

## SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS GUIDE

### CHARGING THE HILL—A GUIDE TO SURVIVAL

Provided by John Brimsek

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Congress enacts laws and the Executive Branch issues rules and regulations which impact every facet of our lives. It is essential that citizens and the organizations they belong to express their views, interests and concerns.

#### HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SAA is regularly in contact with and has excellent relationships with key players on Capitol Hill and Executive Departments and Agencies.

The direct engagement of thousands of SAA members with their Senators, Representatives and regional or local Federal department and agency offices will expand that reach dramatically. Legislators are **VERY** interested in hearing directly from their constituents.

There are a variety of ways you can become engaged including sending messages to your legislators, meeting with them when they are back in the state, and meeting with them in Washington. The objective is the same: provide a very concise summary of the issues and let him or her know precisely what action you request be taken.

SAA can provide all the help you need such as talking points and more detailed briefing papers.

1) SAA has a convenient [Congressional Action](#) link which enables you to contact your Senators and Representatives with suggested messages along with draft Letters to the Editor for your local media or you can simply write your own and transmit it via the link. Offices keep tallies of how many constituents have weighed in on each side of an issue and the legislators look at them. It is like an informal poll providing information on how many constituents care enough about an issue to call or write as well as how many are on each side. If members of interest groups do not weigh in through visits, calls and messages, the assumption is that they are not particularly concerned about the issue.

With all of the issues confronting archaeology, It is more important than ever for SAA members to engage now; during next year's 83rd Annual Meeting in Washington, DC and thereafter.

2) Between now and next year's SAA Annual Meeting in Washington, you can request a meeting with your Senators and Representative and/or their staff in their local offices. The website <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials/> will help you find their contact information.

Members spend a lot of time in the state during Congressional recesses and on weekends. Ask if it is possible to arrange a meeting when the legislator will be there. The local staff will prepare a memo for the Washington staffer who handles the issue. Members' Washington staffers visit the local office from time to time as well and there is a chance the staffer handling our issues will attend the meeting. You can also request a meeting with a regional Department of the Interior and/or National Park Service office.

Offer a tour if there is something interesting to show them.

Whether you meet in their offices or take them on a tour, be sure to take photos with them which can be included in both their and SAA's newsletters. Please send them to SAA's Manager, Communications Amy Rutledge ([amy\\_rutledge@saa.org](mailto:amy_rutledge@saa.org)), indicating who is who in the photo.

If you are unable to schedule a meeting in their local office, consider attending one of their town hall meetings.

3) Meet with your Senators and Representative when you are in Washington, D.C. As above, you can find their contact information at <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials/>.

Every Senator and Representative's official website provides both the Washington phone number and a form to request a meeting. Indicate that you are a constituent and that you would like to speak about issues impacting archaeology. The spring is EXTREMELY busy on Capitol Hill with lots of individuals and groups visiting. You should submit your request four weeks in advance, if possible. Provide times that would work best for you but be as flexible as possible. If you haven't heard back, check with the scheduler two weeks before you arrive and thereafter if need be. You sometimes need to be persistent without appearing to be pushy they are used to it.

Allow plenty of time to get through airport-like security at the Senate and House office buildings. A lot of organizations have their annual fly-ins during the spring. School holidays and the summer are always crowded. Surprisingly, many tourists who arrive here by airplane and, hence have gone through airport security act as though they've never seen a scanner or metal detector and slow things up going through security to enter Congressional buildings thereby delaying your progress.

Once you are in the buildings, there are cafeterias to grab a cup of coffee or a bite to eat. It is better to enjoy a coffee inside than to be in a long line outside worrying about making it to the meeting on time. You are likely to run into some of your colleagues. Once you are inside, it is possible to walk among the three Senate office buildings via tunnels without going through security again. The same is true for the three House office buildings. However, if you cross the Capitol complex from the Senate to the House side and vice versa, you will have to go through security again. While it would be convenient to have both Senate meetings and then the House meeting or vice versa, legislators' schedules often mean you will be going back and forth meaning added delays. If you have multiple meetings, leave at least 30 minutes between meetings on the same side of the campus (House or Senate) and one hour if you need to cross campus.

### **Preparing for and attending the meeting**

Try to arrive at the Member's office a few minutes early and remember that the receptionist is likely a recent college graduate who may be handling our issues within a few years and may be interested in hearing about them. Conversation with any staffer is time well spent. Congressional staffers are spread very thin and cover a lot of issues. Be aware that the Member and/or his or her staffer may be meeting on issues as wide apart as child nutrition before you and foreign affairs after you and need to shift gears quickly. Because of their full schedules, meetings usually last around 15 minutes or perhaps a little longer so it is important to make your points succinctly to allow time for questions and discussion. If you are scheduled to meet with the legislator, he or she may arrive late or be called away for a vote or

other meeting. The staffer attending the meeting may start the meeting or continue to meet with you after the legislator leaves. If the meeting starts before the legislator arrives, the staffer will likely ask you to begin. Proceed as planned. You can then do a brief recap for the legislator when he or she arrives. Try to take notes of key points made by and questions from the legislator or staff.

SAA will provide you with talking points and whitepapers. Realistically, staff will file the whitepapers away until the issue becomes front and center so the talking points will be the focus of the meeting. If you have previously written to or emailed the Member, bring a copy to add to the file. Similarly, if you have written to the President or Secretary of the Interior, etc. bring a copy of those letters for their files.

After brief introductions, move promptly into your presentation. Try to talk from the talking points rather than just reading them. It is fine to glance at them but eye contact is very helpful. If there are several of you, the constituent should take the lead. In some instances there may be an “ask.”

### **Making an effective “ask”**

This is somewhat like a letter where you put what you are asking for in the first paragraph. SAA may be supporting or opposing specific legislation or we may just want to introduce ourselves as a resource and provide the legislator and staff with background information on archaeology and its interests and concerns.

In the case of a specific ask:

Something like, “The Society for American Archaeology supports and asks that you cosponsor and vote for [SAA’s talking points will identify the bill].” Then proceed to continue from the talking points. At the conclusion ask if he/she would agree to the request. More often than not, they will say they need time to review the information but it is always worth asking.

In the case of no specific ask:

“We would like to provide a brief overview of the Society for American Archaeology’s interests and concerns.” Then proceed from the talking points and ask legislator to keep the issues you have discussed in mind should they come up in legislation.

In both cases, while following the talking points, be sure to mention the impact legislation may have on the legislator’s area and/or projects or sites located there, e.g. “passage of this legislation would cripple the work we are doing at X site.” Invite them to pay a visit when they are back home. Be sure to ask if they have questions or concerns and if they would like additional information. Leave behind both your and SAA Manager, Government Affairs David Lindsay’s business card.

The Halls of Congress are not like in the movies. The offices are cramped with little meeting space. If you do not meet with a Member, you may wind up meeting with staff in the hallway or cafeteria on a very busy day. It is not an insult and you will likely see lots of similar meetings up and down the hallway. A word of advice: wear comfortable shoes. Marble hallways may look nice but can be killers when you are standing around.

Take some time before you arrive on the Hill to mentally create an “elevator speech.” If you wind up sharing an elevator or a walk down the hallway with a legislator (it happens) even if he/she is not one of

your legislators, you will have a unique 30 second opportunity to introduce yourself and give the essence of SAA's argument. They are a captive audience for a brief moment in time.

SAA will provide you with a list of Members of the Congressional Historic Preservation Caucus. If the Member you are visiting is a member of the caucus, thank him or her. If not, ask them to join. Caucus members are naturally more inclined to support legislation endorsed by a caucus they belong to.

As with meetings in the local office, ask to take a photo. In many cases, a staffer will also take a photo for possible use in the Member's newsletter or on their website. Again, please send them to SAA's Manager, Communications Amy Rutledge, indicating who is who in the photo.

## **CONGRESSIONAL STAFF DESCRIPTIONS**

In the scheme of things, Congressional staffs are not very large. Senators have about 44 staffers divided among the Washington office and several offices in the State. House Members have about 18 divided between the Washington office and the district office or offices. As a result, staffers are spread thin and each is responsible for a number of unrelated issue areas. Not surprisingly, staffers tend to be young because theirs' is a very demanding 24/7 job which does not pay a lot.

There is also a lot of staff turnover as many will go on to graduate school, move to other offices or other jobs in Washington or move back to their home states. Many legislators have served as staffers themselves. The staffers are invariably very smart and energetic and each position from Intern on up is a training and proving ground for moving up.

A junior staffer you may interact with while awaiting your meeting could well be the lead on SAA's issues within a few years.

The general staff structure is:

**Chief of Staff**—The senior staffer charged with overseeing the office, hiring staff, etc. While they generally do not handle issue areas, they will occasionally take meetings or sit in on them to understand the issues.

**Press Secretary**—As the name suggests, Press Secretaries prepare press releases and statements and interact with the media. In some cases, they may also handle issues.

**Legislative Director (LD)**—The chief policy staffer who will cover some issues and is primarily responsible for managing the Legislative Assistants and Legislative Correspondents.

**Legislative Assistant (LA)**—The LAs have a number of issue areas they are responsible for as well as meeting with constituents, conducting research, briefing the Member, drafting speeches, etc.

**Legislative Correspondent (LC)**—The LCs are the most junior policy staffers who assist the LAs they are assigned to with the goal of advancing to LA when an opening presents itself. As the title implies, they are also responsible for responding to the huge volume of messages from constituents.

**Caseworkers**—They generally work in the state office and help constituents with Social Security, etc. issues. They develop a lot of expertise and are often older and sometimes are asked to stay when the

office changes hands because of that expertise. They will sometimes follow legislative issues and may participate in meetings.

Receptionist—As with the other staffers, Receptionists are usually very bright recent college graduates on the first rung of the public policy ladder. Unless they are swamped, they are usually interested in talking with you.

Intern—Offices have college interns year-round. In most cases, they definitely hope to work on the Hill after graduation.

Some offices, particularly in the Senate, may also have staff with the titles of Counsel, Senior Assistant, Special Assistant, etc. They generally are more seasoned and/or already have advanced degrees.

### **Follow up**

Follow up on your meeting with a message thanking the Member and briefly restating the issues and your “ask,” e.g. to cosponsor or at least vote for a measure. If you did not meet with the Member, address it to him or her anyway (cc the staffer) saying, “I appreciated the opportunity to meet with [staffer’s name] to discuss issues of concern to the Society for American Archaeology. I look forward to working with your office on these important matters.” Reiterate the points made during the meeting. Avoid using snail mail. Following 9/11, snail mail has been diverted for screening which can add a lot of time to the process. Sending a PDF attachment is faster. Before you leave the office, ask for a general email address to send things to and also send it directly to the staffer who should have given you his/her card. If not, they are usually available at the reception desk.

Send SAA’s Manager, Government Affairs David Lindsay ([david\\_lindsay@saa.org](mailto:david_lindsay@saa.org)) a brief recap of the meetings and anything SAA needs to do, e.g. respond to a request for information.

Maintain the relationship. Send the staffer an email from time to time with new information and/or ask if they need or would like any additional information. A complete file will be helpful to the staffer and, should he or she move on, to his or her successor.

### **THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

The legislative process is rarely quick and usually provides a number of opportunities to influence the outcome. Thousands of bills are introduced in each Congress but relatively few become law. While there are exceptions, for our purposes a bill can be introduced in either the House or Senate or in both.

If SAA develops legislation or supports or opposes legislation, you can assist by asking your legislators to take the lead; become an original cosponsor when the bill is introduced; or cosponsor the bill after introduction. Legislative cosponsors SHOULD feel an obligation to vote for their bill! SAA will also work to generate support.

Following introduction, the bill is referred to the committee (and later the subcommittee) with jurisdiction over the subject matter. There may or may not be a hearing. If there is, SAA may ask some of its members to testify. A bill may be amended in subcommittee and then full committee providing opportunities to fine tune it and fix problems.

If the bill is voted out of committee it may or may not be open to amendments on the floor. The further along in the process the bill is, the harder it is to amend. If the bill passes the House or Senate, it is sent to the other body. If a similar bill has not already been introduced there, it will begin a similar process there. In the Senate it is possible to filibuster a bill which then requires 60 (out of 100) votes to pass. Sometimes a bill will be added to another. In that case, it is difficult to stop it. During crunch time near the end of the year, bills may move quickly and sometimes in the dead of night.

If both the Senate and House pass legislation on an issue and if the bills are not identical, it is sent to a conference committee made up of Members from both bodies. If they are able to reach agreement, the compromise bill must be re-passed by both bodies in its final form before being sent to the President.

If the President vetoes a bill, 2/3 of both the Senate and House must vote to override the veto—an infrequent occurrence.

We guarantee that you will find the experience interesting, informative, and perhaps even fun!