

**Bring the National Health Care Reform
Conversation to Your District**
A Guide for State Advocates



Community Catalyst, Inc.
30 Winter St. 10th Floor
Boston, MA 02108

617.338.6035

Fax: 617.451.5838

www.communitycatalyst.org

Background and Purpose of Guide

At Community Catalyst, we feel that it is impossible to overstate the benefits for state advocates to develop strong relationships with the offices of their Congressional delegation. There are about five points throughout the year during which Members of Congress recess and return to their home states. The full schedule can be found at the end of this guide. During these times, your Member will likely conduct business with constituents in the district. This is a great time to plan an event in your community around health care, and we hope this guide will help you.

In December 2008, the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center teamed up with two local partners, AARP South Carolina and the South Carolina Hospital Association, to honor Congressman John Spratt for his longstanding commitment to health care issues.

In a short amount of time and with a small budget, the event successfully accomplished its primary goal: to allow these groups to personally thank the Congressman for his support. Additionally, there were many other benefits for all involved. The media coverage of the event encouraged local dialogue on health care, provided publicity for the three cosponsoring organizations, and showed Congressman Spratt's constituency how he is working for them in Washington, DC. This event also helped solidify the relationship between these groups in the state and the Congressman. These groups are optimistic that he will remember their efforts on the ground and that they can be a resource to him as he continues his work on important health care issues.

Goals for an In-District Event

Advocates do not need to travel to Washington, DC to engage their Congressional Delegation. In-district events are a great opportunity for you and your colleagues to have your voices heard regarding national health reform. We hope that by planning an in-district event, you will be able to:

- engage your Members of Congress
- encourage continued dialogue on health care
- bring advocates and coalitions together
- create an opportunity for media attention
- establish your organization as a key resource on health care issues

Even if you have recently conducted a phone call with Congressional staff, met with District staff, or been to the Washington, DC office to visit with your Member, organizing a meeting or event during recess is still critically important. Our goal is to identify timely and relevant opportunities to engage your Members on a regular basis. Remember that Washington, DC-based government affairs representatives from businesses, education, and other healthcare industries are likely meeting with Members and their staff at least once per month. You want your voice and your issues to be heard in this crowded field, so you too should strive for frequent contact with both your Member and his/her staff. The stronger the relationship you can build, the more you can become a resource for them and gain better access on the Hill.

In Illinois, over 323 places of worship participated in the Campaign for Better Health Care's faith event called "Sound the Alarm", an event held in congregations from all faith traditions across the state to draw attention to the moral and economic imperative of the health care crisis. Congregants pause during services to ring a bell or sound a horn or shofar and to pray for those affected by the health care crisis.

The following week, congregants joined CBHC for their Out In Front events. Faith leaders and fellow constituents gathered together out in front of district offices all over the state to reflect on the current health care crisis and to show their strong support for quality, affordable health care for all by demanding action from Congress this year. CBHC is organizing similar events every month with a different affected constituency "out in front".

Planning Your Event Format

It is important to plan an event that will engage your Member and help begin or strengthen your relationship with him/her. You should try to ensure the event format is inviting to your Member and tailor the event to any particular health care issue that motivates him/her. Some suggestions for possible event formats include:

1. **For newer Members of Congress who are less familiar with health care issues or for organizations who do not have established relationships with their Members**, advocates and local experts can hold a small group discussion regarding key health care issues that impact the Members' constituents.
2. **For Members who are not highly active in health care**, host an event with constituents, health care experts, local elected officials, and/or "strange bedfellows" to thank the Member for any good votes, talk about health care issues, and hear the Member's thoughts on what's coming up in 2009.
3. **For Members who have championed health care issues**, hold a larger event with constituents, health care experts, local elected officials, and/or "strange bedfellows" to thank the Member for their work – possibly present an award to him/her – and encourage their continued commitment to the issue.

Each of the above scenarios may lend themselves to various formats. The direction you chose to go in will depend on the resources available, the amount of time the Member has to spend, and the number of people participating. Some possibilities for an event include:

- town hall meeting
- award ceremony
- open house or reception at your organization
- tour of a clinic or hospital
- meet with an uninsured / underinsured family
- visit a dental program
- visit a school health program
- parade

If it is not possible to set up a separate event, a group of health care advocates and concerned constituents could **attend a previously planned event** to briefly thank the Member and ask him/her to support health care efforts.

If it is not possible to engage with your Member at any time while he/she is in the district, **schedule a meeting with the health aide in the district office**. This meeting can be held at any time.

SAMPLE DOCUMENT: One-pager to leave with legislative staff



***We need to fix the health care system
in order to fix our economy.***

Health reform priorities include:

- Covering everyone
- Making care secure and affordable for working families & low-income individuals
- Ensuring the health care system is sustainable for the long-term by improving the quality of care

We are asking _____ to act quickly and make health care reform a reality.

Covering the Logistics

- Contact your Member's scheduler*

This should be the first step that you take after you decide to hold an event. Members will only be on recess for one week and their schedules will likely fill up fast.

- Reserve a location*

When picking a location for your event, be realistic about the number of people you can expect to attend. If you are holding a group discussion for a newer Member, it would be more appropriate to choose a smaller, more intimate venue. If you have engaged a broad coalition to honor a very well-known Member of Congress for extensive work in health care, you will want to have more space. It is important to pick a location that you can fill. Some options that may be available to you at low-cost or free of charge are:

- Local hospital
- City Hall or State House
- Community Center / Senior Center

- Church hall
- Foundation conference room
- Member's district office

Fill the room

Before you begin to promote your event to partner organizations, determine how many people you need to make the room look full. This will give you an idea of how extensive your outreach efforts should be.

Suggestions on who to contact for participation for larger meetings:

1. current coalition partners
2. strange bedfellows
3. faith-based community, such as PICO

In their ongoing work to support health coverage for children, the New England Alliance for Children's Health partnered with a wide-range of organizations to host a briefing for the region's delegation on the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Included at the table were:

- Representatives from nonprofit advocacy groups
- Children's hospitals
- State Medical Societies
- The New England Council, a regional business group
- Insurance company representatives
- Families

This briefing demonstrated the wide-range of support from various stakeholder groups for SCHIP. Congressional staffers cited the wide diversity of voices working together on a common issue as being very persuasive to them.

Create outreach materials

Once you have determined who you will be reaching out to, you will need to create the materials. Items such as flyers and electronic announcements should contain the basic details of the event: what, when, where, and who.

Plan the agenda

To make sure that you maximize the amount of time that you have with your Member, it will be helpful to have a set agenda. Decide prior to the event what topics and issues you would like to discuss with him/her. Assign speaking roles to participants ahead of time so they may plan appropriately. This will help to ensure that the program runs smoothly.

Assemble state specific data and stories

Become an invaluable resource to your Member's district and Washington, DC staff. Provide them with information that could help them develop floor speeches, speak at Committee hearings, or advocate among his/her colleagues for a particular issue. Stories from the district are always very helpful.

Creating a Buzz

Utilize your contacts

Partner organizations who wish to participate in your event may also assist with the outreach efforts. Provide these partners with flyers, announcements, and any other outreach materials. Ask them to distribute the materials among their lists and contacts.

Contact the media

It is always important for Members to be able to communicate their thoughts and support for issues like health care to a large number of their constituents. Having reporters and news cameras at your event certainly helps them achieve this goal.

- Request editorial board meetings as a way to try and generate interest on upcoming health care issues.
- Release a media advisory to all local media.
- Encourage partners to write letters to the editors of local papers. If letters are printed discussing the importance of health care as an issue and mentioning your event, this has the dual benefit of encouraging dialogue in your community and drumming up support for your event.

After the Event / Follow Up

Write a thank you letter to your Member of Congress.

Remember to write a note to your Member thanking him/her for taking the time to meet with you. It is also important to send notes to any of the Member's staff who helped arrange the event. If you are unsure whether or not to send a note, err on the side of sending a note rather than not.

Write thank you letters to your partner organizations.

It is equally important to thank your co-hosts of the event. For new partners, be sure to invite them to continue your collaboration as the national health reform debate heats up.

Follow-up with the Member's staff

Find a reason shortly after the event to reconnect with your Member's health staff. This will help to ensure that they remember you and can further solidify these important relationships within the office.

Track earned media following the event.

If there is media coverage, please let us know by reporting it to Jennifer Collier at jcollier@communitycatalyst.org.

Appendix A: Timeline

One month

- Begin by outlining your objectives for the event. What message are you trying to convey?
- Decide what type of event you want to plan.
- Choose a date – in order to do this, you should first call the Member's scheduler to determine when he/she is available.
- Begin looking for an available location.
- Start to sketch a draft agenda, including who will be speaking and what they will say.

3 Weeks

- Invite potential speakers.
- Send invitations to all state and local elected officials.
- Sent invitation to Member(s) of Congress.
- Draft and distribute flyers or Save the Dates for the event.
- Finalize agenda.

2 Weeks

- Send invitations to partners and individuals who you would like to attend your event.
- Follow up with confirmed speakers on what you'd like them to cover.
- Follow up on any unanswered invitations to elected officials.
- Gather biographical information on speakers and elected officials who will be participating.

1 Week

- Draft and send media advisory to all local and state media outlets, then follow up with a phone call.
- Make nametags for participants.
- Make confirmation calls to offices of elected officials.
- Designate a point person from your organization who will know and can identify all elected officials in attendance and will ensure that they know where to go and have what they need.
- Assemble informational packets for attendees if necessary.

Day Of

- Arrive early to set up the room.
- Set up a registration table.
- Direct participants with signs if necessary.
- Identify and approach all elected officials, funders, and media in attendance.
- Issue a press release at the end of the event.

Appendix B: U.S. Senate Schedule

DICK DURBIN

Assistant Majority Leader

JON KYL

Republican Whip

UNITED STATES SENATE
111th Congress, 1st Session

2009

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

JANUARY							FEBRUARY							MARCH						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
25	26	27	28	29	30	31								29	30	31				
<small>(2ND—110TH CONGRESS ADJOURNS SINE DIE) (6TH—111TH CONGRESS 1ST SESSION CONVENES)</small>																				
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
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							31													
JULY							AUGUST							SEPTEMBER						
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
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							30	31												
OCTOBER							NOVEMBER							DECEMBER						
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30						27	28	29	30	31		

(Red days = Senate not in session)

1ST SESSION CONVENES—JANUARY 6TH

TARGET ADJOURNMENT—TBA

Appendix C: U.S. House of Representatives Schedule

HOUSE MAJORITY WHIP JAMES E. CLYBURN 2009 U.S. HOUSE CALENDAR																							
JANUARY								FEBRUARY								MARCH							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S		
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31							
25	26	27	28	29	30	31																	
APRIL								MAY								JUNE							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S		
				1	2	3	4						1	2		1	2	3	4	5	6		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	21	22	23	24	25	26	27		
26	27	28	29	30			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30							
							31																
JULY								AUGUST								SEPTEMBER							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S		
				1	2	3	4						1			1	2	3	4	5			
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16	17	18	19		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	20	21	22	23	24	25	26		
26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	27	28	29	30					
							30	31															
OCTOBER								NOVEMBER								DECEMBER							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S		
				1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			1	2	3	4	5		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	13	14	15	16	17	18	19		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	20	21	22	23	24	25	26		
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30							27	28	29	30	31				
RED DAYS = DISTRICT WORK PERIODS = FEDERAL HOLIDAY																							
Majority Whip's Office: 226-3210 Majority Leader's Office: 225-3130 Democratic Cloakroom: 225-7330												http://majoritywhip.house.gov Recorded Floor Information: 225-7400 Recorded Schedule Information: 225-1600											