



## **Arctic Refuge Action**

### **An Activist's Guide to District Congressional Meetings**

Most legislators are eager to meet with their constituents. Lawmakers at any level of government like to use recess periods in their districts to hear from their constituents. Your opinions are valuable to your lawmakers, and your meeting is likely to be very influential. Keep in mind that you don't have to be an expert to get your point across. The message you will bring to this meeting is that of a citizen concerned about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

#### **To request a private meeting with your Senators and Representatives, you should:**

- Send a request letter on Arctic Refuge Action letterhead modeled after the one below.
- Find their district office number in your local telephone book
- Ask to speak with the appointments secretary or scheduler
- Introduce yourself as a constituent, stating where you live
- Tell the appointment secretary which issue you would like to discuss with your lawmaker (keeping the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge off-limits to drilling)
- Request a 15 minute meeting with your legislator (you may be given a shorter appointment, but any time is better than none). While it is best to meet directly with your legislator, if he or she is unavailable, you can schedule an appointment with the legislative aide responsible for environmental issues.

#### **Before the Appointment:**

- It's a good idea to send a follow-up letter or fax confirming your appointment. Remember to include your name, address and daytime phone number.
- Assemble a diverse group of like-minded individuals or groups, (preferably one who are among the lawmaker's supporters), to accompany you.
- Meet with your coalition ahead of time to agree and determine:
  - 1) What your message should be;
  - 2) Spokesperson or lead speaker;
  - 3) Different people to answer specific questions;
  - 4) A note taker;
  - 5) A follow-up letter writer;
  - 6) Appropriate fact sheets and other material to leave the lawmaker. (You can find many specific to certain issues that might interest your lawmaker—such as oil prices, national security and the budget reconciliation process—in the “About the Refuge” section.)

#### **During the Appointment:**

##### Thirteen Easy Steps to an Effective Visit with Your Legislator

1. Dress nicely. Don't let your appearance detract from your message or impair your credibility.

2. Introduce yourself and tell your member or staff person that you are a constituent and a part of Arctic Refuge Action, a coalition of environmental, religious and Native American groups working to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. If you have any family, social, business or political ties to the legislator, mention them as well.
3. Start with a compliment. If possible, thank the member for a good stand he or she recently took on an issue and/or mention if you voted for the member. At a minimum, thank them for taking the time to meet with you.
4. Take the initiative by stating clearly and concisely what issue you want to discuss, what your position is on it and what action you want the member to take. Follow this with facts about why he or she should take your position.
5. Stress how the issue will affect the member's district or state, and, if possible, tell a personal story which highlights your experience with the issue and why you care about it.
6. Give the legislator our brief factsheet on the wildlife, cultural and energy values of the Arctic Refuge, and explain how the budget reconciliation bill will likely include language that would open the Refuge to oil drilling.
7. Mention any other organizations, important individuals, government officials, and legislators which support your position. See "About Us" to find a list of prominent groups affiliated with Arctic Refuge Action.
8. Be a good listener. After you make your pitch, allow the member to respond. However, bring the conversation back to the issue at hand if the member goes off on a tangent or tries to evade it.
9. Answer any questions to the best of your ability, but if you don't know the answer, offer to find out and get back to them. Try to provide the information promptly in a follow-up letter.
10. Ask a direct question to which the legislator can respond "yes," such as, "Can we count on you to vote against the budget reconciliation bill if it includes drilling in the Arctic Refuge?" Press politely for a commitment, unless the member is clearly opposed to your position or to making a commitment.
11. Always thank the member for his or her time at the end of the meeting, even if he or she did not agree with your position.
12. Immediately after the meeting, write down any information you learned about the member's position or concerns so you can share it with others and use it to develop your legislative strategy.
13. Always follow up with a prompt thank you letter. In the letter, reiterate your key points and any commitments the member made to you. Include all follow-up information you promised to provide.
  - Keep the message simple to make sure your lawmaker understands your position and why.
  - Make sure your lawmaker's questions are answered.

**After the Appointment:**

- Write a follow up thank you letter, signed by all the interested groups – even the ones who could not attend the meeting
- Let Arctic Refuge Action know how your meeting went, by emailing [events@arcticrefugeaction.org](mailto:events@arcticrefugeaction.org). If possible send us a copy of your meeting notes.

**Sample Meeting Request Letter**

Dear Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_ ,

On behalf of Arctic Refuge Action, a new coalition of environmental, religious and Native rights groups, I'd like to request a short meeting with you during the course of the congressional recess to discuss an issue we care very deeply about—the fate of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

As you may know, the budget reconciliation bill will likely include language that would open the Arctic Refuge to oil exploration and drilling. We'd like the opportunity to talk with you about the dangers of this measure, and share our perspective on its environmental, economic, and cultural implications.

Since protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is so important to your constituents, several of our members may wish to attend the meeting with you. However, I won't be able to give you an exact number and names until we find out what day and time you may be able to meet.

Thank you very much for considering our request.

Sincerely,