

REPUBLICAN
Policy Committee



Congressman
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Chairman



FROM YOUR HEAD TO THE HOPPER — SUCCESSFULLY INTRODUCING LEGISLATION

A Primer Courtesy of Policy Chairman Tom Price

Member Services University

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Introducing your first piece of legislation – or any major legislative initiative – requires a **comprehensive plan** based on research, media attention, stakeholder interaction and coordination with other Members of Congress. This booklet provides the basics in project management and describes how all the key elements of such a plan come together.

But before embarking on a legislative initiative, establish what the Member's goals are from the onset. The legislative initiative you are contemplating – is it to make a statement? A simple policy change? Or, is this to address a local issue? Everyone needs to be on the same page ahead of time and formulating goals will do that.

Here are some handy rules to meet the Member's goals and guide the endeavor:

Maintain the Member's vision by establishing benchmarks and terms of success

Establish an outline for completion (time and resources are finite)

Emphasize the importance of media attention and stakeholder interaction

Rely on staff to execute – the Member's role is to manage, not micromanage

This primer has been constructed as a checklist. Incorporating all of these elements into the development of a legislative initiative increases the likelihood of success. But as mentioned above, time and resources are finite so incorporation of all of these elements may not be possible.

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The Republican Policy Committee (RPC) is the incubator of creative, forward-thinking legislative initiatives focused on addressing the challenges facing this nation. For assistance on introducing a piece of legislation, contact the RPC at HRPC@mail.house.gov or call x5-4501.

Define the Issue

Undertaking a legislative initiative starts with defining the issue and to do so requires a thorough understanding of the problem or challenge being addressed. First, define the problem or challenge that is being addressed and why a legislative remedy is needed. Conduct a background analysis, a historical review, identify similar or relevant legislation, and realize the scope. Determine if a remedy is constitutional and coheres with the vision of limited government expressed by our Founding Fathers. Finally, identify what impact a legislative solution will have on the nation, your congressional district, and key constituencies and stakeholder groups.

Research the Issue

In the course of defining the issue, conduct extensive research. Key sources include think tanks, stakeholder groups, business organizations, local officials, community leaders and activists, other Members of Congress, congressional committees, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and Legislative Counsel. The research done beforehand is the key to avoiding pitfalls and mistakes down the road. Further, touching base with outside experts at think tanks, stakeholder groups and business organizations is the first step in generating support for the idea.

Drafting Legislation

Once a Member and his/her staff are satisfied with the preliminary work done to define the issue and conduct research, the next phase is the drafting of legislative text (i.e. a bill or amendment). Experienced staff working in conjunction with Legislative Counsel should produce an initiative which comports with the overall vision of the Member and addresses the problem or challenge identified. Thereafter, the bill or amendment becomes the focal point for garnering media attention, reaching out to stakeholders and coordinating with other Members of Congress.

Drafting Support Documents

In addition to drafting legislative text, staff should draft other support documents including Dear Colleague letters and talking points. The preliminary work done to define the issue and conduct research is a solid foundation for compiling key information and statistics into these support documents. The key to drafting is being concise and to the point – Members of Congress and staff are inundated with hundreds of pieces of information per day. Both Dear Colleague letters and talking points must be written to maximize readership and understanding while also seeking support. And to accomplish this may require the creation of multiple sets of support documents – audiences vary so there must be flexibility in how they are addressed.

Tips for Dear Colleague Letters

Here are some simple tips to keep in mind when drafting a Dear Colleague letter:

1. Explain the purpose of the letter upfront.
2. Identify the “ask” – co-sponsor bill, vote for amendment – upfront.
3. Define the problem or challenge that is being addressed upfront.
4. Explain how the legislative text remedies the problem or challenge.
5. Use **bold** or underline to highlight key information.

Original Co-Sponsors

Prior to the introduction of a bill or amendment (to the Rules Committee), a Member and his/her staff should seek support in the form of original co-sponsors. These are folks who will have their names tied to the bill when it is originally introduced. They are also a base of support for the legislative initiative and may sign onto Dear Colleague letters, conduct internal lobbying, and participate in floor communications. Having a broad array of support from elected leadership, committee chairmen and subcommittee chairmen, like-minded Republican Members, and even Democrats adds credibility to the idea.

Coordinating with Elected Leadership and Chairmen

Elected leadership is responsible for controlling the House floor and making determinations as to what legislation will be considered. Committee and subcommittee chairmen make determinations as to the content of legislation which falls into their jurisdiction – plus, think about opportunities for member testimony, legislative hearings and markups. Coordinating with them may elevate the legislation and increase the likelihood of consideration. Further, touching base with elected leadership and chairmen increases the likelihood of rallying support to the initiative.

Coordinating with Caucuses

Congressional Member Organizations, or more commonly referred to as caucuses, provide another opportunity to elevate a legislative initiative and increase the likelihood of rallying support. Further, caucuses often have targeted staff lists to more efficiently distribute support documents. Some of the most popular and well-organized caucuses include the Tuesday Group, the Immigration Caucus, the Pro-Life Caucus and the Republican Study Committee.

Internal Lobbying

Personal communications on a member-to-member and staff-to-staff level is a labor intensive but effective way to lobby for a legislative initiative. Members may host forums to raise awareness about the problem or challenge, conduct member listening sessions, or sway other Members one-on-one on the House floor (staff compiles target list). Staff may telephone and email one-on-one (off compiled target list).

Companion Legislation in the Senate

Finding a champion in the Senate to introduce companion legislation not only raises the profile of the initiative but also increases the likelihood for consideration. An ideal Senate sponsor has a common interest in the initiative, sits on a committee of jurisdiction, or has a parochial interest (home-state issue).

General Stakeholder Preparation

There are a number of stakeholder groups which may assist in advancing a Member's legislative initiative and serve as important allies outside of Capitol Hill. These groups come in several varieties: grassroots (e.g. Tea Party), single-issue (e.g. National Rifle Association), industry (e.g. U.S. Chamber of Commerce), or think tank (e.g. American Enterprise Institute). The key is to identify which stakeholder groups are relevant to the matter at hand and develop a relationship.

Not all stakeholder groups have the capacity to provide every outreach service, but proper coordination goes a long way toward elevating the legislative initiative.

Stakeholder Interaction

After identifying relevant stakeholder groups and establishing a rapport, a Member and his/her staff may seek out a number of different avenues to elevate the legislative initiative. The following is a list of outreach services which a stakeholder group may be able to provide in order to highlight the legislative initiative:

1. Draft a letter of support to congressional offices
2. Write a policy paper or issues brief
3. Alert the media through a press release
4. Conduct general media outreach on national television, radio and print media
5. Author a blog post or op-ed, or even create a video to educate the public
6. Include an excerpt in a stakeholder newsletter or trade publication
7. Lobby congressional staff one-on-one via email or telephone
8. Host a forum or member listening session to better educate Members and congressional staff
9. Host a local site event or field hearing
10. Distribute support documents to stakeholder membership
11. Ask stakeholder membership to lobby congressional staff via email or telephone
12. Ask stakeholder membership to call into radio programs, write letters to the editor, or post blog statements
13. Add the legislative initiative to a group's vote rating / score card

General Media Preparation

After a decision has been made to draft legislative text, a Member and his/her staff must also implement a general media plan. It is critical that communications staff is fully integrated into the process from the beginning. One well-placed media hit such as a timely interview or op-ed piece may be more effective in raising the profile of a legislative initiative than weeks of staff-to-staff lobbying. Preparation begins by establishing contacts with national TV, radio, and print media, including trade and specialty publications; sharing communications staff contact information with producers, bookers, and reporters; and assembling a list of press who cover the issue(s) pertaining to the legislative initiative.

General Media – Day of Introduction

Often times, the day a legislative initiative is introduced is the high point for garnering media attention. To take advantage, there are a number of press events which may be staged but to do so requires considerable preparation ahead of time. Here are some examples in order to generate public attention:

1. Organize a press conference with important invitees such as other Members, key luminaries or stakeholder groups.
2. Invite press who cover the issue(s) pertaining to the legislative initiative for an in-person background interview.
3. Set up a conference call with reporters and bloggers to preview the legislative initiative.
4. Draft an op-ed piece to run the day of introduction.

5. Create a press release for distribution.

Local Media Outreach

Having your local media highlight a legislative initiative not only keeps them informed of the Member's efforts in Washington, it also shows the folks back home how the Member is an effective leader on the critical issues of the day. Make certain that appropriate contacts have been established at the largest local city papers, local neighborhood newspapers and dailys, local television affiliates, and local radio stations (emphasis on morning and evening drive time). Moreover, setting up editorial board meetings with local newspapers allows them to get to know the Member better while also giving the Member an opportunity to pitch the legislative initiative in a one-on-one environment. And do not forget about staging photo opportunities with constituents if the legislative initiative is addressing a local concern.

Blogger Outreach

One of the primary new media alternatives to traditional TV, print and radio is blogs. These interactive forums generally provide a platform to convey a message to a unique audience of like-minded supporters. Used effectively, a blog may allow a Member to drive a message more directly and serve as an echo chamber. There are a number of nationally recognized blogs which accept submissions from Members, and each congressional district has blogs maintained by grassroots activists who would be willing to post supporting documents.

New Media & Website

Every Member should establish a routine and robust online presence and expand outreach to media and constituents through innovative means. A Member's website should highlight the legislative initiative, and adding support documents keeps it timely and fresh. Tools like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube may amplify the message and reach a unique audience. And do not forget about an E-Newsletter, often times the most effective and timely means of communicating with constituents about a Member's legislative initiative.

Floor Communications

Delivering a one minute or special order speech on the House floor is another way for a Member to speak directly about the legislative initiative. Further, the speech may be clipped and distributed to national media, local media, and bloggers.

End Game

Marathon runners are taught to lean forward and run through the tape. Members and staff must do the same. Simply doing the prep work and introducing a legislative initiative is often not enough to realize the Member's goals or maintain the vision – do not stop at the 13 mile mark! To see an initiative through may take months or years – this means a Member and staff must be diligent in garnering media attention, interacting with stakeholder groups and coordinating with other Members of Congress.