

# Successful Advocacy: Meeting With Public Officials

Many factors affect a decision maker's vote on an issue: party lines, campaign contributors, special interests, and constituent opinion. As a constituent, it's important to contact decision makers about issues important to you and let them know your position. Decision makers count phone calls, letters (mail and e-mail), and office visits to determine constituent position, or indifference if very few constituent contacts are made about an issue.

When making a personal visit keep these tips in mind:

- Immediately establish who you are and why you are there.
- Establish why you are relevant and why they should listen to you.
- Keep your communication brief. Officials have many people vying for their time, and often will only have a few minutes to talk with you. For more time, prepare ahead and plan to talk when they are not in session.
- Be to-the-point. Officials must make decisions on numerous issues, and your issue is just one of dozens or thousands. Plan for no longer than a 15 minute meeting. Focus on one issue per visit. Clearly and concisely state the who, what, when, where and why of your issue.
- Be respectful and courteous. Show decision makers you understand the pressures they face.
- To make an appointment to meet one-on-one with a legislator ask to speak to the legislator's assistant or scheduler. Be specific about your reason for wanting an appointment. Make an effort to meet the assistant and establish a relationship.
- To show support for your position, deliver constituent-signed petitions and letters during the meeting.
- Be sure to send a thank you note after your visit. In the note offer a clear and concise summary of your visit.
- Get to know state legislators by picking up a "White Book" guide from the state house. The "White Book" gives contact information and a biography for each legislator. Find something that you have in common with them, create a bond and give them something to remember you after you end your conversation.
- With members of congress, establish a relationship with the legislative assistant (L.A.) that works on environment issues. Communicate often with this person and enlighten them on issues. This can establish you as the "go to" person/entity for the L.A. and the congressional member.