



Wound  
Ostomy and  
Continence  
Nurses  
Society™

## **ADVOCACY AND GRASSROOTS TOOLKIT**

### *Influencing Public Policy: Strengthening the Voice of the Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Community*

The future growth and vitality of wound, ostomy and continence nursing is largely dependent on the ability of professionals to influence key decisions made in our state and nation's capitols. These policy decisions are essential to preserving the future of our practices, hospitals, research facilities, and the patient populations that we serve. To protect the consumers who utilize our services, we must develop and deliver effective messages to our elected officials about the quality of our patient care and its importance to the community.

This is the essence of advocacy, which can be implemented on many levels and take many different forms. Getting involved in the public policy process may seem intimidating, confusing or outside of your comfort level. This toolkit will present a variety of ideas for incorporating advocacy efforts into your practice, from simply establishing regular communications with your elected officials to the more advanced efforts entailed in developing a grassroots program to strengthen your influence in Washington, D.C. or in your state capitol. WOCN has prepared this toolkit as a resource for its members to enhance their own efforts while the Society continues to conduct direct lobbying on Capitol Hill, provide advocacy support and training, as well as coordinate all of the Society's governmental relations activities. We hope that through the information found in these pages, you will find the process of public policy advocacy to be easy, fun and effective.

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## **Section 1: What is Advocacy?**

### **Advocacy is Vital to Supporting and Advancing WOCN Visibility and Programs**

For nursing in general, and WOC nurses in particular, members must engage in proactive and aggressive advocacy efforts to help drive the national health agenda and to receive the attention, response and funding they deserve.

- Much of what nurses do and experience daily while caring for their patients is influenced directly by laws, regulations, and other policies.
- Policymakers and elected officials can positively and negatively influence issues that affect treatments, research, prevention, and early detection.
- Lawmakers regularly make decisions that have an impact on patients, physicians, nurses, health insurers, hospital administrators, and researchers and these decisions may be made with limited knowledge and understanding of the people and systems they are affecting.
- More and more nurses are taking action and making a difference. **Your voice matters and we need your help.**

Members of Congress are most responsive to people from their own states and communities, and they must hear from nurses about our priorities and concerns. Without hearing directly from nurses about priorities, problems and recommended solutions, policymakers either will fail to address such concerns or use information and expertise provided to them by others. Some of their sources may not share the views of the nursing community. Policymakers must have your input, so they are aware of the needs in their communities and the ramifications of changes in policy. **A well-informed, articulate, and passionate nurse can be a valued resource to elected officials and their staff, can raise issues of importance, and can help craft and implement necessary solutions.**

### **So, What Is Health Policy Advocacy?**

**Advocacy** is defined as the support or defense of a cause and the act of pleading on behalf of another person. Nurses engage in advocacy every day on behalf of their patients.

### **Turning Outrage into Action**

Every day, people have experiences that are frustrating, unbelievable, or so outrageous that they think, "How can this be? There ought to be a law!" Nurses often experience this frustration in their day-to-day practice—fighting with managed care companies, facing inadequate Medicare reimbursement, and cobbling together adequate care for uninsured patients.

- Health policy advocacy means channeling this sense of outrage about inadequately conceived laws, policies, and regulations or about the absence of a law when the need for one is clear.

- Advocates let policymakers know what they, as citizens and constituents, believe elected officials should do.

Despite its simple definition, advocacy is multifaceted, and the types of advocacy activities are many and diverse. The good news is that **health policy advocacy doesn't require new skills; it just involves applying existing ones in a new context.**

**Nurses are professional advocates.** They regularly represent and work on behalf of patients, as well as their family members, physicians, and, sometimes, health insurers. In addition, nurses lead busy lives, have competing responsibilities and priorities, and every day give themselves to their jobs. Hopefully, this tool kit makes it easy for you to get involved in advocacy.

So, now that we have convinced you that advocacy can be easy and make a difference in the outcome of our nation's policy discussions, we will move forward into the nuts and bolts of the policymaking process, and discuss how you, as an individual nurse, can get involved.

### **Advocacy is a Right and a Responsibility**

The U.S. Constitution grants us the right to tell our elected officials our concerns and request them to take action to address them! If we took the time, we all could come up with a list of issues we would like our public officials to address.

**Remember: Policymakers work for the citizens.** Your tax dollars pay their salaries, health insurance, retirement benefits, and travel. After all, you are held accountable by your employers. Therefore, you have every right to hold policymakers accountable for their actions, tell them what you want them to do, and give them feedback on how you think they are doing at their jobs. The ultimate performance appraisal you can give your public officials is by voting—either returning them to office or ending their service.

In the United States, we have a participatory democracy and representative government. **Becoming involved is not only a right, but also a responsibility.**

### **Advocacy Is Easy and Effective – Debunking the Myths**

Numerous "myths" of advocacy exist that prevent people from becoming involved in the policymaking process, including the misperceptions that it takes a lot of time, doesn't make a difference, and requires great expertise. You may have questions, concerns, or preconceived notions about advocacy and health policy. To that end, we have compiled the 10 most pervasive advocacy myths and debunked them one-by-one.

<b>1. I am too busy—there is not enough time in the day.</b>	Sending an email takes less than five minutes – only involves a few clicks – and does have an impact. Just look up your member's Web site at <a href="http://www.house.gov">www.house.gov</a> or <a href="http://www.senate.gov">www.senate.gov</a> to locate their email address. Remember: if you do not get involved, no one else will.
<b>2. I am a nurse, not a lobbyist.</b>	Perfect! Members of Congress are more likely to listen to

	<p>you – you are an expert in what patients and nurses face on a daily basis. You can provide the elected official with substantive and valid information, as you know first-hand what occurs in today’s health care system and what is needed to improve it. You are a “legitimate constituent voice” – not a hired gun.</p>
<p><b>3. Why should I bother? It doesn’t seem to make a difference. I have written before and not received a response. When I have received a response, the letter didn’t address the issue I wrote about or I totally disagreed with the views expressed.</b></p>	<p>It absolutely makes a difference, even though it may not feel that way. Offices count calls, emails, faxes, and mail. Staffers log opinions that are expressed and provide regular reports on constituent communications to the Member of Congress. If you have written and not received a response, write or call and let the office know. Sometimes, with the volume of mail, letters can get lost. Also, if you disagree with the views expressed in a response letter, write again and politely repeat your request and rationale and indicate you are disappointed in the Member’s position on the issue. Usually if you bring it to their attention you get a prompt response.</p>
<p><b>4. My Member is a lost cause, doesn’t sit on the relevant committee, or doesn’t care about health care.</b></p>	<p>It is essential to weigh-in and go on record with your Member(s) of Congress. You never know when an issue will resonate with them or their staffers. Many Members of Congress and staffers or their family members have needed nursing care. Many Members who historically were not interested or supportive of nursing issues, once touched by the profession in a time of need, can become our biggest advocates.</p>
<p><b>5. My concerns or issues of priority are not being discussed in Congress.</b></p>	<p>Maybe that is because no one is writing and/or calling about them. You, your colleagues, and your patients can help elevate an issue to the national agenda by communicating with your policymakers about it. Sometimes it takes a grassroots movement to garner attention.</p>
<p><b>6. I am not an expert in the issue you are asking me to weigh-in on.</b></p>	<p>You are an expert in the delivery of quality health care and understand first-hand what patients and nurses face every day. Just be honest about your experiences in the field.</p>
<p><b>7. The process is intimidating. I don’t understand what a substitute amendment is, am unclear on how conference committee works, and cannot remember what a pocket veto</b></p>	<p>The details and nuances of the federal policy making process are difficult to follow, but you do not need to know them all. Do not worry if you cannot remember fourth grade civics – no one can, not even Members of Congress. Just know who represents you in Congress – two Senators (<a href="http://www.senate.gov">www.senate.gov</a>) and a Representative in the House</p>

<p><b>means.</b></p>	<p>(<a href="http://www.house.gov">www.house.gov</a>). Read the information in this tool kit and you will be set!</p>
<p><b>8. I am a Republican, and my Member is a Democrat. I am a Democrat, and my Member is a Republican.</b></p>	<p>Every one consumes health care; nursing is not a partisan profession. Do not worry about your party affiliation; just identify yourself as a constituent and a nurse – these are suitable qualifications for your views to be treated with respect.</p>
<p><b>9. I’ve done my part to support the cause. I’ve written and called before about Nurse Reinvestment Act funding and nursing research and requested my Members’ support. I don’t need to write, call, email, or meet with them again.</b></p>	<p>Every day Congress makes decisions that affect you. Writing, calling, emailing, or meeting with your policymakers regularly is essential. Each year Congress determines funding levels for the coming year, so every year nurses again must contact their Members about the need to support programs that address the nursing shortage and other programs. Every year Congress considers changes to the Medicare program that affect nurses. As such, Members of Congress need to hear from nurses throughout the year. As the saying goes – “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” Policymakers often claim the reason for their inaction on matters is that they aren’t “hearing from their constituents at home” on the issue. Don’t give them an excuse!</p>
<p><b>10. I cannot make it to Washington to meet with my Member.</b></p>	<p>Members and staffers will tell you that developing a relationship with your policymakers and their staffers “back-at-home” is more effective since you can see them in your own community. Coming to Washington is effective but communicating from and at home is even better. Emails, calls, and faxes from you to your Members of Congress sent to their Washington office are great. Visiting the district office or attending a town hall meeting is terrific.</p>

## **Section 2:**

### **The Basics: Communicating Directly with Your Legislator**

Legislators are greatly influenced by what they know and what they hear - especially from the people they represent. By communicating with a state legislator or a member of Congress, you can have a profound impact on the government policies that most affect WOCN practice. If you can write a letter, send an email or leave a brief phone message - just like you do for your patients, friends or family - you can "do" health policy advocacy. It's that easy.

Your elected officials need to hear from you. They hear from constituents and interest groups about many issues from education to transportation to foreign policy. They need to hear from the nursing community as well. Don't assume they know all the facts about the important patient care role that WOC nursing plays in your community. It is incumbent upon you to provide them with the information they will need to fully appreciate the vital role your practice plays.

Remember that you also should communicate with legislators from around your state, not just the elected representative from the district in which your facility or institution is located. Legislators from neighboring districts need to know your practice is essential to their constituents.

There are many ways to communicate with policymakers, such as letters, postcards, email, phone calls, faxes, and face-to-face meetings. Advocates often wonder which method is most effective and whether all are counted equally. Each Congressional office has its own calculus and system for handling and "counting" different communications. Generally, each policymaker gets a regular report from staff regarding how many letters, postcards, emails, phone calls, and faxes have been received on various issues and what positions constituents are advocating. No matter what method you use, the most important thing is to ensure your voice is heard.

For the most part, the information below and the tips and guidelines found in the next chapter apply to all forms of written communication, including faxes, emails, and regular letters.

Depending on the urgency of the situation, use one of the following methods of communications:

- **Letter writing** — This method should be used primarily to accompany information packets, articles, etc. as mail arrives very slowly to Capitol Hill offices.
- **Fax** — Faxed letters are very effective as they are likely to be given to the legislative staff immediately.
- **Email** — Email is particularly effective if you communicate directly through a staff's individual email address or if you are mobilizing a large number of people through the legislator's website.

- **Phone calls** — Phone calls are very effective as it gives you an opportunity to talk directly to the staff and reinforce your relationship with the office.

### **Proper Forms of Address for Members of Congress**

<b>Members of the United States House of Representatives</b>
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The Honorable [First Name Last Name of Member of Congress] United States House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515
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Dear Representative [Last Name of Member]:
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<b>United States Senators</b>
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The Honorable [First Name Last Name of Member of Congress] United States Senate Washington, DC 20510
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Dear Senator [Last Name of Member]:
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Also, you can reach your Members of Congress in the following ways:

- Phone through the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
- Email your U.S. Representative through: <http://www.house.gov/writerep>.
- Email your two U.S. Senators through: <http://www.senate.gov>.
- Look in the “Blue” pages of your phone book, which have local, state, and federal government contact information.

### **Writing or Faxing a Letter**

Constituent letters are a common way of communicating with a legislator and an effective advocacy tool.

- A personal letter will get more attention than a form letter or pre-printed postcard. Make sure to use personal stationary because your employer might not share your views on the subject.
- Make sure you add your name and address, email address and telephone number. Some offices will not even open a letter if it is not from the state of the Congress person.
- Since the anthrax scare and additional security, traditional mail can be too slow. Faxing the letter to your member’s office can be timelier.

Your letter should be simple and direct.

Always be polite. Even if you are angry, frustrated or disappointed, be sure to use a polite tone. Do not be threatening, confrontational or rude.

Identify yourself and why you are writing. In the opening sentence, make your request up front and identify yourself as a registered voter, a constituent and a nurse. For example: “As a nurse who lives, votes and works in your district, I am writing to request your support....” If you are in a leadership position, and are writing in that capacity, indicate your title and the number of people you are representing. For example: “I am the President of the Iowa Affiliate WOCN. This is an organization of 100 nurses in the state of Iowa that ....”

- Be concise. If possible, limit your letter to one page. Even if you are an expert on the subject and have many facts at your disposal, just state clearly why the bill should be supported or opposed. You do not need to state every fact and figure to make your point.
- Personalize your message. Remember to be mindful of patient confidentiality and privacy. Personal stories and illustrations of local impact can be very effective in triggering policymakers into action.
- Be honest and accurate. Do not exaggerate the situation or the consequences.
- Limit your request to one issue and a specific action from the legislator.
- Offer assistance and serve as a resource. If you have an article of interest, be sure to include it with your correspondence or offer to provide it should they be interested.
- Express appreciation. Be sure to thank the legislator for their attention to your concerns.
- Ask for a response. Be clear in your correspondence that you want to know the policymaker’s views on the issue or legislation you addressed.

Make sure to follow up. If you receive an unsatisfactory answer to your correspondence, write or call again expressing appreciation, but communicate that the response is not what you anticipated or requested. Reiterate your points and address any concerns that the policymaker made on the issue.

## **Sending an Email**

Email is an easy way to communicate with a legislator or staff member.

When communicating by email, it is best to use a personal email account, as your employer might not share your views on the topic. Due to the large volume of emails they receive, some offices do not respond individually to each email. But they do count the number of emails on a specific issue and inform the policymaker how many people have written about a particular topic and what position they are advocating.

Some Congressional offices have instituted a computer-based system that helps them to weed out any spam messages. This ensures that the email messages are from legitimate constituents. Typically, this entails answering a simple question or copying a word on the screen.

- All legislators have a web page with a link to contact the legislator. While this is a very easy way to communicate, it is less effective unless you are mobilizing a large number of people. Remember, legislators receive thousands of emails a week so one individual email can get lost.

State key information in the subject line:

- As it is easy to erase email accidentally, so you want to communicate key information in the subject line.
- State that you are a constituent and the issue in the subject line (e.g. “Your constituent writing about \_\_\_\_\_ legislation”).

Keep your message brief and to the point:

- Don’t forget your name and address in the text.
- Embed your message in the text. Attachments should be for background information, fact sheets or endorsements.

Finding your legislator’s website and email:

- You can find your legislator’s email address by visiting either the House or Senate websites ([www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)) and searching for or selecting your legislator’s name.

## **Telephone Calls to an Office**

Calling the offices of Members of Congress is one of the easiest and most effective ways for nurses to communicate with policymakers on issues of interest and priority. Such a phone call, if done correctly, can result in garnering support for your issue.

When calling policymakers, be sure to do so on your own time and with your own phone, as your employer might not share your views on the topic. While calling the local offices of your Members of Congress does not involve a long-distance call, it is best to contact their Washington, DC location as the Capitol Hill offices are better equipped to handle a greater volume of constituent calls and most policy staff are located in the Washington, DC office, not in the district.

To reach the offices of your two senators and your representative in the House, just call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be transferred to their offices. If you are not sure who represents you, just visit [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) to learn your legislator’s name, or ask the Capitol Hill operator to assist you.

Be sure to keep a record of the date and time of your call(s), and the person with whom you spoke or for whom you left a message. Sometimes the phone logs are lost and you may need to follow-up with the office to ensure a response.

Once connected, identify yourself as a constituent to the receptionist. Clearly state your name, your hometown and why you are calling. Ask to speak with the health legislative assistant. An example would be: “My name is Jane Doe. I am a nurse from Chicago and I would like to speak with the health legislative assistant about the funding for nursing education.”

If transferred to the health legislative assistant, you may be put into the staffer’s voicemail. Reintroduce yourself and immediately identify the topic you are calling to discuss. An example would be: “My name is Jane Doe. I am a nurse from Chicago. I am concerned that Congress is not providing enough funding to address the current nursing shortage. I urge the Senator to support increased funding for nursing education.”

- State your position and ask what position the elected official is taking.
- Be prepared to explain how the issue will affect your practice and the legislator’s constituents.
- Make your points brief. It is a good idea to use written notes to help you stay on topic and remain clear while articulating your case.
- Try to develop a dialogue that will allow you to call back in the future. Encourage your congressional staff contact to call you as a resource for information.

Calling the Local or District Office:

- While the District staff may be less influential in terms of legislation compared to the D.C. staff, they are more accessible to constituents.
- Establishing a good relationship with the District Director is a very effective way to influence policy because the District office staff is responsible for constituent services.
- Be sure to provide your contact information.
- If applicable, include a professional or organizational affiliation so the legislator sees that you are connected to the larger community.

## **Section 3**

### **Increasing Your Voice: Building a Relationship with Your Legislator**

Over time, you will have a much greater impact on public policy by developing and sustaining relationships with your elected officials and their staff. As a starting point, it is important for legislators to be aware of your practice and the community it serves. However, in order for you to affect their decision making, they must come to know you, your hospital and clinics, the people that you serve, and the other community leaders who form the backbone of your support.

Keep in mind that you also want to develop relationships with legislators from around your state, not just your elected representative. Legislators from neighboring districts need to know that WOC nurses are providing essential nursing care to their constituents — even if the actual practice is not located in their district.

People respond to people, and it is important to build personal relationships. These can be with legislators or with their key legislative staff. Building a relationship will take time and hard work, but if done well, it has the potential to yield significant results for WOCN and your local health care facility. Ideally, you will be able to involve others with similar interests and issues and build upon their existing relationships with legislators. Here are just a few ideas to get you started.

#### **Send an introductory packet to your Congressional delegation, especially new legislators.**

*The beginning of a new Congress is an ideal time to introduce (or reintroduce) wound, ostomy and continence nursing.*

- If a new member of Congress was just elected from your state, send a congratulatory letter to the legislator.
- Send a letter of congratulations to those who were re-elected.
- Use this mailing as an opportunity to provide key information about your practice, hospital or research facility to legislators from your state.

#### **Provide information, such as WOCN position statements, to educate or update legislators in your state about the important role nursing plays in your community.**

*Use this first mailing to begin to develop or strengthen your relationship with the office.*

- Follow up with a phone call to the legislator's office.
- Remind the staff to call on you as a resource for further information.
- Extend an invitation for a visit to your facility.

## **Maintain regular contact with a legislator's office.**

*Keep your legislators informed about your practice and facility.*

- Find opportunities to send positive articles and information about WOC nursing (e.g. press clips, success story, or WOCN newsletter) at least a few times a year.

*Communicate clearly about relevant legislation — do not assume that they know where you stand.*

- Communicate if you are for or against a piece of legislation.
- Thank the legislator for supporting any relevant legislation.

*There are often local opportunities to meet and network with legislators and their staff, such as open forums or fund raising events.*

- Attend open forums or cracker-barrel sessions.
- After the event, make the effort to introduce (or reintroduce) yourself to the legislator.
- If you have business cards, make sure that you give one to your legislator and offer to be of assistance on any health related issue.

## **Arrange for a visit to your medical or research facility by your legislator.**

*A first-hand tour of your facility can be a very effective way to educate an elected official.*

- Legislators look forward to an opportunity to visit their constituents, and that includes your hospital, clinic, or research facility. Before inviting them directly, it is best to consult with your facility administrators. Let your agency leadership know you would like to host a visit from your legislator, and what goals could be accomplished by a visit.

*Prepare for the visit.*

- Coordinate closely with the legislator's staff, and determining the date and length of the visit.
- Develop a very clear agenda, identifying exactly who the legislator will be meeting, what departments you will be visiting, the message, press availability, and the purpose for each stop on the tour.
- Use the tour to demonstrate the needs of the hospital, practice or research facility and not just the accomplishments; identify services that could be provided with additional funding.

- A visit provides an opportunity to develop a personal relationship with the legislator.
- Include opportunities for the legislators to meet with board members or other administration. The goal is not just to educate the legislator but to build a relationship between the legislator and your leadership.

### **Visit your elected officials in Washington, D.C.**

Ultimately, you may want to schedule a personal visit to your members of Congress in Washington, D.C. Elected officials will take notice of your visit — taking the time out of your schedule to travel to Washington sends a very clear message to your legislators about the importance you place on public policy matters. Plan your visit carefully by being clear about what you seek to accomplish and whom you want to meet.

- The best days to visit a legislator in Washington are Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday.

### **Participate in WOCN Government Relations Activities and Legislative Days**

WOCN organizes opportunities each year for members and leadership to come to Washington, D.C. to meet with key legislators. These meetings provide you a ready-made opportunity to influence legislators and work alongside your colleagues from around the country.

### **Invite a legislator to one of your local meetings.**

*Inviting an elected official to speak at a special facility, practice or hospital meeting is an opportune way to enhance the relationship. Take advantage of relationships that any of your leadership or board members may have with the legislator in arranging for the visit.*

- Prepare for the visit by developing a clear presentation on your practice and/or hospital and the services you provide to the community.
- If possible, incorporate senior leadership in the presentation.

### **Thank legislators and staff for their interest and support.**

*Take the time to thank legislators and staff, whether it is for a meeting or support of legislation.*

- Be certain to express your appreciation to a legislator following a meeting, hospital/practice visit, or any other personal contact.
- Use the thank you as a way to continue building the relationship and as an opportunity to follow up with additional materials on your facility or on a particular legislative issue.

## **Sample Meeting Request Letter to a Legislator**

Meeting face-to-face with a legislator is an effective way to develop a relationship and to impress upon an elected official the importance you place on particular issues. Your letter should be simple and direct about your request for a meeting. If you are proposing to meet in Washington or in the legislator's district, be clear about the specific date and time you will be available to meet.

The Honorable (First Name) (Last Name)  
U.S. House of Representatives/Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20515 (for House)/20510 (for Senate)

Sent via facsimile: (202) (fax number)

Dear Representative/Senator (Last Name)

On behalf of (your facility's name) in (your city), I am writing to request a brief meeting with you on (day and date) anytime between (specific hours of availability). Representatives from our hospital community, including (reference types of stakeholders; e.g., "nurses") will be in Washington that day and would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about the essential role that wound, ostomy and continence nursing plays in the local community.

As you may know, (your facility's name) is a vital part of our community's health care delivery system. We provide quality, accessible health care to all segments of our community. [Insert information about your facility, including the number of patients you serve, the number of people you employ, and your areas of expertise in medicine.]

Thank you for considering our request for a meeting on (date). We would very much appreciate it if your scheduler would contact me (or name of your government relations director if signed by someone else) at (phone number) to schedule an appointment.

Sincerely,

## **Do's and Don'ts: Tips for Meeting Your Representatives**

Meeting with your elected officials is often the most effective way of educating them on a public policy issue. A face-to-face meeting provides an excellent opportunity to convey and receive information and to develop relationships that will benefit your facility. You can simplify the process by following the tips and guidelines outlined below.

### **Before the Meeting**

- Request the meeting in writing and follow up by phone to confirm the date and time and who will be attending the meeting.
- If other people will be accompanying you to the meeting, decide in advance each person's role. Designate one person as the facilitator.

- Be clear about the purpose of the meeting and what you want to accomplish.
- Do your homework ahead of time; research the legislator's voting record and know whether he/she sits on any key committees that affect your issue. You should visit the member's website and search online for useful background information. The WOCN Governmental Relations staff can be a helpful resource to you.
- Prepare materials to bring to the meeting both as "props" during your presentation and as a leave-behind for the legislator.

### **During the Meeting**

- Be sure to arrive on time and dress appropriately (business attire).
- All participants should introduce themselves and indicate their position with their institution and; be sure to specify that you are a constituent.
- Start the meeting by thanking the legislator for meeting with you, and, where appropriate, for being supportive of your position on an issue.
- Present your issue in a clear and concise manner.
- Try to incorporate a personal reference or anecdote to make the issue more real to the legislator.
- Request specific action from your legislator (e.g., support for, or opposition to, a specific bill; floor remarks; talking to leadership).
- Do not argue.
- Do not lecture.
- After presenting your position, listen to the legislator or legislative aide.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say you don't know and that you will follow up after the meeting.
- Thank the legislator or aide for his/her time.
- Give the legislator the leave-behind packet you prepared. Give the legislator your business card and offer your availability in the future.

### **After the Meeting**

- Write a thank you letter to the legislator summarizing your conversation and any commitments that were made.
- Follow-up and provide any additional information that was requested or offered.

- Contact WOCN about the substance of your meeting (if the WOCN government relation's staff is not with you).

## **Section 4**

### **About Congress: Resources to Help You Navigate the Legislative Process**

This section contains background information on the United States Congress and the legislative process. Included are links to a variety of websites that will be useful to you in tracking the status of legislation and planning your advocacy activities in Washington, D.C.

For specific information on WOCN advocacy efforts and federal legislation affecting the field of nursing, visit the WOCN website at: <http://www.wocn.org>

#### **Congressional Calendar**

The U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate maintain their own calendars of legislative activity. In order to obtain the most current calendar produced by each legislative body, you will want to visit their respective websites.

[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

#### **Status of Legislation**

You can track the status of a piece of legislation through an on-line service offered by the Library of Congress. This website offers you the option of searching by a bill number, if known, or by a word or phrase. You can also monitor committee action and floor votes by visiting:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

#### **Contacting Your Members of Congress**

In order to obtain contact information for your Senator or Representative (i.e., phone number, fax number, or email address), you should access their website. The easiest way to get to a member's individual website is through the House or Senate sites.

[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

## **Congressional Committees**

Each House and Senate committee has its own website with more detailed information on committee action and the status of legislation under its jurisdiction.

## **How a Bill Becomes a Law**

For a quick review of the federal legislative process, visit the website below. This site will step you through the process, beginning with the introduction of legislation by a member of Congress, the role of committees, floor action, and eventually the President's signature.

[www.vote-smart.org/resource\\_govt101\\_02.php](http://www.vote-smart.org/resource_govt101_02.php)

## **Authorization and Appropriations:**

The authorizing and appropriating duties are carried out by a division of labor within the committee system. The formal process consists of two sequential steps: (1) an authorization measure that may create or continue an agency or program. (2) an appropriation bill provides funds for agency or program. The process also authorizes subsequent appropriations for specific agencies and programs, frequently setting spending ceilings for them. This authorization of appropriations provisions may be permanent, annual, or multi-year.

Certain legislative committees are responsible for authorizing legislation related to the agencies and programs under their jurisdiction. The Appropriations Committees of the House and Senate have jurisdiction over appropriations measures.

## **Review of the Federal Budget Process**

### **The President's Budget Request**

Around the first Monday in February of each year, the President submits to Congress a detailed budget request for the coming federal fiscal year, which begins on October 1st. The budget typically sketches out fiscal policy and budget priorities not only for the coming year but for the next five years or more. This budget request, developed by the President's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), instructs Congress on what the President believes federal fiscal policy should be, and what the priorities are. The President's budget is very specific, and recommends funding levels for individual federal programs or small groups of programs called "budget accounts."

Each year the President must request funding for "discretionary" or "appropriated" programs. Discretionary programs must have their funding renewed each year in order to continue operating. Almost all health care spending is discretionary, as are the budgets for education and

defense. Altogether, discretionary programs make up about one-third of all federal spending. The President's budget spells out how much funding he recommends for each discretionary program. These programs are ultimately funded under the jurisdiction of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.

The President's budget can also include changes to "mandatory" or "entitlement" programs, such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. The President's budget can also include changes to the tax code.

### **Congressional Budget Resolution**

After receiving the President's budget request, Congress generally holds hearings to question administration officials about their requests and then develops its own budget resolution. This work is done by the House and Senate Budget Committees. Once the committees are done, the budget resolution goes to the House and Senate floor, where it can be amended by a majority vote. It then goes to a House-Senate conference to resolve any differences, and a conference report is passed by both houses.

The budget resolution is not an ordinary bill, and therefore does not go to the President for his signature or veto. It also requires only a majority vote to pass, and is one of the few pieces of legislation that cannot be filibustered in the Senate. The budget resolution is supposed to be passed by April 15th, but it often takes longer. Occasionally, Congress does not pass a budget resolution. If that happens, the previous year's resolution, which is a multi-year plan, stays in effect.

The Congressional budget resolution consists of a set of numbers stating how much Congress is supposed to spend in each of 19 broad spending categories (known as budget "functions") and how much total revenue the government will collect, for each of the next five or more years. The appropriations committees then use these budget functions to determine spending levels for agencies under their jurisdiction.

### **Overview of the Federal Appropriations Process**

There are three types of appropriations measures. *Regular Appropriations bills* provide most of the funding that is provided in all appropriations measures for a fiscal year, and must be enacted by October 1st of each year. If regular bills are not enacted by the deadline, Congress adopts *Continuing Resolutions* to continue funding generally until regular bills are enacted. *Supplemental Appropriations bills* provide additional appropriations and are typically considered later.

### **Regular Appropriations**

Under the regular appropriations process the appropriations committees receive their allocations from the budget process, as outlined above, and begin to make allocations to federal agencies under the jurisdiction of the subcommittees of the appropriations committee. Both the Senate

and House Appropriations Committees have 12 subcommittees with varied jurisdiction of federal programs.

The House Committee on Appropriations reports the 12 regular appropriations bills separately to the full House. The committee begins reporting the bills in May or June, completing all or almost all of them by July or the annual August recess.

Generally, the full House begins consideration of the regular appropriations bills in May or June as well, passing most by July or the recess. Under normal circumstances the Senate tries to pass their version of appropriations bills by September. During the fall, the appropriations committees are usually heavily involved in conferences to resolve differences between the two chambers. Congress must pass, and President must sign, all appropriations bills before October 1st – the beginning of the new fiscal year.

### **Continuing Resolutions**

Regular appropriations bills expire at the end of the fiscal year. If action on one or more regular appropriations measures has not been completed by the deadline, the agencies funded by these bills must cease nonessential activities due to lack of budget authority. Traditionally, *continuing appropriations* have been used to maintain temporary funding to agencies and programs until the regular bills are enacted. Such appropriations continuing funding are usually provided in a joint resolution, hence the term *continuing resolution* (or *CR*).

### **Supplemental Appropriations**

Congress frequently considers one or more supplemental appropriations measures for a fiscal year that provide additional funds for specified activities. Supplementals may provide funding for unforeseen needs (such as funds to recover from a hurricane, earthquake or flood); or increase or provide funding for other activities. These measures, like regular appropriations bills, provide specific amounts of funding for individual accounts in the bill. Sometimes Congress includes supplemental appropriations in regular bills and continuing resolutions.

## **Section 5**

### **Glossary of Legislative Terms**

**Advocacy:** The support or defense of a cause and the act of pleading on behalf of another person.

**Amendment:** A proposal to change a piece of legislation.

**Appropriations:** Provides the legal authority needed to spend U.S. Treasury funds.

**Authorization:** Provides the authority for a program or agency to exist and determines its policy.

**Beltway:** An interstate highway encircling Washington, DC. "Inside The Beltway" asserts that an issue only is of interest or relevant to Washington, DC residents and workers.

**Bill:** A legislative proposal that becomes law if it passes both the House and Senate in identical fashion and receives Presidential approval. Bills are introduced as "HR" in the House, and "S" in the Senate with consecutive numbering in each respective chamber.

**Budget Resolution:** The spending and revenue levels set by Congress each year. It may also instruct committees to change current law in order to save money.

**Capitol Hill:** The area encompassing the U.S. Capitol.

**Caucus:** An informal group of members sharing an interest in the same policy issues.

**Chairman:** The Presiding Officer of a committee and/or a subcommittee - a member of the majority party in the chamber.

**Demonstration Project:** A project funded by the federal government in order to test new technology or policies.

**Discretionary Spending:** Refers to spending set by the annual appropriation levels and decided by Congress. This spending is optional, and in contrast to entitlement programs (e.g. Medicare and Medicaid) for which funding is mandatory.

**Earmarks:** Specific provisions that set aside funding for a specific program or purpose.

**Entitlement Spending:** Funds for programs like Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and veterans' benefits. Funding levels are automatically set by the number of eligible recipients, not at the discretion of Congress.

**Executive Order:** A Presidential directive with the force of law that does not need Congressional approval.

**Filibuster:** The term used for an extended debate in the Senate, which has the effect of preventing a vote. Senate rules contain no motion to force a vote. A vote occurs only once debate ends.

**Fiscal Year:** The federal government's budget year begins on October 1st and ends on September 30th.

**GAO:** The Government Accountability Office, which audits federal agencies and programs for Congress.

**GOP:** Stands for "Grand Old Party," used to refer to the Republicans.

**Hearing:** A formal meeting of a committee or subcommittee to review legislation or explore a topic. Hearings also may be called to investigate a matter or conduct oversight of existing programs. Witnesses are called to deliver testimony and answer questions in all three types of hearings.

**Joint Resolution:** A measure used to appropriate funding, pose constitutional amendments, or fix technical errors. Joint resolutions become law if adopted by both the House and Senate and, where relevant, approved by the President. In terms of Constitutional amendments, they must be approved by three-fourths of the states.

**Lame Ducks:** Members who will not return in the next Congress but who are finishing out their current term.

**Lame Duck Session:** The period of time that Congress meets after an election, in which Members of Congress who have not been re-elected still cast votes

**Majority Leader:** A person elected the party members in the House or Senate to lead them, to promote passage of the party's priorities, and to coordinate legislative efforts with the Minority Leader, the other chamber, and the White House.

**Mandatory Spending:** Required funding that accounts for two-thirds of the federal budget. These funds are not controlled by annual decision of Congress but are automatically obliged by virtue of previously-enacted laws. For example, as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and social security are entitlement programs, funding for them all falls under mandatory spending.

**Mark-up:** Refers to the meeting of a Committee held to review the text of a bill before reporting it out to the full chamber for consideration. Committee members offer and vote on proposed changes (amendments) to the bill's language. Most mark-ups end with a vote to send the revised version of the bill forward to the floor (full Chamber) for final consideration and approval.

**Minority Leader:** A person elected by the members in the House or Senate to lead them, to promote passage of the party's issue priorities, and to coordinate legislative efforts with the Majority Leader, the other chamber, and the White House.

**OMB:** The Office of Management and Budget is the federal agency that prepares the President's budget submission to Congress and develops associated economic forecasts.

**Override:** The vote taken to pass a bill again, after it has been vetoed by the President. It takes a two-thirds vote in each chamber, or 290 in the House and 67 in the Senate, if all are present and voting. If the veto is overridden in both chambers, the bill becomes law despite the objection of the President.

**Oversight:** The term used for Congressional review of federal agencies, government programs and performance.

**Pocket Veto:** A veto when the President fails to sign a bill within the 10 days allowed by the Constitution. Congress must be in adjournment in order for a pocket veto to take effect.

**Pork Barrel Legislation:** It implies the legislation is loaded with special projects (earmarks) for Members of Congress to distribute to their constituents back home. The term suggests the project funding is frivolous and unnecessary.

**Power of the Purse:** Refers to the constitutional power given Congress to raise and spend money.

**President's Budget:** A document sent to Congress each year by the White House, usually the first week of February. It outlines the President's spending priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

**Quorum:** The number of members who must be present before business can be conducted. Two hundred and eighteen representatives make a quorum in the House chamber. Fifty-one Senators make a quorum in the Senate chamber.

**Ranking Member:** The member of the minority party on a committee and/or subcommittee next in seniority after the chairman (highest ranking member of the minority party).

**Recess:** A temporary break in the session for a short period of time within the same day. Recess also refers to longer breaks over several days, such as holiday periods, which are approved by vote.

**Recorded Vote:** A specific type of vote held on the record. It links the name of each Member with his/her voting position.

**Refer:** To send a bill just introduced to the appropriate committee for initial examination.

**Reporting Out:** The vote of a committee to send a bill to the full House or Senate for review.

**Rider:** An amendment attached to a bill, usually unrelated to the subject of the underlying bill.

**Roll Call Vote:** The same as a recorded vote. The name of the Member and his/her voting position are noted together.

**Special Interest:** Any group of people organized around a specific shared topic or policy.

**Whip:** A member elected by his/her party to count potential votes and promote party unity in voting.

**Yeas & Nays:** A specific type of recorded vote. Members call out “yea” or “nay” when their name is called, or signal the clerk with a “thumbs” up or down.

## **Relevant U.S. Government Agencies**

In order to fully follow the development of policy in our nation's capital, you may also want to contact or access the websites of several executive offices, including Cabinet departments and federal agencies. These offices play a role in developing legislative proposals, which the administration submits to Congress for consideration. Depending on the issue and the legislation being proposed, you may want to contact officials in these offices to discuss any concerns or recommendations.

The White House  
[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)  
(202) 456-1414  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
[www.dhhs.gov](http://www.dhhs.gov)  
(202) 690-7000  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
[www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov)  
(410) 786-3000  
4700 Silver Hill Road  
Suitland, MD 20746

Food and Drug Administration  
[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)  
(301) 827-2410  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857

National Institutes of Health  
[www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)  
(301) 496-4000  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Office of Management and Budget  
[www.omb.gov](http://www.omb.gov)  
(202) 395-3080  
725 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503