

Your political action guide to Congress

By Mary Kruczynski | Community Oncology Alliance, Washington, DC

Want to become politically active in support of community oncology? To do that, you need to know the basics about Washington power brokers and the movers who can shake things up.

The issues currently before the 110th Congress, as they relate to community oncology, rest primarily upon three committees:

- **The Senate Committee on Finance**, which has jurisdiction over Medicare and Medicaid;
- **The Committee on Energy and Commerce**, which has jurisdiction over Health and Human Services and the Food and Drug Administration;
- **The Committee on Ways and Means**, which is responsible for raising revenue needed to run the government and which includes an important Subcommittee on Health.

More often than not, you will find yourself engaging more with the legislative aide than the member. Frequently, it is the aide who will review, digest, and summarize information for the congressional member. Usually that information is presented by lobbyists. The Community Oncology Alliance (COA) is one such lobbying group. For more information on working with COA and the committees, see the Resources box.

Of course, it's important to inform your representatives and senators of the events happening in their districts that affect voters. Here's a step-by-step guide:

How do I find out who my members of Congress are?

Simply log on to www.opensecrets.org or www.Visi.com/juan/congress, and type in your street address,

city, state, and zip code. A detailed description, including contact information, political profile, office staff, personal bio, and committee memberships, will appear.

How can I best educate my congressional members about my issues?

Remember that your members of Congress are not as well versed on your issues as you are; it's up to you to provide an Oncology 101 tutorial. Data speak loudly, so provide applicable spreadsheets and comparative analyses. Invite your members into your practice to see what a day in the life of a community oncology practice is like. Resources are available to help enrich your meeting: your state medical and administrative societies, national organizations such as COA, Association of Community Cancer Centers, Medical Group Management Association, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, and US Oncology, to name a few.

How do I make an appointment to see my congressman or senator?

Every member has a scheduler who handles all appointments. Go online to their Web sites where you will find contact information. Provide the subject matter for your visit request, and fax supporting documentation. If a trip to your member's office in Washington, DC is not convenient, insist that your representative visit you when he or she returns to the state. Insist on seeing the representative, and not an aide. If the

member is unavailable, request the health LA (legislative aide). Experience has shown that a live phone call to the Washington office of your congressman or senator brings about the best result.

Resources

Senate Committee on Finance

Max Baucus, Chairman (MT)
U. S. Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6200
Majority Phone 202-224-4515
Minority Phone 202-224-5315
■ www.finance.senate.gov

The Committee on Energy and Commerce

John D. Dingell, Chairman (MI)
U. S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-2927
■ <http://energycommerce.house.gov/>

Committee on Ways and Means

Charlie B. Rangel, Chairman (NY)
U. S. House of Representatives
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-3625
■ <http://waysandmeans.house.gov>

Over the past several years, the **Community Oncology Alliance (COA)** has worked to educate the members of Congress and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services about the issues faced by community oncologists as a result of the passage of the Medicare Modernization Act. For information on scheduling appointments with your members of Congress or participating in a "Sit In Your Chair" meeting, contact the COA office at 202-756-2258 or go to www.CommunityOncology.org.

Would a visit to Washington, DC have more impact than the local district office?

Both are beneficial. Having the member in your clinic is truly an eye-opening experience for him or her. On the other hand, making the effort to travel to Washington speaks volumes to your member of Congress about your passion for the issue at hand.

How can I make my visit most effective?

Prior to the meeting, send preliminary information and a letter of thanks for the appointment. More often than not, you will likely meet with the aide if the member is voting on the floor or attending to other pressing matters. The Health LA, now familiar with you, will know you

on a first name basis and will make an effort to be present on your meeting date. You may find that the aide relies on you for advice as much as you rely on him or her for help with your issue. On the day of your scheduled visit, be sure to arrive on time and always demonstrate courtesy and respect. Stick to the issue and be prepared to state your case factually and authoritatively. Don't be afraid to express your passion about the issue being discussed. If possible, offer a personal story that will hit home with the member.

If you are lobbying for a particular piece of legislation, you might want to consider calling the office of the bill's sponsor before your visit. The sponsor may offer additional suggestions on ways to present the issue to your

congressman or senator.

Usually, these meetings are brief, perhaps 15 to 20 minutes, so make the most of your time. Afterward, send a brief e-mail or follow-up note letting the member know that you will be monitoring the issue closely and are available if additional questions come up.

What if the member or aide asks questions that I'm not prepared to answer?

Never provide information that you are unsure of. Simply offer to get back to him or her with further details. This also gives you a reason to contact the member again at a later date.

Ms. Kruczynski is Director of Policy Analysis, Community Oncology Alliance, Washington, DC.

Committees, explained

EVER WONDER how to untangle congressional committees and subcommittees? Here's some background to help make more sense of them:

Senate Committee on Finance

Max Baucus, Chairman (MT)
U. S. Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6200
Majority Phone 202-224-4515
Minority Phone 202-224-5315
www.finance.senate.gov

History

The Senate Committee on Finance is one of the oldest committees in the Senate, established in 1815. Originally, the Committee had power over both tax and spending until the forming of the Appropriations Committee in 1867.

Principal responsibility

Senate Finance concerns itself with matters relating to the bonded debt of the United States; customs, collection districts, and ports of entry and delivery, deposit of public monies, general revenue sharing; health programs under the Social Security Act (notably Medicare and Medicaid), and health programs financed by a specific tax or trust fund; national social security; reciprocal trade agreements, general revenue measures and those relating to the insular possessions, tariff and import quotas, and the transportation of dutiable goods.

Jurisdiction

The role of the Committee on Finance is similar to that of the House Committee on Ways and Means, except that Finance has jurisdiction over both Medicare and

Medicaid, whereas the House Ways and Means Committee only has jurisdiction over Medicare; the House Energy and Commerce Committee has jurisdiction over Medicaid. The other difference in terms of power is that all revenue-raising measures must originate in the House, giving Ways and Means a slight edge in setting tax policy. Senate Finance also has the authority to investigate, review, and evaluate existing laws and the agencies that implement them.

Subcommittees

Last year the subcommittees from the 109th Congress included Health Care, International Trade, Long-Term Growth and Debt Reduction, Social Security and Family Policy, and Taxation and IRS Oversight.

The Committee on Energy and Commerce

John D. Dingell, Chairman (MI)
U. S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-2927
<http://energycommerce.house.gov>

History

For 210 years, the Committee on Energy and Commerce, the oldest legislative standing committee in the U. S. House of Representatives, has served as the principal guide for the House in matters relating to the promotion of commerce and to the public's health and marketplace interests.

Principal responsibility

Legislative Oversight relating to telecommunications, consumer protection, food and drug safety, public health, air quality and environmental health, the supply and delivery of energy, and interstate and foreign commerce in general.

Jurisdiction

This Committee's jurisdiction extends over five Cabinet-level departments and seven independent agencies from the Energy Department, Health and Human Services, Transportation Department, to the Federal Trade Commission, Food and Drug Administration, Federal Communications Commission, and various quasi-governmental organizations.

Subcommittees

To manage the wide variety of is-

sues under its multiple jurisdictions, the Committee relies on the work of six subcommittees: Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection; Energy and Air Quality; Environment and Hazardous Materials; Health; Oversight and Investigations; and Telecommunications and the Internet.

Committee on Ways and Means

Charlie B. Rangel, Chairman (NY)
U. S. House of Representatives
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-3625
<http://waysandmeans.house.gov>

History

The Committee on Ways and Means was first established as an ad hoc committee during the first session of the First Congress on July 24, 1789. A committee was needed to review the expenditures of the government and the resources available. It is one of the oldest, most prestigious, and most important committees. Two months after its formation, it was discharged but then reappointed from time to time until it was formally listed in the House Rules in 1802 as a standing committee.

Principal responsibility

The Ways and Means Committee is responsible for customs, collection districts, and ports of entry and delivery; reciprocal trade agreements; general revenue measures and those relating to insular possessions; the deposit of public monies; transporta-

tion of dutiable goods; tax exempt foundations and charitable trusts; and national Society Security (except health care and facilities programs that are supported from general revenues as opposed to payroll deductions and exempt work incentive programs).

Jurisdiction

This Committee is responsible for raising the revenue required to finance the Federal government, including individual and corporate income taxes, excise, estate, gift, and other miscellaneous taxes. It has jurisdiction over most of the programs authorized by the Social Security Act. Ways and Means also oversees trade and tariff legislation and is the primary Committee responsible for international trade policy.

Subcommittees

Subcommittees include Trade, Oversight, Health, Social Security, Human Resources, and Select Revenue Measures. The Subcommittee on Health, formally chaired by Nancy Johnson (R-CT) and now chaired by Pete Stark (D-CA), has held hearings on the Medicare Program Oversight; Medicare Payments for Physician Services; Medicare Payment for Hospital Services; Medicare Payments for Post-Acute Care; Retiree Health Coverage and Interaction with Medicare; Medicare Waste, Fraud, and Abuse; Medically Uninsured; and New Technologies in the Medicare Program.