



HOW TO TALK TO CONGRESS

Meet and call your member of Congress effectively

You do not need to be an expert on federal budget issues to address it with your congressional delegation — you are their constituent and **your views are important** to their decisions on matters before Congress.

Scheduling a Lobby Visit

- Good lobbying begins with access. The scheduler controls who will meet with the member, and for how long.
- Request an appointment in writing as early as possible.
- In your request state clearly who will be attending and what issue you would like to discuss.
- Visiting in groups of 6 or less and discussing one or two major topics is most effective.

Do Your Homework

- Appoint a spokesperson for your group.
- Practice answering questions in a simple, straightforward manner.

- Identify one specific aspect of your issue for each person in the group to highlight briefly.
- Know the member's voting record on budget issues.
- Use concrete local examples and numbers about how federal budget priorities affect your community. www.nationalpriorities.org has great resources.

State Your Power

- Be clear about your connection to the member's constituents and your affiliations.
- If you are a constituent, say so. If you represent constituents, tell them how many. Do you have influence over a community of constituents? If you work with churches or other organizations in their district, tell them.



LOBBYING 101

Be respectful but not star struck.

Be concise and direct!

- Expect to get 15-30 minutes; preparation is key to making the most of this short window.
- Members of Congress have a tendency to talk a lot, and will talk about things that they know, not necessarily the issue that you came to them with.
- Make sure they don't take over the meeting. Politely redirect the conversation to your point as needed.

Paint a Picture

- After starting with concrete examples, facts and figures can help to support your case.
- Have someone present at your meeting who can speak with their heart and personal experience about how federal budget decisions and war spending have affected them.

Avoid Threats or Accusations

- Basic courtesy is essential for advocacy, even when we are

deeply angry about a bad policy or failure to act.

- Approach whomever you meet with as an ally no matter where they stand.
- Convey urgency and responsibility in a manner that empowers action rather than raising defenses and stifling further dialogue.

Thank Them

- Thank your representative for their time and their leadership on federal budget priorities if their voting record has been good.

State a Clear Ask

- The most important thing about a meeting is to make a direct and clear ask.
- Use our talking points to help you frame your ask about federal budget priorities and if they have



a specific role to play in the process focus on that.

Leave Something Behind

- Leave written materials for the representative and/or their staff.

Don't Worry

- If you don't know the answer to a question that is asked, it will give you the opportunity to find the answer and get back in touch.

Follow Up

- Be sure to send a thank you note to your representative.

Additional Resources

Friends Committee on National Legislation

[Climbing the Ladder of Engagement](#) — a guide to building a relationship with your member of Congress

National Priorities Project

[Budget Tools](#) — A place to find specific numbers on the impact that federal spending has on your local community. This is great info for your meeting with a member of Congress.

AFSC Congressional Directory

Find your member of Congress [here](#).

New Priorities Network

American Friends Service Committee, UFPJ, National Priorities Project, FCNL, Peace Action, USLAW, Code Pink, Veterans for Peace, and many other groups from around the country come together in the NPN. [Use this website](#) to find current national campaigns and resources.

COMMUNITIES NEED
INVESTMENT TO
THRIVE



Tips for Calling a Member of Congress

Most legislative offices keep track of calls from constituents on various issues and report the number of calls they get to the legislators themselves on a regular basis. Calling your legislator's office to register your opinion is an important way to advocate for a responsible federal budget.

Call the US Capitol Switchboard at **202-224-3121** and ask to be connected to your legislator's office. You may also call the member of Congress outside of Washington in their district office (go to www.contactingthecongress.org to find local info on your member of Congress).

Identify yourself and where you are from to make it clear you are a constituent.

Identify legislation and action you want taken.

Clearly explain your position on the issue (only address one issue per call) and what you would like the legislator to do (vote for or against a bill, etc.).

Ask to speak with the staff person who works on the issue you are concerned about (for example: "May I speak with the staff person who works on budget issues?").

Be courteous, polite and concise.

Basic Budget Talking Points:

- People in my community want DEEP CUTS to the Pentagon budget and to bring the war dollars home.
- It is important to raise revenues by increasing taxes on corporations and the wealthy. Tax cuts and loopholes for corporations and the wealthiest Americans have contributed greatly to the deficit.
- During these difficult economic times it is even more essential to protect funding for the most vulnerable.
- With record unemployment it is essential to INVEST in job creation.

HINT: customize your talking points by adding local information. www.nationalpriorities.org can help you with information specific to your community.