

Federal Informational Series

Advocacy 101

An informational guide for fly-in and virtual advocacy measures when interacting with government officials

February 27, 2023

Michael Tinsley
Past President, Policy Chair, President-elect

Roadmap

- **Contextualizing fly-in advocacy**
- Members of Congress and their staff
- Legislative processes
- Capitol Hill: Before, during and after
- Navigating Capitol Hill

How does constituent advocacy in Washington work?

GOVERNMENT ROLE

Congress and the White House create laws and regulations to govern citizens



WHAT ARE FLY-INS?

During fly-ins, constituents visit with members in the nation's capital to advocate for common interests and goals



CONSTITUENT ROLE

Citizens participating in advocacy efforts:

- Showing support
- Asking for change
- Telling stories
- Sharing ideas
- Providing information

Members of Congress Want to Hear From You



CONSTITUENT CONTACT

Members of Congress value staying in touch with constituents

- Conversations guide policymaking
- Reelections hinge on lawmakers' ability to serve their constituents
- Members trust staff to help them listen to constituents
- Advocates should not be surprised if they meet with staff in lieu of a lawmaker



PERSONALIZED MESSAGING

Individualized communications are highly persuasive

- Personalized letters and e-mails can have more influence on members' decisions than form letters
- Advocates should focus on sending more personal messages to capture individual voice or perspective



ON-THE-GROUND INTELLIGENCE

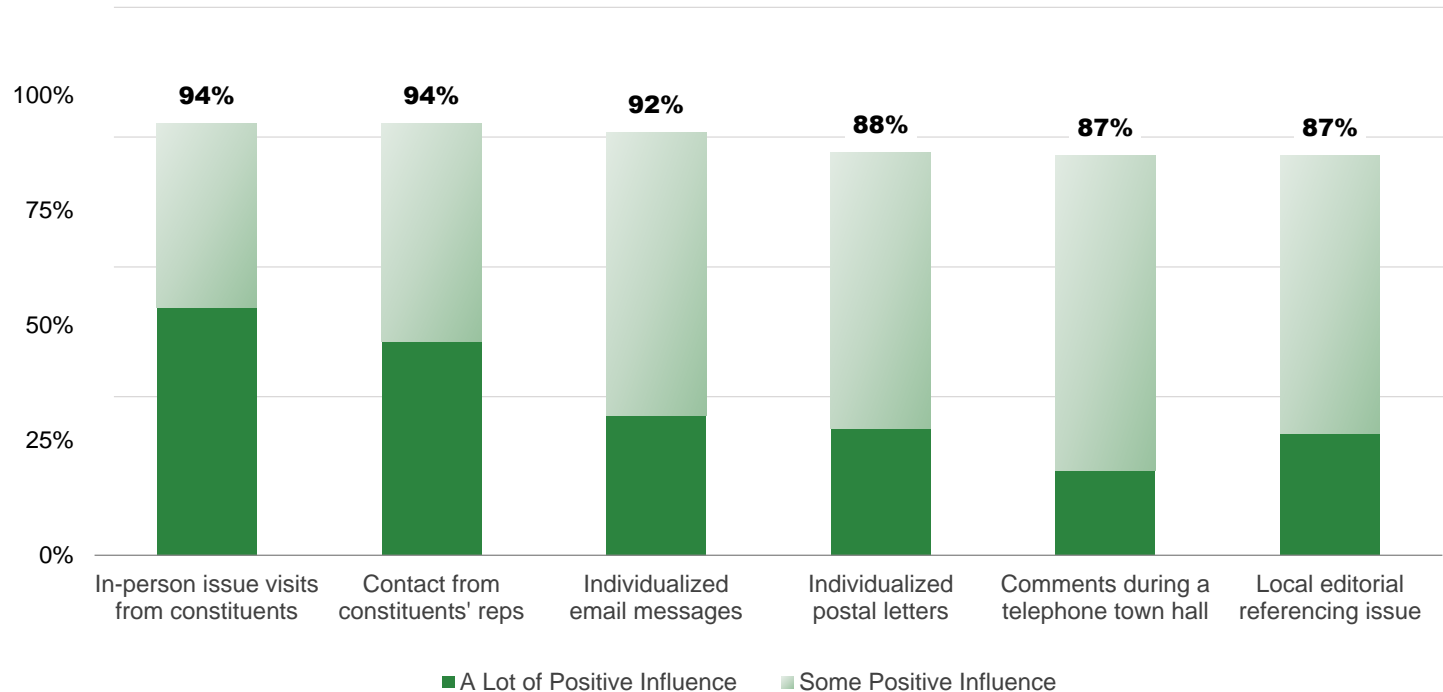
First-hand knowledge of policy impacts are most compelling

- What policy actions do constituents desire?
- Why do constituents prioritize that action?
- What are the impacts of this on our district or state?
- What personal stories connect to this policy?

Home Advantage in Congressional Decision-making

Constituent views and personalized outreach are most influential

Influence of Advocacy Strategies Directed at a Member's Washington Office



*Asked of Chiefs of Staff, Communications Directors, Legislative Directors, Legislative Assistants

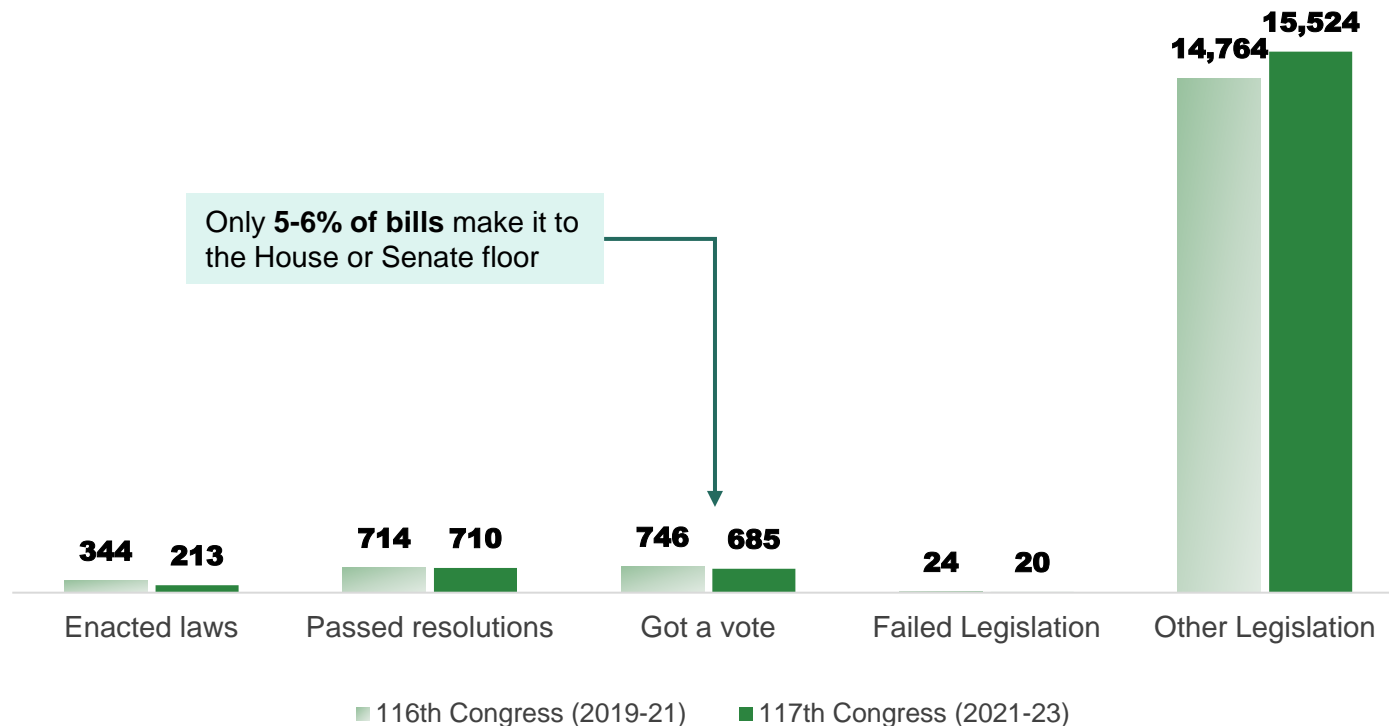
SOURCE National Journal research, Congressional Management Foundation.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

Success in the Advocacy Space can Take Time

Legislation moves slowly through Congress

Bills and resolutions by status



SOURCE National Journal research, GovTrack

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

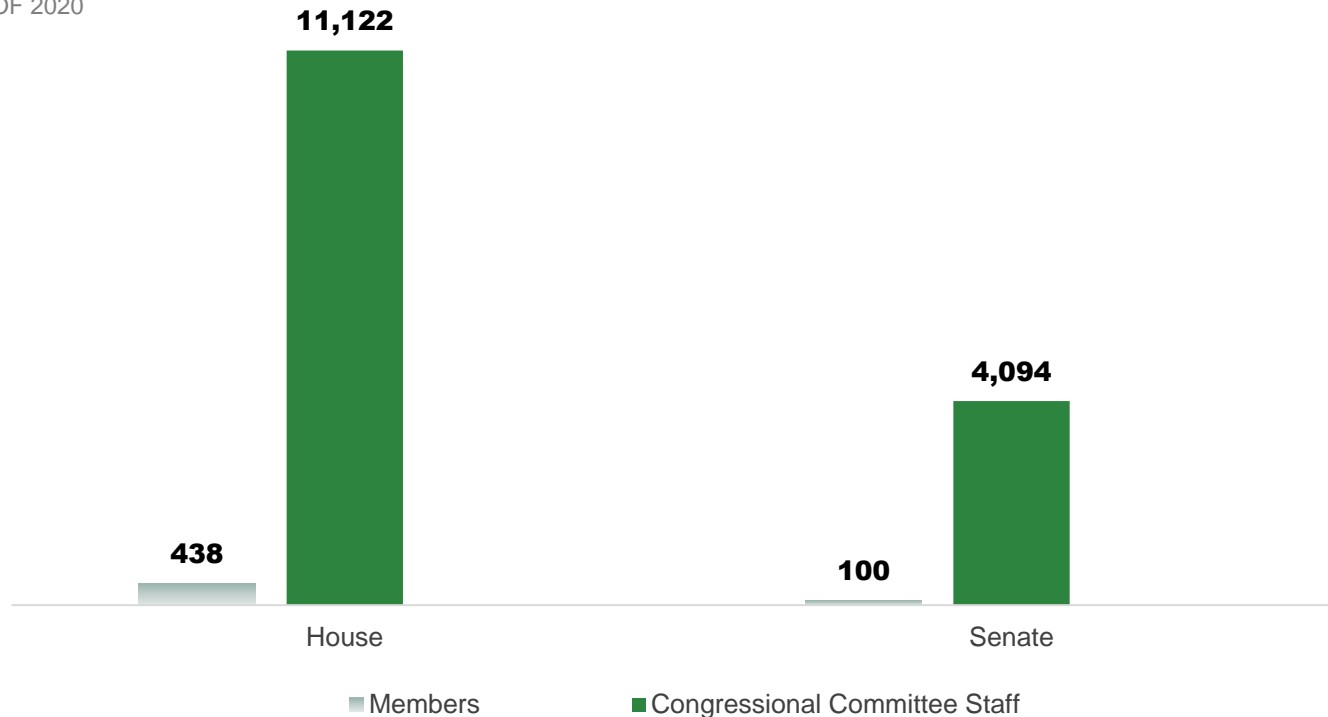
Roadmap

- Contextualizing fly-in advocacy
- **Members of Congress and their staff**
- Legislative processes
- Capitol Hill: Before, during and after
- Navigating Capitol Hill

House and Senate Staffers Significantly Outnumber Lawmakers

Members and staff of Congress

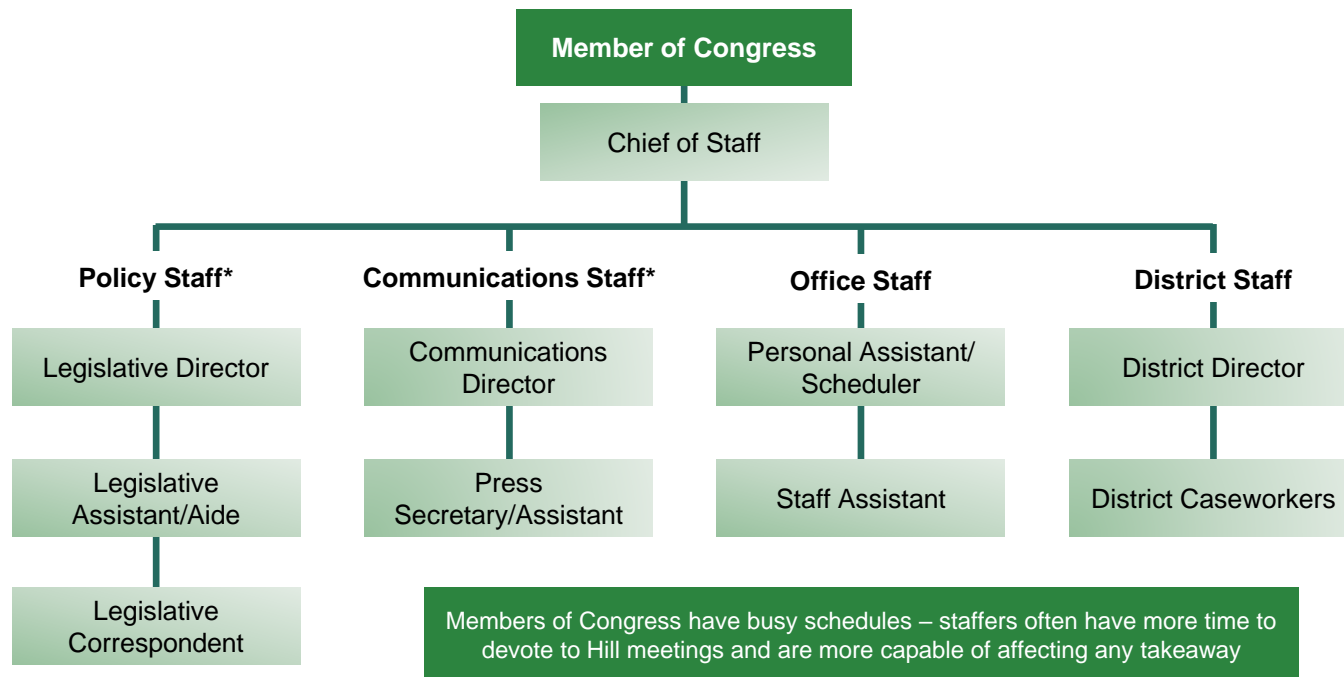
AS OF 2020



**Note: House total includes representatives from US territories.*

Expect to speak to Capitol Hill staff during meetings

Sample organizational structure of a congressional office



**Some offices may have "Senior Counsel/Counsel" roles among Policy staff, others may include a "Social Media Director" or "New Media Director" among Communications staff.*

Hill Staff Often Have More Time to Meet Constituents

Meetings are typically scheduled and run through chiefs, LDs, LAs



Member of Congress

Members tend to be highly overscheduled; they average 70-hour weeks in D.C., often achieved by double-booking meetings; it is not uncommon for members to show up halfway through a meeting or leave part of the way through



Chief of staff

Visitors may not realize how often chiefs are in communication with a member; the tight bond means that chiefs are often delegated to speak for the member to constituents



Legislative director

LDs tend to be specialists in the policies of the committees on which the member serves; they may focus less on other areas



Legislative assistant

LAs tend to be young; their average age is under 29



Legislative correspondent/ staff assistant

LCs and SAs tend to be even younger than LAs, often recent college grads; LCs/SAs may join in meetings as a junior staffer or note-taker

Face Time with Members May Be Harder to Come By in a Virtual Atmosphere

PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATION IN VIRTUAL MEETINGS



Challenging to connect virtually when Congress is in session

“

With congress back in session, please be flexible and aware that the member is running back and forth from votes. It takes a little longer to set everything up but trust our office. We'll have him on the call and be good to go, though building in buffer time can help.

SCHEDULER, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

“

The congresswoman has loved hopping onto meetings and has taken well to the technology, despite a few townhalls with audio or WiFi connection issues. Still, it is tough to schedule meetings with her due to all the committee assignments under her belt.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Difficult to double-book in an online environment

“

It's been a lot more challenging for the congressman to join calls. Before, he could just pop around the office when multiple meetings were happening, but with everything scheduled online, that's harder to do.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

“

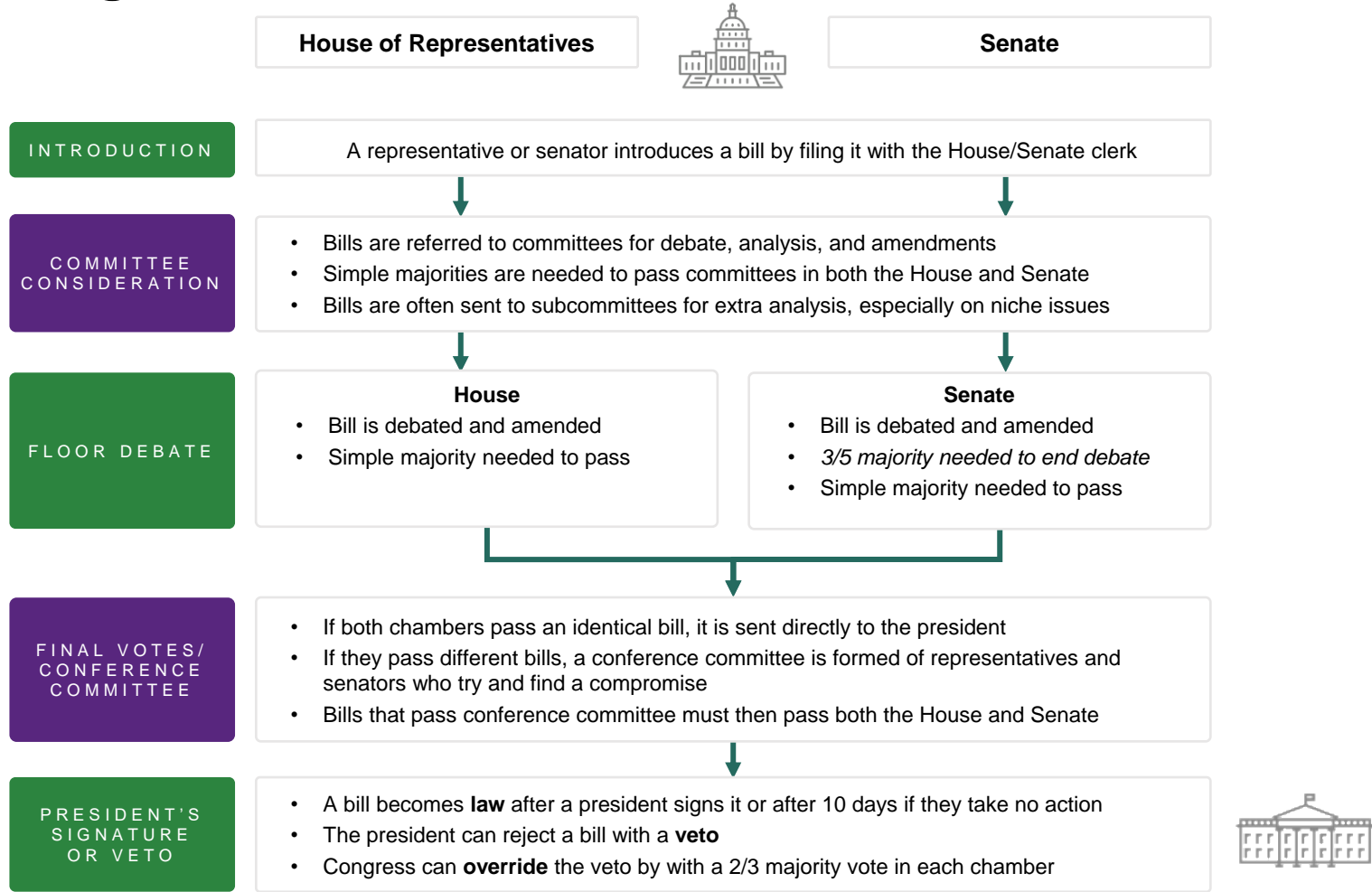
Videos used to be easy when the member was in his home, but now that they are in session, it's harder for him to jump on video between votes... And asking him to join early—to work out any technical issues—isn't feasible since we're on back-to-back calls.

SCHEDULER, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Roadmap

- Contextualizing fly-in advocacy
- Members of Congress and their staff
- **Legislative processes**
- Capitol Hill: Before, during and after
- Navigating Capitol Hill

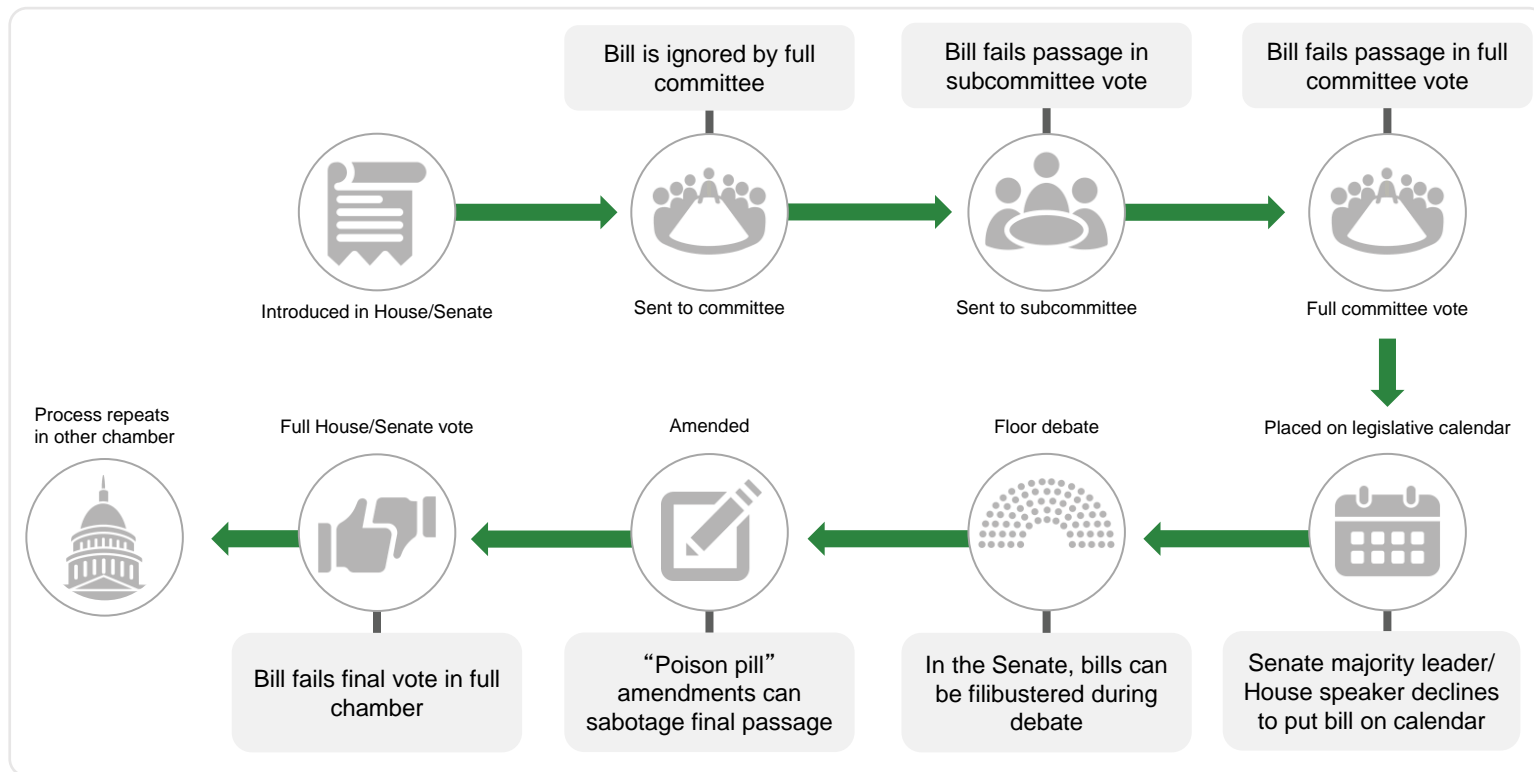
Legislative Process: How a Bill Becomes a Law



SOURCE National Journal research.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

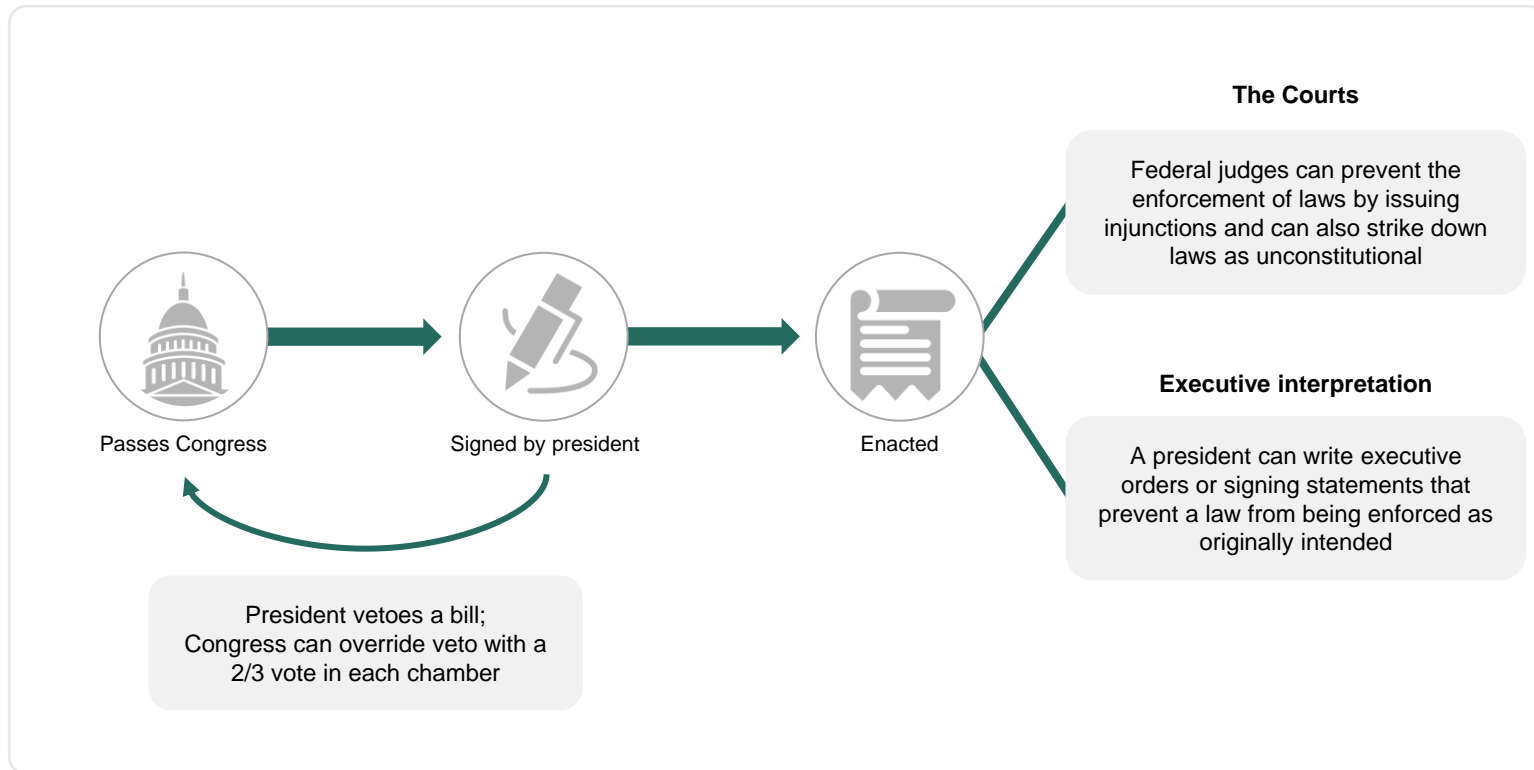
Bills Face Numerous Obstacles to Passage in Congress



NOTE

- The Senate relies on unanimous consent to operate efficiently; therefore, individual senators have the power to delay or prevent a bill's passage by creating additional procedural hurdles, including filibusters

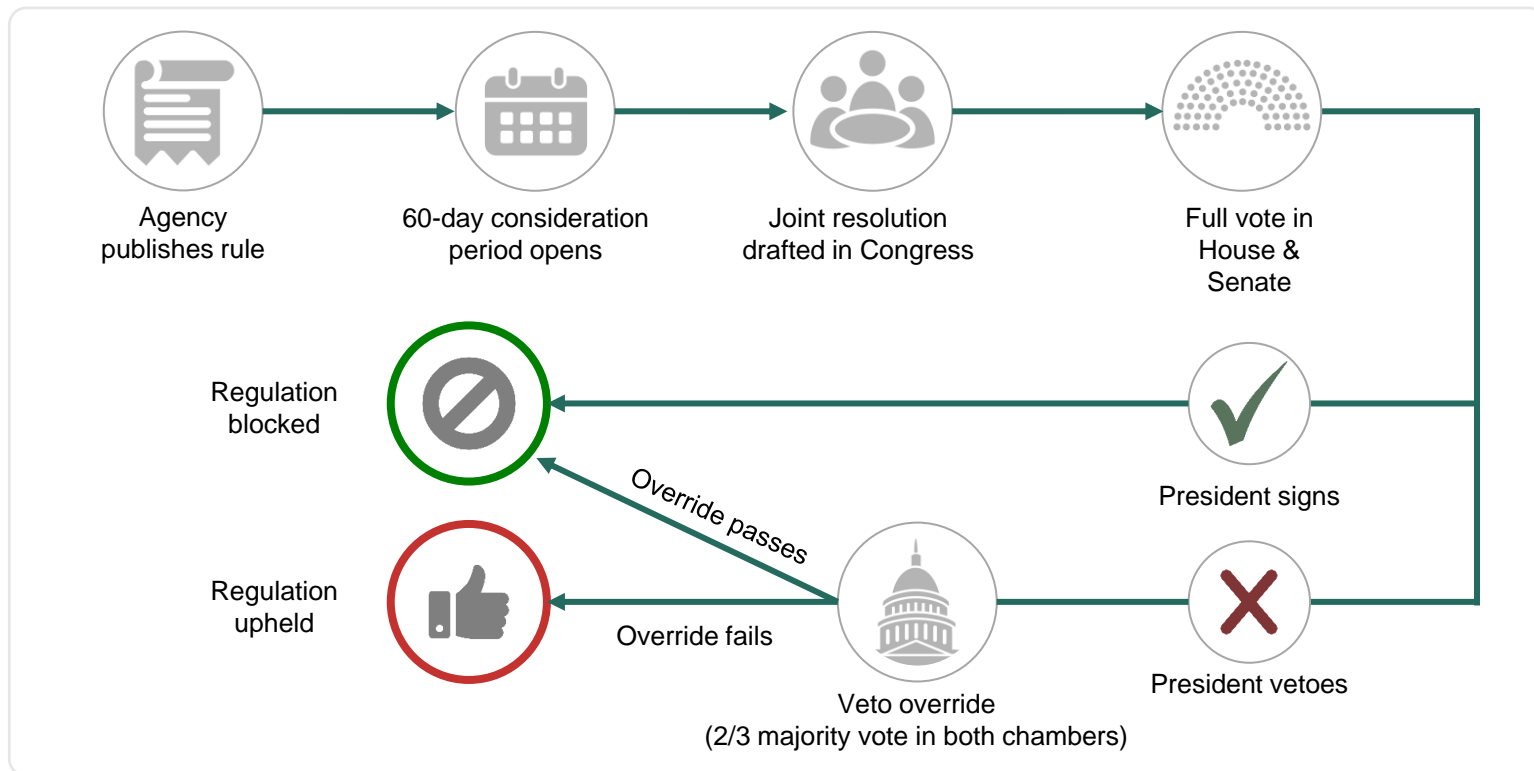
Even After Passage, Bills May Face Hurdles



NOTE

- A bill may pass both the House and Senate but still face enormous challenges, either before or after it is formally enacted.

Overtaking federal regulations via the Congressional Review Act (CRA)



NOTE

- The Congressional Review Act (CRA) is an oversight tool Congress may use to overturn rules issued by federal agencies. The CRA requires all agencies to report their rulemaking activities to Congress and provides Congress with a special set of procedures to possibly overturn those rules.

Roadmap

- Contextualizing fly-in advocacy
- Members of Congress and their staff
- Legislative processes
- **Capitol Hill: Before, during and after**
- Navigating Capitol Hill

Help Offices Assist By Taking Out the Guesswork

COMMON PAIN POINTS AROUND MEETING COORDINATION



Who will be in attendance?



I'd rather have more information than go back and forth with the group digging for information, whether it's a list of topics or attendees. **Attendee lists** are more **important** than groups realize and it's usually something people don't provide up front.

And **knowing the ties to our district** is really wonderful to know too... Our office is **eager to meet with constituents**—that's another reason I'm excited to get attendee lists. Of course, we'll still take meetings with non-constituent groups, but the **invitation will be looked at with different eyes** if we know ahead of time that a constituent will be in the meeting...

I put a lot of effort into trying to know the ask from a group we're meeting with. **Invites can be extremely unclear** with only one sentence of what the groups wants in a meeting. That can be fine with a district group that we're familiar with, but **frustrating with groups we're not familiar with** or don't work with regularly.

SCHEDULER, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



What's on the agenda?



It is **time consuming to guess at the issues or the legislation groups might bring up**. It would be helpful to have a basic meeting request or agenda that says, we're from so-and-so group, here is who will be on the call, this is what we would like to discuss, and these are the times that would work.

It is **very rare to see an actual agenda laid out** in a meeting invitation, it's usually in an email message and I have to go back and find it.

There are **times when people reach out with only a hint** of what they want to discuss and in the **actual meeting** it ends up being a **completely different** call.

That can be **slightly irritating for me**, but **very frustrating** when that happens in a meeting **with the congresswoman**. We **need information** ahead of time **to prep ourselves** and the **member**.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ease Into the Adoption of (Unfamiliar) Meeting Platforms

COMMON PAIN POINTS AROUND VIRTUAL MEETING PLATFORMS



Acclimating to new meeting technology

“

Our office had our fair share of technical problems. My policy issues weren't front-and-center at the onset of the pandemic, so I **had more time to learn the technology** and get used to it. But some of our staff who were less well-versed in it missed meetings simply because they'd given up.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

“

Getting used to the million different platforms was hard. Everyone has different accounts on different platforms so that was the main difficulty off the bat. **Let us know beforehand what platform you will use**—there's anxiety on both sides about whether the member will make it if it's not a platform they're used to.

SCHEDULER, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Ensuring access to the right platform

“

We quickly got the equipment we needed to work remotely, so the technical challenge was really in the applications that needed to be downloaded. To ensure a productive start to a meeting, please **check that the app you're using can be dialed into or** is otherwise compliant with what the Senate is already using.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, SENATE

“

In the beginning, a calendar invite would look like it's a phone call, but then it would turn out to have a web share or video component... Just be sure to **provide a detailed agenda and tell us the platform you're going to use**. It might take time to download a certain app and we don't want to be late.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SOURCE National Journal research, verbatim quotes have been lightly edited for clarity.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

Virtual Meetings Can Require More Up-front Planning

Consider how you'll interact online and adapt to the moment



Not in-person but still face- to-face

“

I prefer Zoom—or other video calls—over phone calls, since you know who is talking and you're less likely to have people cutting each other off.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Make an extra effort to engage online

“

The big difference for virtual meetings versus in-person is that there's a lot of anxiety on both sides. Plus, there's the logistics of trying to do more to engage individuals when you're not in-person.

SCHEDULER, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Offer scheduling flexibility

“

It's tough when advocacy groups only give one day as an option to meet with the office. If we're virtual, it seems like there should be flexibility to meet with the member on another day or week.

SCHEDULER, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SOURCE National Journal research, verbatim quotes have been lightly edited for clarity.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

The Heart of Any Good Policy Story is an Individual but too many organizations prioritize the issue—or themselves

Personal Arguments Over Economic Cases

“

If you can tell a personal story, **tie it to an actual human being** who is affected by the care—instead of necessarily linking it to employment—that is an **easier way to cut through**... it gives the member a reason to go out there and become a champion.

Those stories give them the one-minutes on the floor or talking points at a press conference. The most **effective messages** are ones that **go beyond economic impact** and talk about the impact that they are having on **people's everyday lives**. I'm not discounting the economics but the human element is more memorable.

CHIEF OF STAFF, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Distinctions between Corporations and People

“

Most people in government **see corporations as *not* being people**. I think the best way to get to that is to tell a good story, with real information, real facts. Otherwise, there are a lot of people in government who don't ever get past the corporate angle; this **isn't going to hurt that person** at all, it's **just** going to be **the company**.

FEDERAL EXECUTIVE, DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Start with the End in Mind

“

There is a person at the end of the pipeline. There is a **human being** that is **interacting with your product, or service or industry**, and you start there. Not at the industry level, not at the lobbyist level. **Start at the person level**.

BRAD FITCH, CONGRESSIONAL MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION

Prepare to Go Beyond Talking Points and Anecdotes

Combination of stories, facts and details help strengthen your case



Tailor your message and provide data

“

Listing the **talking points only** goes so far in understanding your issue.

My ideal meeting structure would be an introduction, your high-level talking points, **getting to your ask**—whether asking for co-sponsorship or funding or something else—and then a **follow-up** with more detailed information. And I'd like **data and numbers**, *not just constituent stories*.

Anecdotes are helpful to illustrate an issue but I really need to see the **effect on our state** or the **connection to our office or state**. If its not immediately provided, I'll **ask for it**, and it's usually provided just 70% of the time.

I just got off a call with someone **proposing a new legislative idea**, where they gave me information on how the policy would affect the **issue** but **without any detail on the state impact**.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, SENATE



Be specific, balanced, and mindful

“

Some one-pagers or other materials are heavy on background, but for me, its better to know **how you want our office to be helpful**, and the **more specific the better**. For example, if you say, 'We want to defund ICE,' what programs would you like to see cut? How do you see that coming to pass?

We usually get **one-sided perspectives**, so I **push back** and ask what **the other argument or position would be and why**. If a group presents that up front, it create an honest conversation and can be more helpful in guiding us to a decision.

Another piece of advice is to be **sensitive to the time and the moment**. For some people who were looking to advocate for things **unrelated to pandemic relief**, it can look in **poor taste** to not acknowledge what is going on... On the flip side, people can come across as **opportunistic** by **spinning an old ask** and trying to **relate it to COVID**.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Prepping for Dialogue With a Member of Congress

DISCUSSION ELEMENT AND SAMPLE ARTICULATION



Geographic connection

Introduce your geographic connection and convey appreciation for their work.



Issue connection

Summarize the member's connection to the issue in one sentence.



Urgency

Provide a one-sentence overview of why the story is important now (i.e., an upcoming vote or current events).



Additional details

Share your story and call-to-action, offering access to more information as appropriate.



Future contact

Reference any upcoming outreach that will be taking place between your counterparts.



We appreciate Congressman Smith's efforts on behalf of families in Rochester and I'd like to share my story, because it illustrates why this issue is so critical now.



We know that Congressman Smith is a strong supporter of paid family leave, as evidenced in her recent Twitter chat.



With the vote coming up, we wanted to ensure you had stories that illustrate just how important her position on the issue is.



While I'm here to talk about my experience, there are more at www.strongfamilies.org... We hope our stories and data can assist Congressman Smith in the debate.



Our senior legislative director plans to connect with [name] to share more details about this campaign.

TIP

- Prior to meeting a member of Congress or their staff, evaluate their priorities and any current activities related to your issue. Consider how you might convey these elements in telling your story, highlighting your personal connection to their office.

Planning for a Face-to-Face Meeting on Capitol Hill

FIVE ELEMENTS FOR MEETING SUCCESS

1

Be on time



- Arrive no more than 5 minutes before the meeting; Hill offices are too small to accommodate lingering people, and members are rarely available to meet earlier.
- Inform the scheduler if you are going to be late in case another meeting time must be arranged.

2

Be flexible



- Prepare to meet with either the member or the member's staff; treat both with equal respect.
- If the member arrives in the middle of your meeting, continue as usual; the member will ask questions if needed.

3

Stay on topic



- Keep the meeting focused and persuasive.
- Raise only the issue you scheduled to discuss with the member and/or the member's staff.

4

Keep politics out of it



- Do not discuss elections or campaign support in your meeting; it intimates that the member is "for sale."
- Respect the member's political views and relationships outside of the issue at hand.

5

Leave brief materials behind



- Leave behind a 1-2 page briefing with data points on the issue discussed with the member's office.
- The document should serve as a helpful resource for staff as the issue moves through Congress.

TIP

- Advocates can leverage live meetings with members of Congress and their staff to communicate their positions and build enduring relationships with their representatives. However, meetings are brief and members are busy; advocates should keep these ideas in mind to get the most of their meetings.

What Content is Most Helpful for Capitol Hill Offices?

ONE PAGERS ON THE TOPIC

“Advocacy groups who send **one-pagers are my favorite** people. They add more color to the topic and a clearer picture of what the conversation will be about.”

– *Scheduler, House of Representatives*

PRE-READS OVER LEAVE-BEHINDS

“With in-person meetings usually you receive a leave-behind, but with virtual meetings, I like to get an **agenda and materials in advance**, so I can prep myself. I want to know who’s doing to be on the calls and I like them to be specific on how they’d like our office to help.”

– *Legislative Assistant, House of Representatives*

JUST THE FACTS

“A brief PowerPoint or outline is most helpful, 1-2 slides that say, here’s the issue, why people care and why you should care, how it is specific to our office or district, and a contact list for questions. It is so **helpful to be able to go back to that when we write legislative recommendations**. With so much happening, it’s helpful to do a **quick search for the PDF** attached to an email or calendar hold. It helps drive home to the congresswoman why this is important.”

– *Legislative Assistant, House of Representatives*

DIGITAL FORMATS

“I still get the same number of **handouts** as before but they just happen to be **digital, which I prefer**. With the physical leave-behinds I always scanned them into the computer myself, so it is much nicer to just **automatically receive the information in a PDF or other virtual format**.”

– *Legislative Assistant, Senate*

CURATED AND CONDENSED

“It’s not that we don’t want to read the 50-page white paper, we just have **very little time** to go through all that. Please put whatever is important on the front page, and **don’t have more than a page**. Not out of disrespect, but there is just no time right now when everything is one fire. I **save fact sheets and follow-up points for future reference** or when issues grow.”

– *Legislative Assistant, House of Representatives*

CONTENT OVER FORMAT

“One pagers are great, white papers are great and I get a lot of Google docs, which is fine with me too. I **don’t have a preference for a type** of document but want something to better understand what is being discussed. The **information is more important than the format**.”

– *Legislative Assistant, House of Representatives*

Additional Tips for Navigating Virtual Hill Meetings



Meeting scheduling and coordination

- When scheduling, opt for technology where participants are visible and let offices know what virtual platform you will use
- Be flexible about meeting dates and times, especially when congress is in session
- Supply offices with an agenda, participant list (denoting any constituents who will be present), and pre-reading materials
- Prep advocates for discussions with offices with background information (including bios for the member of congress) and storytelling guidance



Discussion preparation

- Designate roles for meeting participants: who will open the meeting, who will make specific asks, who will close the meeting
- Potential roles include:
 - Facilitator
 - Technical lead
 - Scribe
 - Issue presenter
 - Storyteller
 - Requester
 - Follow-up
- One person can play several roles
- Establish transition cues

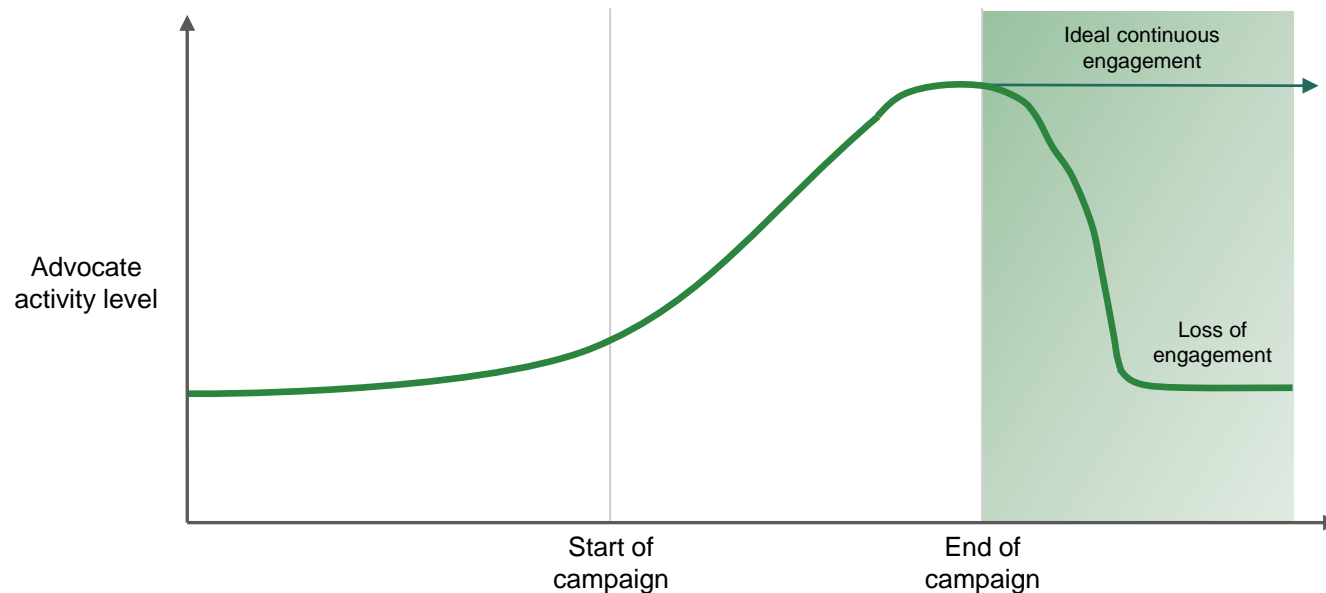


Managing and facilitating dialogue

- Follow the agenda, speaking times and roles (avoid surprises)
- Introduce participants, ensuring linkages to the member, their district or state, are evident
- Mute yourself and pause when switching speakers
- Listen actively, ask—and allow for—questions
- Make your specific ask, confirm follow-up steps and contacts
- Provide digital copies of meeting handouts (unless supplied before the meeting)

Maintaining Momentum After the Meeting

Advocacy Activity Level Over Time (Illustrative)



TIP

- At the start of an advocacy campaign, momentum typically increases steadily, but many campaigns lose advocacy momentum and drop to previous engagement levels after the campaign ends. Ideally, an organization would ensure continuous engagement with advocacy efforts.

After Meeting With a Member of Congress...

...serve as a trusted resource for lawmakers and their staff

POST-MEETING FOLLOW UP STEPS



Always send a thank you e-mail

- Thank the member and/or staffer for their time
- Add a reminder of the meeting topic for the office's reference
- Include information from a reliable source to keep the office aware of your issue



Attend events in the district

- Attend town hall meetings or other events in your district to increase visibility with your member of Congress and their staff
- Find opportunities to engage in policy matters in the district—including building relationships with district staff—to serve as trustworthy resource on your issue



Stay in touch

- Do not over-communicate with members, but do pass along new information about your issue as it is released
- Communicate with your representative—and their staff—in a respectful and informative manner to gain their respect for you and your points of view



Let us know your ask, provide information *before* we meet *and* follow up! It can be really hard to build relationships if we only hear from groups only once a year. Send an email to check in on where things stand with your ask and update us on how we can be helpful.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Roadmap

- Contextualizing fly-in advocacy
- Members of Congress and their staff
- Legislative processes
- Capitol Hill: Before, during and after
- **Navigating Capitol Hill**

Capitol Hill is a (Relatively) Small Neighborhood

GETTING TO THE HILL



By car

- Capitol Hill offers few public parking options; street parking is difficult
- The nearest garage is north of the Capitol, by Union Station
- Many visitors prefer to arrive by taxi or ridesharing service, available throughout the city
- Two of the most popular ridesharing services are Uber and Lyft - both are phone apps



By public transportation

- For most visitors, the Metro system will be the best mode of transportation
- The Red line (subway) serves the north side of the Capitol, while the Blue, Orange, and Silver lines offer two stations to the south
- The Metrobus serves various points around the Hill; visit WMATA.com for detailed maps



By foot

- DC is a relatively walkable city
- Hot and humid weather may make long walks inadvisable during the summer
- Bring an extra pair of shoes, bottle of water, and umbrella to walk around comfortably

House and Senate Buildings Sit on Opposite Sides of the Capitol Building

MAP OF HOUSE AND SENATE OFFICE BUILDINGS



SOURCE National Journal research, Architect of the Capitol.

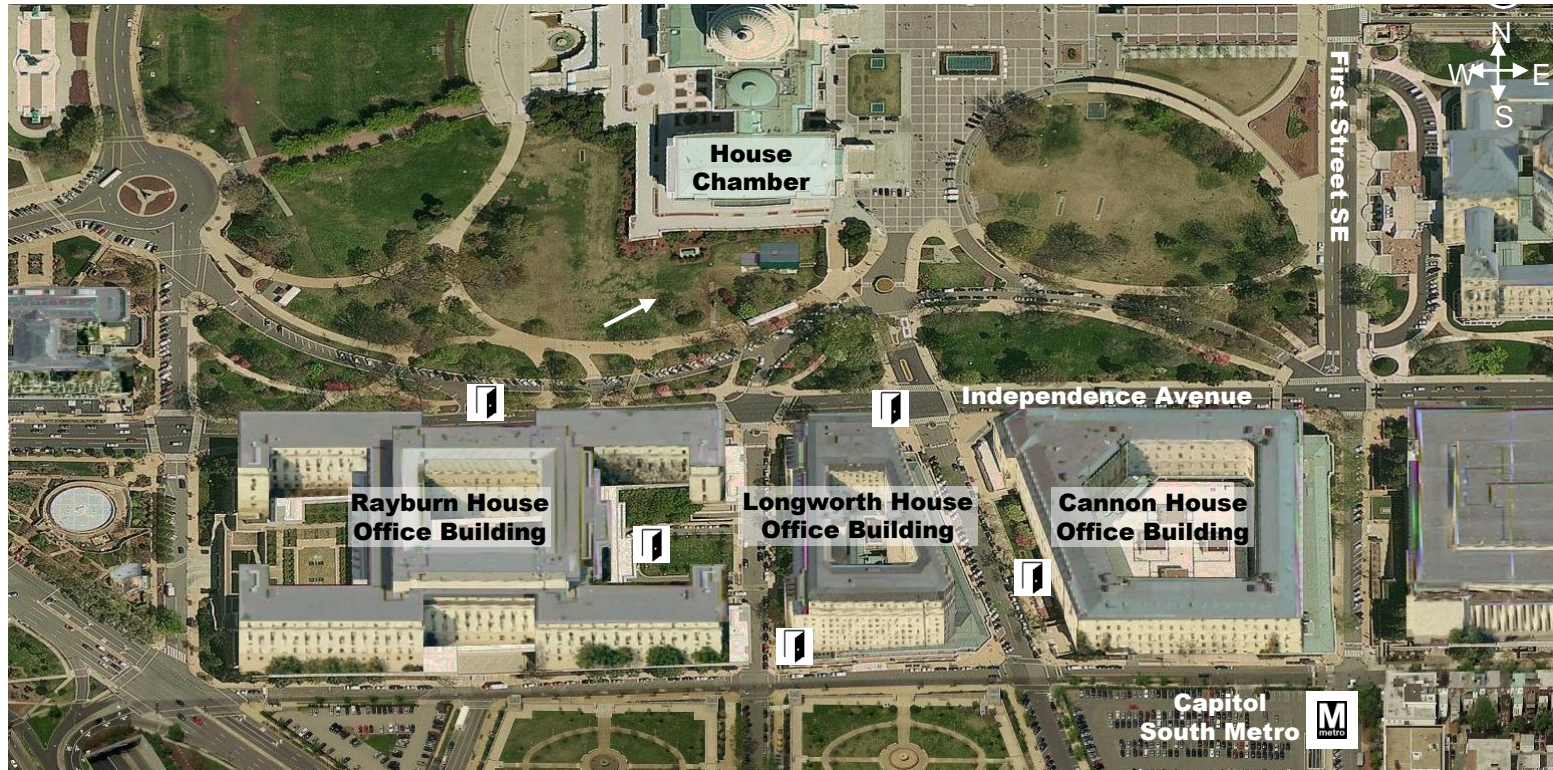
Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

Key Hill Addresses are Simple and Formulaic

CAPITOL HILL ADDRESSES

House side	Other	Senate side
Rayburn House Office Building 50 Independence Ave SW, Washington, DC 20515	Library of Congress 101 Independence Ave SE, Washington, DC 20540	Russell Senate Office Building 2 Constitution Ave NE, Washington, DC 20002
Longworth House Office Building 15 Independence Ave SW, Washington, DC 20515	Supreme Court 1 First Street NE, Washington, DC 20543	Dirksen Senate Office Building 100 Constitution Ave NE, Washington, DC 20002
Cannon House Office Building 25 Independence Ave SE, Washington, DC 20003	Capitol Visitors Center First & East Capitol St SE, Washington, DC 20004	Hart Senate Office Building 150 Constitution Ave NE, Washington, DC 20510
Capitol South Metro Station 307 First Street SE, Washington, DC 20003	Federal Center Metro Station 401 Third Street SW, Washington, DC 20024	Union Station Metro Station 701 First Street NE, Washington, DC 20002

The Geography of the House Side

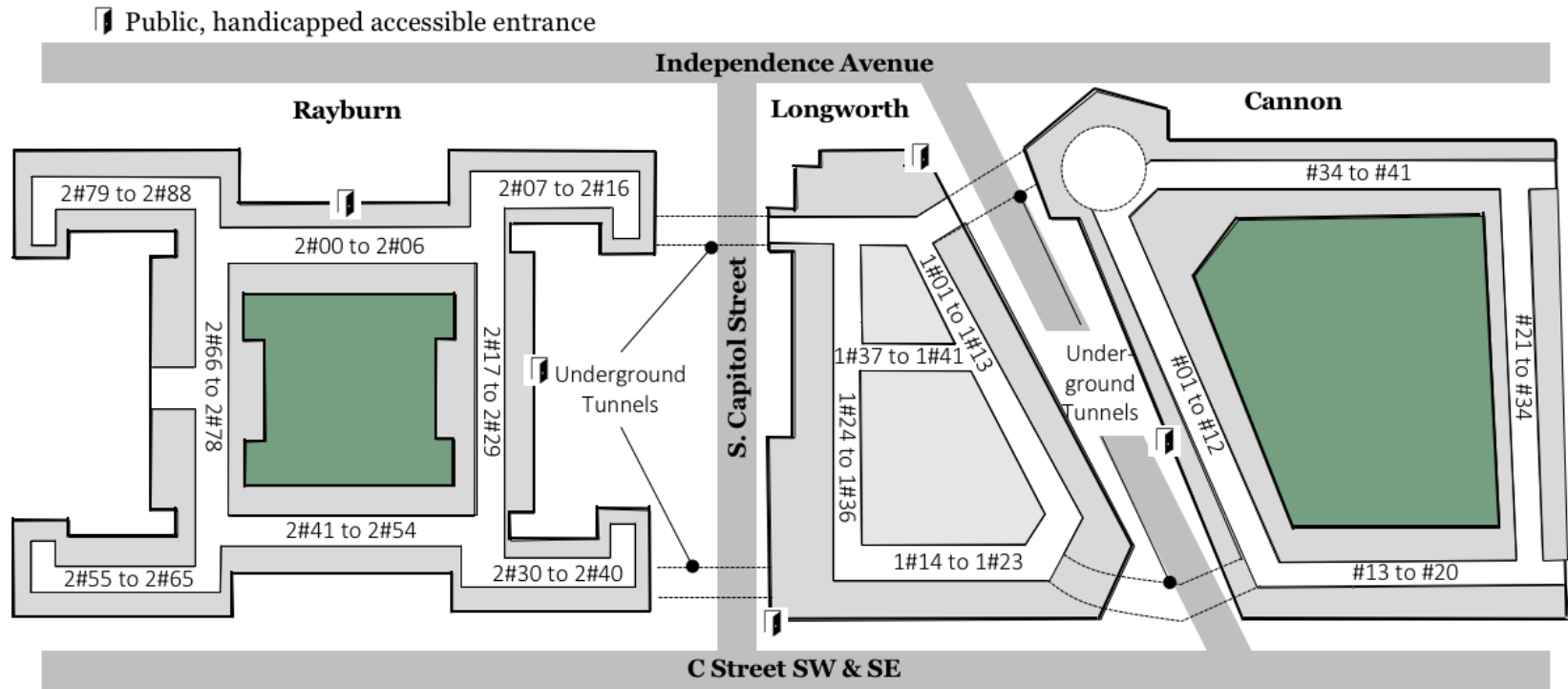


Building	Rayburn (RHOB)	Longworth (LHOB)	Cannon (CHOB)
Numbering system	First digit is always "2" Second digit indicates floor	First digit is always "1" Second digit indicates floor	All rooms are three digits; the first digit indicates floor
Example	Rep. Cohen's office, 2104 RHOB, is on the first floor of Rayburn	Rep. Pelosi's office, 1236 LHOB, is on the second floor of Longworth	Rep. Clyburn's office, 274 CHOB, is on the second floor of Cannon

SOURCE National Journal research, Architect of the Capitol.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

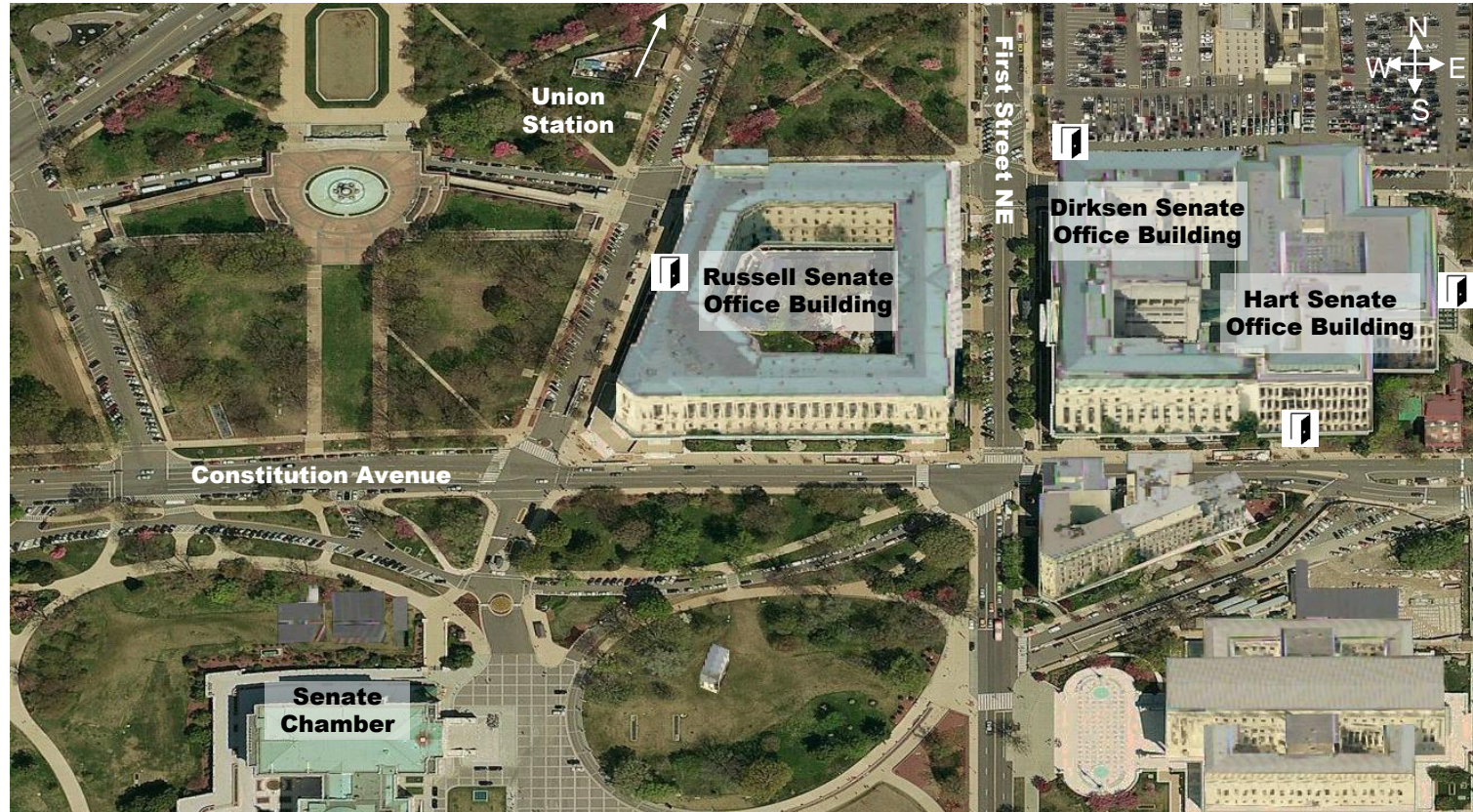
Location and Floor Plan of the House Office Buildings



SOURCE National Journal research, Architect of the Capitol.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

The geography of the Senate side




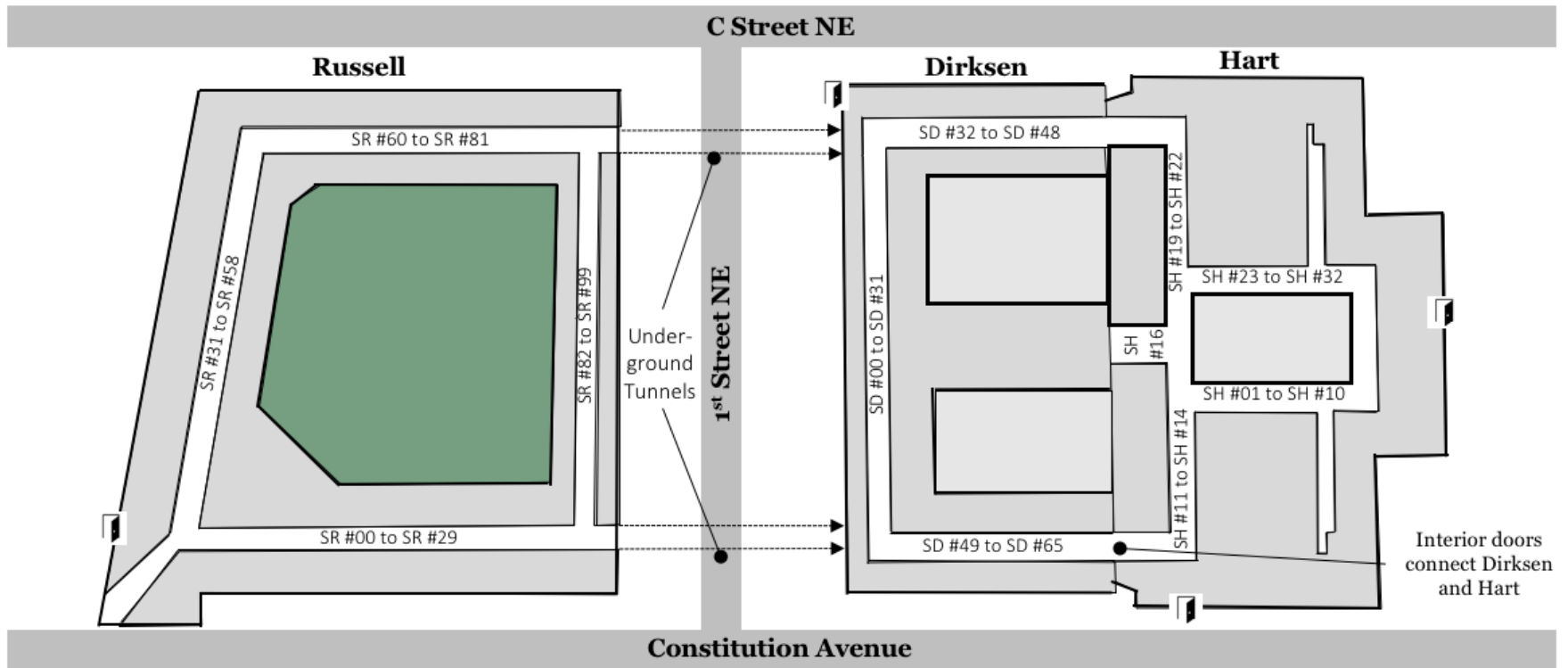
Building	Russell (SR)	Dirksen (SD)	Hart (SH)
Numbering system	All rooms are three digits, the first digit indicating floor number and a prefix indicating office building		
Example	Sen. Chuck Schumer's office, SH 322, is located on the third floor of the Hart building		

SOURCE National Journal research, Architect of the Capitol.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

Location and Floor Plan of the Senate Office Building

 Public, handicapped accessible entrance



SOURCE National Journal research, Architect of the Capitol.

Slide Updated by Michael Tinsley on 2/27/23

Federal Informational Series

Advocacy 101

An informational guide for fly-in and virtual advocacy measures when interacting with government officials

February 27, 2023

Michael Tinsley

Past President, Policy Chair, President-elect