



**What happens during a congressional town hall meeting?** Although the format varies from state to state and member to member, usually, the member of Congress makes some opening remarks and introduces his or her staff. There may be local leaders in attendance as well who wish to make remarks. Then, the floor is opened up to comments from the audience--that's where you come in!

**Before you attend a town hall meeting, take a moment to learn about the member of Congress hosting the event.** You can learn about bills they've introduced and the specifics of their district through the US Congress Web site at [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov). The ACCP Legislative Action Center at [capwiz.com/chestnet/issues/](http://capwiz.com/chestnet/issues/) also includes relevant cosponsorship information.

Should you decide to attend a town hall meeting (and we strongly suggest that you do!), following are tips adapted from "10 Strategies for Using Congressional Town Hall Meetings to Advance Your Legislative Agenda" (Knowlegis, summer 2007). **Please let Stacy Seiden, ACCP Health Affairs, know if you attended a town hall meeting and what the member of Congress had to say about legislation important to chest medicine.** Stacy can be reached at [sseiden@chestnet.org](mailto:sseiden@chestnet.org).

- **Be Prepared:** Constituents who come to town hall meetings with thoughtful arguments, good data, and persuasive stories always get remembered.
- **Tell a Personal Story:** Members of Congress are always looking for firsthand accounts of the impact that policies have on their constituents. Think in advance of how the critical care workforce shortage may affect your patients and your practice.
- **Use Numbers if You Have Them:** Politicians live for one thing--50% plus one. This keeps them reelected and employed. Use numbers by mentioning, for example, "I have x number of patients in my practice."
- **Be Respectful:** Some constituents start a conversation with, "I pay your salary, so you better listen to me." It doesn't matter if you're talking to your grocer or a public official—starting any conversation with another person in a rude manner is not a very tactful way to persuade them.
- **Go in Groups:** Nothing says "listen to me" to a public official like an angry mob. This is not to suggest that you should bring pitchforks and torches to your next town hall meeting, but a chorus is better than a solo performance. Are there other ACCP members, perhaps ones who elected to be Grassroots Advocates, and/or patients who might be interested in accompanying you?
- **Talk to Staff:** Every Member brings staff to town hall meetings. Tell them your story before the meeting (also ask a public question during the meeting), and get their business cards.

- **Leave Paper:** Any documents passed to state-based staff will likely be faxed to the legislative assistant in Washington who covers health-related issues. Talking points may serve as an excellent “leave behind.” Contact the ACCP should you require talking points and/or other background materials. This information also is located on the ACCP Grassroots Advocacy Web site at [www.chestnet.org/practice/advocacy/issues.php](http://www.chestnet.org/practice/advocacy/issues.php).

- **Follow Up Politely:** Politely persistent people are more likely to persuade politicians. Congressional offices are often overworked, so an elected official often responds to an individual who just follows up with a phone call a few weeks after attending a meeting.

- **Get Your People to Multiple Meetings:** Try to get a colleague(s) and/or patient(s) to attend another town hall meeting. Hearing the same thing in different places signals to a politician that there may be a deeper problem afoot.

- **Demonstrate That You’re Not Going Away:** If you continue to show your presence at town hall meetings, the legislator must deal with you, even if it’s only to avoid an uncomfortable encounter at a future town hall meeting.