



Understanding your member of Congress

An overview of a member of Congress's daily activities

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Producer: Hunter Hamrick

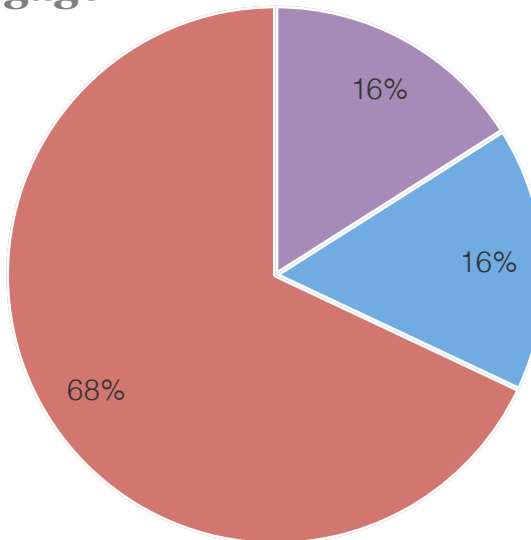
Director: Alistair Taylor



Most members of Congress feel misunderstood by their constituents

Members' response to the statement: "Most of my constituents understand the day-to-day activities I engage in"

Disagree Neutral Agree



Analysis

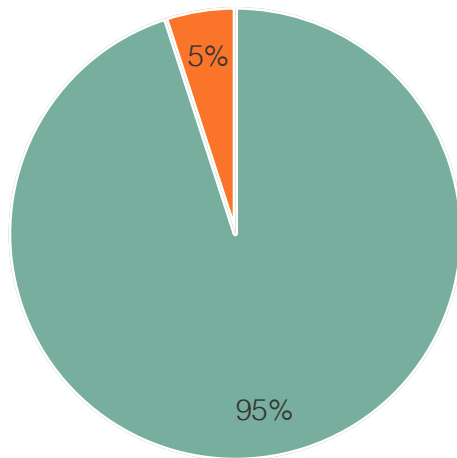
- Many Americans possess a limited, and somewhat distorted, view of what it's like to be a member of Congress; most portrayals of members by the entertainment industry reinforce the stereotype that they are lazy, self-interested and corrupt
- Members themselves add to the criticism by decrying their colleagues and Congress, claiming that nothing is getting done
- Reality is somewhat different: for most members, the job of being a lawmaker is not luxurious or carefree; it's rather chaotic, more like being the CEO of a small start-up company or an emergency room physician



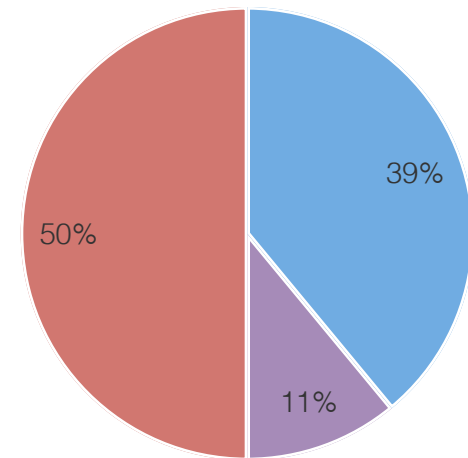
Constituent service work is important to members but members may lack resources to meet demands

Importance to members' job satisfaction of staying in touch with constituents and response to "I have the resources to accomplish my goals in Congress"

Very important Somewhat important



Disagree Neutral Agree



Analysis

- Members prioritize serving and staying in touch with constituents; constituent conversations guide policymaking, and every member realizes that reelection hinges on their ability to serve the constituents who vote them into office
- Nonetheless, members face constraints in their ability to meet constituent demands, and advocates should be sensitive to members' limited time and resources when making specific asks of their member of Congress



A member’s schedule leaves little time for focusing on Constituents and often has events that overlap

Sample House member schedule

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 9:30 AM – 9:30 AM | Speak to attendees of National Women, Infants, and Children’s Association (WIC) Leadership Conference |
| 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Attend appropriations hearing for FDA regulatory programs |
| 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | Attend bipartisan classified briefing on Iran |
| 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM | Attend caucus meeting on jobs and the economy |
| 12:45 PM – 1:15 PM | Meet with WIC program manager to discuss issues and funding |
| 1:15 PM – 1:45 PM | Meet with representatives from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to discuss U.S.-Israel aid |
| 1:30 PM – 2:00 PM | Meet with local county supervisor to discuss national parks bill |
| 2:00 PM – 2:30 PM | Meet with nonprofit representative to discuss food stamp initiative in state |
| 2:30 PM – 3:00 PM | Meet with local U.S. Army officers to discuss land transfer issues |
| 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM | Listen in on fundraising call at party HQ |
| 3:00 PM – 3:30 PM | (FYI: regional Army Corp of Engineers discussing current projects) |
| 3:30 PM – 4:00 PM | Meet with organic farming research foundation to discuss farming programs |
| 4:30 PM – 5:00 PM | Meet with local supervisor to discuss health issues |
| 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM | Meet with local county representatives to discuss flood control efforts |
| 6:30 PM – 9:30 PM | (FYI: American Council for Capital Formation Dinner Discussion) |

From one day in a House member’s Washington, D.C., office in March 2012. Only identifying details have been altered.

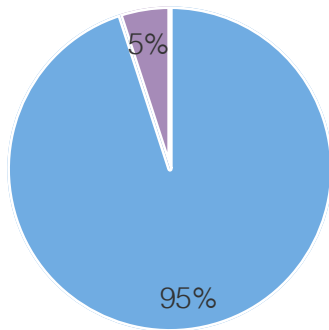
Sources: Congressional Management Foundation and the Society for Human Resource Management, “Life in Congress: The Member Perspective,” 2013



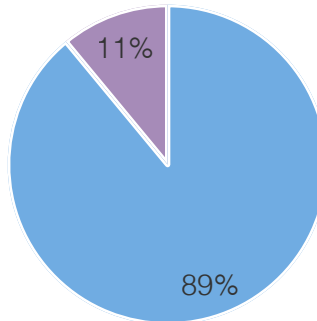
Members rely on their staff to help them serve their constituents

Members' trust in their staff

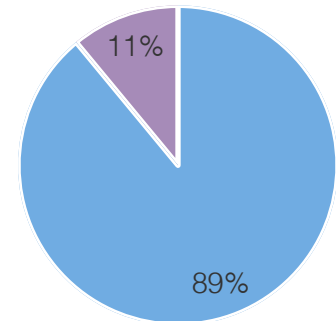
Agree Neutral



My staff clearly understands and is motivated by what I'm trying to accomplish



My staff is good at keeping focused on my goals and priorities



My staff provides sufficient support to help me effectively do my job

Analysis

- To help them keep up with their many professional obligations, members depend on staff, who support them with their day-to-day work and keep them focused on legislative goals
- Members trust their staff to help them carry out their responsibilities in office, including listening to constituents; for this reason, advocates should not be surprised if they meet with staff in lieu of a member