

## **AMCHP 2008 ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

### **WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE:**

#### **What Washington Wants to Hear:**

### **Explaining Your Programs to Congress**

March 1st to 5th, 2008

CHRIS GOLDSON: ...articles regarding maternal and child health appeared in the States' biggest newspaper or the big, that helps get your interest going. In my office, the district office sends us clippings from the local paper every day so we can know what's going on in the district, know what the issues are. And so, if, as you know, most papers do a Sunday big focus, and one of the things was, I think was on SIDS, and that generated the members' interest. Uh, infant mortality, that generated the members' interest. That came from the newspaper, because we read it, staff in the district office, staff in Washington. The member reads it. Most importantly, the community reads it. And so, then they'll start telling us, hey, what are you doing about this? So, that's just a way to tell your research to know what the office cares about, what's relevant to that district.

The other thing is, remember you're building a relationship. Make them know you are a source of information, facts, figures about health insurance, about health information. As a staffer, as I said, we're overwhelmed. We are flooded by paperwork. We are flooded by files. What I need is to be able to pick up, have a

card ready, have something to say, this is coming up. I don't have time to get my PhD this week in this issue, but can, do I know anyone who can get me the information I want or I need so I can help my boss and make a reasoned decision? That's it. Anyone who can do that for me, they're listen to and they're welcomed. And so putting yourself out there as a resource, it's something every office, every member, 'cause we're limited in time but we have all these issues.

Don'ts. Don't take more than 15 minutes. Practice your elevator pitch. This is important because there are weeks that I do not, my member is in the office, in town. She's voting. As a staff, I can't even get time with the member in a week to talk about any of these things. You have 15 minutes with me, all I'm saying is you have 15 minutes with me to talk, I may have a minute with the member to turn your 15 minutes into something actionable. That's, practice your elevator pitch because your message has to be very concise so I as a staff member am armed knowing that I don't have a lot of time with the member, I have to be able to articulate what you've taken 15 minutes to explain to me in a very, even a short synopsis. That's why it's very important to keep your message focused and short.

Two, don't get bogged down in details. It's, the staff already know you are the experts. Most of the times in a meeting I know I'm not the expert. I don't know anything. I don't know half the things you do. We already know you are the experts. Don't get bogged down in details. Keep it simple. Keep it focused. If you

want to follow up on the details, do that but don't get bogged down in meetings. And I've seen this happen.

And three is don't bring a hundred-page dissertation, and I wish I left this at the office. This the biggest don't. The issue was very important. It was so relevant to our district. The gentleman, he brought a, a binder this big, this big. He brought maps, and so, and then that's fine. You can bring whatever you want. I have, we have library space, so that's fine. As a reference material, you can tab it and, but then, as I'm staring at that, and I've lost focus on whatever he's talking about, (laughter) he proceeds to go through it page by page I say, it's a very important issue and he had some very cogent points. But 45 minutes later, I just wanted him out of the office. He had a good message. He had a good point. He, but that was the, it messes it up. Don't bring a hundred page and don't go page by page.

And then the third thing he did, this was, the third thing he did, so after all this time, I was like, okay, I'll, I'll indulge him, listen for whatever. So, at the end of the meeting, I asked him. I said, okay, put, write a letter to the congresswoman and put in it what is it exactly you want us to do. Sounds pretty simple. It, this ought, the, in essence, what he wanted us to do was to waive some federal transportation law. And so I said, okay, listen, I have, you've given me this information and I'm sharing, put in a letter, one letter, what you want us to do.

But, yeah, the reason I said this is because we don't have time. What I was going to do was to take his letter and copy it, change it a little bit and send it on to the agency he wanted us to do it. So I was trying to be as responsive as possible to his need. So I said, two months later, I still haven't gotten that letter. And it's hard. It's like, well, I want to help you, I don't have, but I don't have the time, want to read that hundred pages dissertation or even to understand, to spend time trying to track down information that you already know, and all I am asking is you to share it with me. And so, I think that's just an example. Most staff members want to help you. They just, we're just so loaded. The more help you could, more helpful the information, I say, is a great help. You are very important, very, very important.

So let me sum up. What can make a difference between a yes or a no? For me, for my boss is, does the boss care about it? Do, is this an issue they have a personal interest in either because it's a huge problem in the district or maybe that's what they have done for 20 years before coming to Congress? They worked in this issue. And then, how does the MCH Block Grant fit into the boss' agenda? I think every meeting you will go in, that's what the staff is thinking, that's what they're thinking. So, that's what makes the difference between a yes or a no.

Two, have we heard from the district about it? Are constituents writing us about this? To be quite honest, I've worked for Congresswoman Moore for two and a

half years and I started as the legislative correspondent who, basically, their job is to help respond to all the mail, e-mails, fax, the correspondence. And in those two and a half years, I have not seen one letter on the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. And it's not that you need to flood, because we've responded and done things where only one person wrote on an issue. But I have not seen, so if the constituents aren't writing about it, that helps. It helps the yes or no.

Three, have your stuff together. To be quite blunt, and this goes back to that letter example, the less work I have to do, the more likely your request in some shape or form will move forward. I just don't have time to research and try, as I said, try to get my MPH in public health again. I just need the information. You provide the information, I can move on and we could both have a happy solution. As staff, we're drowning in paper. We are drowning in paper, and we always have time constraints. Whatever we're working on, it's because it's due immediately. And so, to stop that, try to find something else and then still have to do what you need to do by the end of the day. It's hard and we won't do it. So the more help you can be, the less work I have to do, I think the better it is for you guys.

And I think the other consideration is, is it feasible? Always think about that. Is it feasible? Is that \$850,000,000 increase for the block grant feasible? As a staff, it is feasible, but not for every office. So, that, I mean, but that's part of what the difference between a yes and a no. And so, and then lastly, I want to talk about

relationship and relationship building. Okay, so you go out this week. You go out tomorrow. You talk to your staff. We're in a budget. Budget's going to get marked up in an all day session on Wednesday. It's going to be marked up in committee. It's the longest mark, it's the, my boss is scheduled to be in that committee from 10:00 A.M. to midnight. And so, and then it's supposed to come to the floor at the following week. But the budget sets the overall parameters. There needs to be follow-up with the staff at appropriate times in a year. Why? For example, what would be helpful for a staff is before the bill comes to the floor or if it's in a committee, if you sent a e-mail, get cards while you are on your health visits, you send an e-mail saying, oh, this bill has come and, you know, I know Am Chip and Josh is going to help you out and tell you when these things are happening, so you don't have to worry about figuring that out yourself. But you send an e-mail saying, you know, I hear this bill is coming to the floor and this is the funding level we would like and this is why the pertinent numbers, it serves just a reminder. Again, as I said, right information at the right time will always equal action.

And so, those are the times to follow up as we move down this process that Julio outlined where it was October, end of the year before the bill became law. Well you need to do something between now and March and October. And so, getting that information, getting those cards and emailing it at the right time, at the right information. Again, when things come back up just before it gets to the floor. Because what happens is when an appropriation bill is coming to the floor, as staff, what I do is I prepare a memo for the boss. And if I thought, if you sent me

an e-mail and you said, remember this, at least for myself, it helps me to know what programs to highlight in the memo that I'm giving to the boss. There are too many programs in, say, the defense compartment for me to put everything, every line item, every change into a memo for our boss. I have to be concise. So, that's what I said, right time, right action.

And again, I said, prior to a house floor debate, especially for members who aren't on the appropriations committee, 'cause they've never actually looked at the bill until the fire is right before us. There's no reason for us to really look at the bill. After we put in our appropriations request and if we're not on the committee, most members won't pay attention to the Lay Grates Bill until it's on the floor, for the staff, unless they have some other interest in the bill. And other things to follow up with throughout the course of the year is if a local paper has a great story on MCH program, that would be something you would want to share. This was a story in the paper exemplify what we do. Quick note, self-explanatory. Easy follow-up builds interest. We work in a just-in-time environment where as staff we spend most of our time reacting to what's on the floor or what's on the news. So remembering to put the information before me, again, at the right time will have a desired effect.

One of my greatest regrets as a staff is that I can't be more proactive on stuff. It's the biggest regret. I can't be proactive. I'm always reactive, always, hundred percent at a time. It's not this is the need and let's figure out. It's this is what's

coming at me and I need to help my boss and prepare my boss to deal with it. So just lastly, don't just disappear after your visits this week. Become a source of information and tell them you'll be back next year and you'll keep coming back, and don't become discouraged if you don't hear back. It's going somewhere and someone's paying attention to it. I know a lot of constituents get discouraged because they send a letter and no one wrote them back. Somebody read it. You may not have heard back, somebody read it and somebody had to pay attention to it. And finally is we want to help. That's why our boss got elected is to help the community, help the state, help the district. Your job is to help us help, is to let us know what the problem is, help identify solutions and give us the data and info that we need to take action. Thank you.