

How to Influence The Legislature Without Leaving Home



Todd J. Bonlarron
Palm Beach County
Assistant County Administrator

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Trends in effective lobbying is “grassroots” participation. This is essentially people expressing themselves from their home or office on matters affecting their world.

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- If you don't say something, someone else will
 - Saying nothing about an issue invites other perspectives to speak up... and you might not like what they have to say.
- Getting the “message” out about issues is critical in influencing elected officials.
- “Showing up is 90 percent of the battle.”
 - Being present makes a difference.

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Preparation
 - Before you call, do your homework.
 - Rehearse, Practice and Study materials
 - Bring the issue “home”
 - Advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint
 - Know the Member
 - Know their voting record



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Relationships
 - Get to Know Staff and their roles
 - Chief of Staff, Staff Director, Scheduler, Leg. Director, Leg. Assistant, Field Director
 - In District, Tallahassee, and Washington DC offices
 - You can do this from home!

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Relationships (Cont.)

- Catch 'em at Home!

Members schedule appointments, events, town hall meetings when in the district

- Invite them to

Your meetings

- Provide Photo and Press Opportunities



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Communications
- Your Style Matters...
 - Be Brief – if you can't explain it in 90 seconds or less you might lose them.
 - Don't clutter the message
 - Don't Tirade, Be Civil
 - Too passionate.....
may not be most helpful



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- “Going Postal”
 - Regular Mail

Slowest Form of Communication

Might come back as very effective means

Harder to forget about than emails

- Other Services
 - FedEx, UPS Next Day, Priority
 - Faster, but not more effective



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Voice
 - Calls During the Workday...
 - Know District and Tallahassee/DC Office Numbers
Easy to find online

Be Willing to Talk to Staff



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Voice Mail After Hours



Call the direct office lines

Be Brief, Succinct, Don't Ramble

Leave your name, address, phone number and
email address

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

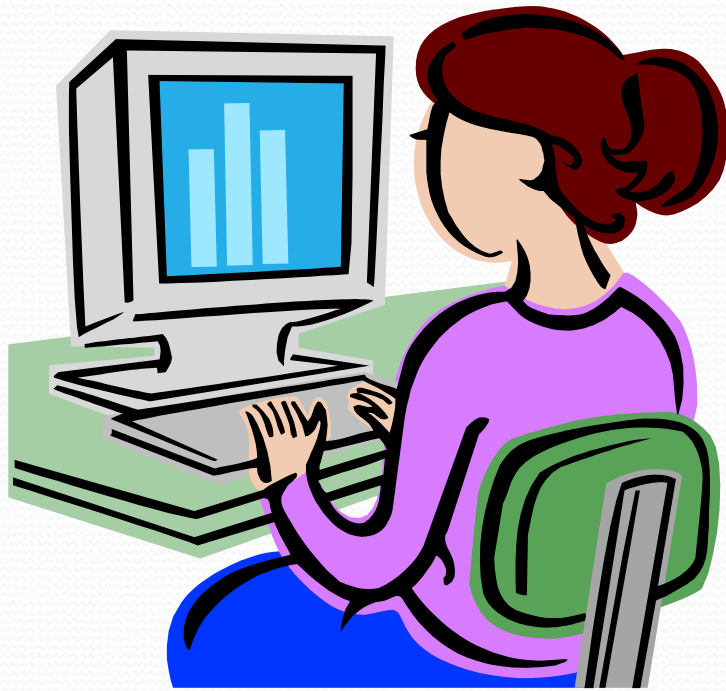
- Electronic

- Fax

- Believe it or not but most offices still have one
 - Keep it simple! Stick to One Message
 - Timing is everything – good for after hours.
 - Use letterhead if you have it



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home



- Electronic (cont.)
 - Email
 - Include Address and Zip Code..... Members typically only respond to emails from the District
 - Find out Staff email addresses
 - Any time – day or night

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Electronic (cont.)
 - Internet
 - Web forms on individual member sites
 - Use email services from different advocacy websites
 - Social media: Facebook and Twitter



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home



Use the Media.....

“Public opinion affects legislative opinion.”

Write letters to the editor,
opinion/editorials.

- Use legislators names if possible

Hold press conferences

Arrange editorial board meetings



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Using the District /State Offices
 - Do this NOW, don't wait for an issue
 - Local issues, Local Solutions
- For these matters, this is the place!
Many federal agencies have local offices
Know the caseworkers and their role



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- **Using the District/ State Offices (cont.)**

Use the staff to help influence at the Capitol

Well established contact with the district staff can be used as a conduit to the Capitol professional staff and the Member

Use the staff to arrange appointments

A good relationship with district staff can provide access to the Member and Capitol staff

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- “Where you stand depends on where you sit.”
 - Know your allies
 - Know your enemies
- Who are you dealing with?
 - Know your member
- Make a Self Assessment...
 - Know yourself, and your abilities
- Assess the political climate...
 - Know the institutional mood...it matters!

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

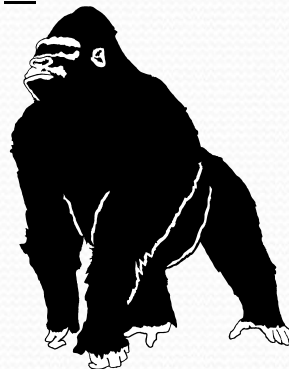
- “Honesty is not the best policy...it is the only policy!!”
- “You don’t make peace by talking to your allies”
- “Politics makes strange bed fellows”
Today’s opponent may be tomorrow’s ally.
- “Always be civil, no matter how irritating the opponents may appear to be.”

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- “The number one no-no in legislative relations is to circumvent staff and only talk to the Member.”



- Legislative staff may seem uninformed
 - But so can an 800_lb. Gorilla – you don’t want to rile either one!



How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

- Make the effort
- Don't be Afraid or Intimidated
- Get Others Involved
- Be Creative
- Be Visible
- Be Tenacious – Follow-up!!

How to Influence the Legislature Without Leaving Home

You really can make a difference and effectively influence Congress and the Florida Legislature from your home or office – it's the new trend in lobbying. *Be a part of it!*