

FEDERAL ADVOCACY IN AUGUST

Congress annually breaks from all legislative activity during the month of August to allow for time in home states and congressional districts in order to connect with constituents and potential voters. Typically they will hold Town Hall meetings or participate in local civic events. As a result, August provides an ideal time to meet with your Members of Congress locally, saving both time and money compared to scheduling the same meeting in Washington, DC. Take advantage of this opportunity to reinforce the importance of county issues, thank them for items accomplished and request action needed before the end of the Second Session of the 115th Congress.

Any legislation not signed into law before the end of the Second Session must be reintroduced in the next Congress. Additionally, the federal appropriations process is frequently not completed by August, so funding levels for the next fiscal year on which county governments rely are not finalized. Therefore, meetings locally during the August Recess are extremely timely and hearing from local elected officials can often change the minds of federal lawmakers. Meeting personally outside of DC also helps you develop, improve and maintain important, personal and political relationships with your Members of Congress.

GETTING STARTED:

- Call the office located nearest to you. Some offices have different staff for scheduling appointments in the state than those who handle the scheduling for DC meetings. However, also be prepared to be directed to the DC office. It depends on the individual Member how it is handled.
- You may be asked to submit the request by email or fill out a form online.
- Provide names, titles and possible times for an appointment.
- Consider inviting your Member of Congress to your location for meeting with more than one local elected official and staff leadership.
- Check in with the scheduler a week before the meeting to confirm date, time and location.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE:

- Research ahead of time how your Member has voted on the key issues you plan to discuss.
- Re-familiarize yourself on their committee and subcommittee assignments, as well as any special interests he/she has, such as participation in any of the Congressional Caucuses.
- A quick review of the Member's website or through internet searches will reveal a lot of useful information. Look for common interests (i.e. hobbies, alma mater, family, etc.).
- Although the preferred meeting is always elected official to elected official, if that is not possible ask for the District Director.
- Members of Congress rely heavily on their staff for advice and recommendations, so building a strong working relationship with a staff person can often be just as valuable as direct contact with the Member. Treat any meeting with staff the same as you would with the elected official in terms of preparation and presentation.

BE PREPARED:

- Review your materials and talking points ahead of time and gather information you need to connect the issue to the congressional district by providing local examples and county statistics.
- Avoid colloquial statements and instead back your statements with proven data and stakeholder endorsements any time you can.
- Take extra copies of handouts to be left behind.
- Have plenty of business cards to hand out.

KNOW THE ASK:

- Begin and end the meeting with an explanation or reminder of your county's legislative concerns and what you are asking the Member of Congress to do.
- The request for action may be different from one Member of Congress to the other depending on the person's committee position, political affiliation or voting record.
- Do not assume the public official's position based just on their political party. Members of Congress do not always follow the party line if it is important to their voters; they can and often will change their minds if given good reasons for a new position.
- Do not discuss fundraising or political grievances during advocacy meetings. Stick to the issues and why they are important to your county and the voters you share with your Members of Congress.

FOLLOW-UP:

- It is fine not to have all the answers. If you promise to get back to someone with an answer, make sure to do so.
- Take photos during the meeting and post them on your social media sites.
- Send a thank you note to everyone you met with regardless of whether you are supplying additional information or not.
- Provide useful feedback to NCACC's public policy staff.
- Don't give up. The policy making process can take a long time, often years.

Strategics Consulting is a federal government relations firm with more than 25 years of experience and serves as a consultant to NCACC. For more information on how Strategics can help your county turn challenges into achievements, contact Leslie Mozingo at (202) 255-5760 or leslie@strategics.consulting.