



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

As we are often reminded, we in the United States are lucky to live in a representative democracy. Yet many of us have never even visited the local offices of our Congressperson or Senator. When we fail to do so regularly and often, we leave the playing field open for those who do visit: the lobbyists. Often we get the kind of policy you'd expect when only some voices are heard loud and clear. There are lots of reasons legislators don't listen to the people. This is far from the only one. But it's the one we can do something about – right now.

Here are some tips for meeting with legislative staffers

A) Know Who You Are

When visiting a political representative, you are speaking for a lot of people – all the people that feel the same way you do who aren't there. Try to quantify who those people are.

Examples: As one of the over 1 million independent musicians in California, I want you to know how concerned we are that a lack of net neutrality will negatively impact our ability to use the web to promote and distribute our work.

As one of the 3 million Californians who work in higher education, I want to stress how much the current openness of the Internet supports cutting edge research and invention. We must act to preserve it for future generations.

B) Don't Be Afraid to Tell a Personal Story – (In 4 Sentences or Less).

Personal stories are powerful. Why have you been moved to take this action? If you can link it to something in your life or that of someone close to you - use it! Just make sure you keep it short and direct.

Example: I came here today because a few years ago, I became an activist in my neighborhood over a proposal for a toxic waste dump too close to my children's school. I started a blog and organized over the Internet to fight this proposal and we won. I want others to have the same opportunity when they see something about to happen that is wrong. How can they if the Internet becomes divided into fast and slow lanes dependent on the ability to pay?

C) Keep it Local

Remember that your representative gets elected (and re-elected) by votes from one particular area. They need to know how an action they take will benefit the residents of Podunk, Wisconsin. Make sure you know how the residents of Podunk, in particular, will benefit.

Example: Podunk is the home of Reliastream, a company with a new software program that competes with Bit Torrent. They will be able to grow if net neutrality regulations assure their products will work consistently with all ISP's and not be subject to non-neutral network management practices.

Example Podunk is home to over 100 nonprofits and over 50 blog sites, partially due to our lively academic community centered on Podunk University. Many of these feature the voices of our youth, communities of color and women, voices that are culturally relevant and innovative. For our young people who get much of their news and information online, we need to keep the Internet free of pay-to-play pricing schemes.

D) Know your Ask

What do you want the representative to concretely do? You need to state it and state it more than once.

Example: We'd like you to send a letter to the FCC encouraging them to proceed as soon as possible with net neutrality regulations.

E) Acknowledge the Arguments of your Opposition

Have no doubt that the minute you finish your friendly meeting, your legislative aide will hear the arguments against exactly what you just asked the representative to do. If they are surprised with arguments they weren't expecting, they may not know what to say. You should tell them.

Example: Some might say that net neutrality will make it too expensive for telecoms to expand their networks to serve people who don't have adequate Internet access now. We would say that without the regulations in effect, they haven't done much to expand services despite record profits. 32% of Californians still don't have hi-speed broadband at home and the US ranks 15th in the world for average speed of service. Is it really the right way to go to give them carte blanche to impose pay-to-play pricing schemes that make it harder for lower-income Californians to participate equally on the web?