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?

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