



Politics 101

Your Representation In Congress

As a constituent, you are represented by 3 federal policymakers (2 Senators and 1 Representative). As a practicing osteopathic physician you may also treat patients from neighboring congressional districts. We encourage you to speak not only on behalf of your profession, but also on behalf of those you employ and those you treat. You are an expert on the patient care atmosphere in that district! (NOTE: The strongest mechanism for communicating your position on federal policy issues is as a VOTING constituent).

The total number of Representatives each state receives is based on population size as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau. Your five-digit zip code identifies the district of which you are a member. If you live in a big city with a large population, we may use your nine-digit zip code to determine your congressional district.

Key Congressional Committees

Although you will visit with all three of your elected officials, there are some issues that are more readily addressed by your Representative than by your Senators. Issues of local or personal importance are more likely to be acted upon by your Representative because he or she is more closely tied to local politics. However, national and statewide issues will be addressed by both your Senators and your Representative(s).

Members of Congress in leadership positions can also have a heavy impact on your issues. It is important to note whether any of your Members of Congress have the legislative power to address your problem through their leadership position. Although any Member of Congress can introduce a bill, not all are able to ensure that it will be passed into law or even gain a hearing! For this reason, you need to know the committees or subcommittees to which Members of Congress are assigned. Members who sit on one of the four major health committees are both better educated on health-related issues and better able to guide a bill through the legislative process.

The four key health care committees are:

- Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
- Senate Finance Committee
- House Committee on Energy and Commerce
- House Committee on Ways and Means

Meeting with your Member of Congress

Of all the different types of grassroots activities, the face-to-face meeting with a Member of Congress and/or staff is the most effective way to influence legislation. In preparation for your arrival, appointment requests have been submitted on your behalf. Appointment requests are typically communicated three to four weeks before the requested appointment date.

As influential as the Capitol Hill meeting is the district meeting, conducted at home Congress is on recess. District meetings are scheduled and conducted just as a Washington Hill meeting except that you will find Members of Congress themselves are more available to meet with you away from the demands of Capitol Hill. Congress has several long recess periods scheduled throughout the year. These schedules are set

every January. Members of Congress also schedule Town Hall meetings during their recess periods. These meetings are an open forum for constituents to raise issues of concern to the Members.

Making Your Meeting Effective

AOA is working to secure your meetings with your Members of Congress. While we are very successful in arranging meetings with Members of Congress themselves, it is inevitable that some Members may not be able to meet with you personally. In those cases you will meet with the Members' Health Legislative Aide (Health LA or HLA). This staff member is your key to the Member of Congress' ear. They are the ones who craft legislation and make recommendations on whether a particular bill should be supported. Don't discount the value of getting to know your Members' Health LA.

It is important to dress professionally for your Hill appointment (business attire is recommended), but it is even more important to be comfortable. You'll be covering a lot of ground on Capitol Hill, so it is very important to wear comfortable shoes.

What is a typical meeting like? Hill meetings can last from five minutes to fifty minutes depending on the Member of Congress or staff and the day in question. Once you and your team arrive at your meeting location, staffers will bring you into a meeting room or in some instances of large groups – the hallway. This should not be taken as a personal slight. While there appears to be an abundance of rooms on Capitol Hill, on certain days securing a meeting room is virtually impossible. Each year more and more organizations decide to come to Capitol Hill to lobby an issue. Members of Congress and staff routinely strike policy deals in cafeterias, hallways and walking to hearings. Once settled, introduce yourselves and talk about the osteopathic profession. In many instances, the person you meet with may be unfamiliar with the profession or the difference between allopathic and osteopathic medicine. You may then discuss any or all of the issues presented to you during the morning briefing. You should pick the issues you are most comfortable discussing, particularly in your first meeting. This is an opportunity for you to build a long-term relationship and raise awareness of not only the profession, but the issues we advocate for.