



How to Visit a Politician

Visiting a politician is one of the most powerful things you can do whilst campaigning for a properly funded and independent ABC.

It carries much more weight than signing a petition, sending an e-mail, sending a postcard, making a phone call or writing a letter.

To make your visit as successful as possible, here are some pointers.

Know the issues.

Know the relevant facts and figures. Learn the counter arguments to any arguments they might use. Be very clear in your own mind what the key issue is, and stick to it.

Know the politician.

Find out his/her name, party, electorate. Check if it is a safe seat, or a marginal one. Is s/he a minister or a shadow minister, is s/he on any parliamentary committees?

Know your objectives.

Be clear about what you want the politician to do. Some possible requests are:

- Make a public statement
- Raise the issue in parliament. In this case you might ask the politician to send you a copy of the Hansard report of the statement.
- Write to, or speak to, the relevant minister on your behalf.
- Lobby party colleagues, raise the issue in the party room.
- Get the issue referred to a parliamentary committee

Be clear about when you want these things done by.

Bring others with you (but not too many) While it is good to have more than one, keep the delegation small. Too many can seem intimidating. Unless you are very well rehearsed, there is a danger that you will trip

over one another, or that the politician will play one member off against another.

It is good if members of the delegation can represent different groups. As well as Friends of the ABC there may be some other community group which share your view on a particular issue.

As many members of the delegation as possible should live in the politician's electorate.

As a rule of thumb there should be no more than three or four in the delegation.

Make an appointment

Tell the politician's office how many will be coming, who they are and what groups they are from. Find out how long you are likely to have. Try to get an appointment in the morning if possible. Politicians, and others, are usually fresher and in a better mood in the morning.

Plan your talk.

Perhaps have different people specialise in different areas. Perhaps have one leader to coordinate things, make the introductions, explain what each person will talk about and lead into each of these areas. Perhaps designate one person as a note-taker to record what was agreed to and anything else the politician says that is important.

Plan the outline of your talk and give it a tentative timeframe. Make sure that all your delegation understand and agree to it. Be

aware that the politician may also want to talk a lot and may even try to side-track things.

Allow at least the last third of your time for talking about what you want the politician to do.

Take a concise leaflet

You should leave a leaflet with the politician when you depart. There may be a suitable one available from Friends of the ABC, or you may wish to write your own, especially if there are issues of special relevance to the politicians own electorate. The leaflet should contain a quick summary of the issue, perhaps including counter-arguments, and a list of what you want the politician to do and when you want it done by. Bear in mind that the politician may not necessarily agree to your requests, and word the leaflet accordingly.

Try not to let it get too long, politicians will rarely have the time or interest to wade through it otherwise. One double-sided A4 page is usually ideal, well presented and typed of course.

Rehearse

You'll feel much more confident if you rehearse. Memorise the outline of the talk. Make sure you can recall the facts you need, or at least the most important ones, and find the others on a quick reference list.

During the visit

Be neat and presentable

Politicians, like other people, can be full of prejudice. They'll usually react badly to people that look messy and unkempt.

Be early

Make sure that everyone knows where the politicians office is and ask them to meet there 15 minutes early. Better still, you could meet even earlier at another location and run through things one more time.

Preamble

Thank the politician for the opportunity to air

your concerns. Make the introductions.

Don't get side tracked

Side-tracking can come from within your own delegation, accidentally, or from the politician, perhaps deliberately. Don't let it happen. Remember your outline and objectives and politely but firmly bring things back on track.

Be polite and patient

Politicians can be incredibly frustrating at times. They might be ignorant, insensitive, prejudiced, or even downright rude. You must resist the urge to throttle them, no matter what the provocation. Be polite and patient at all times.

Try to be nice

Show you care about them. Find out their views on the ABC - this is important regardless. Ask them how their work's going. Try to be nice - don't just push your own concerns.

Thank them for the visit

Regardless of the outcome, thank them again for the opportunity to discuss your concerns.

After the visit

Debrief

Talk it over with you delegation. Discuss what worked, what didn't and how you could do it better next time.

Follow up

Quickly organise and send any information you promised to the politician. Make sure they honour their commitments to you. If you don't hear anything within a reasonable time, phone or write.

Communicate with the Friends of the ABC

Let us know the outcome of your meeting

