



CHRIST OUR HOPE: HEALING A BROKEN WORLD

FEBRUARY 23, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC

CAPITOL HILL VISIT INFORMATION PACKET

2009 CATHOLIC SOCIAL MINISTRY GATHERING

February 2009

TO: Social Ministry Colleagues
FROM: Hill Visits Organizing Committee
RE: Important reminders during your meetings with Members of Congress

We are excited to be together in our nation's capital bringing a unified message in support of important issues that affect our sisters and brothers here and around the world.

To be effective advocates, it is important to develop relationships with your Senators and Representatives through early and frequent contact. The meetings this week are a great first step. We hope you will also be able to continue your advocacy when your Members are at home. This packet contains information on effective Congressional advocacy strategies that we hope you will find helpful. Please refer to your program for more details or ask a staff member about any of the meetings and sessions outlined below.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

A state captains meeting is scheduled for 3:15 p.m. on Sunday, February 22. State captains and co-captains will meet to go over final details on organizing their state delegations for Capitol Hill visits. (State captains were identified ahead of time.)

An Orientation and Hill Visits 101 session for first-time Hill advocates (and for those who want to refresh their skills) will be held at 3:15 p.m. on Sunday, February 22.

All state delegations will meet on Monday, February 23 at 12:30 p.m. or on Tuesday, February 24 at 7:45 a.m. during continental breakfast (alternate option).

The domestic and international policy priority briefings on Monday afternoon, February 23, will explore more concretely the issues we will be advocating for on Capitol Hill. This is an excellent opportunity to ask questions and to receive clarifications and the most up-to-date information on the issues.

Don't forget to leave a packet of information with each office you visit. Packets will be provided to state captains and more, if necessary, will be provided by conference staff.

Please invite Members and staff you are meeting to our Capitol Hill Reception on Tuesday, February 24 at 4:30 pm (Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room G50).

After the visit, please complete the Hill Visit Report Back Sheet to let us know about the results of your Hill visits. Your feedback is helpful as we continue to advocate on these issues here in Washington, DC.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY:

Global Solidarity in Action: A Guide for International Issue Advocacy in the United States is available at no cost from Catholic Relief Services. Please contact CRS at 1-866-608-5978.

An Advocacy Manual: Developing and Changing Public Policies, a Catholic Charities USA publication available at <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1098> Please contact Lucreda Cobbs at (703) 236-6243 or via e-mail at lcobbs@catholiccharitiesusa.org for more information.

Thank you for your advocacy efforts! Together, we can make a difference.

CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY

VISITING MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

A face-to-face meeting with an elected representative, or a key member of their staff, is the best way to discuss issues of concern. Individuals or small delegations taking time to make a personal visit provide legislators with solid, real life evidence of the importance of a particular issue to their constituencies. Moreover, rational discussions on pending legislation with legislators can educate and, ideally, influence their position.

Do not feel you are imposing: after all, legislators meet with constituents daily. If you feel intimidated at first, remember that legislators depend on you for support just as you depend on them. What follows are a few steps to help ensure a successful meeting.

STEP 1: ARRANGING THE VISIT

Visits can be scheduled through the scheduler (appointment/calendar secretary) usually through the legislator's Washington, DC office. It is best to set up the meeting two or three weeks in advance. Meetings are usually scheduled for about half an hour but you may just get 10 to 15 minutes. Find your members of Congress at www.senate.gov and at www.house.gov or call the US Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121.

Clarify the purpose for the visit: Get Acquainted? Express Views? Seek Action? Identify who will be attending. You'll increase your chances of meeting face-to-face with the Member by having a group meeting of constituents who represent different experiences and backgrounds. This broadens your base and influence.

Depending on legislative developments, it may be necessary to meet with staff rather than the legislator. Since legislators rely heavily on their professional staff's opinion, this is also a very important meeting. Staff can provide you with access and, if they are sympathetic to your position, can become a trusted voice in the ear of the legislator. If your legislator decides to adopt one of your causes, it is the staff who will do much of the work. Ask to meet with the Legislative Director (LD) or Legislative Assistant (LA) who handles the particular issue you wish to talk about.

Confirm the visit with the scheduler or staff member by e-mail letter soon after arranging the appointment, and then again by phone the day before your meeting.

STEP 2: PREPARING FOR THE VISIT

Develop a succinct agenda. If you're going as a group, agree on your goal and message before hand. Show a united front; divisiveness is both irritating and confusing. Agree on one facilitator/spokesperson in advance.

Do your homework. Have well-reasoned facts and figures on your issue(s) ready, but do not be overwhelming. Be ready to answer questions and (when necessary) respond to counter-arguments.

Be sure all participants in the meeting are politically astute. Know the extent of the legislator's district, committee assignments, number of terms served. Know the legislator's voting record, and/or position, on the issue(s). Know the lawmaking process and what legislative actions are required. Much of this information is available on the Congressional web site (thomas.loc.gov).

Prepare a "leave-behind" information packet for the legislator: fact sheets and stories supporting your issues, bundles of constituent letters, and any appropriate briefing materials. A specific request for action should also be included (two to three paragraphs articulating the legislative action requested, and why that action should be taken). Make sure you include your contact information in case staff would like to follow up.

If possible, have high profile supporters send strong letters expressing their point of view before your meeting takes place. "Dear Colleague" letters, written by elected officials to their fellow legislators, are also effective and should be sent prior to your meeting or at least be included in your information packet.

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STEP 3: DURING THE VISIT

(Arrive on time, even a little early)

Be on time, positive, and friendly. Know your agenda and stick to your message. Don't assume the legislator is familiar with the details of the issue/bill. Take notes during the visit which will provide a written summary. Make a note of the names of staff members assigned to work in this area.

Make your presentation simple and straightforward since you may have only 5 to 10 minutes left by the time you get through with introductions and pleasantries. When visiting your legislator, prepare two sets of remarks; one that is 15 minutes, the other that is 90 seconds long. That way you will be prepared if she/he is called out of the office in the middle of your visit.

Limit the number of issues you want to cover. Do not overwhelm.

Because it was you who arranged the visit, legislators will expect that you start the discussion. One format for discussion follows a simple outline:

I. Create an Open Climate

Begin the visit by introducing yourselves and thanking the legislator for meeting with you as well as for some favorable position they have already taken (if one exists).

II. Present your Message

- (a) OPEN the discussion by framing the issue on your terms;
- (b) EXPLORE the issue by taking a position and identifying relevant legislation;
- (c) SUPPORT your position by explaining why such a measure is good public policy;
- (d) APPLY the policy to real lives by making clear how the legislation affects people in the legislator's district. Anecdotal evidence of how you will be personally affected can also be very moving. A few memorable statistics can further emphasize your point. When possible, show that the issue affects a broad cross-section of the community. Also, be sure to cite any significant support within the district.

III. Make a Specific Request for Legislative Action.

Then, let them know what action you are requesting. A specific request for legislative action will allow you to control the meeting. You have now set the agenda. If attempts are made to divert discussion, simply, and politely, return to your issue. Finally, if the legislator seems supportive, seek a commitment. If the legislator remains opposed, ask her or him to keep an open mind and remain neutral.

Be responsive to your legislator's questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't fake it or bluff. Say "I don't know, but I'll get back to you on it." Then DO IT.

Don't overstay your welcome. Conclude the visit by again extending the appropriate thank you's. Reaffirm your intention to forward any information or materials which were requested by the legislator.

Step 4: Following the Visit

If possible, debrief as a group immediately after the meeting. Personal visits always increase a legislator's awareness of an issue. However, the effectiveness of such a visit increases markedly when accompanied by follow-up actions.

Send a thank-you note or e-mail which reinforces your message and the local impact, restates an understanding of the legislator's position, highlights the main points of the visit, and concludes with a personal story which surfaced during the conversation. It should also provide the member with any additional materials or information she/he may have requested.

Send a copy to other members of the group and those who are directly lobbying on your behalf. If the visit was held with a staff member, still address the letter to the legislator with a copy (cc) to the staff member.