

Quick Guide to Researching Your Members of Congress

When meeting with U.S. Senators and Representatives, the chances of a successful outcome increase when you have a good sense of the person you are trying to persuade. It will help you develop your approach, and possibly help you avoid pitfalls.

Step 1: Start with the Basics

Visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov to find out the names of your Members of Congress and get links to their websites. The websites generally contain biographical information, office locations, a news section, a section on issues and information about the person's committee assignments.

Key questions to consider: What is the person's background? What issues does he or she highlight? Do you or anyone you know share any connections with the person? What types of things has he or she been active in lately?

Step 2: Find Out the Legislative Priorities

Check out the Library of Congress' www.congress.gov for legislation that a Senator or Representative has sponsored or cosponsored. It shows the subject areas that those bills fall into, the status of that legislation and other details. The Center for Responsive Politics' website – www.opensecrets.org – is primarily focused on money in politics, however, each Senator and Representative's profile also contains a "legislation" section that shows how the numbers of bills sponsored or cosponsored compares to the averages amongst his or her colleagues.

Key questions to consider: How often does he or she sponsor/cosponsor legislation? What kind of legislation does the person champion or actively support? Has that legislation gone anywhere?

Step 3: Research the Voting Record

Labor Votes – The AFL-CIO maintains a searchable database of Congressional voting records on many issues that are a priority to organized labor at <http://www.aflcio.org/Legislation-and-Politics/Legislative-Voting-Records>. Occasionally some of the legislation that the USW tackles does not appear in the chart. Please call Rapid Response for more information on these issues.

General Votes – For broader voting record information, visit www.votesmart.org.

Key questions to consider: Does the person have a strong labor voting record? Do they vote for or against issues like what I am discussing?

Step 4: Find Out the Contributors

Find out who is contributing to the Senator or Representative by doing a search on www.opensecrets.org. This site provides a quick and easy way to find out the top industries, political action committees (PACs) and donors filling the campaign coffers.

Key questions to consider: Who are the biggest donors? Are the donors generally supportive of the issue I'm pushing or opposed?

Step 5: Search the News & Social Media

Doing a Google News search for the Senator or Representative's name – www.news.google.com – can help show what types of coverage the person is receiving lately and provide potential areas to connect. You can also check major state papers (mostly for the Senate) or local papers (for Senators and Representatives). Other Washington, D.C.-based publications like *Roll Call*, *Politico* and *The Hill* offer an "inside the beltway" look at the types of coverage a Senator or Representative are receiving. Find the lawmaker's facebook page and Twitter account to see the types of things that are being posted (you don't need an account to view the posts).

Key questions to consider: What are the stories and posts about? Do they have an impact on the information I'm discussing?