



National Rehabilitation Association

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“Patricia Political Pointers: The Dos and Don’ts of Effective Legislative Advocacy”

- First and foremost be sure to make your appointments with your respective Members of Congress (or their staff) as soon as possible when visiting the Hill.
- Appointment(s) should be made through the Congresspersons’ Scheduler, also known as the Appointments Secretary, to ensure you are on the Congresspersons’ or staff schedule.
- Familiarize yourself before your meeting(s) with the legislators’ background and voting record. If you are meeting with a staff person, you should also familiarize yourself with the staff persons’ background as well.
- When meeting your legislators please remember what I call “The Three Ps”; ***be punctual, be prepared, and be patient***. Many times, a Member of Congress or his/her staff will not be able to meet with you at the appointed time, so schedule your appointments accordingly allowing for sufficient time between appointments.
- Many times appointments are held not only in Congressional offices, but also in the cafeteria, or even the hallway. If the later venues occur, do not be offended. There is limited meeting space on the Hill and this is especially true when hearings are occurring.
- If you are a constituent of the Senator or Representative, identify yourself as such and take a moment to compliment the legislator or his/her staff on something they have done in their State or District.
- When taking NRA’s Issues Statements to the Hill, please identify two or a maximum of three Issues Statements to discuss during your meetings with your Members of Congress.
- Wear comfortable shoes when making your visits on the Hill. A lot of marble gave up its life for the House and Senate Office Buildings.
- When scheduling your meetings with Members of Congress, if possible, try to schedule as many meetings you deem appropriate when you are on the Senate side and the same with the House side, to avoid walking back and forth from the House side to the Senate side, and vice versa.
- Do not use acronyms without qualifying the acronym and this includes the acronym “VR”. Members of Congress and their staff deal with multiple issues simultaneously and they are not always well-versed in the vernacular of all programs.

- If you serve veterans, try to mention this during your conversation with your Member of Congress and the staff. Members of Congress are especially interested in learning what services and supports are available to our heroes at home, all of whom have given so much to protect our country.
- If you are able to have a consumer with you during your visit to the Hill is always desirable because the Hill loves success stories and hearing this directly from the consumer will certainly get their attention.
- Having an employer/business person with you that too would be very much appreciated since Members of Congress want to hear from employers who hire individuals with disabilities. If this is not possible, if a large or small business owner is willing to email or fax the Member of Congress with regard to the successes they have experienced with hiring individuals with disabilities who have been trained by qualified rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation counselors, that will always be welcomed by the Member of Congress, especially if the employer is a constituent.
- With regard to what items you take to the Hill, treat your trip to the Hill as you would approaching a TSA official when traveling by plane and do be prepared to go through a metal detector in all of the office buildings.
- Always remember to follow up with your Member of Congress and or his/her staff to thank them for meeting with you. This can be done via phone, fax (yes, there are still fax machines on the Hill and they are used), as well as via email, which given the young age of a Hill staffer, is the most popular.
- As always, the NRA Government Affairs Summit Committee will provide the names of the Members and their contact information for all relevant Committees in both the House and Senate.
- Offer yourself as a resource to the members of congress and be sure to follow up with the Member or staff, especially if they ask a questions that you cannot answer at the time of the appointment and please know that it is all right to say that you will have to get back with them.
- Meetings with Members of Congress and staff should be treated like all other meetings. Do not eat during the meetings, make sure your cell phone(s) are turned off; and dress accordingly.

If anyone would like to pursue this topic further, Patricia Leahy is available to answer any questions before you meet with your Members of Congress and can be reached at:

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