

How to ‘Lobby’ Your Elected Officials on Net Neutrality

Say the word “lobbyist” and people often conjure up images of high-priced lawyers and fancy suits. But the reality is that all of us can “lobby” our members of Congress. Every day in Washington, corporate lobbyists flood the halls to influence policymaking on communications issues, including Net Neutrality – the principle that preserves the open Internet.

The outcomes of these decisions are vital to the many millions of Americans who rely on the Internet to engage in politics, build our businesses, connect with others and share our views. But legislators really need to hear from more than just big business – they need to hear from the public, too.

Policymakers are public officials, and it’s their job to serve the public interest. One of the best ways to remind them of this is through a face-to-face, “in-district” meeting. While in Washington, these legislators are lobbied heavily by the phone and cable companies to undermine Net Neutrality. So it’s important for legislators to hear from you when they’re back in district.

Here’s how you can get started:

An In-District Meeting with Your Members of Congress

Plan carefully. Assemble a small group of fellow constituents to organize the meeting with you and agree on one particular issue to address, such as urging your legislator to support the FCC’s efforts to protect Net Neutrality. Try to schedule your meeting during a congressional recess, when your representatives are more likely to be around. The month-long August recess is often the best time to do this.

Make an appointment. Call the legislator’s home district office (not the Washington, D.C. office) and ask for the name of the scheduler. Fax a written request for a meeting to the scheduler’s attention. In your fax, be sure to include your name and contact information, note the issue you’d like to discuss during the meeting, and suggest a range of times that you can meet. Follow up with a call to the scheduler within a few hours of sending the fax.

Prepare. Agree upon a few key talking points and write them down. Find out your legislator’s record on the issue you will be addressing, and plan to address this during the meeting. Also make copies of fact sheets that you can share with other attendees during the meeting. Find fact sheets on Net Neutrality at: savetheinternet.com/resources

Expect a brief meeting. Plan to have each participant in your group briefly make one important and unique point during the meeting. Leave time for the legislator or staffer to ask questions and respond to your request for action. Note that meetings with a legislator can be as short as 10-15 minutes, although meetings with legislative staff may be longer.

Be polite, clear and concise. Tell the legislator how the issue affects you personally and provide facts and examples to support your argument. Don’t be argumentative; keep the tone positive.

Ask for a specific action. For example: “Will you vote ‘No’ on the Senate’s resolution of disapproval of the FCC’s Net Neutrality rules?” It’s OK if the legislator or staffer wants to get back to you later with an answer.

Document the meeting. Make certain that one person in your group takes notes so you can report back to others about what was said. It’s also useful to bring a digital camera and to ask the legislator or staffer to pose for a picture with the members of your group.

Exchange contact information. Make sure that you get a business card from the person that you meet with. If you have a card, definitely leave it behind.

Follow up. Send a thank you note and watch for your legislator’s action on the issue. If a commitment has been made to you, make note of whether there is follow-through.

Let us know how it went. We’d love to hear about your meeting. Tell us about it at savetheinternet.com/Report_Back. Share your success stories or tactics with others. Blog about your experience and share photos.