



DO'S AND DON'TS OF COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

DO'S

Make your legislators your friends. The cardinal rule in politics is loyalty. If you are perceived as a loyal friend, your actions and words will influence legislators.

Involve your legislators in your activities. Invite them to meet your employees or board of directors, invite them to lunch, dinner or your open house.

Get to know legislative staff. Treat them as you would treat a legislator. Their cooperation is what can make or break your chances of success.

Invite your legislator to community events. Politicians like crowds and high visibility events where they may address the "folks." Invite them to traditional church, civic, social and family events.

Contact your legislator about your concerns. The best thing to do is to meet them in the district or at the Capitol. You can also call them by telephone, write them a personal letter, or send an email. Never use a form letter.

Contribute to "your" candidate's campaign. You can help contribute to your candidate's campaign by giving money, door-to-door assistance, endorsement in literature or local newspaper, or organize events for candidates. However, be careful; know who your candidate is.

Prepare well for legislative hearings. Prepare text and be brief, speak directly to the proposals at issue. Be candid and prepared to answer questions.

DON'TS

Never address a legislator as "Mr.," "Mrs." or "Ms." The proper title is "Representative" or "Senator."

Never demonstrate your partisan views with legislators present. You may embarrass them, or yourself.

Never threaten legislators with political reprisals. If you want to defeat a legislator, there are better means than this.

Never imply or demand that your political contributions buy a vote or legislative support. It's illegal, stupid, and will backfire.

Never attempt to embarrass a legislator in a public forum. It's in bad taste and will likely alienate rather than attract support for your position.

Never "burn your bridges" with legislators. While they may not support you today, you may need them tomorrow.

Never support or oppose a candidate without obtaining the facts about all the candidates. You may later find the "other" candidate to be more qualified.

Never misstate your group's position on issues. The group must remain credible in the legislature if it is to attain its goals.

Never "insist" that a legislator should vote or support or oppose a proposal. "Request" is the proper word to use.

Never contact legislators at odd hours. They, too, need sleep and family time.

Never mix your personal political concerns with your group's issues. While you may support or oppose gun control, abortion, highway construction, nuclear power, etc., these issues should be discussed in other letters, other telephone conversations and other meetings.

Never "cry wolf." Legislators hear the wolf howling on most issues, and you may lose credibility when you overreact.

Never forget to say thank you. A letter of support and thanks after a vote will be long remembered by legislators and staff.

REMEMBER:

In the eyes of legislators, you represent your group. Understand the position of the group, educate legislators on those positions, and make clear to legislators any differences between your group's and your own positions. Report legislators' concerns and views to your group.

No legislator will agree with you 100% of the time. Understand a legislator's former position and votes on issues and why a legislator will take a certain position. Thank legislators when they support you and never "burn your bridges" when they don't support you.

No legislator can understand every bill, law, or regulation. Explain your views assuming the legislators have a limited understanding of the issue. Inform legislators that the group will provide additional information if they desire.

Legislators are busy. Make appointments to see them in the district or at the Capitol. Time limits should be 30 to 40 minutes at the most. Do not wear out your welcome.

Keep in contact with your legislators. If you maintain contact, you will not sound like a special interest when you ask for their support or opposition at a later date.