

# Some Tips on Meeting With Legislators

(Adapted from Alliance for Clean Texas Guidelines)

Lobbying an elected official is a distinctly personal activity. While there is no universal "right" way to do it, here are some important guidelines.

## DO'S

- Dress neatly. "Business casual" is appropriate for most meetings.
- Make sure everyone introduces himself or herself - you are building a relationship with your legislator and his/her staff. Especially if there are two or more on a visit, consider having a sheet of paper containing the names, affiliations, and contact information for each person on the visit. At the top put the date, time, place and purpose of your meeting. This can be put in the office file.
- Keep initial visits short, arrange follow-up meetings later with more details. However, visits at the local level may be longer, especially if you are meeting with a legislator's staff. A meeting with the legislator may be 15 minutes (especially in Austin) up to about 30 minutes. A meetings with staff is usually at least 30 minutes and greater.
- Do try and make a good first impression, it will go a long way. SMILE.
- Have your own agenda and points to make, but be flexible. If more than one person is making the visit, decide ahead of time what points each person will make. Leave time to answer questions.
- Bring written materials that convey background or key facts, and refer to specific legislation.
- Tell stories that illustrate your points, keep them short!
- Ask for actions the Legislator can do. Ideally, get specific commitments before you leave the meeting. However, the commitment may be of a general nature.
- Thank them and let them know you look forward to working with them on these issues. Be sure to ask what kind of additional information would be helpful and then be sure the legislator/staff receives it.
- Look for friends in unusual places. In politics, a friend is someone who works with you on a particular issue-whether Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative-even if that person or group opposes you on every issue.

## DON'TS

- Don't discount the importance of staff. Be sure to build a relationship with staff. If you hand out business cards or a list of people making the visit, make sure the staffers receive copies. Legislators rely upon their judgment to gather and consolidate information used to develop positions on issues.
- Don't deliver *too many* messages.
- Don't try to be an expert if you're not.
- Don't try and answer a question that you don't know. Tell them you will get back to them as soon as possible.
- Don't lie or mislead a legislator about the importance of an issue, the opposition's position or strength, or any other matter.
- Don't promise anything you cannot deliver.
- Don't forget to notice and thank anyone who has helped you. The "good old boy/good old girl" system is alive and well everywhere.
- Don't gossip.
- Don't waste time on opponents who are publicly committed to their positions. It is more productive to shore up known allies and to lobby legislators who are least committed, or who claim to be neutral or keeping an open mind.
- Don't cut anyone off from contact. Do not let a legislator consider you a bitter enemy because you disagree; today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally.