



Approaching Politicians 101

Before making an appointment with a politician

Before approaching a politician (including political candidates), you should be confident about the worthiness of your issue(s) as well as confident that you are, indeed, providing an essential service to the politician, whose job will be made easier by knowing you.

What you should know about politicians:

- Politicians are interested in you and what you have to say. Politicians spend more time on constituency-related issues than any other political work.
- It is their job to provide (and demonstrate) value to constituents & supporting stakeholders
- If you do not become their mental health contact, someone else will.
- All politicians, regardless of experience, identify “helping individuals” as their most important duty (see attached ‘Limits on Power’ information sheet).
- Politicians are protecting/advancing their interests so you must make your issues relevant to them.
- Do not expect immediate action. The political system is conservative.

Tips for approaching your local politician:

- Identify whether your politician is an ‘apprentice’, ‘seasoned’ or a ‘careerist’ and construct your points considering what they are interested in and find important about their jobs (see attached ‘Limits on Power’ information sheet).
- Follow-up with staff by writing a quick thank you note, taking the opportunity to re-iterate the points you made on your visit.

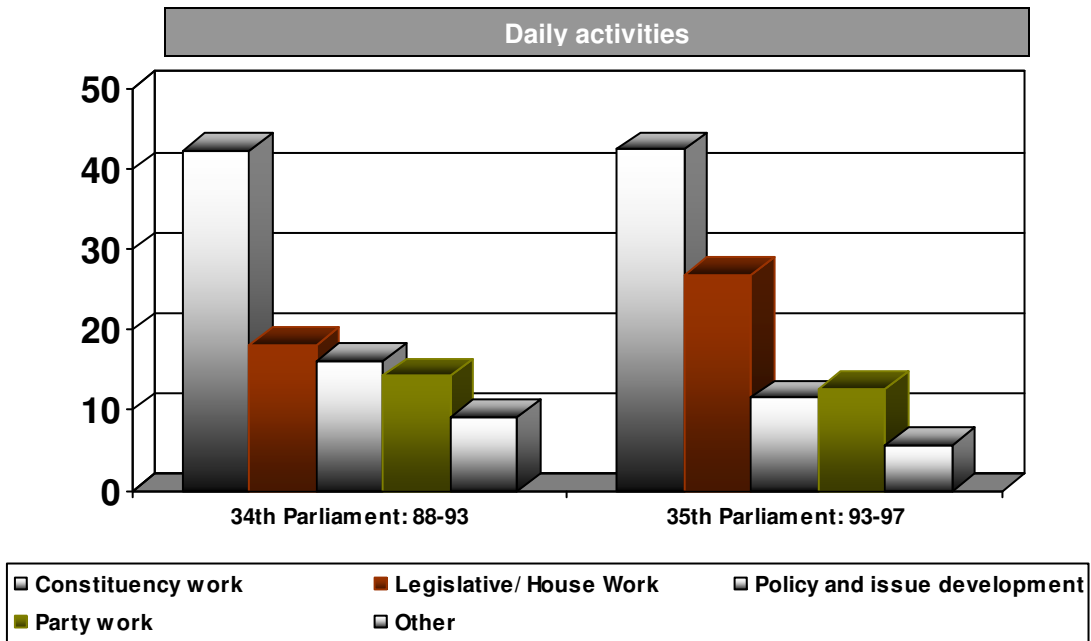
What to say:

- Introduce yourself and your profession. Explain what you do for a living.
- Prepare a 30 second spiel on the importance of psychology and list the 3 or 4 key issues you would like to see the government work on. Key issues to consider are outlined in the December 8 CPA Election Alert (<http://www.cpa.ca/cpsite/showPage.asp?id=1029&fr=>). They are also presented at the end of this document.
- Ask the politician questions such as: Where do you (your party) stand on this issue? What can we (your party) do to move this issue forward?

How to say what you want to say:

- Don’t get thrown off track
- Stick to your key points
- Be repetitive

Limits on Politicians' Power



Source: Docherty, David C. *Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons* University of British Columbia Press, 1997.

Ranked Importance of Duties (1=more important; 5=less important)			
<i>Position sought</i>	Apprentice	Seasoned	Careerist
Protecting riding	2	2	3
Helping individuals	1	1	1
Acting as government watchdog	5	5	4
Keeping in touch	3	4	2
Debating in House of Commons	4	3	5
Source: Docherty, David C. <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons</i> University of British Columbia Press, 1997.			

Ranked Enjoyment of Duties (1=more important; 5=less important)			
<i>Position sought</i>	Apprentice	Seasoned	Careerist
Helping constituents with problems	2	1	3
Helping to form public policy	3	2	1
Being an issue advocate in caucus	4	4	2
Serving community that elected me	1	3	4
Communicating government policy	5	5	5
Source: Docherty, David C. <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons</i> University of British Columbia Press, 1997.			

Connecting with a politician — How to connect, what to say & how to say it

The following information is adapted from the CPA publication, “Psychology and Public Policy: An Advocacy Guide for Psychologists”. To read the full document, visit:

http://www.cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_toc.htm

Arrange a One-on-One Meeting

The single most effective way to communicate your message to a politician (including candidate) is through a face-to-face meeting, but it may be with an assistant, not the politician him or herself. Most assistants are experts in their areas, and politicians depend heavily on their expertise to help keep them informed. The assistant can give you an idea of where the politician stands on the issue, let you know what additional information might be needed and tell you what action the politician might be able to take.

The rule for one-on-one meetings with an assistant or the politician is to plan ahead: know your facts, know your politician, and know the arguments the opposition will be using against your position.

Scheduling a Meeting

Contact your politician's riding office, state your affiliations and the subject you wish to discuss, and ask for 15 to 20 minutes of your politician's time. If it is clear that the politician is unable to meet with you, then a very good substitute is a meeting with the assistant in charge of the issue area you are interested in discussing. **DO NOT FEEL DISCOURAGED IF YOU CANNOT MEET WITH YOUR POLITICIAN.** In fact, public officials have demanding schedules and depend on their assistants to research issues and report on constituent concerns. Call to confirm your meeting a few days before it is scheduled to occur.

Once the Meeting is Scheduled

Do your homework. Learn as much as you can about the politician's position/record as it relates to your issue. Be prepared to talk in detail and directly about the issue you wish to discuss. Know the opposing arguments as well as those in favour of your view. Have your information ready in a digestible, concise form. Have personal stories ready - case studies that illustrate the human side of what you're talking about. Be able to answer specific questions on how the issue affects you, your community, the province or the country in general.

Supply fact sheets. It's important when you go that you leave something (e.g., a one-page synopsis describing the issue in bullet form) with the assistant or the politician.

During the Meeting

Be on time. But don't be surprised if they are not. Campaign schedules are hectic and being a visitor to a politician's office often requires patience and flexibility.

Establish ties. Introduce yourself, convey information about your affiliations, and exchange pleasantries briefly. Make a point of introducing yourself to and learning the names of key staff with whom you may also meet, including the politician's secretary or riding office manager. They may be especially helpful in the future.

Don't waste time. Get right to the issue you wish to discuss. Don't get bogged down in small talk. You will have a precious few minutes with the politician, and you have a purpose for the meeting.

Be inquiring. Ask your politician if he or she is familiar with your issue. If the answer is negative, take the opportunity to inform him or her. If the answer is positive, ask him or her to state his or her position. If he or she is unable to do so, then say you will check back later.

Be assertive. Know what you want in advance and ask for it.

Be respectful. Be tolerant of differing views and keep the dialogue open. State your points clearly and firmly, but don't argue. Never speak badly of other politicians or organizations. Always be polite but don't let politeness make you timid.

Be responsive. Try to answer questions. When you can't, offer to get back to him or her with the information. It is much more important for you to provide accurate information than to give an answer which may be incorrect.

Be appreciative. Always end the meeting on a courteous note. Thank him or her for the time spent with you and leave promptly. Follow up with a thank-you letter, capitalizing on the opportunity to restate your points.

Make a Telephone Call

When time is short or an issue is very pressing, you may be asked or you may want to communicate with a politician by telephone.

When preparing for a telephone call, start at the beginning, remembering that the person you talk to may have just gotten off the telephone with another constituent who had a very different concern. Be prepared with facts and information at your fingertips and a clear idea of what you want your telephone call to achieve.

Before placing a call, make sure:

- You have a clear idea of the message you want to communicate. Write the main points down and, if needed, refer to them when you make your call.
- Your facts and arguments are organized in a clear, coherent manner. You will have only a few minutes to make them.
- You can state exactly what action you want taken on the issue.

You can ask to speak to your MP (and/or other political candidates), but don't be disappointed if he or she is not available. Next ask to speak with the assistant who handles the subject of your interest. Remember, this is often just as effective. If neither the politician nor the relevant staff members are available, you can ask for a return call or leave a brief message, such as, "My name is Dr. Jane Jones and I am a professor of psychology at the University of Hometown. I am calling to ask for [the politician's] support on...". Be prepared to give your address or telephone number in case the politician wants to respond.

Be persistent but courteous. You may have to call back several times before you get through to either the staff person or the politician. Don't be discouraged – no one is trying to avoid you. Just remember politicians get many calls each day – keep trying.

Key issues

1. Canadian Mental Health Commission

This is a very important development for Canadians. We need to ensure that psychology and our issues are appropriately included. The Senate of Canada's Report which outlines the framework for the Commission is available at www.parl.gc.ca/38/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/come/soci-e/rep-e/rep16nov05-e.htm and CPA's Press Release is available at: www.cpa.ca/cpasite/shownews.asp?id=366&fr=

This issue is important because:

- It is the first time that Canadian governments have agreed to an ongoing pan-Canadian organization to examine mental health issues in Canada.
- The Commission will develop a pan-Canadian "plan" for mental health, support research, share best practices, suggest ways to improve services, educate Canadians, help eliminate discrimination and stigma etc.

Points to make with candidates:

- Psychology strongly supports the Commission
- The membership of the Commission must be broad and inclusive and must include psychology.
- Psychology is the largest specialty provider of mental health and behavioural health services in Canada.

Questions for candidates:

- If elected, will you and your party support the Commission?
- If elected, what will you and your party support the inclusion of psychology on the Commission?

2. Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator of Canada

The Correctional Investigator is appointed by Parliament to investigate problems and complaints in the prison system. This year his report, released in October, focused on mental health problems in prisons and the community and the lack of resources to address them. Psychology is the largest provider of mental health services in the corrections system and so this issue is of significant interest to us. In addition, the Report calls for more community services, which affects a wider number of psychologists and their services.

Points to make to candidates:

- Psychology strongly supports the Report of the Investigator.
- Canada needs more services to keep teens and adults out of the judicial and corrections system and to help them when they return to the community.
- Communities are safer when there are effective community programs.
- Corrections Canada needs to spend the money already allocated for improved services.

Questions for candidates:

- If elected, will you and your party support the recommendations in the Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator of Canada?
- If elected, will you and your party's support improving mental health and psychological services for diversion programs, inmates and parolees?

3. Increased Support for Research and Universities

The Canadian university research community is a vital part of Canada's knowledge economy and the country's prosperity. It needs to be further strengthened to keep up with domestic demand and international competition.

Points to make to candidates:

- The three granting councils need funding increased.
- The Federal Government needs to reintroduce a post-secondary education transfer to the provinces for core funding needs.

Questions for candidates

- If elected will you and your party follow the recommendations of the submission of the Canadian Consortium for Research to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance which recommends increased funding for the granting councils and a postsecondary specific transfer to the provinces for the core funding of universities and colleges?

4. Access to Services

Many Canadians (children, adults and seniors), do not have access to needed psychological and mental health services. This is particularly true for low and middle income Canadians, rural Canadians and First Nations peoples. This is well known and documented.

Points to make to candidates

- 20% of Canadians will suffer from a mental illness in their life time.
- Most visits to family physicians are because of a psychological or psychiatric problem or a psychological or psychiatric problem is a significant contributor to the diagnosis and treatment.
- Psychological problems cost Canada billions of dollars per year.
- Psychological problems cost Canadian business and industry billions of dollars a year in lost productivity, lower quality, reduced creativity and innovation, increased benefits use etc.

Questions for candidates

- Will you and your party support a specific transfer to the provinces and territories to improve access to psychological services in particular and mental health services in general?

Will you and your party support the development of a government plan such as legal aid to help low and middle income Canadians access services in the private sector when they are not available in the public sector?