

# Political Advocacy for Beginners (and Introverts)



By **Alethea Gerding** 

Managing Editor  
ASCPT

Quick show of hands: How many of you chose a career in an editorial office, where you can quietly work behind your computer screen, because you are a raging extrovert who never misses an opportunity to advocate and loudly make your voice heard? I've now seen multiple versions of a protest sign (at the Women's March, Science March, etc.) that read "So bad, even the introverts are showing up." That summed up my views nicely.

I have been learning (baby steps) political advocacy over the past several years, and my more extroverted and politically active friends have been showing me the way. While for the most part my brand of political advocacy has involved making phone calls or knocking on doors for my chosen political candidate, some of the skills I've learned and some of the things I have observed over the past several years have come in handy while advocating against a potential executive order.

In late 2019, rumors spread that the US Office of Science and Technology Policy had drafted an executive order that would recommend a zero-month embargo on publishing federally funded research. The financial ramifications for many societies and publishers could be immense. In addition to simple opposition to the potential order, there was concern that important stakeholders (including the publishers and scientific societies) had not had an opportunity to weigh in or express their concerns. It seemed that most were operating in the blind with no real sense of when (or even if) this order would be issued, what it would mean when it was, and if the Administration would even allow stakeholders the opportunity to share their views.

In December, a [letter](#) circulated among publishers and non-profit scientific societies expressing concern. More than 125 non-profit societies signed the letter, as did the US

Chamber of Commerce, Wiley, Elsevier, Wolters-Kluwer, and Macmillan. I acknowledge here that my society and our publishing partner (Wiley) were both signatories to this letter.

I followed this rumor with interest, because it could have genuine, deep repercussions for my profession in general, and my society in particular. I began to follow it even more closely when I heard that Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) may have been instrumental in putting the brakes on the executive order. "If the current policy is changed—particularly without benefit of public hearings and stakeholder input—it could amount to significant government interference in an otherwise well-functioning private marketplace that gives doctors, scientific researchers, and others options about how they want to publish these important contributions to science," he wrote in a December 12th letter to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and Mick Mulvaney, who was, at the time, head of the White House's budget office.<sup>1</sup>

This stood out to me because, as a North Carolinian (as many of us in ISMTE are), I am one of Senator Tillis's constituents. And while Senator Tillis and I are not on a first-name basis, his office number is in my contacts list, as I occasionally call to offer my opinion on "pending legislation before the US Senate" (I guess I've called enough to have memorized part of his voicemail).

Typically, I try to marshal my facts and speak rationally about whatever issue of the day is causing me enough unrest to call my Senator's office. That said, while the me who existed four years ago can't even believe I've gotten this far, I realize that calling to complain about the latest perceived outrage is likely not viewed as more than a constituent blowing off steam.

To truly capture the ear of a legislator (and/or their staff), a little more thought, fieldwork, and detail are required. What's required is political advocacy.

I recognize that we are a field of introverts. We don't shout what we do. Do our political leaders even know we are here? Does Senator Tillis have any concept of the number of constituents and North Carolina small business owners who could be affected? Think of it this way: Did you even know this field existed prior to joining it? How would our political leaders know? So, how to be a political advocate in a field of introverts?

Answer: I don't know! If I did, I imagine the Senators I complain to to the extent that I've got portions of their voicemails memorized would have voted differently on at least \*one\* issue I've called them about. Clearly, I'm no expert, but I've been following and learning from some who are. So, here are a few basic things I've learned. My examples are all in relation to the potential executive order regarding publishing, but they can be applied to almost anything.

Some advocacy tips (in no particular order)

1. **Know your audience.** In the letter noted above, several key phrases stand out to me: "This would effectively nationalize the valuable American intellectual property ..." "... supporting billions of dollars in US exports and an extensive network of American businesses and jobs."<sup>1</sup> These warnings against nationalization and the focus on American businesses were intended for a Republican audience. Notice the letter says nothing on, for instance, the importance of science funding and appropriate and vetted peer review for climate change policy. A letter to a Democratic audience may focus on something like this instead. Know who you are speaking to and what issues are important to them. Tailor your message accordingly. I believe they call this "spin" in the political world. "Spin" does not mean lying; it isn't lying to communicate differently to different audiences. Do you talk to your best friend from college the same way you do to your grandmother?
2. **Provide specific facts that affect your state (or district).** Political leaders care about being re-elected, and showing they have provided jobs, money, or security for their constituents can make for a good political advertisement. In the case of this executive order, states like North Carolina, Illinois, Virginia, and Massachusetts (places with higher concentrations of non-profit societies and academic publishing professionals) may be more affected than others. Find facts to tell your elected representative that any particular piece of legislation or executive order will cost his or her district X number of dollars and X number of jobs.
3. **Research your Senators' or Representative's committee assignments.** If your elected representatives do not sit on the appropriate committees, they may have little power to affect the issue. In the case of the OSTP's proposed executive order, Senator Tillis' role as chair of an intellectual property subpanel on the Senate Judiciary Committee subpanel gave him the access and sway to make some difference.
4. **Work your contacts.** If your neighbor works on the Senator's re-election campaign, or your friend is

dating a staffer in someone's office, work that connection. When the OSTP executive order was circulating, ISMTE's President-Elect, Meghan McDevitt, reached out to her friend who had contacts in Senator Sherrod Brown's office (D-OH). Meghan was connected with a legislative correspondent who quickly scheduled a phone call to discuss concerns about the executive order.

5. **Provide the voice of an organization (or group of organizations).** A letter signed by more than 125 non-profit societies and major publishers will get more attention than a letter signed by a single society such as ISMTE, which will get more attention than a letter signed by one constituent. I think we would all love this not to be so, but there is a reason lobbyists exist. If you care enough about an issue, see if the professional groups you belong to feel likewise, and work with your contacts there to provide the voice of that organization. You may find, though, that the members of your organization don't all agree (how boring would that be if they did?). In the case of this particular executive order, many OA publishers, librarians, and others are lobbying for it. Additionally, a society that serves members internationally may find that many of its members are not affected by rules and regulations that may be of concern to those of us in the United States. To my mind, part of what makes ISMTE a great organization is that we include editorial office professionals from all sorts of editorial offices, so there are some of us who would lobby for the order and others who would lobby against. Therefore, this is likely not the issue for ISMTE to stake a position on. That doesn't mean the next time a similar issue arises, you can't inquire. Lobby within your professional organizations—if there is consensus, you can be a part of crafting their position statements.

I began writing this column way back in late February, and as I put the finishing touches on it in late March, the world has changed completely. It is difficult to contemplate the OSTP executive order while worrying about my parents, homeschooling my kids, and feeling generalized anxiety about a global pandemic. A response to this has been one of the many, many things that I have back burned. However, I see many of the actions listed above being put into action. Read the [letter](#) to the President, endorsed by the American Hospital Association, American Medical Association, and American Nurses Association, and see if you can spot a few of the above tips.

I wish you all the very best and look forward to a time when executive orders that could fundamentally change the structure of my profession are the biggest thing I need to worry about!

### Disclosure

The author discloses the following: Alethea Gerding is an employee of the American Society for Clinical Pharmacology

and Therapeutics and a member of the ISMTE Board of Directors.

### Reference

1. Brainard G, Malakoff D. Science groups, senator warn Trump administration not to change publishing rules. *Science*. <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/12/science-groups-senator-warn-trump-administration-not-change-publishing-rules>. Accessed April 6, 2020.



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