

# What to Know Before You Go

## Knowing Your Audience

### Knowing Your Audience: The Members Themselves

#### *Three Key Questions*

---

There are three things you should know about your elected officials, specifically:

- What Committee is my legislator on?
- What are my legislator's policy interests?
- Where is my legislator on the political spectrum?



# What to Know Before You Go

## Knowing Your Audience

### *What Committee or Committees is my member on?*

---

Most legislative branch organizations, whether local, state or federal-based, have committees. Policymakers are assigned to committees based on their interests, their districts (or states, in the case of the U.S. Senate), and, for the more competitive major committees, on how long they have served (seniority). Depending on the level of government, policy makers usually serve on one to three committees and their ability to influence legislation depends largely upon whether they are members of the committee of jurisdiction. For example, a member of the Transportation Committee will have a much more difficult time trying to influence legislation that is in the Banking Committee. State legislatures vary, but, in general, members of the committee of jurisdiction will have more influence over the policy issues within their committee's jurisdiction. Knowing the committee assignments of your policymakers can give you insights into the issues that interest him or her and into how he or she will be most effective in helping you with your concern.

### *What issues does my legislator care about?*

---

Yes, all legislators should care about the issues their constituents care about -- and they do. At the same time, they have policy interests of their own. Knowing of those interests can help you develop a message that will resonate. Advocates often ask me how they can raise their own issue to the top of the legislator's agenda. The

# What to Know Before You Go

## Knowing Your Audience

truth is, it you can't. To be most effective, try learning about what the policymaker cares about and then connecting your issue to that. The best ways to find that out are to:

- ❑ Find out what bills they've introduced at [www.CONGRESS.gov](http://www.CONGRESS.gov)
- ❑ Read the Bio pages on their website. You can find those pages at [www.HOUSE.gov](http://www.HOUSE.gov) and [www.SENATE.gov](http://www.SENATE.gov).

### *Where is my legislator on the political spectrum?*

---

Policymakers help all constituents, not just those who are affiliated with their political party (as some people believe). After all, your representative has been elected to represent you and your interests, regardless of your party affiliation. But it is important to know the member's party affiliation to determine if they are part of the majority or minority party in the legislature. While many policymakers seek to work collaboratively and across party lines, those of the majority party still have an advantage in efforts to get legislative proposals passed.

The best way to find that out is to review the issues tab on their websites. In particular, take a look at their statements about issues on related to your own. This will tell you where they are on the political spectrum.