

## Tips for Meeting with Your Officials

Although letters, e-mails and phone calls are useful advocacy tools, meeting face-to-face with your elected officials--or their staff members--is the most effective way to communicate your interests and concerns. These visits help officials judge the mood of the community and allow constituents to promote their favored issues to their elected officials. Remember, you don't need to be an expert on the issues--you simply need to have a basic understanding and a sincere interest or concern about them.

Below are a few suggestions for holding a successful congressional office visit:

- **BE PREPARED.** In addition to educating yourself about the key points and latest information on the topics you wish to discuss, you should also take a little time to find out some basic personal details about your legislator. You can find this information, in addition to links to your legislators' websites by clicking [here](#). Also, find out how your legislator voted on UN-related legislation by clicking [here](#).
- **IDENTIFY A GROUP LEADER.** If you are part of a group of several or more individuals, select a spokesperson to lead the discussion and also determine who will be discussing which key points or issues.
- **FOCUS.** You will likely have only a short period of time to make your case. Before the meeting, narrow down the issues to be discussed to a manageable number and identify the main messages and information that best illustrate and "sell" your position.
- **INTRODUCE YOURSELF.** At the beginning of the meeting, briefly provide information not only about yourself, but your tribe, professional activities, community involvement, etc.
- **LEAVE CONTACT INFORMATION.** Have a business card or contact information to leave behind.
- **BE POSITIVE AND POLITE.** Even if your legislator is a staunch opponent of your issue, try to discuss something positive to begin the meeting – such as thanking him/her for a particular vote, a certain action, or simply for meeting with you. Your argument will not be effective if your tone is excessively critical or combative.
- **BE SPECIFIC.** Make a specific request of your official, and always cite bill numbers (i.e., please vote for S. 2433). You should also try to give examples of how a desired action will benefit the agency, community and, especially, your state or local region. Highlight the benefit to the constituency of the official.
- **EXTEND APPRECIATION.** Thank your official or their staff for meeting with you and follow-up with a thank you letter which also reiterates the specific requests you made during the meeting. You may want to ask if there is anything you can do for them, such as by sending them information on topics discussed during the meeting.
- **LEAVE MATERIALS BEHIND.** After your meeting, provide your legislator and their staff with fact sheets or other pertinent information on issues covered during the meeting, as well as materials about your local agency.
- **DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF A STAFF MEMBER.** Do not be offended if you end up meeting with a staff member instead of the elected official. These individuals hold considerable sway and are very important when it comes to making decisions.