

# Coffee with Congress Planning Guide



## COFFEE CAMPAIGN FOR FAIR ELECTIONS

The “Deliverable” – A conversational, collegiate, informative meeting with your local elected official or senior staffer. The yardstick is NOT whether or not you’ve persuaded the member to vote for a bill. Success comes from you and your cohorts having delivered the message about legislation, and announcing the presence of the Coffee Party as a force of persuasion.

### Before planning your meeting

[Check online](#) to find other Coffee Party chapters in this rep’s district or in the state. Contact the leader(s) and ask if they are planning a meeting with the rep or senator. Tell them what you are doing, and keep them in the loop as you proceed. And be sure to **list your event at** Coffee Party USA so other organizers don’t duplicate your action.

Next, call the district office of your elected official, and ask to speak with someone who can schedule a meeting with the elected or a senior staffer. Suggested script:

**“Hello, I’m a constituent of Sen/Rep \_\_\_\_\_’s. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I’m calling on behalf of the \_\_\_\_\_ chapter of Coffee Party USA. We are a new organization that gives voice to individual Americans. We promote civil discourse with voters and elected officials about issues that matter to us. Several of our members want to meet to convey our concerns about money in politics and how voices like ours I’d like to schedule an appointment with a few members of our local group to have a 20-minute discussion with Rep/Sen\_\_\_\_\_ the Chief of Staff when she/he is back home for the district work session.”**

It is very likely that you will be stonewalled on your first attempt. Always leave your telephone number and email address, and ask for the name and email address of the CoS if you don't have it already. Follow up your first call with an email to the CoS that includes a piece of literature from the Coffee Party. **Do not send any information on any bills**, or you’ll give them an excuse not to visit with you.

No matter how many times you are put off, you must calmly persist, repeating the message in the script above. **We are doing what every citizen should be doing, and it is their job to listen to us.** Persistence will pay dividends!

Communicate with your chapter after getting a meeting confirmation. Plan your talking points before the meeting. You won’t have more than 5 minutes per issue, so know your facts and prepare handouts. It’s more effective if each speaker handles one topic or bill. Discuss and leave polling data from the [Fair Elections](#) and [Money in Politics](#) Lobby Kits. Use the suggested language whenever possible. Finally, send a reminder to your cohorts the day before the meeting.

# The Day of the Meeting

Schedule your cohorts to meet 30 minutes early. This is the time for a final briefing on the issues and a reminder for everyone to be civil, conversational, and personal. Review any roles you might have assigned, and make sure someone is responsible for covering all the points.

## **PLEASE:**

State your views calmly and listen actively. Encourage candor from your official. Look for points of agreement and build from there. Try to understand even when you don't agree. Facilitate firmly yet gently. Address the elected or staffer as a constituent with a personal concern.

Do not be confrontational or argumentative. Do not speak to the elected or staffer as if you are a lobbyist with an agenda. Do not make threats of any kind, even polite ones. Do not dominate the conversation. Do not let them think you agree when you don't. Do not insist that they agree with your view. Do not record the conversation unless they tell you it's okay.

## **Meeting: suggested language to use**

Use your own words to convey something like this:

"Thank you for meeting with us. (have cohorts state name and street of residence)  
We are deeply concerned about losing the voice of the American people in political discourse. The size and breadth of campaign contributions has gotten totally out of hand, affecting the legislative process and public discourse. Political races should not be awarded to the individual with the biggest megaphone – the Coffee Party wants ALL voices to be heard. We believe the Supreme Court has exacerbated an existing problem in its Citizens United ruling.

Today, We would like to talk today about remedies that have to do with restoring democratic principles that include Fair Elections (produce polling data), Shareholder Protection Act, DISCLOSE Act (our members voted strongly for NO exemptions), and the need for a Constitutional Amendment that explicitly grants Congress the authority to limit corporate and union spending that is intended to affect the outcome of federal political races.

Conclude the visit by leaving written information with the elected or the CoS. Ask if there is any other information which you could supply to help the member of Congress reach a decision.

Finally:

Take a group photo with the elected or staffer.

Leave your materials and a previous photo of your group holding a sign

Upload pictures to the Website \_\_\_\_\_

Post a blog entry \_\_\_\_\_

Write a letter-to-the-editor \_\_\_\_\_

## **HELP! My Member of Congress won't meet with us...**

It's okay. Members of Congress are busy. Some ideas:

- It's fine to meet with their staff – it may even be more productive since staffers are likely better informed, and very often decide the official's view.
- Ask for their public schedule, or find it on their website.
- Have another person reach out to the District Scheduler or a different member of the Congressional staff. If enough folks call, they'll take another look.
- Call the Washington office if you continue to get a run around. Keep track of every call and every email sent to the office. Document this as if you'll be taking it to court.
- Take it to "court." Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper and state that after all your diligence, you still could not get a meeting with your own rep or senator. Tell their political challenger your story if the member is up for re-election.
- Show up at public meetings where the Representative or Senator is in attendance. Make an effort to shake hands, and state that you've been having terrible difficulty arranging a meeting, and could the member help with that?
- Keep calling. Be polite and insistent. Remain in control of your emotions. Advise them that you have important information to present on a matter that is supported by over 75% of all Americans.
- Ask WHEN? if they say they will call you back. If they miss that call, remind them of that. A calm, persistent pest will get attention.