

Preparing for Congressional and Senate Meetings

Meeting with your senator or member of Congress or their staff is among the most important steps you can take to make your voice heard on trade and legislative issues. As a constituent or an employer, and an industry expert, you bring a perspective to the table that few other visitors to a member's office can offer.



When you are meeting with a member of Congress or their staff, please remember the following:

- Be respectful of the representative and all staff with whom you talk or meet, regardless of any political, ideological, or issue differences.
- Try to be flexible regarding last minute scheduling changes, especially with meetings in DC, because they may occur due to the scheduling of floor votes, committee meetings, flight changes, etc. that are beyond the control of the member or staff. Note that meetings may be held in a hallway, in the front office, in a conference room, a member's office, outside of a committee room or in the Capitol, depending on the availability of space and participants.
- The most important thing to bring to the meeting is your own set of experiences and views and the information you have about the practical impact of how the member's discussions/votes will affect your business. Define exactly what it is that you are trying to accomplish. If feasible, invite the member or staff to visit your facility and meet the workers whose jobs may be at stake. This is one of the most impactful ways to solidify your relationship with the Congressperson.
- Representatives will also be interested in the views of groups and political organizations, particularly those that have supported them in the past. The views of organizations like the local chamber of commerce or labor union are also important. Be prepared to answer questions and provide them with information about others who support your issue or to respond to arguments coming from those who do not agree with you.
- The goal of these meetings is to familiarize members with you and your firm, inform them of the issue and your point of view, point out that your issue has support with people in the member's state or district, and ask them to do a specific thing – cosponsor your bill, vote for or against a bill, send a letter, contact you when an issue that may impact your company rises to the surface, etc.

The Importance of Meeting with Staff

While senators and representatives are the ultimate decision makers, it is important to recognize that their staff members can have significant influence over the course and content of legislation. Constituents are urged to maintain ongoing contacts with these individuals, especially subcommittee staff and the lawmakers' own legislative aides. Many members of Congress rely a great deal on their staff to vet a particular issue, prepare a memo to advise them when the time comes to make any decisions, and provide face-to-face regular contact with constituents.



When you need to contact a lawmaker about specific legislation, his or her staff aide also should be alerted and copied on any correspondence. This is one way of ensuring that your issues are not lost or overlooked among the stack of legislation that is discussed every day. Also, keep in mind that every senator and representative maintains an office(s) in his or her home state. These district offices offer an excellent opportunity to build relationships with key staff, channel the latest information back to senators and representatives and generally get your message across to the legislator. Remember that members and their staff genuinely want to hear from constituents. While they enjoy meeting with the company representatives in Washington, they get a sense of the importance of the issue when someone from the home office makes the effort to visit them either in Washington, D.C. or in one of their local offices.

When you have the opportunity to meet with the member him/herself, it is important to name the staff person with whom you have been working and compliment that person directly to the member. Such a simple thank you and tip of the hat will build lasting impressions with the staff and could help get your issue to the top of the pile faster.

We generally help prepare a one-page document that summarizes the details of your issue. We will supplement this information with any proposed language that could be used to introduce a bill, amend a bill or otherwise achieve your goal. We also prepare talking points to assist you during your presentation with the member or staff. It is important to cover the details, clearly state your goals, leave behind information to which they can refer later, and close with an invitation to visit your company.

Committee Staff: Meeting with the staff of the committee or subcommittee that may have jurisdiction over your issue is also important. These staff members are experts in the legal and political considerations of your concern. In addition, they write the text, amendments, substitutes and reports of the bills considered by the panel and run the hearings and markups. They will implement their chairperson's wishes but are themselves very important in determining how and even if a bill will be considered by the panel. If they are supportive of your goal, or even noncommittal about it, having met with them and explained your point of view can go a long way in improving your chances of being heard. In the meeting, you must be precise about what you're trying to accomplish and prepared to answer detailed questions. If you do not have the answer at hand, do not be afraid to admit that and let them know you will get them the information they need as a follow up to the meeting. Such a response also provides an excellent opportunity to touch base with them again after the in-person meeting.

How to Conduct the Meeting

When you meet with the member of Congress or their staff, you should first thank them for their time, then determine their familiarity with your company. Spend time sharing how many employees are in their state/district, the amount of economic activity for which your company is responsible in the community and the history of the company.

Let them know that you want to establish a relationship with them so that when legislation that may impact your business arises, they will feel comfortable calling you to solicit an opinion.

You may want to have some general company information (no more than one page) ready to leave behind with the staff.

You may begin discussing the pertinent issues with very clear and prepared talking points. Know that some members of Congress have a policy in which after 12-15 minutes, their staff is instructed to enter the room to "remind" them of another meeting, call, hearing, etc. The message must be succinct and clear. You should





also have a one-page document to leave behind that summarizes the issues you raised and the request you are making. With staff you can generally count on 20-30 minutes of their time.

Follow-up is essential. Any information you do not have during the meeting should be conveyed via email along with the one-page document that you left behind after the meeting. A formal letter thanking the staff or member for the meeting is standard. It is also essential to ensure that your meeting is not a “one off” experience. If the matter is important enough to meet, it is important enough to touch base every 3-4 weeks thereafter. Additionally, if the meeting is to familiarize the staff and member with your company and priorities, it is essential that an in-person meeting take place at least twice a year.

In every meeting, you should invite the member or staff to visit your facility. It is important to be genuine and to follow through on the invitation. Members thrive on getting to know their constituents and the possibility of expanding their base of supporters through meeting with employees. If there is a new facility opening, or a milestone in the company’s schedule, consider inviting a member of Congress to be present at the event.

Keeping them apprised of the company through press releases or articles on events at the company are important as well. For example, if your company participates in a fundraiser for a cause and there is an article either in your internal newsletter or in the local newspaper, share that article with the member’s office. The better they know the company, the more they will rely on you for expert advice on your issues.

How Legislation is Created

To the average person, the process of getting a bill through Congress may seem highly complex and technical. Actually, the process itself is fairly simple. What can be confusing to the layperson is (1) the volume of legislation pending before Congress and (2) the system Congress has for distribution of its work. It is true that Congress handles a great deal of legislation each year, but only a handful of bills will be of particular interest to you. So long as you keep your sights on the legislation that affects you, you should have no trouble following the progress of those bills. And once you familiarize yourself with the key committees responsible for handling your issues, following the progress of legislation will become much easier.



The key to deciphering the legislative process is in understanding that legislation is grouped into three main categories.

Authorizing legislation: A bill that creates a new federal program, extends the life of an existing program, or repeals existing law. Authorizing bills usually set a limit on the amount of funds that can be spent annually by a program over a period of three or five years. But it’s important to remember that an authorizing bill only establishes the framework for a federal program - it does not provide funds to operate the program.

Appropriations bill: A bill that allocates funding for specific federal programs. Unlike authorizing legislation, which remains in effect for one or more years, an appropriations bill must be enacted into law every year. Each year, in fact, Congress must pass a series of 13 appropriations bills to keep federal departments and agencies operating. Or, as we have seen in recent years, Congress may pass a continuing resolution, a measure that instructs agencies to continue funding at the most recent appropriated levels.

Entitlement legislation: A measure that guarantees a certain level of benefits to persons who meet eligibility requirements set by law, such as Medicare, Medicaid and college student loan programs, or that establishes programs for businesses such as consumer product safety, OSHA standards, etc. Entitlement programs typically do not need to be reauthorized, nor do they require annual appropriations.



Laying the Groundwork: The Role of Individual Members of Congress

Generally speaking, the earlier you get involved, the better your chances of having an impact on decision making. The further a bill advances in the legislative process, the more difficult it becomes to change or modify. This fact is especially true now that Congress often groups several issues into one bill.

The first formal step in the legislative process occurs when one or more members of Congress introduce a bill. But from an advocate's perspective, the work begins much earlier than that. For example, once you have identified an issue or problem that merits special attention, one or two members of Congress should be identified whose philosophy and voting record indicate that they would be willing to play a leadership role in supporting the issue. After extensive discussions with the senator or representative and their staff, formal legislation is prepared for introduction. Bills introduced in the House are assigned an "H.R." number (e.g., H.R. 2037) and bills introduced in the Senate are given an "S." number.

Of course, having legislation introduced and getting it enacted into law are two different matters. Preventing a bill from languishing in someone's files requires broad support for the issue or the firm support of your member of Congress. Constituents must contact their own senators and representatives to convince them to co-sponsor the bill. The way that is done is by having the lawmaker's staff contact the original sponsor and ask to have his or her name listed as supporting the bill. In addition, regular attention needs to be paid to your sponsor's office through letters, visits and emails.

The Importance of the Committee System

Congressional committees are the workhorses of Congress. As the number of issues brought before Congress grows, lawmakers increasingly rely on the committee system to sift through the facts and determine how issues should be resolved. Congress is made up of both standing committees and select committees. Generally, standing committees have the power to generate legislation in their particular areas of jurisdiction, such as tax writing or appropriations. Select committees, such as the Senate Special Committee on Aging, are primarily advisory in nature.

Most committees have delegated specific issues under their jurisdiction to subcommittees, whose job is to analyze each issue and eventually make a recommendation to their parent committee (or full committee, as it is sometimes called). Here again, it is **vitaly important** that constituent contacts be made with subcommittees as **early** in the process as possible. In their earliest stages of review, subcommittees welcome input from interested organizations and individuals. At this point, letters and personal visits with members of the subcommittee and their staff can have tremendous effect on the panel's recommendations. In many instances, a subcommittee will hold public hearings, either in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere, where constituents may ask to present their positions. There is also the opportunity to present written comments for the hearings and to use the hearings as a mechanism to highlight your issue by working with staff to have a question on a particular topic asked during the hearing by a member of Congress.

If your senator or representative is not on the relevant subcommittee, does that mean you have no influence over the outcome? Not necessarily. It is true that members of a subcommittee are regarded as "specialists" by their colleagues and can therefore wield considerable power in deciding whether or not an issue will be advanced through the legislative process. However, your own senators or representatives, whether or not they are on the subcommittee, often can be effective intermediaries, depending on their personal or political relationships with the subcommittee members.



Floor Action

Once a committee has approved legislation, it becomes eligible for debate on the House and Senate floors, where it may be passed, defeated or amended. Because floor debates often are scheduled on short notice, you should prepare your messages (e.g., e-mails, letters etc.) well in advance. However, keep in mind that **timing** is extremely critical. Any communications about legislation that is coming up for floor debate should arrive as close to the time of voting as possible.

The leadership is critical to determining what does and does not make it to the floor of the House or Senate. Thus, in many instances it is also necessary to work with the leadership offices to press them to give the bill floor time.

Conference Action

It is usually the case that the House and Senate pass different versions of the same bill. When that occurs, a handful of members from each chamber are appointed to serve on a conference committee that attempts to work out a compromise. A conference committee usually consists of selected members of the House and Senate subcommittees that originally developed the legislation. In some instances, conference committees may need to resolve only a few issues; in the case of appropriations bills, there may be several hundred to be reconciled. Constituents whose senators or representatives happen to be on a conference committee can play a crucial role in the deliberations.



The end product of the meetings is a conference report containing a compromise bill and a section-by-section explanation of the agreed-upon compromise. Once both the House and Senate agree to the conference report, the measure is sent to the president for approval (or veto).

Getting Around D.C. – Helpful Information

Hotels: The following 4 hotels are located closest to Sandler, Travis & Rosenberg, PA office location:

- **SOFITEL LUXURY HOTEL** located at 806 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005. Phone (202) 730-8800.
- **JW MARRIOTT WASHINGTON, DC** located at 1331 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20004 Phone (202) 393-2000
- **W WASHINGTON DC** located at 515 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20004 Phone (202) 661-2400
- **MARRIOTT WASHINGTON AT METRO CENTER** located at 775 12th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Phone (202) 737-2200

If you prefer to stay closer to Capitol Hill, the following are a list of the closest hotels:



- **CAPITOL HILL HOTEL** located at 200 C Street SE, Washington, D.C. 20003-1909. Phone 202.543.6000
- **HYATT REGENCY WASHINGTON ON CAPITOL HILL** located at 400 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington D.C. 20001. Phone (202) 737-5773
- **HOLIDAY INN WASHINGTON - CAPITOL** located 550 C Street SW, Washington, DC 20024. Phone (202) 479-4000

Taxi. Taxi services are plentiful and economical in D.C. The easiest and fastest way to retrieve a taxi is to stand on any street corner. Taxi drivers use a metered system just like every other city in the country. The D.C. taxis are all supposed to have working credit card machines, but such is not always the case. It is recommended that you bring sufficient cash and small bills for the taxi. In addition, the Uber car service is now in Washington, D.C., allowing you to find a taxi via that application.

House and Senate. When entering any House or Senate building be prepared to be screened by a magnetometer and/or an X-ray device. Having any electronic devices will prolong going through security. Please leave any tablets or computers either in your hotel room or at Sandler, Travis & Rosenberg's office. If you have a briefcase or portfolio into which you can place your phone, wallet, keys, watch, change and other metal items, it is recommended that you do so to speed security clearance. Likewise, you may wish to wear a belt that does not have a buckle that triggers the alarm and avoid steel shank shoes if possible.

Capitol. You should keep your belongings with you at all times when visiting the Capitol because unattended items may result in a disruption of service at the Capitol or confiscation. The following items are strictly prohibited in the Capitol, including the Capitol Visitor Center.

- Liquid, including water
- Food or beverage of any kind, including fruit and unopened packaged food
- Aerosol containers
- Non-aerosol sprays (prescriptions for medical needs are permitted)
- Any pointed object; e.g., knitting needles and letter openers (pens and pencils are permitted)
- Any bag larger than 18" wide x 14" high x 8.5" deep
- Electric stun guns, martial arts weapons or devices
- Guns, replica guns, ammunition and fireworks
- Knives of any size
- Mace and pepper spray
- Razors and box cutters

Food. If you have a long lobby day agenda, you may want to carry a bottle of water and a protein bar with you. Sometimes meetings get rearranged into the scheduled lunch hour and thus lunch is not possible. Likewise, lunch may be a quick bite to eat in one of the cafeterias rather than a formal sit down meal outside the office buildings.

