

What To Do When Your Congressman Turns You Down

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The August Recess (August 1 – September 7) is a great time to meet with your member of Congress or congressional staffers to discuss the audit and competitive bidding issues that are challenging your business and your patient access to medical equipment.

If you reach out to your congressional member's district office staff and find that a private meeting or tour of your facility will not fit the schedule, there are still ways to see your congressman or senator while he is in town. Attending a campaign fundraiser or a town hall-style public event (or a meet-and-greet event) will get you the opportunity to briefly meet face-to-face and discuss the issues.

Here's a list of tips for making this happen.

1. Finding Event Information - Because of campaign finance rules, congressional campaign events and legislative events for constituents must remain separate. This means you will seek out information about these events from two different sources.

Campaign Events – Go to your member's campaign website to look for events or for a phone number call the local campaign office. To find the site, search for his name online and the word campaign. "Bruce Braley Campaign," for example. You'll be required to give a contribution at the event, but doing so will be worth the opportunity to be involved and meet face-to-face even if for a moment.

Legislative Events – Call the district office to learn more about meet-and-greet opportunities. You can find the office located closest to you on the official legislative website, which is different than the campaign site. You'll know this site because the web address will look official and be followed by .gov.

2. What to Expect – All events will ask you to sign in. They will usually allow time for meet-and-greet and then the member of Congress will give a speech about current policy issues or a motivational campaign talk. Make sure to make your way to the Congress member early. If you sit back and wait, you may miss the opportunity.

3. Connect with Staff at the Event – The member of Congress will always have staff nearby to help the event run smoothly. The person who is the "right hand" of the congressman will be quite visible. Go up to that person and ask him for a moment to speak with the congressman. Mention "issues related to Medicare" and also that you would like to get a photo with the congressman. The earlier you do this, the more likely it is you will get the face-to-face time you want. Also, ask the staffer for the name and email address of the person to follow up with in the Washington, D.C. office and one name and email address of a local staffer. Ask specifically for those who work with health or Medicare issues. In the future you can send important email messages directly to those staffers.

4. Check Your Ideology at the Door – It's important to meet with members of Congress whether or not you agree with their policy positions. Particularly during campaign events when the Congressman is speaking to his partisan base, it might be difficult to listen to if you don't agree with the points being

made. Remember you are here for one reason today. Stay focused and stick to your issue. Don't be sidetracked by the show.

5. It's Your Turn to Talk Now – Your tone and “elevator speech” will be key to getting your point across. When you get the opportunity to talk, be friendly and factual. Don't be confrontational. Give scenarios about how your business and customers are being impacted by CMS policy. They should now know what competitive bidding and audits are, so you should be able to move into your everyday concerns without starting from square one. Tell a true, local and factual story to make the situation more real.

6. Follow-Up – Email a thank you that includes our [one-pager of policy solutions](#). Again, if you attended a fundraiser, don't mention the fundraiser in the email. Just mentioned the date you met and offer thanks and more information. Here is an example.

Dear Sara,

I met Representative Braley this weekend and had a moment to speak about the Medicare competitive bidding program and audits that are wreaking havoc on home medical equipment suppliers and the patients we serve. I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk to him and wanted to send this additional information about policy solutions we are proposing. Please see attached. Thank you for your time and feel free to contact me for more information.

Sincerely,

Tom Powers

Have you met with your congressman? What were the challenges? What went well? I want to know more about your experiences. Tell me about them by emailing me at tom.powers@vgm.com.