

Capitol Day Tips

WHY: Legislators Depend on Input from Constituents

- ★ Your opinion matters! This is your representative government and the process is improved by your involvement.
- ★ No need to be intimidated. You can be impressed by the building, the history, and the institution - but you do not need to be intimidated by speaking to your elected official.

WHERE: Capitol Logistics

- ★ Enter the Capitol Building at the East, West, or South side. You will be required to pass through a metal detector. Any bags or briefcases will be x-rayed.
- ★ The “rotunda” where the House and Senate Chambers are located is on the 2nd Floor. Be aware that the counting system is basement (cafeteria area where you enter the building), 1st Floor (Governor’s office, IANEPCA Capitol Day exhibit area), and 2nd Floor. On the 3rd Floor is the “galleries” where you can watch House and Senate debate.
- ★ The House chambers are located on the North Side of the rotunda; the Senate chambers is on the South Side; and the State Law Library (where there are Internet-connected computers available to the public) is located on the West end.
- ★ Elevators are available and are new and accessible to people of all abilities.

HOW: The Doorkeeper System

- ★ DO NOT try to walk into the chambers to locate your legislator. The public is only allowed in the chambers when escorted by a legislator. There is a doorkeeper system that requires you to fill out a “slip” and send it in to your legislator.
- ★ The slip is yellow for the House; pink for the Senate. They are located at tables directly in front of the chamber entrance.
- ★ The slip requires you to fill in your name, the name of the legislator you wish to contact, and their SEAT NUMBER (not to be confused with their district number). Legislators are listed alphabetically on a sheet of paper located on the wall above the table – this lists legislator seat numbers.
- ★ Circle the option called “waiting to see you.” It is also good to write on the note where you are from (Jane Doe of Belmont, Iowa). This way legislators know you have come a long way to see them.
- ★ Hand the slip to the doorkeeper and wait for a response. Sometimes it may take your legislator 10-15 minutes to come out (they may be finishing up a call or conversation before coming out to speak to you).
- ★ If your legislator is not available or not in their seat, a page or doorkeeper will come back out and call your name. You may need to listen closely as the rotunda can get loud.
- ★ If your note does not come back out – it means your legislator was there and received it.
- ★ Sometimes a staff person will come out to speak to you if the legislator is occupied. Be polite and treat this staff person as you would the legislator – a lot of times the staff person is a friend, relative, daughter/son, or spouse of the legislator.
- ★ Be prepared because the Capitol can be noisy and crowded, and you may feel jostled if the crowd that day is particularly large.

TIPS IF YOU CONNECT WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR:

- ★ Be brief – legislators have very little time during session. Use an “elevator speech” – what you would say if you only had the time to talk while riding in an elevator with them.
- ★ Use your legislator’s titles – Senator or Representative.
- ★ Clearly identify yourself, your health center, and the group (IANEPCA) you are with at the Capitol that day.
- ★ Pick one or two priorities to discuss. Too many issues will overwhelm them.
- ★ Be courteous.
- ★ Ask them what they might do to help you with your priority issue (Is there something you might be able to do to help us with this? Is this something you could support?)
- ★ Thank them for their support, or for their consideration if they are not ready to commit to a position.
- ★ Don’t burn bridges! You may not agree with your legislator on this issue, but they might be there for you on the next one.
- ★ A short note or email from you to follow-up on your conversation is an excellent way to become a resource for future communication – and it is a great reminder of your visit.

TIPS IF YOU DO NOT CONNECT WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR:

- ★ If your slip comes back out and your legislator is not available, take the time to write a short “sorry I missed you” note that states very briefly the issue you wanted to talk to them about.
 - “I was here today with the Iowa Nebraska Primary Care Association representing People’s Community Health Center in Waterloo, where I am a physician assistant.”
 - You might also consider adding “I will be here until 2 p.m. should you want to call me on my cell phone 555-5555” or “I will e-mail you more about the issues I came to discuss.”
- ★ It is okay to continue writing on the back of the note if you run out of room.
- ★ Circle the option “Has Left the Following Message” and send back the note.
- ★ Be sure to mark the time of day & date that you left the note.

A WORD ABOUT THE DAILY SCHEDULE AT THE CAPITOL

- ★ Schedule changes and conflicts are inevitable and unavoidable. Each legislator can feel as if they are required to be at least three places at once at all times. You can only be flexible and work with the options that are available to you.
- ★ Future visit tip – always email or leave a phone message with your legislators letting them know when you are coming to town, and the times you will be at the Capitol. That way your legislator can plan to be around or let you know what time works best for them.
- ★ Legislators have no offices – only desks on the floor – so it is difficult to know where they will be at any given time during the day.