

## CITIZENSHIP: STATE ADVOCACY

### Embracing your Citizenship - CITIZEN ADVOCACY REMINDERS

- **Register to vote and VOTE!!! IT'S ABOUT POWER!**
- **Know your audience.**
- **Build relationships** and educate legislators about your issues. The system was designed to represent you unless you let the special and money interests control the power! Let legislators and public policy makers know what is important to you. Citizen advocacy is about persuasion, not debate. You are trying to get their vote for a solution, not win an argument.
- **Why will public policy makers listen to you?**
  - You are a constituent from their district, who VOTES!
  - You have good reliable information.
  - You are a trusted source based on professional background, community status or personal knowledge.
  - You are representative of a group they want support from.
  - Your comments are representative of broad based cross-section of politically active people.
- **Tell your story.** Note your business or expertise or family situation or family circumstances or professional expertise relevant to the particular program and why you are advocating for that program. Personal stories and experiences make the needs of vulnerable families come alive with passion and emotion and humanize the numbers and data. Be prepared with the facts, but make the facts real with compelling stories from your experience or from others. Tell your story in op-eds, letters to the editor, public meetings, and just sharing with family and friends --- and public policy makers.
- **Be clear about the message.** Make each message simple and direct. Be precise and typically cover only one topic in each message, letter, email, call or fax or visit. Three to five very short paragraphs in any advocacy email or letter is the maximum.
  - Identify yourself as voting constituent.
  - Identify your issue specifically, urge specific action,
  - Provide supporting facts or a story. Leave 1 page fact sheet.
  - Specify action again.
  - Become their resource expert. Offer to send more information.
  - And always ask how they plan to vote and why?
  - Thank them.
  - Ask when is a good time to follow up.
- **Know your audience of policy makers:** Policy makers can fall into several categories about your issues:
  - Champions – They will lead with you for your cause.
  - Allies: They are always with you, but may not lead.
  - Mild opponents: They will oppose you most of the time.
  - Hard Core Opponents: They will lead/champion the opposition.
  - Persuables/Moderates: These are key targets for persuasion.

#### **Ways You Can Help Fix America's and Arizona's Health Care System**

**EDUCATE YOUR SELF** and learn the facts so you are AN informed participant in the public discussion and contribute solutions to improving and changing the system. Did you know that the U.S. is the only major industrialized country without universal health care coverage? Do you know how we compare to other countries on costs and outcomes? Good resources for factual information are listed on back page.

**Critically evaluate any proposed solutions:** Questions like: Will the plan really cover everyone? Does the plan, like Medicare, have a predictable, guaranteed level of benefits? How does the plan fit with your values of personal responsibility, community and shared responsibility, the nature of health care as human right, or a special privilege, or a marketplace commodity?

**Talk with others.** Share your own health care experiences and ask your friends about theirs. Most of us know someone who's had problems with the health care system. Learn about others' experience and use those stories to push for change. Tell your story and listen to others stories about the health care system. Use the stories to improve and change the system.

**Let your views be known.** Tell your lawmakers in simple, heartfelt language what you think should be included in health care reform. Your voice gives your representatives the facts and support to do what's right. Don't forget your state legislators—there are many state initiatives pending. Write letters to the editor and express your opinions to newspapers and call in to radio talk shows. Making your views public gives others courage to speak out. Rent the movie *Sicko* and let the newspaper and your lawmakers know how you feel about America's health care system. Go to public meetings and participate in creating solutions.

**Join with others, get others involved and be persistent about health care reform for everyone.** The system is broken; we need to find new ways to help fix the system for everyone, expand coverage, lower costs, and create quality health care for all. Health care reform is necessary but may take time and effort on all our parts. You can't do it alone but together we all can contribute to change. With elections on the horizon and discontent about the U.S. health care system running deep, we have a special window of opportunity to improve the system. You can be part of it.

- When sending emails, letters, faxes or calling always identify yourself as a voting constituent from your Legislator's district. As a voting constituent, you have great power.
- Accountability is the key to citizen power. Respectfully, politely and firmly, we must hold our legislators and elected officials accountable by asking them how and why they vote in particular way and WHY they vote. We then must organize during elections cycles for participation and accountability so we get the representation we want for all Arizona's families.
- Don't underestimate the power of an authentic "thank you." Always thank the legislator for their service, but remind them you will also stay in touch. And be sure to thank your legislator when they do agree or vote as you urged. Always remember to thank them. Remember our legislators are human beings too.
- Some ADVOCACY DON'TS
  - Don't Be Angry
  - Don't Be Hostile
  - Don't Threaten
  - Don't Have too much information
  - Don't Be Dishonest or Exaggerate
  - Don't visit policy makers alone, always go with others to help even out the power differences.
- It's about Coalition Building and Partnerships. It is about acting together for power!
- Together citizens have a great power and can make change. Acting with others rather than alone!!!! Mobilizing existing resources and creating new advocates. Remaining flexible. Building an email network and list – spreading the word!

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