Maximizing Your Grassroots Effort in the New Congress/Administration

Bradford Fitch
President & CEO
Congressional Management Foundation
How to Hug a Porcupine
Building Relationships with Lawmakers and Why It’s Important
“Does your representative in Congress care what you think?”

(Rasmussen National Survey – 2016)
“Congress cares what constituents think.”
- Public Opinion
11% of Congress Appeared on “Meet the Press” in 2014
In 21 states, local newspapers lack a dedicated reporter keeping tabs on Congress

BY KRISTINE LU AND JESSE HOLCOMB | LEAVE A COMMENT
“Please rank the most important aspect of your job.”

(Congressional Management Foundation Survey of U.S. House of Representatives Members – 2011)
"Congress cares what constituents think."
- Public Opinion

"Staying in touch with constituents."
- Member of Congress Opinion
Agenda

- Environment on Capitol Hill
- How to Build Relationships
- Comments from Legislators and Staff
Sources

• Focus Groups with Congressional Staff
• Surveys with Congressional Staff
• Interviews with Members of Congress and Staff
Environment on Capitol Hill
Average Percentage Increase in Constituent Mail

- **House**
- **Senate**
- **All Offices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>All Offices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>111%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>154%</td>
<td>169%</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>297%</td>
<td>255%</td>
<td>255%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>396%</td>
<td>241%</td>
<td>585%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>548%</td>
<td>202%</td>
<td>548%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>401%</td>
<td>158%</td>
<td>548%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“The most important thing that people should understand is that mail [letters, e-mail] matters more than most constituents think it does.”

- Republican Senator
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Full Time House Staff</th>
<th>18</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year House Staff Number Frozen</td>
<td>1974</td>
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</table>
"If your Member/Senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on his/her decision?"
“A lot of influence”

- In-Person Visit from Constituent: 46%
- Lobbyist Visit: 8%
“Lobbying is much more substantive and out in the open than its ugly caricature. Lobbyists primarily woo lawmakers with facts. Making the case is what effective lobbyists do most and best.

They spend the rest of their time persuading lawmakers' constituents to back the same causes, very much in the mode of an electoral campaign.”

- Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, The Washington Post
“How helpful is it for messages from constituents to include the following?”
Personal story related to the bill or issue: 79%

Constituent's reasons for supporting/opposing the bill or issue: 90%

Information about the impact the bill would have on the district: 91%
H.R.2784

“No Private Contracts To Be Negotiated When the Patient Is Buck Naked Act of 1997”
SEC. 3 CERTAIN SITUATIONS WHERE IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE TO NEGOTIATE A PRIVATE CONTRACT

To promote equality in the negotiation of private contracts, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services shall issue regulations prohibiting the discussion or signing of private contracts at any time—

(a) the patient is buck naked and the doctor is fully clothed (and conversely, to protect the rights of doctors, when the patient is fully clothed and the doctor is naked);

(b) the patient is wearing one of those short, flimsy little hospital gowns that don't close in the back;

(c) during any sigmoidoscopic or proctoscopic examination of the gastrointestinal tract or a digital rectal examination of the prostate;
Your Member of Congress’ Brain

- Wants to make a difference in the world
- Desire to please everyone
- Amount of time thinking about your issue
- Ego
- $$$$$$$ capability
How to Build Relationships with Lawmakers
Survey Question

How frequently do you experience the following in constituent meetings?
One or more constituents was rude: 23%

- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
One or more constituents was rude

- Didn't convey personal story related to issue: 55%
- One or more constituents was rude: 23%
One or more constituents was rude
Didn't convey personal story related to issue
Didn't know the Member's relevant committee assignment(s)
Didn't have data on impact on district/state
Didn't understand negative consequences
Was unspecific with their request for action
Too many topics/talking points in their meeting
Too many participants in the meeting
Didn't know Member's history on policy/issue

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- Didn't have data on impact on district/state
- Didn't understand negative consequences

Very frequently
Somewhat frequently

- One or more constituents was rude: 23%
- Too many topics/talking points in their meeting: 84%
- Was unspecific with their request for action: 81%
- Didn't know the Member's relevant committee assignment(s): 78%
- Didn't convey personal story related to issue: 55%
The worst is when big groups come in and read down a laundry list of bills supported by their national association. Please just pick two or three.
One or more constituents was rude 23%
Didn't convey personal story related to issue 55%
Didn't know the Member's relevant committee assignment(s) 78%
Was unspecific with their request for action 81%
Too many topics/talking points in their meeting 84%
Too many participants in the meeting 85%

- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
One or more constituents was rude

Didn't convey personal story related to issue

Didn't know Member's relevant committee assignment(s)

Too many participants in the meeting

Too many topics/talking points in their meeting

Was unspecific with their request for action

Didn't know Member's history on policy/issue

Very frequently

Somewhat frequently
One or more constituents was rude: 23%

Didn't convey personal story related to issue: 55%

Didn't know the Member's relevant committee assignment(s): 78%

Too many topics/talking points in their meeting: 84%

Too many participants in the meeting: 85%

Didn't know Member's history on policy/issue: 87%

Didn't have data on impact on district/state: 90%

Very frequently

Somewhat frequently
One or more constituents was rude

Didn't convey personal story related to issue

Was unspecific with their request for action

Didn't know the Member's relevant committee assignment(s)

Didn't have data on impact on district/state

Too many participants in the meeting

Too many topics/talking points in their meeting

Didn't know Member's history on policy/issue

Didn't understand negative consequences

Very frequently

Somewhat frequently
“I particularly admire someone who's able to articulate the opposing argument, that can give a good faith account of the other side. They seem to understand my situation, and I respect that.”

- House Democrat
Build a Relationship with Staff
Average Age of House Legislative Assistant: 27
“In your opinion, how important are the following for understanding constituents' views and opinions?”
Attend a Town Hall Meeting
Access to affordable health care is one of the top challenges facing our Nation in the 21st century. It is a problem that affects both the young and old alike. It hits businesses and forces them to make tough choices.
“I have told paid lobbyists for years that any lobbyist worth his salt will concentrate on getting my constituents to tell me what they think...not what he thinks. He better spend his time getting them to write me because that’s what I listen to.”

- Republican Senator
“Friend” Your Member of Congress
Survey Question

How many similar comments on a social media post is enough for your office to pay attention to?
35% less than 10
45% 10 to 30
21% More than 30
Survey Question

How long AFTER posting an office/Member comment will you review reactions?
It doesn’t matter how old the reactions are, we’ll still review them.
“We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”

- Thomas Jefferson
CongressFoundation.org