



LOBBYING THE LEGISLATURE TIPS FOR COMMISSIONERS

County officials should never underestimate their influence on legislators during the session.

County elected officials are the most effective lobbyists. While FAC staff is at the Capitol every day, county commissioners -- as elected officials are the most effective voice for county government. Phone calls, visits, emails, or fax messages from you to your legislators carry tremendous weight.

Develop a rapport with members of your delegation.

Remind them that county officials and FAC are some of the very few sources of information where a legislator can get some idea of the impact of legislation on an entire community. Mostly, they will be hearing from lobbying organizations and individuals who have a very narrow, self-interested constituency. Counties represent all of Florida.

Plan on visiting the Capitol several times during the session and during FAC Legislative Day. Make appointments with members of your legislative delegation. Visit with them in their offices and attend committee meetings.

Regular phone contact during the session is important. Let legislators know how certain bills would affect you and their constituents.

Know how to reach your legislators. Be sure to have your legislators' telephone and fax numbers, addresses and email addresses. Double-check this information each year since new offices are sometimes assigned after an election.

Know the best time to reach them. Ask them when they are usually in their office. Keep in mind that schedules are less

predictable in the final weeks of session.

Offer technical support on issues you share in common.

If your legislator is carrying a bill you support, provide him or her with local anecdotes and situations that have prompted introduction of the bill, as well as the fiscal impact it will have on your area. Factual information and local impact will help your legislator argue more effectively in committee and on the floor.

Offer to testify on a bill of interest to the county.

Testimony from commissioners is encouraged and welcomed during committee meetings. Legislators appreciate other elected officials testifying in support of their bills. Even if you can't come to the Capitol, your phone call can be helpful, especially if you have already developed a relationship with your legislator.

Give legislators an early "heads up" call if one of their bills is going to cause problems to your county. They will appreciate your early warning of problems they may expect as their bill moves through the process. Also, they may wish to team up with you early to work out the problems.

Maintain direct contact while your legislators are at home.

Virtually all legislators will be in their home districts during weekends and when session is out. Make a point to visit them, arrange periodic meetings with delegation members or arrange joint meetings with other counties in their district during the session, as well as during the remainder of the year. Personal contact is key.

PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH LEGISLATORS...WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO

Avoid attacking legislators if they do not agree with your position -- especially in public or the press. Publicly attacking legislators is rarely effective communication.

Be direct in giving your opinions. Most legislators want to know what you think about an issue. Use the "golden rule" as your guide -- treat you legislators, as you'd like to be treated.

Don't burn your bridges. It's natural to be disappointed if your legislator doesn't vote the way you ask him or her to. But don't let one vote destroy your relationship -- you will need their support on many other issues in the future.

Thank your legislators for the positive things they do. Complaints not balanced by appreciation can wear thin over time. Take the time to send a letter or make a call to say "thank you."

Offer to help legislators with constituent issues that may never find their way into legislation. Legislators are asked to address a wide variety of issues during the year. Often, you may have the knowledge and background to help a legislator handle constituent issues. Many of the constituency groups that contact you also contact their legislators. Your day-to-day local perspective can prove invaluable to both legislators and constituents.