

Chief of Staff (CoS) or Administrative Assistant (AA)

One of the few staff who reports directly to the member, the CoS is often the senior political advisor to the Congressman, and may be the office manager as well (this may be the person to talk to if you are looking for a job in their office). Unless you are a campaign donor, friend, or otherwise well-connected (or a job seeker), you will not likely meet with the CoS on grassroots legislative matters.

Scheduler/Appointment Secretary/Personal Secretary

Handles all aspects of the member's schedule, who he will and won't see, constituent visits, speaking engagements, etc. If you are visiting Washington, talk to the scheduler to see if you can arrange a meeting with the Congressman.

Press Secretary

Handles all media activities, sets up news conferences, writes news releases, works to get the Congressman on TV and radio shows, cultivates a friendship with the media, answers media questions, preps the Congressman to give the right answers, etc.

Legislative Director (LD)

The LD is the senior Legislative Assistant, and oversees the LAs and their assignments and takes a senior role in advising and writing legislation.

Legislative Assistant (LA)

Each office has a few "LAs," each specializing in different issues. They write legislation; work with the committees, the White House, federal agencies, lobbyists and special interests (both good and bad) who have written legislation for them; and advise their member or the LD on pending legislation. They report to the LD.

IMPORTANT: The "LA" who handles the issue you are concerned with is the person you should talk to, not the receptionist. Call the office and ask: "Who is the LA that handles [your issue]?" then talk to that person and request that they discuss the issue and your views with the Congressman. Have something of interest (facts, debate points, news, ideas) to tell the LA, not just "tell the Congressman to vote no." Follow up with a brief letter or fax—be sure to ask for their email address. If possible, schedule a visit. The LA can also tell you if the member is planning to vote for or against a particular bill—or if he is undecided. Those who are undecided are those you will want to give the most lobbying attention.

Committee and Subcommittee Staff

Each committee and subcommittee has its own legislative staff, with greater involvement in drafting legislation and holding hearings than a member's own staff. They are valuable to talk with or meet to discuss legislation, but not for the purpose of asking a member to vote for or against a bill.

Receptionist

When you call and just ask that the Congressman support or oppose a bill, the receptionist will usually be the one who assists you. But the receptionist will simply add your opinion to a list showing that X number of people called in favor and X against an issue. For greater influence, talk to the LA handling your issue as described above.

District Staff

Members have one or more offices in their district or state, staffed by a few people. These staff are often easy to work with to arrange staff-level meetings (and you won't have to travel far!). Be sure to ask them to have the member write you a reply as a confirmation that the staff reported the meeting to the member. District offices receive fewer phone calls, so targeting such offices for calls will make a greater impression (positively or negatively) than calls to their U.S. Capitol office.

Caseworker

Works with constituents to solve problems with federal (not state/local) agencies, such as Social Security, Medicare, etc. The caseworker usually works at the Congressman's district office. Sometimes a call or letter from a Congressman's office can help bring about action where your efforts have failed.

Legislative Correspondent (LC)

Answers constituent letters, faxes and emails. The LC will usually prepare for the Congressman a periodic summary of how many letters, faxes and emails received are for and against each issue. Most offices do not reply to out-of-state/district mail and email, unless you are writing as a representative of an organization or company, or if you are a donor or other supporter. Always ask for a reply if you want one, and expect that most replies will be form letters.

"Personnel is policy." You may find that many staff have different political views than their Congressman or Senator, thus a good conservative representative can be somewhat neutralized in his effectiveness on issues by staff not loyal to his philosophy. Congressional briefings for new members encourage members to accept "diversity" by not selecting staff loyal to their philosophy. Lobbyists and advocates for big government also seek to befriend representatives and their top staff to convince them to adopt their positions. That makes YOUR job as a citizen lobbyist all the more important to help representatives make the best decisions.