

SETTING UP A MEETING WITH A MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Senators and U.S. Representatives have offices in Washington, DC and in their home states and districts. When Congress is in session, lawmakers tend to be in Washington, DC. When Congress is in recess, lawmakers are often back in their districts working. You can meet with members of Congress and their staff in either the district office or Washington, DC office. In either case, your first step is to contact the Congressional office and find out the name of the scheduler. When you request a meeting with a lawmaker be prepared to state:

- Who you are (e.g. President of Local 2001);
- Who you represent (e.g. 1200 workers at the Miami VA Medical Center);
- What you'd like to discuss with the lawmaker (e.g. Wage grade pay and contracting out at your facility as it affects quality of patient care);
- How many people you are bringing (e.g., 5 union officers); and, dates you are available (e.g. plan weeks to a month in advance).

You may be asked to submit the request in writing. Even if you are not asked to do so you will want to write a short letter to confirm the request. You can use this letter to let your members know about the Local's effort to represent their interests before Congress.

It may not be possible to meet with the lawmaker. If they are not available, you will want to meet with their staff. Staff advise lawmakers on what legislation they should support or oppose. Staff can and are very influential. They are key to accomplishing our legislative agenda. Developing a good working relationship with congressional staff is an essential part of your Local's legislative action.

**SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING A MEETING
WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS**

Date

Name of Scheduler
Scheduler, Representative _____
_____ House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear _____:

On behalf of the 1200 employees represented by Local 2001, of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO, I would like to schedule a meeting with Representative _____ with five of our members. Our members work at the VA Medical Center in Anytown, Anystate. As taxpayers, workers and constituents of Representative _____ we would like to meet to discuss the issue of VA staffing levels, employees pay and contracting out our facility. These issues affect our members and the quality of patient care at the hospital.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with Representative _____, during the next recess in May or July. I can be reached at the Local # union office at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to arrange a mutually convenient time during the next district working period.

Sincerely yours,

President, Local # AFGE

CONDUCTING A CONGRESSIONAL VISIT PLANNING CHECKLIST

MAKING THE APPOINTMENT

- Call Congressional office; find out name of scheduler; request meeting
- Write short letter to request and/or confirm meeting
- Request formation needed for meeting from AFGE Legislative Department:
 - Member of Congress Biography
 - Member of Congress Voting Record
 - Issue fact sheet/position paper
 - Visit Report
- Arrange place for pre-meeting
- Inform members of lobbying team of date, time and place of pre-meeting and meeting.
- Check with team members to see if anyone should be added to the team because of knowledge of an issue or persons, connections to the Member of Congress (Remember: the ideal size of the group is 5 to 9 people)
- Arrange for a camera to be brought to meeting for pictures

CONDUCTING A PRE-MEETING

- Pre-meeting is held an hour to an hour and one-half before the visit at a site close to the Congressional office. If this is your first meeting, you may want your pre-meeting to be a day or two before to allow more time for your teams discussions.
- The team meets to plan, strategize and script the meeting
- Review the goal and topic of the meeting
- Establish the order of introductions and go through what team members will say; their presentation should be personalized
- Script what points team members will make on the issue to be discussed; the fact sheet/ talking points will be your guide
- Explain leader's major tasks:
 - Directs discussion; does not do most of talking

Ends meeting before Member of Congress does

If possible, the picture needs to be taken at end of meeting

CONDUCTING THE CONGRESSIONAL VISIT

- Be early (10-15 minutes is good) and expect the Member of Congress to be running late
- Leader should inquire how much time the team will have with Member of Congress; it may be much less than you originally scheduled (Knowing this will allow you to end the meeting on time)
- Meeting begins with personal introductions: name and place of employment; years of service; place or residence and connection to the Member of Congress (if any) or a little about your family
- Leader introduces the issue on topic to be discussed; each team member should contribute to the discussion
- Solicit the views and position of the Member of Congress on the issue; ask for a commitment for or against the issue (or to co-sponsor AFGE supported legislation)
- Keep the tone of the meeting professional; keep your cool, even if the Member of Congress does not agree with AFGE's position
- Leader concludes the meeting, thanks the Member of Congress for their time and requests a photo
- Get the name of the staffer who handles federal workforce issues in order to establish ongoing contact

CONDUCTING A POST-MEETING

- Happens after visit (in hallway or outside building)
- Leader reminds the team to:
 - Make thank you call
 - Write thank you note with request of support for our issue
 - Complete Congressional visit report
 - Mail/FAX copies of Note and Report to:
 1. Legislative Department (202) 639-6492
 2. National Vice President
- Leader explains value of call and letter--it counts twice

- Leader calls Legislative Department (202) 639-6413 and reports on meeting and need for follow-up
- Leader makes follow-up call to the team a few days later to ensure they have completed their reports, calls and letters