Science Policy News

The August Challenge: 50 Meetings, 50 States, 1 Message

The month of August means one thing in the policy world—members of Congress returning home.

Every August, members of Congress leave Washington and return to their home districts or states to meet with constituents. The “August recess” is an invaluable opportunity for students and researchers to have face-to-face meetings with their members of Congress and discuss the important and exciting research being done in their own backyards.

This summer, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are once again challenging our members to schedule meetings with their members of Congress during the month of August. The goal of the challenge is simple: 50 meetings, one in every state. This would be 50 opportunities to tell a member of Congress about the potential benefits of your research for their district or state, the new technologies or applications your research could produce, or the jobs and training opportunities your research provides. These are the stories your members of Congress need to hear, and we need you to tell them.

This August is especially important because it occurs right in the middle of the fiscal year 2015 budget debate. Both the House and Senate have moved forward on their respective spending bills for several research funding agencies such as USDA and NSF, but the final funding decisions haven’t yet been made. That’s where you come in. While the budget negotiations are still in process, members of Congress must hear from their constituents about the importance of strong support for federal research programs. Putting a face and a story behind those research funding dollars will be invaluable when it comes time to make final budget decisions.

If that weren’t enough, this August is also just two months before the midterm election. As the election approaches, members of Congress focus on the issues that are important to their constituents. We need to make sure Congress knows our researchers are working to meet growing national challenges in food, agriculture, and natural resource management, but we need federal support to do it.

We Can Help You Schedule Meetings, Craft Your Message

To prepare new advocates for the August Challenge, the Science Policy Office has updated our Advocacy Toolkit.¹ The Toolkit has step-by-step instructions on how to identify your members of Congress and schedule a local meeting. You will also find informational materials and talking points that you can use in your meetings to show the value of food, agriculture, and natural resources research in your district or state. Later this month, the Science Policy Office will host a webinar that will provide information on the federal budget process and research funding programs.

Nervous about talking to a real live member of Congress? No problem, the Science Policy Office has you covered there too. Through our science communication campaign, 101 Words or Less, we can help you craft the story of your research into a form that a non-scientist can understand and relate to, maximizing the effectiveness of your meeting. Start your science communication journey at http://cqrcengage.com/sciencesocieties/101words.

If you are interested in scheduling a district meeting in August, email the Science Policy Office at sciencepolicy@sciencesocieties.org with “August Challenge” in the header, and we will email you back with instructions on how to get started.

Only with your involvement can we hope to reach Congress and protect funding for vital research programs that are critical to our national prosperity. Be a voice for research and meet with your member of Congress today!

¹ See www.soils.org/science-policy/get-involved/toolkit

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