"Do’s" and "Don’ts" for your Congressional Visits

10 Things to Never Do

1. Never be critical of personalities – criticize issues and philosophies, but never the performer.
2. Never threaten. (i.e. – telling a member if he doesn’t do such and such you won’t vote for him!)
3. Never let your glands rule your heart and head, stay calm – if you lose your cool, you lose your case.
4. Never lie or tell half-truths…nor conceal or distort important facts.
5. Never waste a legislator’s time. It’s precious – always be brief and to the point.
6. Never butt in when another is talking with a Congressperson.
7. Never tinker with an unfamiliar issue – TELL your story – it’s what they want to hear.
8. Never criticize or berate another person or group in public.
9. Never make public assumptions about another person’s motives.
10. Never make your enemies mad enough to work against you.

10 Helpful Hints

1. If full agreement isn’t possible, aim for a consensus rather than pushing for a 100% victory…it’s rare that anyone gets everything that he or she wants.
2. Be accessible to Congressperson and staff if they have questions.
3. Talk with your enemies…they may be your friends in the future on another issue.
4. Assign the right person to talk with a Congressman. Members respond more to “whom” than to “what.” Talking doesn’t mean much unless the speaker is someone to whom the Congressperson has a reason to listen.
5. Know your issues and be ready to defend your positions on them.
6. When giving testimony, always be prepared to say “yes,” if a congressman asks: “Have you read the bill?”
7. Carefully choose your issues. If the Member you are visiting sits on a committee in which one of your issues will be considered, make that issue a priority.
8. When you invite a legislator to lunch or dinner, try not to talk issues…be at ease and use the time to build goodwill for future contacts.
9. Follow a principle of Socrates…never directly contradict another person’s point of view; if you disagree, do it obliquely.
10. Always follow up on a visit with a written “thank you” when you get home – even if you think the meeting didn’t go as well as it might have. Always include praise and thanks for staff who have been helpful – they can be a tremendous asset to you in the future.
“HILL TALK”

Adjournment sine die — The adjournment of Congress without setting a day to reconvene. This usually officially marks the end of a congressional session.

Clerk of the House — Chief administrative officer of the House of Representatives with duties corresponding to the Secretary of the Senate.

Closed or gag rule — This type of rule prohibits amendments that have not been approved by the committee which brought the bill to the House floor. This rule is granted by the Rules Committee and forces the House either to accept or reject the bill as it stands. The procedure is usually limited to tax and security bills which are complicated and highly technical.

Cloture — A method of limiting debate in the Senate. Under cloture, debate is limited to one hour per Senator. Three-fifths of the Senate must approve cloture before it can take effect.

Conferees — Those members of the House and Senate who are appointed to the conference committees. They are generally appointed by the Speaker of the House and by the Senate Majority Leader.

Congressional Record — A printed account of the proceedings in both the House and Senate chambers which is produced daily.

Enacting Clause — A clause contained in every bill which states: “Be it enacted that…” At any time during debate on the bill, any member may “move to strike the enacting clause”, whereupon immediate vote is taken on the motion. If the motion passes, the bill is virtually dead.

Engrossed Bill — A passed and amended bill in one House which is rewritten, printed on blue or engrossed paper, and delivered in a formal ceremony to the other House.

Executive Session — A meeting of a Senate Committee, a House Committee, or the entire chamber which is closed to the public.

Filibuster — A method of postponing or preventing a vote. Filibusters are used mainly in the Senate and generally come in the form of unlimited debate or continuous talking. Filibuster are prevented in the House by its strict rules.

Floor Manager — A member, usually representing sponsors of a bill, who attempts to steer it through debate and amendment to a final vote in the chamber.

Germaneness — In the House, rules require that amendments to a bill pertain to the subject matter under consideration. In other words, they must be germane. In the Senate, amendments are not required to be germane except when they are offered to a general appropriations bill. However, in the case of appropriations bills, a majority vote of the Senate can accept them as germane. Additionally, all amendments proposed after cloture must be germane regardless of the bill.

Grandfather Clause — An exemption of people who are already engaged in an activity from a rule which restricts or prohibits that activity.

Journal — An official record of the proceeding of both the House and the Senate. Unlike the Congressional Record, the Journal does not include the verbatim report of speeches, debates and the like.
WRITING TO ELECTED OFFICIALS
HOW TO GET YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

Next to voting, writing a letter to your elected officials is one of the most important and effective ways that you can participate in the American political system. Writing an effective letter outlining your legislative concerns need not be a tedious or frightening project.

HOW AND WHAT TO WRITE. Before starting to write your letter, make sure you have the proper name and address of the elected official. If you are not sure who is the proper legislator, call your local Board of Elections, Chamber of Commerce or League of Women Voters.

If the issue you are writing about impacts your business, use your business letterhead. Make sure your letter is legible, preferably typed. Be sure your letter has your return address on it. Envelopes frequently get thrown away.

Clearly identify the subject of your letter. State the name of the legislation and the appropriate House or Senate number. State your reason for writing, citing arguments in support of your position. Explain how this issue will affect you, your family, business or profession. Also, include its impact on your community, state and national economy. If you are writing about a bill that addresses a real problem but which offers the wrong solution, suggest alternatives. Don’t write to complain…write to bring about change.

Be sure your letters are reasonable. Don’t ask for the impossible and don’t threaten. Don’t way you will vote against the individual unless he does what you ask. Threats will end up hurting your case much more than they will help it. Most legislators are acutely aware that if they do not please a constituent, they are not likely to receive his vote in the future.

As a constituent, you have the right to know your legislator’s position on an issue. Be sure to ask him for his specific opinion of a bill.

Lastly, always remember to thank the legislator if they vote your way. Everyone appreciates a complimentary letter—and remembers it. On the other hand, if a vote is contrary to your position, don’t hesitate to let them know. That will be remembered also.

WHEN TO WRITE. When writing your letter, consider its timing. It is always best to write your legislator during early consideration of an issue. Early information can help develop his position on the issue. Later correspondence aimed at changing a legislator’s mind will be less effective.

The best time to write is when a bill is in committee. It is at this state that an individual legislator can have the greatest ability to impact the outcome and language of a bill.

Once you have written, the hardest part will be waiting for a response. Elected officials mail is read and answered, but not always as expeditiously as we would like. If you are not pleased with the response that you get—that is, if the response is a form letter, or very non-committal—write again. It never hurts to let your legislator know about your concerns.

If you still are not convinced to write your elected officials, reconsider. They have a political and legal obligation to let you know how he is voting on the issues and you have the political and legal privilege to make your opinions heard.
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<td>The White House</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Washington, DC 20500</td>
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<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
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HINTS FOR VISITING CAPITOL HILL

Make an appointment. Nowadays, it is not very considerate or productive just to drop by a legislator’s office unexpected. If you want to make sure that your visit is productive, make an appointment. Even if there is only a few minutes notice, give the legislator or the staff assistant the opportunity to prepare themselves for your arrival.

Sell yourself. Remember that, in actuality, you are not selling a legislative proposal or your company (or association), but yourself. If you are friendly, helpful, understanding, and not hostile, you can be successful.

Get to the point. When making a visit to any elected official, don’t take forever to make your pitch. Tell them who you represent, the number of members and employees you represent, what your primary concerns are, and how and why these concerns are related to X piece of legislation.

Keep your meeting short. Don’t take longer than 10 or 15 minutes to express your concerns, unless invited to do so. If you can get in the office and get out quickly, you will get in a second time.

Use good manners. When making a visit to a legislator’s office, make sure that you do not use any facilities in the office unless offered (this includes the telephone, copy machine, and restroom).

Be kind to staff members. Whether in person or speaking over the telephone, always be kind to staff members. They will end up being the individuals who have the greatest potential to help or hinder you and your cause.

Don’t make any promises unless you intend to deliver. Just as it is not very good to threaten an elected official, it is also not wise to make false promises.

Don’t forget to say “please” and “thank you.” On Capitol Hill, you can never say “thank you” too often.

Check your facts and figures. Make sure that you are presenting accurate facts and figures, not ones that you made up.

Don’t try to sell a bad bill. If you do not truly believe in the merits of a bill, don’t expect others to. If a bill is ill-conceived or poorly written, it could end up hurting you and your industry far more than benefiting it.

Give full credit for a bill to the sponsoring legislator.

Don’t become discouraged. As you become more familiar with the legislative process, you will discover the many ways that legislation and people can become thwarted. If you are looking for a big win the first time out, don’t be discouraged if you fail. Remember, visiting elected officials rarely activates or converts them; it reinforces them.
Senate - Legislation is placed on the Legislative Calendar. Scheduling of legislation is the job of the Majority Leader. Bills can be brought to the floor whenever a majority of the Senate chooses.

2. Debate

House - Debate is limited by the rules formulated in the Rules Committee. The Committee of the Whole debates and amends the bill but cannot technically pass it. Debate is guided by the Sponsoring Committee and time is divided equally between proponents and opponents. The Committee decides how much time to allot to each person. Amendments must be germane to the subject of a bill – no riders are allowed. The bill is reported back to the House (to itself) and is voted on. A quorum call is a vote to make sure that there are enough members present (218) to have a final vote. If there is not a quorum, the House will adjourn or will send the Sergeant at Arms out to round up missing members.

Senate - Debate is unlimited unless cloture is invoked. Members can speak as long as they want and amendments need not be germane, i.e., riders are often offered. Entire bills can therefore be offered as amendments to other bills. Unless cloture is invoked, Senators can use a filibuster to defeat a measure by “talking it to death.”

3. Vote. The bill is voted on. If passed, it is then sent to the other chamber unless that chamber already has a similar measure under consideration. If either chamber does not pass the bill then it dies. If the House and Senate pass the same bill then it is sent to the President. If the House and Senate pass different bills they are sent to Conference Committee. Most major legislation goes to a Conference Committee.

D. Conference Committee

1. Members from both the House and Senate form a conference committee and meet to work out the differences. The committee is usually made up of senior members who are appointed by the presiding officers of the committee that originally dealt with the bill. The representatives from each house work to maintain their version of the bill.

2. If the Conference Committee reaches a compromise, it prepares a written conference report, which is submitted to each chamber.

3. The conference report must be approved by both the House and the Senate.

E. The bill is sent to the President for review

1. A bill becomes law if signed by the President or if not signed within 10 days and Congress is in session.

2. If Congress adjourns before the 10 days and the President has not signed the bill then it does not become law (This is known as a “Pocket Veto.”)

3. If the President vetoes the bill, it is sent back to Congress with a note listing his reasons. The chamber that originated the legislation can attempt to override the veto by a vote of two-thirds of those present. If the veto of the bill is overridden in both chambers then it becomes law.

F. The Bill Becomes Law

Once a bill is signed by the President or his veto is overridden by both houses it becomes a law and is assigned an official number.
1. Legislation is placed on the Calendar

House - Bills are placed on one of four House Calendars. They are usually placed on the calendars in the order of which they are reported yet they don’t usually come to floor in this order – some bills never reach the floor at all. The Speaker of the House and the Majority Leader decide what will reach the floor and when. (Legislation can also be brought to the floor by a discharge petition.)
How A Bill Becomes Law

A. Legislation Is Introduced. Any member can introduce a piece of legislation.

House - Legislation is handed to the clerk of the House or placed in the “hopper,” a box on the clerk’s desk where members deposit bills and resolutions to introduce them.

Senate - Members must gain recognition of the presiding officer to announce the introduction of a bill during the “morning hour,” the time set aside at the beginning of each legislative day for the consideration of regular, routine business. If any senator objects, the introduction of the bill is postponed until the next day.

- The bill is assigned a number. (e.g. HR1 or S1)
- The bill is labeled with the sponsor’s name.
- The bill is sent to the Government Printing Office and copies are made.
- Senate bills can be jointly sponsored.
- Members can cosponsor the piece of Legislation.

B. Committee Action - The bill is referred to the appropriate committee by the Speaker of the House or the presiding officer in the Senate. Most often, the actual referral decision is made by the House or Senate parliamentarian. A bill may be referred to more than one committee, and it may be split so that parts are sent to different committees. The Speaker of the House may set time limits on committees. Bills are placed on the calendar of the committee to which they have been assigned. Failure to act on a bill is equivalent to killing it. Bills in the House can only be released from committee without a proper committee vote by a discharge petition signed by a majority of the House membership (218 members).

Committee Steps:

1. Comments about the bill’s merit are requested by government agencies.

2. Bill can be assigned to subcommittee by Chairman.

3. Hearings may be held.

4. Subcommittees report their findings to the full committee.

5. Finally, there is a vote by the full committee. If passed, the bill is “ordered to be reported.”

6. A committee will hold a “mark-up” session during which it will make revisions and additions. If substantial amendments are made, the committee can order the introduction of a “clean bill” which will include the proposed amendments. This new bill will have a new number and will be sent to the floor while the old bill is discarded. The chamber must approve, change or reject all committee amendments before conducting a final passage vote.

7. After the bill is reported, the committee staff prepares a written report explaining why they favor the bill and why they wish to see their amendments, if any, adopted. Committee members who oppose a bill sometimes write a dissenting opinion in the report. The report is sent back to the whole chamber and is placed on the calendar.

8. In the House, most bills go to the Rules committee before reaching the floor. The committee adopts rules that will govern the procedures under which the bill will be considered by the House. A “closed rule” sets strict time limits on debate and forbids the introduction of amendments. These rules can have a major impact on whether the bill passes. The rules committee can be bypassed in three ways: (1) members can move rules to be suspended (requires a two-thirds vote), (2) a discharge petition can be filed, or (3) the House can use a “Calendar Wednesday” procedure whereby Wednesdays may be used to call the roll of the standing committees for the purpose of bringing up any of their bills for consideration.

C. Floor Action
CAPITOL SOUTH

Closest Station To U.S. Capitol on Blue and Orange lines
(Serves Blue and Orange lines)

Station address: 355 First Street, SE, Washington, DC

Location: First St. between C & D Sts. SE
UNION STATION

Closest Station to U.S. Capitol on Red line
(Serves Red line only)

Station address:
701 First St. NE, Washington, DC
See next page for info on Capitol South Station

Location:
Entrance to Amtrak Terminal
East side of First St., NW, north
Mass. Ave. (west side of station)
Closest Station To Marriott at Metro Center
(Serves Red, Blue, and Orange lines)

Station address:
607 13th St. NW, Washington, DC

Location:
SE corner 11th and G Sts., NW;
SW corner 12th and F Sts.;
SE corner 13th and G Sts.;
NE corner 12th and G Sts.