



Communicating with Congress

The Congressional Management Foundation report “*Communicating With Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*” has suggestions which are important for our members in reaching Capitol Hill. To understand the new reality of email, last year alone 182 million email messages were sent to Capitol Hill. To make the messages of our Farm Bureau members have the greatest impact, there are specific aspects of email communications which are important when members send messages to Capitol Hill:

What Staff are Looking for in Constituent Messages

- o Name, address, zip code.
- o Reference to a Bill, bill number and title.
- o Impact on district/state.
- o Constituent’s reasoning, personal story.
- o E-mail address.
- o Phone number.

Personalized messages have the greatest impact and are read by congressional offices. The report indicated that staff are looking for personalized messages with specific impact on a piece of legislation or will have on their operation and how it affects the Rep./Senators district or state. We should continue to encourage and train our members to personalize their messages. Also, when providing sample text or talking points, we will continue to draft in such a way as to provide this information as much as possible.

The importance of these messages is demonstrated in the figure that **PERSONALIZED MESSAGES ARE 10 TIMES MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN FORM MESSAGES.**

One suggestion to assist in the personalized messages is to pose questions on the user instructions to encourage personalized messages.

Despite the volume of emails, congressional staff does read these email messages, at least the first few sentences for content and to verify that the message is from a constituent. However, 75% of staff believes that “identical form messages are sent without the constituent’s knowledge or approval.” Still, nearly all staff (96%) surveyed reported that if their Member has not arrived at a firm decision, personalized communications would have “some” or “a lot” of influence. It may be a good idea when you are visiting or talking with congressional staff over the next several months that you express that messages sent from our members are constituent messages. “CapWiz is the tool for our members to send messages to their elected officials through constituent action and are not form communications sent from Texas Farm Bureau.” Being able to distinguish our constituent-driven messages from other groups form communications is an important distinction the Congressional offices need to understand.

Avoid the GRASSROOTS WORST PRACTICES!

- ❖ Directing a campaign at a specific staffer.
- ❖ Sending a negative campaign to a Rep./Senator who supports you.
- ❖ Sending multiple, simultaneous communications from the same person.
- ❖ Generating campaigns from lists, rather than constituent action. (Prevalent view on Capitol Hill.)

Timing and coordination are important to have a positive impact on an issue. Coordinating Farm Bureau messages with lobbying visits and Farm Bureau staff contacts at the right time in the process will have the greatest impact. The right time for member responses is before the Rep./Senator has taken a position, and is looking for input from constituents on an issue. Combined with visits and Farm Bureau staff communications, contacts from Farm Bureau constituents is an added point that Rep./Senators will consider when deciding on an issue.

Messages that are targeted to a specific Rep./Senator and convey knowledge on specific legislation, tend to be more persuasive than a high quantity of general messages. **In other words, TIMING and CONTENT MATTERS!**