



ADVOCACY NEWS ADVOCACY ACTION

Advocating in Your Own Backyard

by Chris Gallagher, OAC Policy Consultant

“All politics is local” is the truest statement ever made about the most important factor in being successful with your advocacy efforts. When people think of advocacy or lobbying Congress, often times they think of Capitol Hill as the best place to press their issue with a legislator. But, the best advocacy pilgrimages might be a short drive in your car to your legislator’s district office or attending a local public event, such as the state fair, where your legislator may be “pressing the flesh” to stay “connected” with their constituents. The following provides some tips on how you can connect and influence your legislators right in your own backyard.

VISIT THE DISTRICT OFFICE

While members of Congress do a majority of their work from their Washington, DC, offices on Capitol Hill, they also have a number of district offices back in their state. For example, House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) has two district offices – one in Troy and one in West Chester, Ohio. While the primary function of these offices is “case work,” such as helping constituents with social security benefits and immigration status, these offices become the home base for the legislator during “district-work periods” when Congress is out of session. These periods, which are sometimes referred to as “recess,” are clearly defined at the beginning of every year and publicly listed through the official House and Senate legislative calendars.

Once you have consulted your “legislator’s calendar,” be sure to call their district office a few weeks prior to when they are supposed to be back in the state so that you can schedule an appointment. Even though your legislator may be “on recess,” they still have extremely busy schedules when they return to the state, so don’t just drop by their office – call ahead of time so that your legislator can carve out some time to listen to your concerns.

ATTEND A TOWN HALL MEETING

Another great way to access your legislators is by attending a town hall meeting that legislators frequently sponsor back in the state. Many remember the town hall meetings that took place across the country during the healthcare reform debate. Though the images of these

gatherings were often heated, they illustrate how these events afford constituents a wonderful opportunity to dialogue with their legislators about important issues.

Most recently, legislator town hall meetings have been focusing on jobs and the economy. One possible way to ensure that your issues become the focal point of your legislator’s next town hall meeting is to work with fellow advocates to set up your own town hall meeting – again, reaching out to your members of Congress and local legislators far ahead of time so that they can make time on their schedule to participate.

VOLUNTEER FOR A CAMPAIGN

While U.S. Senators only face re-election every six years; members of the House of Representatives seem to always be in the middle of a campaign, given their elected term is two years. Giving up some time on your weekend to help your legislator secure another term in office can be very rewarding. Not only will you learn a great deal about the candidate, you can also build fantastic relationships with key staff for your legislator – both at the local and national level.

GET INVOLVED EARLY AND OFTEN

Finally, the best way to ensure a strong bond with your legislator in Congress is by establishing a relationship before they are even sworn in on Capitol Hill. Countless members of Congress worked their way up through the ranks – serving on local school boards or as county supervisors, running town or city governments as mayors, or serving in the state legislature. Becoming politically active and engaging and supporting policymakers at the early stages of their political careers will ensure that their door will always be open to you when your issue comes up.

Bottom line, being a good advocate takes time, commitment and patience. The best time to develop these “advocacy skills” is at the local level. Don’t have the patience, but have the commitment and time? Run for office. What better way to make sure your voice gets heard than by speaking about issues important to you as the policymaker for your neighborhood, town, county or state!



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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