

ABA Day in Washington 2008



12th Annual Program

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL LEGISLATIVE VISITS

American Bar Association
740 15th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20005



Congressional Visits

There is no one "correct" way of calling upon a Member of Congress. But there are some things that you can do that will greatly increase the effectiveness of your visit. Here, are a few guiding principles to remember:



11 Steps to a Successful Visit

- Make an Appointment
- Do your Homework
- Select a Spokesperson
- Be Prompt
- Be Brief



11 Steps to a Successful Visit

- Be Positive
- Localize the Issue
- Do Not Ignore Staff
- Leave a “One-Pager”
- “Close the Deal”
- Write a Thank You



Make an Appointment

- E-mail a letter to the scheduler in the office of each Member, advising of your trip to Washington and requesting a meeting. Include the issues you would like to discuss.
- Contact the ABA Governmental Affairs Office staff for the most current scheduler names and e-mail addresses.

Appointment Tip

- Leave plenty of time between appointments -- as least 30 minutes, more if going between House and Senate appointments to account for delays.



Be Prepared!

- Proper preparation for the meeting is the name of the game!
- Use the ABA Constituent Visit Checklist to learn the issues, the personalities, the legislative process and the Member's voting record.
- Know the key points you would like to make and anticipate likely questions or reactions.
- Know and be able to respond to your opposition's arguments.
- Recognize the roles played by the parties, House and Senate leadership, committee chairs, etc. and what each can and cannot do.



Be Prompt!

- Be on time, even though you should plan to wait for Members to finish previous meetings, return from committee meetings or the House or Senate floor, etc.



Select a Spokesperson

- Select a person who is:
 - Known to the Member, preferably a close friend, business colleague, etc.;
 - most knowledgeable on the issues; or
 - otherwise best able to state your case.



Select a Spokesperson

- If each group member is going to speak, decide in advance who is going to say what.
- TIP: if you have a large group, ask the scheduler in advance how many people can attend the meeting – there may not be room for everyone!



Be Brief!

- Don't try to cover more than three issues.
- Decide in advance which is the most important to cover for each particular Member (review committee membership, leadership roles, etc.)
- Meetings typically last no more than 15 minutes, but can be cut short by a floor vote, etc. Make your point and move on.
- Don't overstay your welcome – keep your eye on the clock.



Be Positive!

- Thank the Member for his/her past support on key issues.
- Look for common ground – don't retreat from your position, but respect the Member's point of view even if it differs from yours.



Localize the Issue

- As Tip O’Neil said, “All politics is local.”
- Most important, explain how the legislation/issue affects the Member’s district or state.
- Be specific – e.g. use local stories regarding legal aid
- Make it easy for the Member to vote your way!



Do Not Ignore Staff!

- Find out which staff person handles your issues and develop a working relationship with him or her.
- Many staff members are very influential with their bosses and can be of great help in relaying inside information, influencing a Member, etc.



Do Not Ignore Staff!

- Build a Relationship with Staff –
 - DC Staff handle substantive issues; local staff generally handle casework.
 - Exchange e-mail addresses with staff who handle your issues. The staff can then call on you for information, and you will be able to reach staff during crunch times.



Leave a “One-Pager”

- Leave behind “One-Pagers” setting forth your position on each issue so that the Member or staff can refer to it after you've gone.
- Make sure your name, address and telephone number is either imprinted on them or your business card is securely attached.
- TIP: Ideally, your one-pager should be accessible from your web page.



“Close the Deal”

- Tell the Member exactly what you would like them to do – sponsor legislation, write a letter to a committee, etc.
- Members hear from many different constituencies on most issues, and are careful to avoid making too many commitments.
- Don't take generalized statements of interest or support to be true commitments on your issue. Be sure to “Close the Deal!” before you leave.

Write a Thank You Letter

- Write a letter thanking the Member and/or staff for their time and attention.
- Briefly summarize your position and any understandings that might have been reached.



Conclusion

- Don't wait for a crisis!
 - Make sure your Members are aware of your issues well in advance of committee markups or floor votes!
 - Develop working relationships with Members and staff:
 - Offer to serve as an information resource; and
 - Invite Members and staff to bar/pro bono/legal aid events.
 - What is the one great way to do this?



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April 15-17, 2008



You will achieve your goals and have fun
doing it!