

It's 9 a.m. Do You Know Where Your Member of Congress Is?

Serving in the U.S. Congress is grueling work – long days of hearings, meetings, and consultations, endless lists of telephone calls that must be made to raise money, and not enough time for the real issues that most members were elected to grapple with. Added to this challenge is the five-fold increase in communications to Congress over the last decade.

Yet members of Congress consistently tell FCNL that even with this crush of activity one top priority is finding ways to listen to constituents, going beyond opinion polls, exchanges with major financial donors, and large public meetings.

Legislators Want to Hear From You

Your legislators want and need to hear from you. The challenge for most members of Congress is how to sift through the volume of emails, other communications, and requests for meetings.

In this issue of the FCNL *Washington Newsletter* we provide tips on writing your members of Congress, setting up meetings with legislators or their staff, and answers to commonly asked questions about what works and what doesn't work.

The core of the FCNL strategy, developed through 64 years of work, is building relationships with the members of Congress who represent you in Washington. As you will see in the profiles we've included here, these relationships can lead to positive action.

The first step is to learn more about the individuals who represent you in Washington. Find out what committees your representative and senators sit on and what issues they consider key priorities. Make a point to identify the key staff working on the issues you care about. This research can be helpful when

dealing with members of Congress with whom you don't agree on many issues.

Based on this information, you can then meet with others in your community to develop a lobbying strategy. Remember, FCNL can help you identify key lobby strategies and approaches, but you as a constituent will be the most effective lobbyist with your members of Congress.

Consider "adopting an issue" and focus your emails, letters, and individual lobby visits on that issue for a period of months. For example, you could read the article in this newsletter on cluster bombs and decide to campaign to persuade your member of Congress to cosponsor legislation banning these weapons. Find out more about the issue on the FCNL website. Then research whether your two senators and your representative have signed the legislation banning cluster bombs.

Begin by writing a letter, then consider asking several of your friends and family to write letters as well. Consider requesting a meeting with your representative to discuss the issue, or holding a public forum to which you invite one of your members of Congress. ■

Four Steps You Can Take

- Adopt an issue and write four letters to each of your legislators this year.
- Write two letters to the editor on the issue
- Meet face-to-face with your legislators or their aides twice this year
- Attend a town hall meeting your representative is holding to ask a question

The FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION (FCNL), a nonpartisan Quaker lobby in the public interest, seeks to follow the leadings of the Spirit as it speaks for itself and for like-minded Friends. Views expressed in FCNL's *Washington Newsletter* are guided by the Statement of Legislative Policy which is prepared and approved by FCNL's General Committee. FCNL includes Friends appointed by 26 Friends' yearly meetings and by nine other Friends' organizations in the United States.

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Personal Connections Can Help FCNL

FCNL supporters who personally know a member of Congress can open doors on the Hill to our lobbyists. Recently, FCNL Policy Committee member Loring Henderson was able to introduce a new member of Congress to FCNL.



Loring Henderson

In the 2006 election, voters in eastern Kansas elected Nancy Boyda to a first term in the House of Representatives. Though not a constituent of Rep. Boyda (KS-2nd), Henderson, who lives in Lawrence, KS, has known the congresswoman for many years.

Henderson talks with Rep. Boyda, bringing her up to date on issues on which FCNL focuses. On one occasion he also described to her FCNL's new "green" building on Capitol Hill.

Meeting Arranged With FCNL

Henderson recognized that Rep. Boyda's election provided an opportunity that FCNL looks for—to introduce new members of Congress to a new resource. When he visited Washington, DC, in the spring for a Policy Committee meeting, Henderson invited Rep. Boyda to visit the FCNL office. She accepted the invitation and visited during the day so that she was able to meet some FCNL staff, tour the building, and have lunch with the Policy Committee.

"I respect Quakers' thorough and fair approach to issues. I was impressed with the environmentally friendly building and am pleased to make the connection to FCNL. I realize that this is one of many resources in Washington that I can rely on," the congresswoman said.

Asked for advice to others in approaching friends who may be policymakers, Henderson said: "Be straight with them, offer them concrete opportunities to get involved, and make connections for them with people who have solid information for them. Remember, members of Congress are very busy people—don't waste their time." ■

WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER

Do Emails and Letters to Congress Work?

The short answer to this rhetorical question is yes, but the results of your communications vary widely depending on the member of Congress and how the letters, emails, and faxes are written.

Members of Congress collectively receive more than 200 million emails and letters every year. Representatives have, on average, about four staff people handling constituent communications, while senators often have more.

Before email, most offices heard from about 2 percent of their constituents. Now the figure is closer to 4 percent to 5 percent. The challenge for each office is how to deal with the increased volume of communication in an efficient and meaningful manner.

Offices have different systems for managing communications from the people in the district who elect them. In most cases communications are routed to Washington, where a team of staff people open the mail and email, categorize the correspondence, and make decisions about what to do next.

Individual Letters Work

What we at FCNL hear from most congressional offices is that they give higher priority to individu-

alized communications from people who have a specific request, say something about themselves, write in their own voice, and make a local connection.

Sorting through this mass of communications can be difficult. "We hope to spend about as much time answering your communication as you spend sending it to us," one congressional staffer explained to FCNL recently.

The same staff member confirmed that for every letter or email the office receives from an individual who provides his or her name, address, and other identifying information, the staff in that office add the position on that issue to a tally sheet. Each week, the chief of staff for that representative calls a "mail meeting" where senior staff discuss what the member of Congress is hearing from constituents and pass on a summary to the elected representative.

This anecdotal data from one staff person tracks with what was reported in the last comprehensive survey of congressional offices. Individualized letters, emails, and faxes received a lot of attention. Form letters that look like the individual simply clicked "send" on a pre-written letter receive less attention. But the congressional survey found that 63

(continued on page 6)

Arranging a Meeting with Your Member of Congress

While scheduling a meeting with your member of Congress may seem daunting, it is easier than you think. Here are a few suggestions to ease the process of organizing a visit.

While you may choose to lobby by yourself, inviting two or three others from different backgrounds, such as educators, business people, and representatives of different ethnic and faith-based groups, will show broader concern for your issue.

A meeting can be arranged in your legislator's district office when she or he is back home or in Washington. Call the member's local or Washington office and ask for the scheduler's name and contact information. Submit a written request of no more than a page and include the following:

- The purpose of your meeting: state the issue and specific bill (if possible) that you would like to talk about.
- Names and background of people in the group.
- When and where you propose to meet: include several possible meeting times, with exact days and times.

Fax or email your request to the scheduler and follow up the next day with a phone call to ensure that the request was received. After two or three days, call the office again.

Remember, even if you cannot arrange an appointment directly with your member of Congress, meeting with a staff assistant is still important as it builds a valuable relationship.

Q & A on Communicating with Congress

My member of Congress rarely agrees with me on the issues and almost never votes the way FCNL recommends. Why keep writing?

Your role may be all the more important because your member of Congress does not agree with you. Keep writing, and seek out others in your community who may be identified as community leaders that may also be willing to communicate with your members of Congress.

Look and listen for openings to start a conversation: Positions do change, but often not as fast as we at FCNL would like. Continue to engage your member of Congress on the big issues, while recognizing small steps she or he may take.

Try another issue: FCNL lobbyists regularly find members of Congress who don't agree with FCNL's position that the U.S. needs to withdraw from Iraq but are interested in how green building technology can cut energy consumption without costing an arm and a leg. Some members of Congress who are strong supporters of tax cuts are also among the most effective opponents of illegal government spy-

ing. Don't abandon your principles or focus but do seek out areas of common interest where you might be able to start a conversation.

My member of Congress already supports most of FCNL's positions. Should I still write regularly?

Yes. Remember that your representative is undoubtedly hearing from others in the district who do not support his or her position. Additionally, members of Congress often hear complaints, but rarely hear a thank you from constituents. Your letters, emails, and visits provide your senators and representative with the strength to continue to speak out effectively.

Do your homework: Members of Congress sit on different committees and become experts on different issues. Find out what committees of Congress your senators and representative sit on and then consider focusing on the issue where your members can make the most difference. Consider signing up to receive FCNL's regular, specialized email reports on issues where your member of Congress can make a real difference.

Encourage bipartisan action: FCNL's strength has been the combination of a prophetic witness for the world we seek and a focus on encouraging members of Congress to build bipartisan coalitions to effectively change policy on nuclear weapons, funding for the United Nations, and other issues. Ask your members of Congress what efforts they are making to build a bipartisan consensus to change policy on key issues of concern to you and your community.

When I write to my member of Congress, I usually get a form letter. Often the letter doesn't appear to respond directly to the email or letter I sent to my member of Congress.

Congressional offices receive tens of thousands of emails, letters, and other communications every week. No member of Congress reads even a small percentage of the letters sent to him or her. But persuading staff that they need to develop a new form letter on an issue is a good way of encouraging a policy discussion within a congressional office.

The next step is to respond to the form letter with more detailed questions and more about yourself. Consider also following the steps on page 3 to request a meeting with your member of Congress or with congressional staff to discuss the issue. ■

Being Heard on the Hill; Tips from Staffers

"You want to make it as simple and straightforward for us as possible. Don't assume that we know every single acronym or every single organization in a district or about a certain topic...Make it easy for us to understand and see if we have any questions about the topic." – a staffer for a House member from Utah

"If you have a half hour with a staffer, that's great. Sometimes you'll get five minutes. So you've got to have a half-hour version of your argument [and a three-minute version]. So you've got to know: what are the points that have to be covered? What is essential to your conversation?" – An aide to a House member

"When I was lobbying we had what we called "one-pagers." Here's all the information you need to know about this issue on one page, front and back. As a staffer I keep those one-pagers" – An aide to a member from California

Can't Do Everything? Adopt An Issue!

The war in Iraq. Global warming. Military spending. Poverty. Torture. Spying. All of these problems seem to clamor for attention. But, if you're like most people, you have difficulty finding the time and energy to take meaningful action on all of the issues on which FCNL lobbies.

We at FCNL don't imagine that any one person will be able to work on all the issues we track in our work. One way to deal with the challenge of being pulled in too many directions is to **adopt one issue** and to work for positive change in that area.

In identifying an issue on which to focus, consider what interests you. What tugs at your heart, be it the Iraq war or U.S. health care? What issue has affected you personally and will allow you to speak from your own experience?

Another factor to consider in adopting an issue is the committee assignments of your members of Congress. The committees on which they sit or their own personal interest in an issue can be a critical factor in how much influence your members may have on an issue you might adopt.

To find out you members' committee and subcommittee assignments, you can use FCNL's congressional directory, either online or in print.

What Does It Mean to Adopt an Issue?

Here are some of the ways that you can gain background and take action on the issue you've adopted.

Pay Attention to the Issue

- Read emails, articles, and news stories from FCNL and from other organizations about the issue.
- Use FCNL's website or other resources to find out what Congress has done recently to address the issue.
- Attend events in your community that touch on the issue. Such events are also a good opportunity to meet other people who are concerned about the same issue you are.

Translate Your Knowledge into Action

- Respond to action alerts from FCNL and other organizations about the issue.

- Share what you learn about that issue and the possible solutions with family members, friends and neighbors.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper about the issue, responding to the paper's coverage of the issue. Send published letters or relevant local news stories to your legislators.
- Develop a relationship around the issue with one or more of the members of Congress who represent you. Set up a meeting with the local office, and get acquainted with the staff person who works on that issue.

FCNL will continue to inform you about the many issues we work on, but you'll have the most impact with your actions if you focus on the issue that you care and know the most about. ■

Stock Market Got You Down? Try Guaranteed Income!

If you are age 50 or over, consider an FCNL Education Fund Charitable Annuity. The minimum annuity gift is \$5,000.

Benefits include:

- Guaranteed income for life;
- Fixed return, not subject to market fluctuations;
- Immediate charitable tax deduction (gifts postmarked by 12/31 qualify for this tax year);
- Confidence that your funds are invested in a socially responsible portfolio;
- Assurance that your support for FCNL's Quaker witness in Washington will continue beyond your lifetime.

Interested? Contact Caroline Slobodzian at FCNL (phone 800-630-1330, ext. 2526; email caroline@fcnl.org). Or visit the planned giving section of FCNL's website at www.fcnl.org. Click on "How to Give" then "Planned Giving." You can create a sample personal plan using the "Planned Giving Calculator."

Lobbying Against Cluster Bombs

Anthony Christopher-Smith had never heard of a cluster bomb before attending FCNL's Young Adult Lobby Weekend in 2007. A graduate student at Washington University in St. Louis, Anthony had been on one lobby visit prior to the lobby weekend.

But when Anthony heard about the deadly impact that cluster bombs have on civilians throughout the



FCNL staff person Laura Weis and Missouri constituent Anthony Christopher-Smith met with an aide to Rep. William Lacy Clay of Missouri to discuss legislation banning cluster bombs.

world, he decided to learn more and then introduce his representative, William Lacy Clay (MO), to the subject. "I was roughly familiar with the landmine issue, and knew nothing about cluster bombs, so I decided to challenge myself," says Anthony. "And the more I learned about them, the more interested I became."

As it turned out, Rep. Clay's staff had not heard much about cluster bombs either, so Anthony shared what he had learned about the indiscriminate killing and maiming caused by cluster bombs, many of which were made and used by the United States. He also urged the representative to cosponsor the Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act of 2007.

Shortly after his visit, Anthony followed up with a phone call to the staffer to whom he had spoken and learned that his extra work had paid off. Rep. Clay had decided to cosponsor the Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act.

"The system really does work sometimes," he says. "The best way to make progress is to be friendly, informed, patient, and to try to show them how their interests and yours can come together." ■

Emails and Letters (continued from page 3)

percent of congressional offices said that even a form email—that is one that is not edited at all to insert individual content—has "some influence" on their member of Congress.

Write About Yourself

When you write a letter, think about whether this is an issue that is already on the agenda for your senator or representative. We at FCNL believe letters should be focused, polite, and should ask for one specific action.

Remember to say something about yourself. Several congressional staff with whom FCNL have talked said that adding a few sentences describing where you live, where your children go to school, how long you have lived in your community, or what groups you are a part of can make a difference in how your communication is handled.

Some offices put a high priority on hand-written letters, while others look for signs that the individual has a strong grounding in the community. Sending a message by postal mail can take between one and three weeks to arrive (because all mail is screened out-of-state before being sent to Washington), but some congressional offices still place more value on postal mail. Other offices prefer email. Most offices accept communications both in Washington and at their state offices.

FCNL recommends that you build a relationship with your representative and two senators over time. Asking questions, sending in letters, and arranging face-to-face visits with staff or the member of Congress when possible are all part of this dialogue.

For more information, see FCNL "Communicating With Congress: How to Make Your Voice Heard in Washington" available on our website or by calling the office at 1-800-630-1330. ■

Laos Cluster Munitions (continued from page 8)

cal details on what exactly had been dropped. A Swedish military engineer seconded to the Swedish Development Agency working in Laos finally took pity on us and sat us down to explain that no quick fix was possible. According to him, no military anywhere had the slightest idea how to clear, or demine, a country the size of Laos. He said that cluster munitions, as they are called, had never been used to this extent before and that armies—taught how to clear a path just wide enough to permit the passage of troops in trucks or tanks—would have no idea how to remove unexploded ordnance from the Plain of Jars or from the highly polluted areas along what had been the Ho Chi Minh Trail—the supply route for the Vietnamese forces fighting in South Vietnam, some of which ran through Laotian territory.

90 Million Bomblets Dropped

The U.S. air war left behind a devastating legacy, and to this day Laos is thought to be the most heavily bombed country per capita in history. From 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped 90 million cluster bomblets over Laos in 580,000 bombing missions—equivalent to one plane load every eight minutes, 24 hours-a-day, for nine years. Contrary to the tested rates, up to 30 percent of the cluster bomblets failed to detonate, leaving as many as 25 million unexploded bomblets still littering nearly 40 percent of the land in Laos.

It has been 34 years since the last cluster munitions were dropped on Laos, and still there is no end in sight to the damage caused by them. Since 1973 as many as 12,000 civilians have been killed or maimed, and hundreds of new casualties occur each year. Cluster bombs hamper basic food production and economic development in Laos, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Bombs Still Going Off

According to the 2006 *Landmine Monitor*, 164 new landmine or unexploded ordnance casualties occurred in 91 reported incidents during the previous year: 36 people were killed and 128 were injured. Many of the incidents still take place in Xieng Khouang province, in and around the Plain of Jars. A sharp increase in injuries and deaths was reported in 2004 and 2005—a rise that experts attri-

A young mother in the Laotian village of Muong Ngoi whose husband was killed by a cluster bomb.

*Photo credit:
Bob Eaton*



bute to population pressure, poverty, and a consequent increase in the number of people desperate enough to work in the dangerous scrap metal trade. Recent studies by Handicap International, the organization I now work for, show that boys aged six to 15 account for nearly one-quarter of the cluster munitions casualties in Laos today.

Jonah, that infant son, is now in his twenties and long out of college. The year he turned 25, a 25-year-old rice farmer from Sepon District in Savannakhet province was cutting trees to clear a rice paddy about three kilometers from his village when his shovel hit an unexploded cluster submunition. Neighbors carried him unconscious in a hammock to the district hospital three hours away. He lost his forearm, his hearing, and the sight in his right eye. He can no longer work and is in near constant pain.

According to the UN Development Program, at current funding levels, the cluster bomb removal program in Laos may take up to 100 years to complete.

I wish I had a different ending to the story, but I don't. The lesson we must take away is don't permit the use of cluster munitions: not now, not ever again. ■

For more information go to www.banclusterbombs.org. Organizations that continue to work on cluster bombs in Laos include: Legacies of War, www.legaciesofwar.org; The Mines Advisory Group (MAG), www.mag.org; Handicap International, www.handicap-international.us; and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), www.mcc.org.



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The Bombs That Keep on Killing in Laos

By Wendy Batson*

In early 1981 my husband, our infant son Jonah and I moved to Laos, a small landlocked country in Southeast Asia. We had been hired by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to work with villagers to help rebuild their war-devastated communities.

Early on we flew by helicopter up to the Plain of Jars, a vast plateau in the central region of the country that was pounded with bombs during the U.S. air war. We stopped by a small jerry-built structure that turned out to be the province hospital, and inside we found seven casualties lying in roughly made beds. Four of them were brothers, the sons of a Hmong woman sitting miserably in the corner. Her boys had been working in an upland rice field in the hills above the plain when the eldest struck a guava cluster munition lying just beneath the surface. His arm had been blown off and he had been blinded. The three younger boys fared better and were expected to recover once their shrapnel wounds healed. The heat and the smell were awful, and I remember concentrating on not throwing up.

Many months later my husband made a trip up river to visit a string of villages along a tributary of the Mekong that reportedly had been severely damaged

TAKE ACTION: Urge your senators to cosponsor the Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act (S.594).

during the air war. He spent the night in the village of Muong Ngoi, sleeping on the porch of one of the small houses on stilts, the guest of the village chief. The next day he was taken to meet a young shell-shocked woman holding tight to two young children. She was surrounded by family who were preparing burial services for her husband, who had gone into the forest the day before with a friend to search for medicinal plants. He climbed a tree to cut down some twigs. Jumping from a branch, he had landed on a buried "bombie", which went off, killing him instantly and grievously wounding his companion.

It was 1983, ten years since the bombing had ended. We did not understand how so many lives could still be destroyed by weapons used in a war that had ended years before. Along with colleagues from the Mennonite Central Committee office in Laos, we set out to understand what these things were that were blowing people up and, more importantly, how to stop the carnage. We thought there must be some technical solution out there and that all we needed to do was figure out what it was, how much it cost, raise the money, and fix the problem.

Months of research and inquiry led nowhere. The U.S. government would not release information or maps, nor was it willing to let us have techni-

*Wendy Batson is Executive Director of Handicap International-US, which recently published "Circle Impact," an authoritative study of cluster munitions casualties available at www.handicap-international.us.

(continued on page 7)