



ASCRS eyeContact Grassroots Handbook

How to Be an Effective Advocate for your Profession

Additional resources available at the ASCRS

eyeContact Action Center

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Chapter 1 - Welcome

Dear eyeContact,

Thank you for taking the time to lend your support to the American Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgery (ASCRS)'s eyeContact grassroots advocacy program. Whether you are a seasoned political pro or just starting to consider getting involved, being a grassroots advocate has the ability to transform not only your personal and professional lives, but the community around you. Welcome to the start of your journey!

ASCRS grassroots advocates (a.k.a. eyeContacts) are trusted and effective voices for ensuring specialty physicians' viewpoints are heard by policymakers at all levels of government. As members of a highly regulated profession, ophthalmologists ignore legislative and regulatory issues at their own peril. When you become an eyeContact, you join an enthusiastic group committed to providing the highest level of care and ensuring patients have access to the care they need.

With an increasingly polarized political system and the day-to-day demands of work and family, it can seem daunting to become an advocate. ASCRS understands those concerns and has designed the eyeContact program to fit in with your schedule, allowing you to do as much or as little as you can manage. This guide is designed to help you decide the best way for you to be involved.

Take this opportunity to do something for you. Being a good citizen and speaking for your profession are important parts of the decision to advocate, but don't forget there's something in this for you, too. Take this opportunity to meet new people and to have new experiences. You'll never know unless you try.

Sincerely,



Brock K. Bakewell, MD
Chairman
ASCRS Government Relations Committee

Chapter 2 - Introduction to the eyeContact Program: How to Use This Guide

What is Grassroots Advocacy? Like many national organizations, one of ASCRS' key priorities is to advocate for a public policy environment favorable to our members. A major part of that is to facilitate a relationship between members and their elected officials through grassroots advocacy. Professional lobbyists play an important role in identifying potential issues, but it is the individual members of an association that are the most influential advocates. Elected officials are more eager to hear from actual voters in their districts and states.

Policymakers Want to Hear from You! As physician advocates, eyeContacts start out with an incredible advantage. Not only do legislators want to hear from their own constituents, they are most eager to hear from experienced professionals who are among the most likely to vote. Your profession comes with built-in credibility. When you pick up the phone to call your legislator, send an email, or step into his or her office, you already have his or her attention; this guide will help you learn what to do with it.

Three Ways to Participate. Not everyone has the same ability or amount of time to commit to being an eyeContact; some eyeContacts may want to start slowly and hone their skills gradually. Whatever time and effort you can give is helpful to ASCRS. We have organized this guide into three basic stages, beginner, intermediate, and advanced, and arranged the tasks and activities to build on each other with increasing intensity and effort.

What You Will Learn. This guide will help you gain a basic understanding of techniques employed in grassroots advocacy. The guide will walk you through how to contact your legislators, build relationships, and extend your influence throughout your community. We have tried to make this comprehensive, but as always, things change, or you might need a little extra advice. ASCRS government relations staff are always available to assist you in your efforts.

This is a Guidebook, Not a Law Book. In politics, the circumstances of the issue drives the tools used and strategy employed. Just because you are a new eyeContact, do not feel that you cannot employ some of the advanced topics discussed here. Similarly, even the most experienced advocate should not forget to make sure the basics are covered. Think of something that is not included in this guide? That is OK! The best weapon is the one your opponent does not have. Be creative in your advocacy, and do not forget to share with your fellow eyeContacts!

Getting Started: Grassroots for Beginners

Chapter 3 - eyeContact Job Description

What Have You Gotten Yourself Into? In short, as an ASCRS eyeContact you agree to develop a relationship with your elected officials, keep them informed of issues pertaining to ophthalmology, and communicate ASCRS' position on key policy issues. As a means of achieving those goals, eyeContacts are expected to respond to Grassroots Alerts in a timely manner and keep abreast of current issues. In addition, they may be asked to attend town hall meetings, meet-and-greets, make personal visits with legislators or their staff, or deliver eyePAC checks.

Chapter 4 -The Five-Minute Advocate: How to Be an Effective Advocate in Five Minutes a Week

Really, Five Minutes is All it Takes! Work and family schedules are packed. It is hard to justify taking on a new challenge, especially something outside your "wheel house" like grassroots advocacy. Sure, ASCRS would like all of its members to be champion eyeContacts who put in a lot of time and effort, but most effective grassroots advocates find they do not need to spend much time to have a big impact.

Here are a few little things you can do to get started:

- If you do not already know who your federal legislators are, go to [ASCRS' eyeContact Action Center website](#) to look them up. Click on your representative's and two senators' websites. Spend five minutes to read their biographies and the issues they support.
- On your legislators' webpages you should be able to sign up for their e-newsletters. These are often short but informative messages that keep you up to date on what your legislators are doing.
- "Friend" or "Follow" your congressman and senators. Many politicians rely on social media as a quick and easy way to get the word out to constituents. *And* it is a two-way medium—you can let them know what you think by responding to their posts.
- Set aside five minutes each Friday to read ASCRS' government relations newsletter, [Washington Watch Weekly](#). After a few weeks, you will be surprised how much you know about what is happening in healthcare policy and issues affecting ophthalmology.
- Respond to [ASCRS Grassroots Alerts](#). The government relations staff tracks legislation on Capitol Hill and lets you know when your action is needed via email. Our software system instantly matches you with your state and district and provides you with a sample email to send to your representative or senator. All it takes is about 30 seconds!
- Keep your ears open—you might learn something. What are your patients, friends, and family saying? What is on the local news? Knowing what is important to those around you helps put your issues in perspective.
- Vote: simple, classic, and the best way to let your elected officials know you are listening!

Chapter 5 -Getting to Know Your Legislators and the District

Not all Legislators are Created Equal. Public opinion polling frequently shows that voters have a very low opinion of Congress in general, but tend to have a high opinion of their particular representatives

because “my local guy is different.” That sentiment tends to be true because politicians are all different. They come from different areas of the country, walks of life, backgrounds, and perspectives—usually reflecting their district or constituents in some way. In Congress, there are 535 unique people trying to do the same job. Doing a little bit of research about your legislators will help you be a more effective advocate in the future.

Get to know your legislators first by going to their websites. ASCRS’ [eyeContact Action Center](#) website helps you look up your legislators and links to their individual websites. Generally, members of Congress’ websites feature a biographical section, a “latest news” section, and an issues section.

A few questions to ask yourself as you proceed:

- How am I similar or different to my representative or senators? Do we have similar backgrounds? Professions? Families? Did we go to the same school? Find ways where you relate; that’s a great way to start a relationship.
- Also try to get an idea about the legislator’s role in Congress. What committees does he or she serve on? Does your legislator spend a great deal of time on healthcare issues?
- For the most part, issues of importance to ASCRS originate in the House Energy and Commerce or Ways and Means Committee or in the Senate Finance Committee. If your legislator is on one of those committees, it is important to make sure he or she is familiar with ASCRS’ priorities.
- Determine your legislator’s seniority in Congress and on his or her committees. The higher the seniority, the more powerful the legislator.
- Take a few minutes to research your district and state. What are the main industries represented? Who are the big employers? What do your fellow voters in the district care about? Having an idea about your surroundings will give you an idea of where you fit in.

Many inexperienced advocates complain that their legislators do not prioritize their issues. Generally, that means the advocates are not telling their legislator why he or she should care or how the issue affects patients. Frame your issue in the context of your legislator’s viewpoint.

eyeContacts in Action Case Study: Farmers Need Eyecare, Too. A couple of months ago, Dr. I. Contact researched her Congressional district and found that she lives in a suburban area of a mostly rural district. Her representative serves on the Agriculture Committee, and his website is covered in pictures of him with farmers in the district. ASCRS sends Dr. Contact a Grassroots Alert on a bill that improves access to specialty care. She remembers her representative’s interest in rural issues, so she edits the sample email ASCRS has provided her and adds a sentence reminding the congressman that oftentimes rural patients have to travel long distances to get the care they need. By appealing to a known interest, she increased the likelihood of influencing her legislator.

Chapter 6 - Communicating with Your Legislators

Get Ready to Act! The most frequent way ASCRS government relations staff will ask eyeContacts to take action is through a Grassroots Alert sent to your email.

- The email will provide you with a link that takes you to our [advocacy website](#).
- After entering your email address and zip code, your complete demographic information will appear, along with a pre-set email.

- Depending on who the alert is targeted to—just House or Senate, both, or a particular committee membership—your legislator will appear at the bottom with a button to click and send the email.
- ASCRS asks that you respond to those alerts as soon as you are able since they are generally time-sensitive.

Despite Congress' reputation for inaction, things can occasionally move very quickly and unexpectedly on the Hill. When this happens, ASCRS will send a Grassroots Alert asking you to make a phone call.

- We will provide the number, instructions, and a brief script.
- Be prepared to spend about three minutes on the call and to speak to someone on the congressman's staff.
- Clearly state at the beginning of the call why you are calling (usually state a bill number) and have a short 1-2 sentence explanation of what the measure would do and why it is important the legislator vote one way or another.

The Personal Touch. As mentioned in the previous chapter's case study, taking a few seconds to add your own experiences to the pre-set email can go a long way toward influencing your legislator. Be sure to keep pertinent information in the message including ASCRS' position, bill numbers, or amendment information, but beyond that, feel free to make the message uniquely yours. Suggestions for what to add include a real-life example of how this particular legislation will help or hurt you or your patients or reminding a legislator that he or she has always been supportive of this issue in the past and should continue.

The Big "Ask." Whether you are calling or emailing, or even during a face-to-face meeting, it is vital that you always be clear with your legislator about what you want to them to do—what is known as "having an ask." This reinforces the importance of your communication and holds the legislator accountable. Asks range from sponsoring and supporting a bill, to simply asking your legislator to keep in touch and remember you are a constituent who cares about healthcare issues. Asking politicians for something always provides you with a reason to follow-up; either to remind them they promised something or to thank them when they did it. Many times a legislator will not agree to what you ask, but he or she should always listen and will respect you for interest in the issue. Be sure to follow-up with a thank you, even if the legislator opposes your position.

ASCRS' Inquiring Minds Want to Know! When you have an interaction with a legislator, it is important to let ASCRS government relations staff know.

- What was the outcome?
- Did the legislator promise to do something?
- Did the legislator ask for more information that we can provide?

Knowing about the legislator's communications with constituents helps government relations staff formulate our strategy on Capitol Hill. The easiest way to report back to us is to fill out the [Legislator Interaction Report Form](#).

Going Further: Topics for the Intermediate eyeContact

Chapter 7 -Face-to-Face Meetings

Vote with Your Feet. A survey of congressional staff conducted by the nonpartisan [Congressional Management Foundation](#) recently found that legislative staff rate in-person meetings with a constituent as the most influential means of persuading an undecided member of Congress. While it requires considerably more effort than an email or phone call, a visit to your legislator’s office, either in the district or in Washington, D.C., is the single most effective means of grassroots advocacy. ASCRS holds an annual “Fly-In” in conjunction with the Alliance of Specialty Medicine that brings physicians to Capitol Hill to learn about current legislative issues and meet with members of Congress. Legislators respect and appreciate the effort you put in to meet with them.

Get on the Calendar. Congressional schedules are packed. Be sure to provide plenty of time to schedule an appointment with your legislator. Send a short, but formal, letter or email to the legislator’s scheduler (there may be a link to do this on his or her website) that indicates you:

- Are a constituent. Provide a home address.
- Would like to meet to discuss certain issues. Provide a brief description of the issues.
- Are available to meet on the following days. Provide a few options for the scheduler.

Be prepared to follow-up with a phone call if you have not had a response in at least a week. Once you have set an appointment, please notify ASCRS, and we can provide you with issue information. If you plan to meet your legislator in Washington, D.C., let ASCRS know, and we can assist you to schedule the meeting.

Know Before You Go. A few minutes of preparation will help you have a successful meeting.

- If you have not done the required research on your legislator mentioned in Chapter 5, do so now.
- Pay particular attention to any information about the legislator and his or her position on the issue you plan to discuss.
- Feel free to contact ASCRS for issue information or assistance researching a legislator’s voting record.
- Plan out what you will say to the legislator. Use the tips for personalizing your message and incorporating an “ask” detailed in Chapter 6.
- Let the legislator know how this particular issue affects you and your patients.
- Be sure to look up directions to the meeting site and leave plenty of travel time. Your meeting will be more successful if you are not flustered from being late or lost!

Nobody Does it Without Help. A common complaint from grassroots advocates in any field is that instead of meeting with the legislator him or herself, they often only get to meet with someone from the legislative staff. But a staff meeting could be a blessing in disguise! Oftentimes an office holder has such a packed schedule that meetings can last only about five minutes, and they may not have in-depth knowledge on every subject. Legislators rely on individual staff members to be experts on particular issues. Staff are responsible for research and advising the legislator and can spend time on a more substantive conversation. Staff draft legislative language, put together committee hearings and are

usually the last person a legislator speaks to before voting. Legislators hire individuals they trust, so a staffer can be a powerful ally to the advocate.

After your meeting, please report back to ASCRS through the [Legislator Interaction Form](#). Send a thank you note to the legislator and be sure to restate your position on the issue succinctly.

Chapter 8 -Developing Relationships With Your Legislators

Let's Get Acquainted. The biggest benefit of becoming an eyeContact is the opportunity to interact with your legislators and build a relationship. A sound relationship where both advocate and politician know and trust each other is also the most effective means of achieving policy goals. Most lawmakers and their staff want to know as many of their constituents as possible.

A good way to forge a relationship with your legislators is to take advantage of any opportunity to meet. Do not let party affiliation stand in your way. Even if you would not vote for this person, he or she represents you for at least the time being; make yourself available as a trusted professional with expertise that can help him or her. Disagree respectfully. Who knows, you might just change his or her mind!

When Can We Meet? Chances are you are not as removed from your legislators as you might think. If you have done your homework and learned about your legislators, you probably came across a few instances where your interests might overlap. Your legislators might be your patients, belong to the same religious institution, alumni organization, or other civic group as you. Any of these are good opportunities to start making a connection.

If you cannot find any ways through what you already do, try to attend events the legislators publicize themselves. Most elected officials host a number of town hall-style meetings a year and other meet-and-greet functions. In addition, fundraisers can be good opportunities to meet since they are generally smaller audiences. Sign up for your legislators' newsletters or social media channels to get current information on upcoming events.

I've Got No Issue With You. What if you do not have a particular issue that needs your legislator's action? This is a great opportunity to build a relationship without pressing time demands. Congress takes regular breaks for District Work Periods (a.k.a. recess), and these present a way to meet your legislator without having to travel to Washington, D.C. District Work Periods are also good opportunities to invite legislators to tour your practice.

Use the tips listed in Chapter 7 to help you set up a meeting. Take this time to introduce yourself as a credible voice for physicians in the district and ask the legislator to continue a dialog on healthcare issues.

Keep in Touch. If you have an established relationship with any of your legislators, do not forget to check in with them from time to time and remind them you still support them and are following developments with healthcare policy. If you have provided information or help once to a legislator or a staff person, they will keep coming back to you as a trusted confidante. Be sure to tell ASCRS government relations staff if you have any existing relationships with elected officials—even if they do not represent you; it is valuable information that helps formulate strategy on Capitol Hill.

Chapter 9 - Developing Your Message: How to Craft the Most Effective Communications

Rising Above the Chatter. Oftentimes in advocacy, the toughest competition comes not from a direct foe, but from an advocate for another issue entirely. With nearly every business or organization engaged in public advocacy, that means the average member of Congress' mailbox and office is overflowing with requests and messages from thousands of other lobbyists and advocates.

The nonpartisan Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) found that due to the ease of communication provided by the internet, [constituent communications to senators increased by about 548 percent and 158 percent to representatives between 2002 and 2008.](#)

More people than ever are getting involved in advocacy. That makes it all the more important that eyeContacts also get involved and that they do so in the most effective manner—or risk getting drowned out by everyone else.

You Gathered Intel for a Reason. As noted earlier in Chapters 5 and 6, doing some research into what really makes your legislator tick can make your efforts more successful.

- Use the text ASCRS supplies as the bare bones—it answers the pertinent questions: What bill? Why?—and then build from there.
- Frame your message in the context of other national issues, district issues, or past actions and interests of the legislator.
- Share personal anecdotes to demonstrate how the issue will affect the district, your practice, or patients by either fixing an existing problem or making a negative impact.

Do not underestimate the power of staff: If you have had interaction with a particular staffer before, especially the healthcare legislative assistant, feel free to send messages directly to him or her. The last person a representative or senator usually talks to before voting is his or her aide who handles the issue. If you make a good case to the staffer, you have someone the legislator knows and trusts on your side. Do not forget to follow-up; make sure your legislators do what you have asked, and then thank them. Let them know you are not just a faceless email, but a constituent who cares about what your legislators do.

The Medium is the Message. Generally, ASCRS will alert eyeContacts to the best way to communicate on a particular issue, but we cannot always have eyes and ears in each district. Once you have built a relationship and gotten to know your legislators, you will probably learn the best way to get their attention.

For example, does your senator like to tweet? Boil down your ask to 140 characters and send it to him that way. Be creative and find out the best way for both you and your legislators. And do not forget to share with ASCRS and your peers if you come up with a real winner; today's innovation is tomorrow's standard operating procedure.

Chapter 10 - Hosting an Event

You're the Host. Since legislators need to meet so many of their constituents, they often rely on larger public gatherings to help make contacts. Both established organizations and individuals in the district play an important part in planning and hosting those events. If you have time to devote to it, hosting

your own event, such as a practice tour, can be a rewarding experience for both you and the legislator. You have the opportunity to have your issues take center stage as well as the gratitude of the lawmaker for your help, and the lawmaker gets the publicity he or she needs.

It's Your Party, Do What You Want. While hosting an event can take some time and energy on your part, the advantage is that you can choose the type of event that makes you the most comfortable. If you are unsure of what event would work best, contact ASCRS for assistance or the district staff of your representative or senator; they will know what works well in your area. Use the tips from Chapter 7 for scheduling a face-to-face meeting to invite your legislator to the event. Outlined below are a few format ideas to get you started:

- **Practice or ASC Tour** – Hosting your representative or senator at your practice or ambulatory surgery center (ASC) is a great way to get to know your legislator on your “home turf.” Legislators are interested in what goes on in their districts—take this opportunity to show them what you and all the people on your team do on a daily basis and show the difference you make in the community’s health. Be sure to highlight the efforts of everyone on your staff. Lawmakers may not immediately recognize the variety of careers represented in the average ophthalmology practice or surgery center. Take the opportunity to “show off” any new technology or innovative procedures; legislators like to brag about what makes their districts so special. Be sure to contact ASCRS government relations staff as you plan the event, as we can provide guidance and issue materials.
- **Meet-and-Greet** – An informal event with five to 15 people in attendance that could take place at your practice. This type of gathering allows for a great deal of personal interaction with the legislator. Plan for the discussion to center around a few broad topics. A meet-and-greet is a good option for a small group of local physicians, neighborhoods, and religious groups. Time of day is flexible, so try to work around the legislator’s schedule. Coffee and light snacks are always appreciated by attendees giving up their time.
- **Issue Forum** – If you want to reach a larger group of people and ensure an in-depth discussion of the issues, a forum or debate is a good option. Many community organizations such as the Rotary Club, the League of Women Voters, or professional societies have regular meetings where attendees expect substantive programs. If you are a member of such an organization, volunteer to arrange for your legislator to speak at an upcoming meeting. If you do not have those types of connections, either look for a group to partner with, or commit to bringing a group of your colleagues together for the occasion. If you plan on inviting an incumbent and a challenger candidate, make sure both campaigns agree to the rules and format well ahead of the event.
- **Fundraisers** – During the campaign season, candidates rely on contributions to pay for advertising and voter outreach. If you have established a good relationship with your legislator, offer to host a fundraiser. These can range from five to 500 people, take place at private homes or in public areas—the choice is up to you. Work with your legislator’s campaign committee to determine the best format option. Be sure to establish with them who is responsible for inviting attendees, collecting the money, and supplying food and drink. ASCRS staff are available to assist you in planning fundraisers; be sure to contact government relations for help. In addition, ASCRS often makes an eyePAC donation toward the event.

A Picture’s Worth a Thousand Words. Do not forget to take pictures if you host any of the above events!

- Share them with the legislator when you send your thank you.

- Promise to put them where your fellow physicians or community members will see them. You can share them on social media, include them in local newsletters, or find what works best for you.
- Be sure to send them to ASCRS so we can publish the pictures in *Washington Watch Weekly*.

Chapter 11 - Getting Involved in Political Campaigns

I Scratch Your Back, You Scratch Mine. Getting elected to any public office is an enormous, and expensive, undertaking for any candidate. Legislators rely not only on cash donations, but also many volunteers to help with the campaign. Giving a few hours to help your favorite candidate is a rewarding experience for you and will likely earn you a great deal of gratitude from the legislator. He or she is not likely to forget your efforts when you come back later with an issue affecting your profession. If you are unsure of how best to get involved, contact ASCRS government relations for guidance.

You're a Pro: How to be a Champion eyeContact

Chapter 12 -Mentoring and Recruitment

Hear it From a Friend. Your opinion counts—probably more than you realize—to your friends and colleagues. When you have positive experiences as an eyeContact, make sure you share them. Some people are reluctant to take on such a role because they do not feel equipped or know where to start. A friendly word of encouragement from you could make a big difference to someone who is considering taking action. If you find this guide or any part of it helpful, send it on to a friend.

Amplify Your Voice. Throughout this guide, we have emphasized that you must be strategic in the way you communicate with legislators. And while it is true that one well-crafted message can be just as powerful as many generic messages, big change only comes when many people engage. So go out there and recruit your friends! If you schedule a meeting with your legislator, invite the other doctors in your practice. Buy a table at a fundraiser and invite residents or medical students who might not be able to afford a ticket. Your actions will speak volumes!

If you know someone who might be interested in becoming an eyeContact, let us at ASCRS know, and we can provide him or her with additional information.

Chapter 13 -Develop Your Own Advocacy Plan

You Take it From Here. This guide strives to be as comprehensive as possible to cover all the ways you could engage as an eyeContact. As you become more experienced and familiar with grassroots advocacy, you will start to find out what works best for you in your particular area. Time, work, family, and geography can all play a role in how you participate. Take some time to reflect and evaluate your experiences and then chart out some goals for yourself.

- What have you done well in the past?
- How can you expand on that?
- Have you earned a place as your Congressman's trusted advisor on healthcare issues? Challenge yourself to urge him to take the lead on one of ASCRS' key issues.
- Do you enjoy entertaining and hosting fundraisers? Volunteer to be on your senator's campaign finance committee when she runs for re-election.
- Take what you know about your state or district and the people that represent it to develop a longer range plan.
- Consider running for office yourself. Politicians come from all backgrounds and professions. We need more physicians in office who know what the profession needs!

If you are considering running for any office now or in the future, contact ASCRS for information to get you started. If you currently are an office holder, let ASCRS know! You are a great example for other eyeContacts.

Other Topics

Chapter 14 - eyePAC: How it Relates to Grassroots

The Mother’s Milk of Politics. As outlined in Chapter 11, running for office is expensive. Like many national organizations, ASCRS seeks to assist good candidates for office through a Political Action Committee (PAC)—eyePAC. PACs assist in government relations by giving a profession a stronger voice together than individuals have on their own. eyePAC supports candidates who have a proven record of supporting ophthalmic and specialty medical issues. Many physicians find it useful to donate to eyePAC, knowing their contributions are going to the most worthy candidates.

The Check is in the Mail. eyePAC strives to demonstrate a connection between a contribution to a candidate and the constituents in his or her district. Oftentimes, ASCRS will ask a doctor in the district or state to deliver the eyePAC check. ASCRS generally looks for physicians who have contributed to eyePAC or have an existing relationship with the legislator to deliver the check. This provides a good opportunity for eyeContacts to meet with legislators.

Some people may feel uncomfortable with giving campaign contributions. There are many common misconceptions about political giving and PACs; many involve a perception of underhandedness or secrecy. In fact, PACs are quite transparent and accountable. All information about federal PACs is available through the Federal Election Commission www.fec.gov. PACs were created to counteract the prevalence of secret money in the early part of the 20th century. Many PACs, including eyePAC, that focus contributions on key members and committees are highly regarded instruments of collective action.

Chapter 15 - Troubleshooting: Common Questions and Stumbling Blocks

Here is an inexhaustive list of some of the most common questions and complaints that government relations professionals hear from their grassroots advocates. Have a burning question not answered here? Let us know!

- I contacted my legislator and got no answer.

The good news is that citizen engagement with elected officials is at an all-time high (largely due to the internet); the bad news is that this means most legislators are bombarded with more calls, emails, and meeting requests than they could ever possibly manage. Some legislative offices only consider constituent requests “serious” when they have tried at least twice for help. So be persistent. Follow-up meeting requests with a phone call or email a week later. If you are still not getting anywhere, call the legislator’s office and ask how they prefer to receive requests and communications from constituents. All offices are managed differently. Ask ASCRS government relations staff for assistance.

- I am meeting with a (young) staff member.

As detailed in Chapter 7, congressional schedules are packed and can change at the last minute. If your legislator cannot meet with you in person, he or she will assign the appropriate staff person. Meeting with staff can sometimes be more valuable if your legislator does not serve on a committee

that oversees your issue. The legislator may not be as well-versed as a legislative assistant whose sole job is to follow healthcare issues. Know that the lawmaker hired the staff member because he or she trusts the aide's judgment. When you win over a staff member, you have made a powerful ally. Finally, some constituents feel uncomfortable dealing with staff who may be quite young. Again, know that the legislator trusts this person as capable of the task.

- Politicians are stupid/lazy/corrupt.

Anyone who has watched the evening news knows that there are sadly a few bad apples in the bunch. But by and large, these are exceptions rather than the rule. Most politicians are dedicated public servants who are willing to listen, even if they do not agree with you. They come from all walks of life—some are doctors—and are generally very hard working. Take some time to get to know your local elected officials before you judge them.

- Politics is dirty.

Get in there and clean it up! People in power may seek to use their influence unfairly, so be there to hold them accountable. Get to know your elected officials and share with them your issues of concern—and be clear with them that you will be following their actions on the issue. If a politician promised something and did not deliver, ask him or her for an explanation. Make sure to send your thanks if they do come through for you.

- I'm not getting anywhere/one person can't make a difference.

Generally, the least successful advocates are ones who do not follow the rules. If you are not being specific in your communications (i.e., not including bill numbers or other vital information) or you have not taken the time to personalize your message with a compelling reason why your legislator should support or oppose your issue, you are probably being drowned out by other advocates.

- I'm not comfortable/knowledgeable enough talking to my legislator.

Many legislative and regulatory issues, particularly health-related, can be confusing, dense, and full of unrecognizable acronyms. Legislators and their staff are used to dealing with people unfamiliar with the legislative process. Stick to the basics, and if they ask you for more information, offer to refer them to the ASCRS government relations staff. Before you meet with a legislator, it is always a good idea to check with ASCRS staff or the government relations pages of the website for the latest legislative information.

- I don't have enough time to read all the bills and issues to be conversant.

An eyeContact's job is to represent ASCRS and ophthalmologists in your state and district to your legislators, not to pour over hundreds of pages of legislative text. ASCRS employs professional government relations staff to do the required research on issues. When you respond to an alert, or meet with your legislators, ASCRS will provide you with relevant information. Most eyeContacts only need a one-page fact sheet to have enough background on an issue.

Chapter 16 - Other Resources, Bibliography

- ASCRS [eyeContact Action Center](#) – Use this as your base for up-to-date issue information, current Grassroots Alerts, and how to get in touch with your elected officials.
- Congressional Management Foundation – www.congressfoundation.org – A good resource for academic studies and best practices on advocacy activities.
- Daily Capitol Hill news outlets – Up-to-the-minute information on all congressional actions and national news.
 - *The Hill* www.thehill.com
 - *Politico* www.politico.com
 - *Roll Call* www.rollcall.com (*some content subscriber-only*)

Chapter 17 – Conclusion

So Now You Know. At a time when the political system seems more polarized and disconnected from the average person than ever, becoming an eyeContact may seem an unwelcome responsibility; yet if we as advocates for balanced solutions disengage now, those without the know-how and professionalism will be making all the rules.

Realistically, will one eyeContact be able to fix the healthcare mess and put the country on a sustainable path forward? Probably not. But what is almost guaranteed is that you will come away with a much better understanding of the present challenges facing the profession, new policy solutions, and a stronger relationship with your elected officials and other people in your community. So as we said in the introduction, get involved for your own fulfillment and engage in the way that is smartest for you. Take some time to reflect on the suggestions in the guide, figure out what works for your practice, your family, and your district, and get started!