

Working with the United States Congress

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During the January 1991 annual meeting in Washington, D.C., many SRM members will have a unique opportunity to visit with Members of Congress (Members). It is vital to the range management community in this nation as well as other nations, that the Members learn about the worth of our rangeland resources measured in environmental stability, economic value, ecosystem functions, and pastoral values. These Members make the laws and direct our National conservation policy. Not only is it important to speak our concerns, we must demonstrate our interest and commitment by sharing with those Members who are our leaders and represent our States. They must view us as enlightened professionals in the art and science of Range Management.

We can no longer go it alone in this profession. We must have partners and friends. Those Members on Capital Hill represent us and millions of Americans who are more concerned than ever about our natural resources. We need these Members as partners. The natural resources of this Nation and the World depend on our success.

Organization and Function of Congressional Offices, Committees and Subcommittees

Members of Congress have offices in Washington, D.C., and offices in their State. The Washington, D.C., offices handle National issues and the Member's legislative agenda along with constituent mail on National issues and contacts by constituents in Washington, D.C. The State offices handle constituent contacts and mail on personal or local issues. The State offices are key contact for residents of the State. The Members organize their offices to meet specific needs, so there are always exceptions to the following descriptions.

Washington, D.C., Offices

The Senate offices are larger, with 25 to 30 staff members. The House offices have staffs of 12 to 15. Both offices have an Administrative Assistant or "AA" who handles the administrative affairs in the Member's office. The "AA" is sometimes called the Chief of Staff and may be assisted by an Office Manager.

Each office has a Legislative Director who manages the Member's legislative agenda and is assisted by Legislative Assistants (LA's). The Director assigns specific areas of responsibility to each LA such as agriculture, public lands, or natural resources. (HINT—If you are unable to meet with a Member, try to meet with the Legislative

Director of the LA assigned to your area of interest).

Other positions may include Legislative Correspondents, Interns, Appointment Secretary and Receptionist. Both House and Senate offices have a Press Secretary.

A Senator sits on approximately four committees and two of the subcommittees under each committee for a total of eight subcommittees. A Member of the House sits on approximately two committees and two subcommittees under each committee for a total of four subcommittees. Committee staffers may be assigned to handle issues for a Member in a role similar to a personal staff member.

Offices within the State

State offices for Members are located throughout the State for Senators and within the House Member's District. An Office Manager or Field Representative heads the State offices, which may also have Case Workers.

Staff members located in local offices within State are key contacts. The Member expects them to know about local and State issues and keep the Member informed. They handle the local problems of constituents. It is important that local SRM members establish contact with local staff members and offer their assistance. A great way to open the contact is to drop in at the local or state office of the Member and visit with staff there. When the time comes, they can be helpful in setting up your Washington appointment. They can also arrange for White House tour tickets, Senate and House gallery passes, and other things.

Senate and House Committees/Subcommittees

The Senate and House accomplish almost all of the work related to legislation through their respective committees and particularly the subcommittees within each body. Professional staffs, who accomplish the detail work essential to legislative action, serve each committee/subcommittee. Both the majority and the minority parties have professional staff groups. The bulk of legislative initiatives come from majority staffs. Minority staffs usually react rather than initiate.

If you are concerned and want to discuss an issue(s) which has a potential legislative solution or there is legislative action planned or underway, it is very important that you get well acquainted with the professional staff of the subcommittees as well as the Members and their personal office staff. Most professional staff members on committee and subcommittee staffs were hired at the recommendation of a Member. You can obtain an introduction to the appropriate professional committee staffer through the Member's personal office.

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Other Information You Should Know

A recent survey of the legislative aides in the Senate, that cover environmental issues, revealed that their average age was 27. Their educational backgrounds were: 47% lawyers or political scientists, 44% history, English or economics, and the remaining 9% biology, ecology, or a related field. This is not necessarily bad. It does mean that they must depend, in part, on the expertise of others to develop legislation and advise their Member. You are important to them.

When Congress is in session, the legislative staff work long days. Most arrive in the office about 9 am, have read the *Washington Post*, and are ready for a pressure packed day of meetings, negotiations, and preparing briefs for their boss. Many activities come on short notice. The staff people may be at the office well into the evening, 6 to 8 p.m. They are generally given a great deal of responsibility and feel the strains of the pressure. You can talk with them most anytime in their offices.

Knowing Your Senators and Representatives

A "back home" district elects each Member of the House. Elected Representatives are sensitive to the needs in that district. Usually, they have trusted advisors who they call upon to give them the facts. To be effective with the Member you should know who those advisors (opinion leaders) are and if they support your ideas and programs. Senators represent the entire State and they also depend on trusted advisors in the State. All Members have pet issues and causes that got them elected to the Congress. You must know those initiatives and where the strong support is in each State.

If possible, find out the Members' "real" self interest. Values frequently become less clear while working in Washington. The Members try to keep in touch with their home base. If you can get to know them on a first name basis and get a handle on their real feelings about interests and concerns, you can work more effectively with them. They are great human beings and a pleasure to work with. While you are around them, be yourself and allow them to relate with you on that level.

Before going to Washington, D.C., find out what committees/subcommittees your Senator or Congressperson serves on. References such as the "1989-1990 Official Congressional Directory" (available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402) or the "Congressional Staff Directory" (available from the Congressional Staff Directory, Ltd., Mount Vernon, VA 22121-0062-about \$50.00) are good sources. These references list the Members and the persons on the professional staffs. Most local libraries should have similar references. You can also check with the local offices of your Members to find out which committees they serve on.

You Have Clout as a Constituent

Even though we often think of the U.S. Congress as representing the whole country and developing broad based policies and legislation, they are responsible to the

needs of the people that elect them and keep them in office. This provides both opportunities and limitations in what we can expect from interactions with them, but you are very important to them as a constituent and local representative of an organization.

How to Get Started

Start Now—It is important that you start now to make your contacts. Do *not* wait until a week or two before you come to Washington next January. This early contact is called front end loading, and to be successful, you must start now. Check to see if someone in your Section is acquainted with the Member or a staff person; this can provide a good opening wedge.

To prepare for direct contact with a Member, a person on a personal staff, or a professional staff of a subcommittee, we suggest: (1) Determine the issues important to your Section (The leadership of each Section should have a strategy planned for contacting their delegation and the Section members should have specific roles assigned.) (2) Clearly define each issue and put it in writing in one page or less. (HINT—Provide copies to the staff members. They have to write briefing papers when people visit the Member and they appreciate any information they can get, including draft briefing papers!) (3) Keep issues separate in presentation, even though they may be interrelated. (4) Assemble or refer to additional background material that will support each issue. (5) Compare your defined issues with the written policy of the parent Society.

Take staffers on field tours, perhaps a trail ride, evaluation tour, or success story tour. Do what ever you can do to make that contact. Work hard at making the event productive and informative.

Make the initial contact for an appointment with professional staff in Washington, D.C., through the local office of your Member of Congress. If possible, do that in person so that you get acquainted with your local office staff. Generally, don't plan an initial appointment exceeding one half hour. Your primary purpose is to become acquainted with the professional staff and start a dialogue. It is unlikely that the member will attend such a meeting.

Start lining up appointments in October or November, at the latest. If the member is newly elected, you may have to wait until January, just before the visit. Let them know who will be coming, and give them an idea of the topics you want to discuss. It's likely you'll contact and meet with the legislative assistant who handles agriculture or public lands issues for the Member. You want to talk with these people during your visit, whether the Member is available or not.

It is a good idea to send a letter requesting the appointment and follow up with a phone call as soon as there's been time for the letter to get there. The same advice applies if you want to spend some time with key staffers on the subcommittees of the Agriculture and Interior Committees. Chairman often aren't available unless you

happen to be constituents!

As mentioned before, your communications must be short and to the point. Legislative staff seldom have time to sort through long documents. Most technical people often write for their peers in journals and have not developed the skill of writing the type of material that is easy for these people to quickly digest.

The Visit

Refresh the group representing your Section on your objectives and assign topics or talking points to individuals or one of two spokespersons.

Conservative business dress is appropriate on the Hill. You may wear western clothes unless you favor extremes such as belt buckles the size of dinner plates, pants stuffed into boots, and hats with 5-inch brims. You will want to look like the professional that you are.

Be on time, but be prepared to wait. This means that it is wise not to schedule appointments too close together. Be considerate of the Member's or staffer's time. Say your piece, ask your questions, and be ready to move on. If they want you to stay and answer questions or talk about other subjects, they'll let you know. But they seldom have whittlin' time.

When meeting with legislative staff in their high pressure environment and with their hectic schedule, it is easy to assume that the staff member is not interested or that they don't want your opinion. It might also be discouraging that you are not meeting with the Members. Don't give up.

Your input as a concerned citizen is both needed and welcomed. Prepare yourself, be patient, be persistent, and be professional and you can help make a difference. They will listen to you over a professional lobbyist, so do not hesitate to make your input.

DON'T LOBBY. You are there to provide information on issues of concern to you. Creditable information, well presented, will speak for itself. (Lobby is defined as trying to get legislators to introduce or vote for measures favorable to a special interest.) (To maintain SRM's tax exempt status, we cannot lobby as SRM members.) You need to check with your employer about your organization's policies related to visits with Members of Congress.

Followup

As soon as you get home, send a letter to the people you visited, expressing thanks, summarizing the topics you discussed, and offering to be helpful if they want to call on you in the future.

If all goes well, you will have impressed some key people that SRM is a strong professional outfit with knowledgeable members who can help by providing reliable information without coming on like lobbyists. You will have established communications which will strengthen over time as you cultivate and maintain them.

Alternatives

While most meetings will be brief ones in the Member's office or even in a small crowded anteroom, some Sections may want to arrange to host a dinner or luncheon meeting with all or part of their delegation plus key staffers. Rooms are available for these functions, but you need to consider costs and the probability of getting a good turnout of both Section and Congressional people. Work through one of the Members' local offices to set this up. Conflicts with SRM Annual Meeting events should be avoided.

Summary

START NOW—Invite local congressional staffers to attend a local rangelands tour, or have a special tour to feature some problem or success. Be prepared to explain this problem, your concern, and alternative solutions. The "Show and Tell" approach is useful to communicate what you are doing and hope to accomplish.

Stay positive, nothing will turn a staff worker or Member off quicker than negativism, ridicule of others, or sarcasm about our profession, our management, or missions. They will accept a professional approach with respect, admiration, and enthusiasm for our work and cause.

Staff members at all levels will always need credible information. SRM members can meet this need by providing factual, unbiased information when asked. If the staffer knows and trusts an SRM member, the stage is set.

Our objectives in 1991 are to learn about Congress, gain visibility, and identify key rangeland issues for Members of Congress. We want them as our partners in the management of important natural resources for our Nation. We wish you success in every effort.

Looking for Annual Meeting information in this issue? It's in the plastic envelope your *Rangelands* came in, along with *Trail Boss News*.