MANAGING BIASES

“Chamber Staff Perspective”

Sabrina N. Lewellen, JD
Deputy Director, Arkansas Senate
Assistant Secretary Secretary of the Senate
There are 35 members of the Senate and 100 members of the House of Representatives.

The Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate. The Speaker of the House presides over the House.

Senators represent approximately 83,312 Arkansans and Representatives represent approximately 29,159.
ARKANSAS SENATE

Democrats: 13
Republicans: 21
Women: 6
Minorities: 3
ARKANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats: 48
Republicans: 51
Women: 17
Minorities: 12
Green: 1
ARKANSAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SENATE LEADERSHIP

President Pro Tempore
One Majority Leader
One Minority Leader
One Majority Whip
One Minority Whip

Four Assistant Pro Tempore
(One per Congressional district)
Regular Sessions in odd numbered years. Fiscal Sessions in even numbered years.

Term limited state
ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

- All nonpartisan staff
- Senate Chamber – 13 permanent
- House Chamber – 21 permanent
- Bureau of Legislative Research
- Legislative Audit
- No personal, caucus or leadership staff
The Arkansas Senate Constituency Services Office is a nonpartisan entity charged with assisting all 35 State Senators in investigating and resolving constituent questions, problems and concerns through the provision of professional and comprehensive casework, limited legal research, administrative support and other necessary methods.
CSO GOALS – “HEARD & SERVED”

- Provide prompt and thorough professional product to Senators and their constituents
- Promote Senators to their constituents
- Protect Senators
- Preserve work product through record retention
CSO HIGHLIGHTS

- Diversity of correspondence
- Attorney General Opinion submissions
- Flag requests
- Assistance with legislative, local, state & federal agencies in Arkansas and across the United States
- Organizing/scheduling meetings (Capitol)
- Miscellaneous casework
- Miscellaneous Senatorial requests
WHY MANAGE BIASES?

Democrats controlled since 1874 (138 years)

2012 – Republicans took over both chambers for the first time since Reconstruction
Review legislative orientation/organizational process
  - Who is helped?  Who is hurt?  What is the cost?

Positive and professional messaging from the beginning

Work with daily finish and the ultimate end in mind
  - If legislators were interviewed at the end of each day, what do you hope is said about your staff?
  - If legislators were interviewed at the end of their tenure, what do you hope is said about your staff?
IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Legislator the day after an election

Meet with legislator-elects individually

Meet once/twice annually

Be aware of the optics!
PERSONALIZE SERVICES

- Provide options where you can
- Show you value their preferences
- Remember they are people and their own constituent
Special Instructions:
Email CSO Case Reports
Signature Line - David J. Sanders
Font - Use Garmond Font on Letters
COLLEGIAL MESSAGING

All voices are important

Know the primary and the loudest voices

Try to find out what members are saying

Just ask
“Yes” is easy. “No” can be a game changer.

Know the options/limits BEFORE you approach

Follow-up, especially after the first “no”
CLOSE WELL

- Recognize the difficulty of the end
- Careful language during the closure
- Legislator until the end
- Chamber departure rarely means extinction
CHALLENGES REMAIN

- Starting over after enjoying years of established credibility and trust
- Shift in type of legislator
- Side effects of term limits
- Made up minds – politics, process and people
Legislators balance political, professional, personal and private lives every day in ways few understand – but we do.

Know and own our power and position as legislative staff

Meet legislators where they are...even in their biases

Situations of bias are not permanent
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