Influencing Congress from Your Front Porch

Strategies for Engaging Lawmakers on Their/Your Home Turf

Bradford Fitch
President & CEO
Congressional Management Foundation
“Does your representative in Congress care what you think?”

(Rasmussen National Survey – 2013)

“Please rank the most important aspect of your job.”

(Congressional Management Foundation Survey of U.S. House of Representatives Members – 2011)
“Congress cares about what I think.”
- Public Opinion

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

• Environment in Congress
• How Do Members Spend Their Time and Who Do They Talk To?
• How to Build Relationships Back Home
Sources

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

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

Baseline: 64%

- 2002: 55%
- 2003: 78%
- 2004: 94%
- 2005: 66%
- 2006: 72%
- 2007: 154%
- 2008: 241%
- 2009: 401%
- 2010: 158%

2002: 78%
2003: 64%
2004: 55%
2005: 92%
2006: 169%
2007: 110%
2008: 202%
2009: 275%
2010: 158%
Staffing

Number of Full Time House Staff 18

Year House Staff Number Frozen 1974
"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?"
“How helpful is it for messages from constituents to include the following?”
Message Includes…

- Information about the impact the bill would have on the district: 77%
- Constituent’s reasons for supporting/opposing the bill or issue: 74%
- Personal story related to the bill or issue: 48%
The Power of a Personal Story
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;
How Do Members Spend Their Time and Who Do They Talk To?
Average Hours Per Week Worked by Members

- Chamber in session: 70 hours
- Chamber out of session: 59 hours
Number of Weekends Per Year Members Spend in Congressional District

- Less than 10: 6%
- 10 to 19: 0%
- 20 to 29: 0%
- 30 to 39: 17%
- More than 40: 78%
Member Time Spent on Major Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Congressional District</th>
<th>Washington, D.C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislation/Policy</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituent Services</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/Campaign</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press/Media</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/Management</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Activities</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who & What Does Congress Listen To?

- Expert Constituents
- Passionate Constituents
- Angry Constituents
- Influential Constituents
- Conscience
How to Build Relationships Back Home
“In your opinion, how important are the following for understanding constituents' views and opinions?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending events in the district/state</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized messages from constituents</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District/state office hours</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In person town hall meetings</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone town hall meetings</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper surveys/polls</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identical form communications</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online surveys/polls</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online town hall meetings</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member/Senator's blog</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Question

When your Member is trying to develop new ideas for issues and legislation, how important are the following activities?
Meetings with VIPs/Community Leaders: 100%
Meetings with Constituents: 95%
Meetings with Interest Group Reps.: 89%
Site Visits: 85%
Task Forces or Advisory Board Meetings: 84%
Community Office Hours: 62%
Town Hall Meetings: 52%
Survey Question

Which three of the following strategic factors are most important for determining whether your Member will personally attend an event or meeting in the district?
Top 3 Factors

• 64% Number of Constituents Attending
• 54% Opportunity to Advance the Member's Strategic Goals
• 37% Member's Interest in the Issue

Bottom 3 Factors

• 21% How Often the Member has Previously Interacted with Group
• 15% Opportunity to Interact Informally with Attendees
• 4% Number of VIPs Attending
Helpful Hints

“Be gracious and look for common ground.”

“Highlight the opportunities to mix with constituents/employees/members rather than staged presentations.”

“If they are friendly, and even if we don't agree, most likely I will approve a meeting with the Congressman.”
Survey Question

When your Member attends a site visit in the district (touring factory, visiting child care center, etc.), how long should the visit ideally take?
Ideal Length of Site Visits

- 30-60 minutes: 53%
- 1-2 hours: 42%
- Less than 30 minutes: 4%
- More than 2 hours: 0%
- No preference: 0%
Attend a Town Hall Meeting
Invite Legislator to Your Facility

Health Care

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.
Set Up In-State Meetings
Thank you, Congressman Engel

To the editor:

In recent years a number of products from China have been contaminated: pet food, toothpaste, children’s toys and now milk products.

Beijing did not allow state-run media to break the news of the tainted milk until after the Olympics, even though it was known in July. Information censorship endangers lives.

For this reason I am particularly grateful to Congressman Engel for co-initiating a letter (that 60-plus Congress members joined in signing) to French-based satellite company Eutelsat, requesting that it reinstate independent U.S.-based Chinese-language New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) to its Asia satellite.

New Tang Dynasty TV carries news the Chinese regime wants to keep quiet. NTDTV provides a platform for Chinese citizens to let the rest of the world know what is going on in China. Thank you, Congressman Engel, for taking the lead in supporting free media so that we will all be safer and better informed.

KENT KONKOL
“We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”

- Thomas Jefferson