

Headlines from the Hill

Ready...Set...Go! My representatives are back home.... What can I do?

By Rachel Conant and Carlos Jackson

ALTHOUGH THE 2008 ELECTIONS may seem far away, members of Congress are anxious to meet with their constituents when they are back in their districts during Congress' annual summer break in August. For nurses, meeting with your elected officials either at a town hall meeting or in their local office is a great way for nursing's message to be heard.

Even though a number of nurses descend on Capitol Hill during the year to lobby on ANA's key issues and write to their member of Congress when ANA deploys its N-STAT action alerts, it is essential for nurses to attend in-district meetings while their representatives and senators are home. Nurses are on the front lines everyday, have real-life experiences to share, and are best able to put a local, personal perspective on how their legislators' potential policy decisions will affect their jobs on a day-to-day basis. They need to hear from you.

Scheduling meetings with congressional representatives in your home district is easy and, as stated, the best way to make an impact on nursing issues.

Here are some steps to ensure an effective meeting:

- Send a letter or e-mail today requesting a meeting in the district. Most members of Congress can be reached in their district office over congressional recess and many are available on Fridays when Congress is in session. Additionally, many post their recess office hours and the times of town hall meetings on their website.
- Promptly follow up letters or e-mails with a telephone call to the member's district office. Ask to speak with the member's scheduler who handles district office appointments. You may be referred to the member's Washington, DC office. If this is the case, you can contact the Capitol Hill switchboard at (202) 224-3121. They will transfer you to any House or Senate office.
- Invite fellow nurses, friends, and family to attend the meeting. Speaking the same message, individually and collectively from the nursing community, is the best way to make an impact on a

congressional member's position on our issues. ANA also contacts congressional members to attend meetings it organizes, or meetings organized through one of its coalition partners.

- In advance of the meeting, meet to strategize. Designate a lead person to deliver the key message you want to leave with the member of Congress. Each participant can visit ANA's Government Affairs website, www.anapoliticalpower.org, to brush up on the "nuts and bolts" of the nursing and health-care-related policy issues that should be brought forward during the meeting. In addition, participants can read the most recent edition of ANA's monthly online legislative newsletter, *Capitol Update* (www.capitolupdate.org), to gain insight into the latest policy and political news that affects the nursing community.
- Discussions with members of Congress should be organized and focused on nursing's principal issues. Ask directly for the member's help in supporting ANA's position and try to get a clear sense of where the member stands on the principal issues.
- Immediately write an individual thank-you note to the member of Congress and any staff member present during the meeting. Be sure to express your appreciation to any of the member's staff involved in scheduling or facilitating the meeting.
- Finally, follow up with ANA's Government Affairs staff. We need to hear what occurred during the

meeting so we can follow-up with members of Congress as soon as possible after your meeting as well as when they return to Washington.

Ready to go? Mark your calendar—Congress will be back in session after September 3. If you have additional questions about in-district meetings, please contact ANA's Government Affairs Department at gova@ana.org. ★



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