Hello, Congressman Jones … This is …

Communicating Effectively With Elected Officials

- It’s your job to get people to understand your cause.

- Legislators are deluged with well-intended citizens pushing for support of their cause.

- Everybody has a powerful and sometimes emotional story. It’s not a matter of getting your story out, you want people to identify and understand.

- You are only going to get a few minutes. Be willing to walk and talk. Be brief and stay on message. Even if you scheduled a meeting, you may not see the elected official.

- Understand the legislative process – it’s long and deliberate.

- Watch abbreviations when you talk.

- Be polite and reasonable. Remember to say “thank you.”

- If you have additional materials, keep it to one or two pages.

- Personal stories always help.

- Don’t forget the media can be an effective ally. What they communicate can influence the legislator and public opinion.

- Pitch your cause as a part of a solution to a problem. Is what you do going to create new jobs, lead to a safer food supply?

- Understand the political environment. Provide the legislator with justification for why they should vote your way or support your cause. Is what you are doing going to improve the lives of their constituents and how?

- Forge relationships. Don’t call when times are tough. Use their back-home visits where you can provide updates on your work. Include politicians or members of their staffs on your boards and commissions. Know their causes, voting records, districts.

- Be truthful. Know the facts and share the facts.

- Have a clear “ask” and don’t forget the “ask.”

- Remember the 5 W’s and 1 H.
  1. Know who to bring.
  2. Know what to bring.
  3. Know when to schedule a meeting
  4. Know where you will meet.
  5. Know why you are there.
  6. Know how to make your case.
  7. Know what you don’t know.