

What To Know Before You Go!

Logistics

Attending the Meeting

What to Do and What to Expect

Any new meeting situation can be a little intimidating. The following tips will give you a better sense of what to expect for any meeting with a policymaker, as well as specific ideas for Washington, D.C.

What to Expect

When you walk in to the office, don't be surprised if it feels a little bit like a war zone. The telephones ring constantly, there are usually at least five TVs blaring coverage of the day's floor debate, and staff are running from one meeting to another. This is why it is so important for you to have thought about your message beforehand.

The person at the front desk (usually a staff assistant) will greet you. Let them know that you are there for a meeting and who the meeting is with (sometimes, your meeting will be with a staff person as opposed to a member). Then they will ask you to either have a seat in the usually VERY SMALL lobby or, if there's no space, ask you to wait outside. Don't be offended – there's just no room. The staff assistant will let the person you are meeting with know you are there and that person will come out to start the meeting.

Overall Tips

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- ❑ Be on time: Meetings are often scheduled in 20-minute increments back-to-back. If you are 15 minutes late, you'll only get five minutes. If you are 20 minutes late, you've lost the opportunity and will need to try to reschedule. If you are part of a group, and one of your meetings is running late, split up. It's better to have part of the group show up on time for the next appointment than to have everyone show up 20 minutes late.

- ❑ Don't arrive too early: Sound odd? Yes. But officials' offices typically do not have large waiting areas. If you arrive well ahead of your planned meeting (say 20 minutes to half an hour) you may have to wait standing up, squished against a wall, or out in the hallway. It's best to arrive about five minutes before the scheduled meeting time.

- ❑ Wear comfortable shoes!: Part of the reason why legislatures are so intimidating is that many of them are made of marble – including the floors. They are hard to walk on for even a few minutes, let alone several hours. This is not the time for your Manolo pumps or, if you must wear them, put a pair of comfortable flats in your bag to change in to.

- ❑ Be flexible: A number of things may happen that might seem unusual, like being asked to meet standing up in the hallway. Don't be insulted if the staff suggests a hall meeting. It simply means that either the office is too small for the number of people in your group or another meeting is already using the one available meeting space. Likewise, the official may be called away to vote during your meeting. You may have a meeting scheduled with the official, but due to last minute changes in the schedule, you may find you are meeting with a staff person. Just go with the flow!

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- ❑ If you can't attend, coordinate with your group & scheduling staff about calling to cancel: It is surprising how many people feel that they don't need to call to cancel meetings that have been set up for them with policymakers' offices. If you aren't able to make a particular meeting, and you are the only one assigned to go, it is common courtesy to cancel. If there are other people scheduled to go, check with them to make sure that someone will be attending.
- ❑ The five-minute rule: You must prepare to deliver your message powerfully and effectively in no more than **five minutes**. With the possible interference of votes, schedules running late, and last-minute emergencies, that may be all the time you'll have.

Specifics for Washington, D.C.

Getting to Capitol Hill

- ❑ Transportation: Your organization may have arranged transportation to the Hill for your group. If not, or if you prefer to go on your own, know that the House-side offices are best reached by the Capitol South Metro Stop (on the blue and orange line), and the Senate-side offices are best reached by the Union Station Metro Stop (red line). You can also take a cab and simply tell the cab driver the name of the office building you are going to (i.e., please take me to the Longworth House Office Building).
- ❑ Security: If you've been through an airport metal detector you will have no problem with getting through the security measures on Capitol Hill. They have a

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very similar system, although the lines are significantly shorter and you do not have to take your shoes off. Be sure to leave the guns, knives and incendiary devices at home!

The Capitol Hill Layout

- ❑ Overview: The Senate office buildings are Russell, Dirksen, and Hart, which are on the Senate side of the Capitol (the north side or to the left as you face the Capitol from the reflecting pool). The House office buildings are Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn which are on the House side of the Capitol (the south side, or to the right as you face the Capitol from the reflecting pool). They are in the order noted above on each side. For example, Longworth is between Cannon and Rayburn and Dirksen is between Hart and Russell.
- ❑ Getting in-between buildings: All of the office buildings and the Capitol itself are connected via underground tunnels. However, due to security reasons, you cannot walk between the House and Senate underground without a staff person. You can go between buildings on one side or the other (i.e., between House buildings and between Senate buildings). That said, if it is a nice day, I recommend against using the tunnels to go from building to building. Go outside instead. It is very easy to get lost underground.

It takes about 20 minutes to walk from any of the Senate office buildings to any of the House office buildings. Note that it can also take 10 to 15 minutes to walk from Cannon to Rayburn (the two furthest House buildings) or from Hart to Russell (the two furthest Senate buildings) so give yourself time to get from meeting to meeting.