Get to Know Your Legislators

The most effective means of communicating with your legislators is through direct contact, either at their home, at a public meeting, in the state house or on the phone. Legislators are generally very willing to meet or speak with constituents. When speaking directly with a legislator, however, it is important to keep the following basic rules in mind:

1. **Consider yourself an information source.** Legislators have limited time, staff and interest on any one issue. They can't be as informed as they might like to be on all the issues, including the issues that concern you. Your job is to provide them with information.

2. **Tell the truth.** There is no faster way to lose credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator.

3. **Know who else is on your side.** It is helpful for a legislator to know what other groups, individuals, state agencies and/or legislators support your cause.

4. **Know the opposition.** Anticipate who the opposition will be. Provide legislators with information to counter your opposition's arguments.

5. **Make the legislator aware of any personal connection you may have.** No matter how insignificant you may feel it is, if you have friends, relatives or colleagues in common, LET THEM KNOW.

6. **Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.** If a legislator wants information you don't have or asks something you don't know, tell them and then offer to get the information for them.

7. **Be specific.** If you want a vote, information, answers to a question -whatever it is, make sure you ask for it directly and get an answer.

8. **Follow up.** It is important to find out if your legislator did what was promised. It is also important that you thank them if they voted for your position.

9. **Don't "burn any bridges".** It is easy to get emotional over issues. That's fine, but be sure that no matter what happens you don't permanently alienate a legislator. Your strongest opponent on one issue may be an ally on another.

10. **Remember – you have a right to be heard.** Your tax money pays legislators' salaries, pays for the paper they write on, and the phone they use to call you. They are responsible to you, and nine times out of ten are grateful for your input.