

# Tips for Making Contact With Your Members of Congress



## Scheduling a meeting with your Member of Congress (or their staff)

➤ **Call the office where you would like to meet:**

This contact information can be found at any of the web sites listed to the right. It can also usually be found in your local phone book. When you call, ask for the name of the scheduler and the foreign policy aide and tell them you would like to schedule a meeting.

### Web sites to find more info:

<http://congress.org/> (info about various elected officials)

<http://www.house.gov/> (click on “Member offices”)

<http://www.senate.gov/> (click on “List Senators Alphabetically”)

<http://thomas.loc.gov/> (links to all kinds of info about Congress, including bills)

To download materials and resources to help with your meetings:

<http://www.soaw.org/> (Click on “TAKE ACTION” Then “LEGISLATIVE ACTION”)

- **Send your request in writing:** For a meeting with the Member of Congress, the office will usually ask you to send a request in writing. Be very specific about what you want (a personal meeting) and what you would like to meet about (closing the SOA/WHINSEC!) Include any information the office requires, and make sure that there is correct contact information listed for at least one person in your group. Send the request to both the scheduler and the foreign policy aide.
- **Follow up on your request- be persistent:** Call the office if no one has contacted you within a week. If it seems like it will be difficult to get a meeting with your Member of Congress at this time, you could ask to meet with the foreign policy aide.



## Get ready for the meeting with your Member of Congress (or their staff)

- **Prepare for the meeting:** You do not need to be an expert, but you should be familiar with the basics of the issue you will be discussing. Familiarize yourself with the talking points to close the SOA. However, if you don't know something, it is perfectly ok to say, “I don't know, but I can look into.” It helps to become familiar with the Member's latest position or actions on the issue. Call the SOAW office for notes on any previous meetings. Bring educational materials to leave and any other information that may be helpful to convey your message.
- **Draft an agenda and assign speaking parts:** It should include introductions, issues, specific requests (in order or priority), summarizing points, thank yous and closing, and follow-up action steps. Establish a note taker for the group and pay close attention to any commitments made. It is a great idea to role-play or practice your meeting before you go, especially your specific ask for a commitment, for example, “Can we count on your co-sponsorship (or vote or proactive leadership—depending on their current level of support)?”
- **Be polite, courteous, and on time:** Showing up early is polite and it will give you a chance to think about the presentation of your talking points. Remain courteous throughout the meeting; even if you

SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS WATCH

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disagree on an issue, this may help make the Member more willing to reconsider her/his position or react favorably to future requests. Be a good listener. Remember to dress appropriately, and keep your agenda to the time allotted.

- **Be personable:** Each participant in your group should introduce themselves. Talk briefly about your involvement in the community and any relevant group you belong to. Make sure to mention any leadership role you may have and thereby how many people you represent. Thank them if you know of positive actions they have taken or simply thank them for meeting with you. Establish a personal connection with the Representative, Senator, or aide in the meeting. Ask them to share their goals and what they care about. Share your own views and concerns.
- **State the purpose of your visit clearly:** Remember to stick to the topic and talking points. Know what to say and make your requests clear. However, in addition to specific requests, don't be afraid to ask the Member what else they could do on your issue. If you feel they are trying to steer you off track by talking about too many other issues, politely return to your main idea, "While this too is an important issue, I would really like to spend more time talking about closing the SOA/WHINSEC.")
- **Follow up:** Make sure you know the name of the aide to follow-up with. Ask for their card so that you can spell their name correctly and have their email address. Write the Member/aide a thank you note to express your appreciation and briefly restate the issues discussed and the way you would like to see them respond to the issue (i.e. co-sponsoring a bill to close the SOA/ WHNISEC). Thank the Member and offer yourselves as a resource in the future; always keep them up to date on the issue. Provide, or say when you will, any information that was requested during your meeting or will help emphasize your key points.



## Taking the Next Steps

- **Get others involved:** Part of following up is also reporting back to your community and getting in touch with others who have organized similar meetings with Members of Congress. Strategize with others near you about which talking points work, and organize campaigns together. Call for a district or state-wide call-in day to demonstrate the support in the community: For example, on the first Friday of every month, call the local office you visited and urge others to do the same. Or on the first Tuesday of every month, call the DC office with the same talking points. Diversify your tactics and get more people involved each time, but stick to the same message: Close the SOA/WHNISEC!
- **Get in touch with SOA Watch:** Another way to continue your work is to get in touch with SOA Watch. The office has even more materials and tips to help you take the next steps in lobbying. Ask for a lobby packet, and specifically ask for any hand-outs that might help you respond to specific questions raised by your Members of Congress.
- **Come to Washington, DC:** Members of Congress and their staff are particularly impressed when people make the trip to DC personally. **The SOAW office would also be more than happy to work with you on congressional visits any time throughout the year.** Just call ahead to the SOA Watch office and your Members of Congress to arrange meetings.
- **Follow-up in the district:** If your initial meeting was in Washington, DC, then follow-up with a meeting or action in the Congressional district. This also gives an opportunity for more people to get involved than just those who were able to travel all the way to DC.

### Getting in touch with Congress

Congressional Switchboard 202-224-3121

[Your Representative]

[Your Senator]

Washington, DC 20515

Washington, DC 20510