



THE

ARRL

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

ASSISTANT

A HANDBOOK OF OPERATION

BY THE ARRL *AD HOC* LEGISLATIVE ACTION COMMITTEE

## I. INTRODUCTION

This handbook is provided to assist you as an ARRL Legislative Action Assistant (LAA) to understand better the task you have volunteered to perform on behalf of ARRL, Amateur Radio and the public we serve. As an LAA you will advocate (lobby for or against) Federal laws identified by the ARRL Board of Directors. This action will be designed to promote and protect Amateur Radio. This work will ultimately benefit the public.

The ARRL Legislative Action Program is intended to provide Amateur Radio with a coordinated, intelligent voice to promote Federal Legislation that affects Amateur Radio. As such, it is important that you always remember you are a representative of ARRL and the Amateur Radio community to the Federal Legislator you have volunteered to contact. The manner in which you perform your volunteer activities reflects not only on you, personally, but also on all hams. The success of the ARRL Legislative Action program will depend greatly on how well you follow the basic outline of the Program.

In fulfilling your duties as LAA, you are not expected to be an expert in law or electronics. Instead, you will be one of your Federal Legislator's valued resources who have personal knowledge regarding Amateur Radio and how it benefits the public. Do not feel badly if you are asked questions you cannot answer. If this occurs, make a note of them and the person who asked them, and offer to get answers for them. Note any questions that are brought up during the visit in your report. League experts will get the answers to you.

Please understand that in your official capacity as a LAA, you must not become involved in partisan politics. Partisan politics is when a person works for one party to win over another party or for one candidate to win over another candidate. ARRL is a tax-exempt organization as defined by the US Internal Revenue Code. As such, the League is prohibited from becoming involved in partisan politics. As a private individual, however, you can work on behalf of candidates and contribute to their or their party's campaign treasury if you choose. Simply be sure to keep your actions as an LAA and as a private citizen separated.

Working in the non-partisan political arena can be fun. You should expect to meet very interesting people. Enjoy your work on behalf of Amateur Radio.

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

### A. Overview of the ARRL Legislative Action Program

1. The ARRL Board of Directors, in consultation with the CEO, General Counsel and Chwat & Co. inc. determines the legislation we wish to effect and the strategy we will use to do this. Chwat & Co. inc. is the Washington government relations firm the ARRL retains.
2. The Directors organize and oversee the Program in their respective Divisions. They may appoint a Division Legislative Action Chairperson (DLAC) to do this for them.
3. The Legislative Action Coordinator (LAC) is identified and appointed by the Director to manage legislative action activities in a state. The Director may appoint more than one LAC per state if this is necessary.
4. The Legislative Action Assistant (LAA) is identified and appointed by the LAC with the concurrence of the Division Director. When directed to make contacts, LAAs visit Legislators or their aides in their offices in their home-district. LAAs are organized in teams of no more than three members. When necessary, fewer than three team members are acceptable.

5. When appropriate, all ARRL members in a District, state or, on occasion, the entire country will be requested to write to their Federal Legislators in support of targeted legislation.

**B. Who is responsible for organizing the ARRL Political Action Program?**

The ARRL Legislative Action Program was established in Minute 18 of the 26 January 2005 Annual Meeting of the ARRL Board of Directors. The ARRL Chief Executive Officer manages its day-to-day operation. The President oversees the Program and reports on its status and progress to the Executive Committee and the Board. Between Board meetings, the Executive Committee ensures that the policy of the Board, including policy related to this program, is followed. The ARRL Board of Directors determines the specific legislation we will effect. The ARRL General Counsel and the government relations (lobbying) firm the ARRL retains support the President, CEO and EC to develop strategies and timing for our actions.

**C. Who are the Players on the Government Team?**

Throughout this Handbook, you will see references to Congressmen\*, Legislator, Member of Congress, US Senator, US Representative and Congressional Aide. These are the people you will be directed to visit in their offices in their home districts. These people are defined to mean:

1. Congressman, Legislator, Member of Congress: These terms are interchangeable. The people are either members of the US House of Representatives (a US Representative) or the US Senator (a US Senator).
2. US Senator: A person elected from a specific state to represent the voters of the state in the US Senate. There are two Senators for each US state.
3. US Representative: A person elected from a specific Congressional District within a state to represent the voters of this District in the US House of Representatives. The number of Representatives for each state is determined from a formula that involves the total number of voters in the state.
4. Congressional Aide: This is a person hired by a US Representative or a US Senator to assist the Congressman manage and operate his Congressional office. Aides are advisors to the Congressman who they support.

\*For simplicity sake, we will use male pronouns in referring to Congressmen and Congresswomen. The use of the words Congressman, his, etc. are a matter of expediency and historic means for referring to all Legislators regardless of their sex. We hope the use of this expediency does not cause problems for anyone.

**D. Why You Should Contact Your Member of Congress**

1. Federal Legislators frequently vote based upon their understanding of the wishes of their constituents. As a constituent, your opinion is important to them.
2. Because of their knowledge of communications, radio amateurs can serve as a valuable resource in an area of expertise Legislators and their staff often lack.

Elected officials view their constituents as "resources" and want to hear from them. They need input from their constituents to gauge positions on a piece of

legislation and determine how it will affect their district. Our input may also assist in determining how a Legislator will vote on an issue.

As a licensed Amateur Radio operator, you can provide a valuable resource to your member of Congress. The insight you offer as to how a particular piece of legislation may affect hams and the public could make the difference between whether or not the Congressman will support the position of Amateur Radio. Members of Congress do not have sufficient resources to allow for a full understanding of every issue that comes before them. Although they rely on staff members who are tasked with monitoring specific issues (such as telecommunications) each legislative assistant (aide) has a varying degree of knowledge of these issue areas.

More often than not, the knowledge Legislators have of Amateur Radio is fairly limited. Therefore, your combination of being a constituent and a federally licensed Amateur Radio operator can help make the difference by ensuring that your Congressman and staff receives the balanced information they need to make good decisions on Amateur Radio related legislation.

#### **E. The US Congress makes the laws of the country.**

Bills in the US House of Representatives begin with "H.B." Bills that originate in the US Senate start with "S." These are often referred to as "House Bill nnn" and "Senate Bill nnn."

When seeking support for a particular piece of legislation, make sure you refer to it by the correct designation. Ask your Representative to support "H.B." bills, only, and ask your Senator to support "S." legislation. The most common action we will probably ask you to take is to ask a US Representative or US Senator to "co-sponsor" a piece of legislation. The most basic fact you should have before contacting the Legislator is the proper number of the bill you wish to discuss. This small bit of information will make your call or e-mail much more efficient by making it possible for your Congressman and his staff to refer to the bill you are talking about most easily and correctly.

After a bill is introduced, it is referred to a committee for consideration by a select group of Representatives or Senators. The Congressmen who serve on each committee and subcommittee (and staff who work for each) have a particular expertise in the subject area and are able to give the legislation the proper scrutiny before the bill is presented to the full House or Senate for consideration.

Once a bill has been cleared by the committee, it moves either to the floor of the House or Senate for a vote by the full body. If it passes, it is then referred to the other legislative body (e.g. bills passed by the House of Representative will move to the Senate) for a similar round of consideration. If the bill is passed in both the House and the Senate, it is sent to the President to be signed into law.

A useful website for tracking legislation is <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

#### **F. What We May Ask Your Legislator to Do.**

ARRL will seek support of Federal legislation that furthers the cause of Amateur Radio and makes it possible to continue to serve the public. In general, the main functions of support your Congressional offices can provide to you as an Amateur Radio licensee are as follow:

1. Sponsor Federal legislation to change or create law.
2. Co-sponsor a piece of legislation pending before Congress (publicly support the legislation by adding their name to those backing the bill).
3. Vote for or against Federal legislation being considered by the House or Senate Committee on which they serve.
4. Vote for or against Federal legislation being considered on either the US House or Senate floor.
5. Assist with concerns or questions that we may have with Federal agencies, such as the FCC.

### III. SCHEDULING A PERSONAL VISIT WITH A FEDERAL LEGISLATOR

#### A. Make an appointment in advance.

A typical method for doing this is to telephone his office and request an appointment. Advise the aide you are a constituent of the Representative or Senator. Be prepared to explain briefly the topic of your visit, the approximate number of people who will come with you and the approximate length of time the meeting will require. Whether or not you get an appointment during this initial phone call, follow it with a letter that generally restates the purpose of the meeting, the number of people who will come with you and the length of time it will consume.

#### B. Be firm, but don't be a pest.

If you haven't received an appointment to meet with the Legislator or aide within a couple of weeks, telephone again and repeat the process.

#### C. Know the background of the Legislator.

Before you call your US Senator or Representative's office, it may be helpful to learn about him. You can do this by going to your Legislator's page on <http://thomas.loc.gov> and clicking on Biography at the top of the screen. Look for information that may show common interests between the Legislator and a member of your delegation that will be on hand for the visit. Don't worry if your Legislator belongs to a different political party from you. You will not be discussing partisan politics with him.

### IV. PREPARING FOR A MEETING

#### A. Where do I get information to plan my visit?

Background information for your visit will be prepared by the ARRL HQ staff. This will include information on US legislation you will be asked to discuss, material you will leave with the Congressman at the end of your visit, and forms you can use to report the results of your visit. The form can be found at the *Grassroots* area of the ARRL *Members Only* web site. (As an ARRL member, you can access the Members Only section of the ARRL.org web site. When the ARRL web site opens for you, click on *Members Only*. If you have not previously registered to use this area of the site, fill in the information requested to gain access. At the Members Only area, click on the *Grassroots* link in the column to the right of the screen.)

**B. When should you contact your Legislator?**

Make visits only when your Legislative Action Coordinator (LAC) asks you to make them. One major feature in our Legislative Action Program is that our effort needs to be coordinated if we are to realize greatest success. By coordinating the timing of visits and of sending letters to Legislators, and even by determining which Legislators to contact at which times, we maximize the value of our effort. Avoid the temptation to begin a campaign on behalf of a bill or a cause until you have been notified to take action. Pursuing legislative action is similar to a military campaign. Starting too soon or too late, or failing to deploy the proper resources at the proper time is likely to doom the campaign before it has begun. We need to bring the correct resources to bear on our legislative agenda at the proper time and with the proper Legislators as targets of our visits and letters.

The needed coordination will be provided through instructions from the ARRL Legislative Action Program management.

**C. You are not expected to be an expert . . . just a reasonably knowledgeable constituent.**

One of the best ways to make a useful and lasting impression with Legislators is to meet with them personally. Your US Congressman likely spends at least a few weekends in his state or Congressional District every several weeks. During certain parts of the year (e.g. summer recess), Congressmen have an extended opportunity to work out of their offices in their state or District offices. Unlike "meet and greets" that occur during family trips to Washington, DC, this is a real opportunity to get quality face-to-face time with your elected officials. Realistically, though, it may be more likely that you will be able to meet with an aide to your Legislator instead of with the Legislator. This is acceptable, because it is the aide's job to pass information on to the Legislator.

When meeting in person with your Congressman or his aide, do not be nervous or feel intimidated. You are certainly going to offer him a great deal of education on the subject of Amateur Radio and how we amateurs serve the public. The Legislator will likely look forward to learning about its importance.

**D. Participants.**

You should certainly feel comfortable meeting on your own; however, the ARRL Legislative Action team approach is designed to perform best when a two or three-member team makes the visit. When the team consists of two or three members, the task of talking and presenting our position can be shared among the Team members. Team members who are not doing the talking at a particular moment, should listen very carefully to questions and comments made by the Congressman or aide to detect preconceived ideas or unstated positions they may have. Follow up on the things you learn and also share this intelligence with our Washington DC team. To avoid confusion, there should typically be no more than three participants in a team.

1. Plan in advance who will speak and the approach you will use.
2. Plan what you wish to say to your Legislator or the aide. Try to keep the meeting focused on the topic you wish to discuss. You can find background information for your meeting on the ARRL web site under Members Only at the *Grassroots* link.

## V. PRESENTING OUR CASE

How you as a LAA fit in is simple. Your contact “back home” can be the key that opens your Congressman’s door on Capitol Hill in Washington to our Washington team. Your visit demonstrates that people back home are interested in the legislation you discuss. The information you give to the Legislator gives him solid reasons for your interest. This makes it much more likely that he will be interested in talking about the topic more deeply when our ARRL Washington representatives pay a visit to his office on Capitol Hill.

### A. When you visit your Congressman.

1. Tell the Congressman or aide whom you visit that you represent Amateur Radio operators in his district or state. Be sure to mention the number of amateurs in this district (i.e., the number of hams in the Congressional District if the Legislator is in the US House of Representatives, or the number of hams in the state if he is in the US Senate). These numbers generally represent the number of registered ham voters in the district. They are available from the *Grassroots* area of the ARRL web site.
2. Be brief but concise in your discussion. Congressmen and their aides are usually busy people who appreciate having meetings that are relatively brief and to the point.
3. Dress appropriately. As an ambassador of Amateur Radio to your Legislator, you need to show visibly that we are reliable people and that you respect the person you are visiting. Being neat, clean and well dressed is one way of making a proper impression. Your position requires dignity of dress and dignity of action. Similarly, speak with confidence and avoid extensive use of slang terms and ham radio jargon. What you wear will depend in part on where you live. One will not go wrong with dressing in typical business clothing; however, some offices in specific Districts may operate on a less formal basis and neat, casual attire will work well in these instances.
4. Avoid jargon. Very few people outside of the communications fields know or need to know the meaning of Yagi, DX, ragchew and other catchwords (jargon) we amateurs use regularly. If you must use a word or two of jargon, be certain their use adds to the discussion. Give a brief, easily understood explanation of their meanings.
5. Emphasize our positives of public service to legitimize our request. Emphasize Amateur Radio’s work to assist Red Cross, FEMA, Fire Department, etc. during tornadoes, floods and other emergencies that have occurred in your state or locality. Do not focus on DXing, foxhunting and other phases of Amateur Radio that could be considered as frivolous by people outside of Amateur Radio unless the Legislator or aide asks about these subjects. Instead, use Amateur Radio’s record in providing unique and timely service to the public when justifying our existence. Even if the Congressman asks about DXing or other of the more hobby aspects of Amateur Radio, be sure to describe these in terms of the training they provide for communicating in time of emergency.

### B. Leave Something Behind.

Having a handout with a few key bullet points will help the Legislator focus on and understand the issue. Leave-behinds will generally be available to print out from the

*Grassroots* link of Members Only. The video Amateur Radio Today is also excellent to use as leave-behind information. Each of these sources of information is concise and to-the-point. We need to remember that Congressmen and their staffs are usually inundated with material that is hard to follow and never gets read. Do not offer something that will not be useful. Handouts designed specifically for use with government officials will usually be found at the *Grassroots* link described under *Have a Plan*. Similarly, copies of Amateur Radio Today may be downloaded or ordered at <http://www.arrl.org/ARToday/>.

Try to keep the meeting focused as well. Federal Legislators are very busy and will appreciate a well-timed meeting.

**C. Get an answer before you leave.**

At the conclusion of your meeting ask for the Legislator's position on your issue.

**D. Say Thank You.**

As you leave the meeting thank the Congressman or aide for seeing you. After you return home be sure to have a member of your team send a brief note by US Mail that thanks the Congressman or aide for making time available for you to discuss and provide information on our issue to them. These two actions are common courtesy that should be observed. They also demonstrate maturity on your part and of Amateur Radio.

If your Member of Congress has agreed to support your request, express your and Amateur Radio's appreciation for this support.

## **VI. AFTER THE MEETING**

**A. Keep in Touch.**

You have started a relationship with the Congressman or aide. Over the coming years you may ask for additional meetings on Amateur Radio related subjects. Depending upon the Legislator or aide, you could send greetings to him on special occasions (e.g., Christmas, New Year) and congratulate him for particular achievements (including committee assignments in Congress). In smaller communities in particular, you might find it appropriate and practical to "drop in" at the office simply to say hello occasionally. Maintaining a friendly relationship can prove very useful.

**B. Share What You Learn -- Keep the ARRL Informed.**

What you learn during your visit may be as important as the information you give.

When you make a contact with a Member of Congress or his staff, be sure to keep the ARRL informed. Relaying any responses you receive through your meetings may help the ARRL develop a more precise agenda concerning who needs to be contacted, the information we need to give them and how they should be targeted to gain their support for Amateur Radio. Please use the meeting report form you will find at *Grassroots* on the ARRL Members Only web area to keep management of the ARRL Legislative Action Program informed of the meeting you had with your Congressman or aide. In exchange, as legislative issues begin to move on Capitol Hill, information will be provided to you as to how best to communicate with your contacts.

## VII WHAT ABOUT STATE LEGISLATIVE ISSUES?

### A. We've discussed the Federal Government, but who manages the state and local scene?

We have discussed the ARRL organization for affecting Federal legislation, but what about effort to affect state and Local laws?

State and local issues fall under a separate ARRL program that has been in place since the position of State Government Liaison (SGL) was established at Minute 20 of the July 1982 Board Meeting. This program operates within the ARRL Field Organization and is directed by the Section Manager for each Section. The functions of the SGL are described at <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/org/sgl.html>.

### B. What About Cross-Involvement of Section and Federal legislative action people?

There is no reason people who are appointed to positions in the ARRL Legislative Action Program cannot also be appointed to serve in the state and local program that is managed by the SMs. Similarly, SGLs and other appointees in the state and local program may be appointed to positions in the Federal program. For example, it may make total sense to have the same person serve as LAC and SGL in a state. In doing this, the appointee will have two, separate management chains to work through. The basic requirement for participating in both of the programs simultaneously is that the Director/DLAC, LAC and SM(s) as well as the appointee all agree they can work cooperatively to benefit the two programs.

## VIII. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Amateurs who are appointed to participate in the ARRL Legislative Action Program must be ARRL members. This is because of the tax-exempt status of the League. The ARRL, as is true of all CFR 501(c)(3) organizations, is allowed to work freely to educate its members on legislative issues of importance to them. We are limited; however, in the amount of effort we can devote directly to educating nonmembers. It is too cumbersome to maintain the records necessary to demonstrate to the IRS that we have not exceeded the maximum limit of effort if we were to choose to work directly with nonmembers; therefore, appointment to a position in the program is restricted to ARRL members.

**Factoid: Hiram Percy Maxim, W1AW, was the first lobbyist for ARRL. At the end of WW I, the Navy Department was given control of wireless communications for the US. It did not want Amateur Radio operating to resume. Hiram, along with a group of his friends, went to Washington to lobby throughout the government on behalf of Amateur Radio. Their work led to Amateur Radio being allowed to resume operating on 1 October 1919. Since the day of OM Maxim, ARRL has conducted a steady although often-invisible program of "advocating" or "lobbying" on behalf of Amateur Radio.**

Thanks to Mr. John Chwat of Chwat & Co., Inc. who contributed substantially to this handbook.

## **IX. USEFUL NAMES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

My Division Director or Division Legislative Action Chair is:

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My Legislative Action Coordinator is:

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My LAA Team members are:

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