

SPEAK OUT WORKING WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Meeting with a Member of Congress or their staff is one of our most important tools to affect change in U.S. policy on debt and World Bank and IMF issues. Below are some suggestions to help you plan a powerful visit to a congressional office.

HOW TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

“In Your Home District”

Congress is in recess and legislators are usually home in their districts for about one week around these holidays and can meet with constituents. For exact dates contact your legislator’s local office. When attempting to meet with a member, try to schedule the visit during one of these times.

Contact the Appointment Secretary or Scheduler. Explain your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for Congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and who will be at the meeting. Say that you desire to meet with the Member of Congress directly. Try to get influential members of your community, like religious or business leaders, to join you on your visit; you will be more likely to get a face-to-face meeting.

If you can not get an appointment with your member directly, ask to meet with the Chief of Staff in the district office. When you meet, express that you would like your concerns to be conveyed to the staff person who works on debt in Washington, DC. Find out who they are and plan to followup with them, as well as the district staff.

In Washington, DC

Follow the above advice in requesting a face-to-face meeting with your Member of Congress when you come to DC. Don’t be discouraged if they can’t meet with you; sometimes it is just as effective to meet with staff that works on our issues. Do insist, however, on meeting with the staff member that handles debt and World Bank/IMF issues. Get their business card and followup with them directly after your meeting.

HOLIDAYS

January

Martin Luther King’s birthday

February

President’s Day

March/April

Good Friday
Easter/Passover

May

Memorial Day

July

Independence Day

August

Congress usually adjourns for most of August

September

Labor Day

October

Rosh Hashanah
Yom Kippur
Columbus Day

November

Thanksgiving

December

Congress usually adjourns for most of December

TEN TIPS FOR A POWERFUL MEETING WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

From Jubilee USA Network member, RESULTS (www.results.org)

Before the meeting:

1. **Do Your Homework.** Find out what issues your Representative or Senator cares about. You can do this by taking a look at their website (available at: www.house.gov and www.senate.gov) or asking their local office for their newsletter. Find out how they have voted on debt in the past and if they are on committees important to our work.
2. **Be Prepared - Practice Speaking.** After you create an agenda for the meeting in which each person has a speaking part, everyone should create a brief 2 or 3 minute talk for their section and practice it with at least one other person. Be brief, clear and to the point and don't be afraid to show your passion.
3. **Inspire Yourself.** Prior to the meeting, spend at least a few minutes having each person speak about why you care about this issue and why you are going to this meeting. Envision the power and possibility of the meeting.

At the meeting:

4. **Connect with your Representative or Senator or their staff person.** Establish a personal connection with your Member of Congress or their staff in the meeting by asking them to share their goals and the issues they care about. Share your own vision and concerns.
5. **Acknowledge your Member of Congress.** It is rare that our Representatives and Senators hear the words "Thank You" from their constituents. Always thank them for the supportive actions that he or she has taken or just be sure to thank them for taking the time to meet with you.
6. **Make the issues real.** One of the most powerful ways we can advocate for our issues is to invite someone from an indebted country, or someone who has traveled there recently, to make the issues more vivid for your Member of Congress. Telling the story of a specific family or showing your legislator a video during your meeting puts your legislator in the shoes of others for a few minutes and makes the issues real.
7. **Paint the big picture and the small picture.** For example, one person could tell a story about their personal experience of the effects of debt in Africa or Latin America or its impact on one family (the small picture). Then, another partner could flush out how current debt relief does not go deep enough or the need to reform the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (the big picture).
8. **Make specific, clear requests and ask for an answer.** Often, the main reason groups have unsatisfactory meetings is that their requests were not clear and specific enough. Your members of Congress need to know what you want them to do (what bill you want them to sponsor, what other Representative or Senator you want them to speak to, how you want them to vote). However, in addition to the specific requests you bring, don't be afraid to ask the Senator or Representative what else they see they could do on your issue (whether they say yes or no to your original request).
9. **Illustrate examples of our work.** Bring any press clippings of local Jubilee events or letters to the editor on our issues. Bring photos from travels abroad or Jubilee literature to leave behind.
10. **Know your next steps.** In the meeting, ensure that the next steps for follow up are clear (what your group will do next, what the legislator will do next) and which aides to contact to follow up, etc. After the meeting send a prompt thank-you note, and follow up on requests with the appropriate aide.

