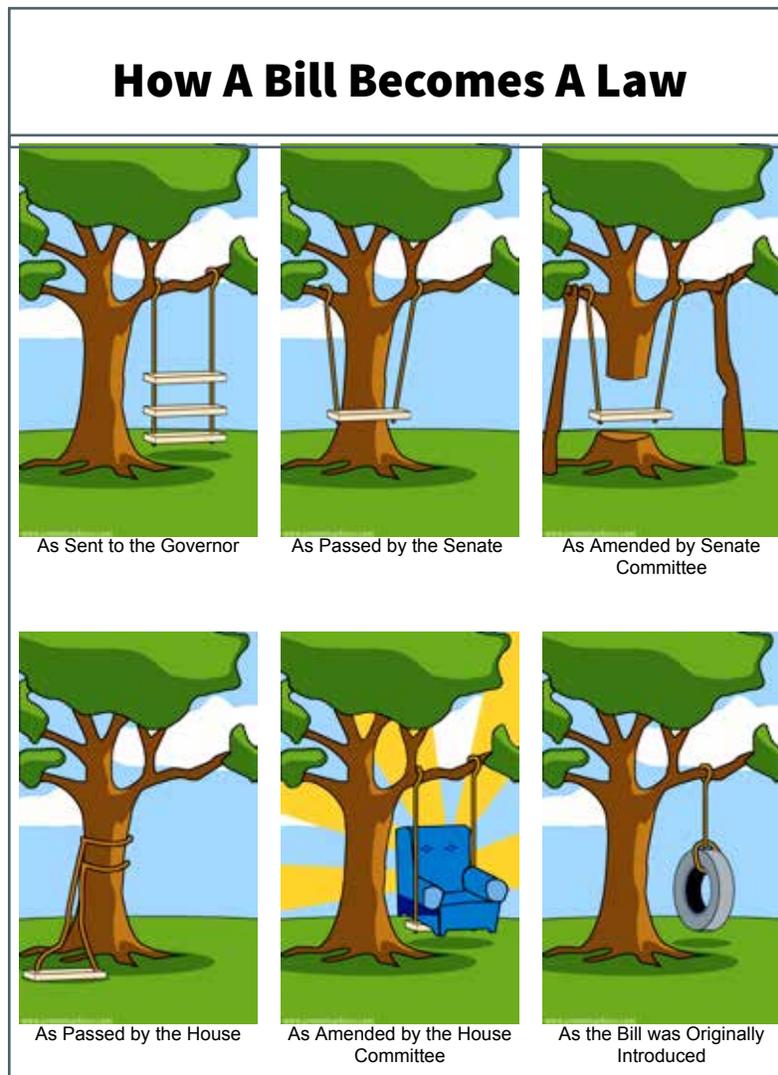


Navigating The Legislative Arena

To many, the legislative process in Jefferson City often appears to be defective and broken. The reality is, there are just a lot of cooks in the legislative kitchen. Although individual legislators may have pet peeves or agendas that initiate some legislation, most of the bills introduced during a legislative session are offered by legislators responding to requests from special interest groups. These special interest groups consist of organizations representing all aspects of American life. Think of a profession or occupation, a business, a charity, a municipality, a county, a school district, water districts, a fire district, a university, a religion, retirees, veterans, sportsmen, environmentalist, etc., and you will find a group(s) advocating on their behalf. We are a nation of special interests.

Accommodating all the wants and concerns of these varied groups often results in laws that are awkwardly worded and subject to multiple interpretations.

How does a local government official whose communities are directly affected by the laws passed in Jefferson City make a difference in the crowded legislative arena?



Cartoon created at www.projectcartoon.com.

First, you have the Missouri Municipal League in your corner. The League actively advocates for hundreds of bills each year on a wide range of legislative issues of interest to municipal officials. The MML Advocacy team serves as representatives of League members at the Missouri General Assembly. This involves serving as a presence

for municipalities in the Capitol, meeting and working with state legislators and staff, attending and monitoring the activity of legislative committees and coordinating municipal testimony and grassroots efforts. The League also publishes a weekly "Capitol Report" during the legislative session to communicate important legislative issues to municipal officials that the League advocacy team is following at the Capitol.

During the legislative session, the Missouri Capitol is a very busy place, full of legislators, lobbyists, students, tour groups, legislative and administrative staff, and constituents. It can be an intimidating and confusing place in which to effectively talk to legislators. However, as a municipal official, you can be a key influencer of policy. You have the experience and

information your legislator needs to hear, and your physical presence shows your support for important issues that affect cities and towns.

Although visits to the Capitol during the legislative session can be effective, the most important lobbying is done at home, in your legislator's home district. Lawmakers need to hear from their

constituents. Effective lobbying requires multiple contacts and follow-ups.

The Legislative Staff

It is important to get to acquainted with the staff members assigned to legislators, their aides, secretaries and committees. Often you will need to meet with your legislator's aide. They can give legislators feedback on "hot button" issues. Get to know them because you will need to work closely with them.

Always Identify Yourself

Public officials and their staff meet a lot of people. It is impossible for them to remember everyone. Be sure to always identify yourself at every contact and remind them of your special interest.

Familiarize Yourself With The Issues

Be aware of the status of each bill that pertains to your subject or issues. Check the bill's status daily.

Know Your Local Legislator

Study their past record on related issues. Learn what is important to your legislator. What are their interests and committee assignments? Try to determine the most effective

approaches to gaining their attention. Ask yourself what would make your issue compelling to them. Take time to identify any prior commitment that your legislator may have had to your cause. Always encourage legislators to promote support for your cause among their colleagues.

Acknowledge

Commend legislators for any positive action on your issue or concern. A phone call or sending a personal note is an effective way to say thank you. Be quick to commend and slow to criticize. Being critical is seldom beneficial unless done in a constructive manner. If you are opposed to an action taken by your legislator, always provide alternative solutions. Remember, the legislator who votes against your position today may support your position tomorrow.

Presentation Of Your Case

Do your homework and make sure that you have all of the facts but be brief with your appeal. Work with your legislators – do not confront them. Remember, they lobby other legislators to support or oppose your issue. Always come prepared with written documentation that supports your position for your legislator. Keep literature and information brief. Provide material that is easy to read

with main points highlighted. As a common courtesy, be sure to turn off or place your cell phone on vibrate during your meeting.

Follow Up Periodically

We are all busy people. Stay in touch with your lawmaker and provide a brief reminder about your position to your legislator since thousands of bills are considered each session.

The Negative Legislator

If a legislator responds negatively to your issue, never overreact or become emotional. Always keep the door open for the future. Many times, a legislator will change their opinion after learning more information. Remember to talk to your adversaries as well as your advocates. Never take any vote for granted. If you are going to oppose someone's bill, tell them. Often a compromise can be worked out that will benefit both parties. You may gain a supporter! 🍀

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