and other useful information.

10) Write a Thank You note

- Write a letter expressing appreciation for the Member or staffer's time and briefly summarize any commitments you may have received.
- This may be the most important part of a successful meeting.
- **IMPORTANT:** Remember the staffers name that greeted you first.

Questions?

Contact:

Tristan R. Bréaux
NHC Director of Policy

tbreaux@nhc.org

O: 202-466-2121 ext. 238

C: 202-714-0456