

# All Politics Is Local

By Michael F. Conlan

**A**sometimes overlooked key to being a successful legislative advocate is building relationships with an elected official's local "district" office. Representatives and senators rent space in at least one city in their district, and some have four or more scattered around that may be close to you. Some legislators even use RVs for mobile offices.

Each office has a director and specific staff members responsible for legislative issues with a local impact. They closely coordinate with their counterparts in the Washington office. Lawmakers usually spend time in a district office when they are back home.

These offices serve as the "eyes and ears" on local issues and conditions. They concentrate on providing constituent services and casework, especially contacting federal agencies when constituents can't get results. While representatives and senators can't guarantee a favorable response on say, a missing Social Security check or a disability claim, they do guarantee a response.

Get to know who covers health care, Medicare, and Medicaid issues in the district office nearest you. Stop by and see them to offer your personal assistance and to provide background information on community pharmacy issues. Here are some other tips:

- Offer to refer people who call their legislator asking for help in finding community pharmacy care.
- Leave your business card with staff every time you visit.
- Make certain the district office staff has information about your pharmacy and offer them—and their boss—a tour.
- Once you have made staff contacts, send them copies of any pharmacy newsletters or other publications you may produce.
- Get in touch with your legislative staff contacts when you have a job opening (manager, bookkeeper, and part-time), because many constituents call their legislator's office when they are job hunting.

All of this will make you a familiar face and name around your elected lawmaker's local base of operations. When legislators look for local experts, you will be a natural choice. When key votes affecting community pharmacy are coming up, your calls will get though and your e-mails read and answered.

Another way to get noticed by the district office staff and in the capital, too, is to write letters to the editor on community pharmacy issues. These letters to daily, weekly, and community newspapers are widely read. Many elected officials assign a staff person the job of reading all letters in any publication that circulates in their home district in order to keep a finger on the public pulse.

When legislators look for *local experts*, you will be a natural choice. When *key votes* affecting community pharmacy are coming up, *your calls* will get though and *your e-mails* read and answered.

Any issue facing community pharmacy is a potential topic. Had a Part D check due that didn't show up for 60 days? Write about it and the legislative remedies, H.R.1474 and S.1954.

Keep it simple, straightforward, sincere, and concise. Avoid jargon or abbreviations. Make sure you include your pharmacy's name. Newspapers love letters from local business owners. Get the e-mail or mail address from the letter's page. You'll really feel good when you see it in print. **ap**