There are 435 members in the U.S. House of Representatives. That’s a relatively small number for, say, a business or even a neighborhood, but this size makes it near impossible for a member, especially a new one, to get to know all of the other members and what their priorities are. That’s one of the reasons why congressional caucuses are so popular.

Caucuses are groups of members of Congress who share common legislative or policy interests, and there were more than 500 of them registered last year, including the Congressional Soils Caucus. Sometimes a caucus’s purpose is to support a very specific policy objective, for example, the “Congressional Expand Social Security Caucus”—no secret what its members want to do! But much more often, membership in a caucus signifies the congressman’s interest in a group or issue. The Congressional Soils Caucus is just such a group.

The Societies’ Science Policy Office supported the establishment of the Congressional Soils Caucus in 2006 to educate policymakers and stakeholders about soils and soil science and also to demonstrate the strong and bipartisan interest in the subject. Soil science is cross-cutting, and regardless of a congressman’s political bent, few disagree that soils are the literal foundation for growing healthy and safe food, storing and filtering clean water, and building resilient communities. Many are also keen to learn about soils’ roles in carbon sequestration and drought mitigation, and other important ecosystem services.

Caucus events like briefings connect the dots between soil science and other important issues. In past years, we have held briefings on land restoration, hemp production, and citrus greening through the lens of soil science. We also support an annual Soils, Vines, and Wines reception that highlights the importance of soils (terroir) for wine quality. This reception is co-sponsored by the Congressional Wine Caucus and is always well attended.

This year, in addition to the reception, we are holding four congressional briefings. The Science Policy Office is sending SSSA members Steve Hart, Nick Basta, Andrea Basche, and Caitlin Rottler to present the scientific connections between soils and wildfires, urban farming and public health, drought and flooding, and carbon sequestration. See the sidebar for more details about each briefing.

The Congressional Soils Caucus: Ask Your Representative to Join Today!

Members in Action

On 29 April, CSSA member Seth Murray presented at the congressional briefing, “Better Whiskey through Science—Leveraging a Public Corn Breeding Program to Improve Regional Whiskey Flavors and Create New Industries.”

2019 Congressional Soils Caucus Briefing Series

- 14 June—Nick Basta, The Ohio State University | “Cleaning Up Lead and Other Dirty Issues in Soil for Community Health on a Budget”
- 23 September—Andrea Basche, University of Nebraska–Lincoln | “Turning Soils into Sponges: Opportunities for Agriculture to Reduce Flood and Drought Risks”
- November 4—Caitlin Rottler, USDA ARS Grazinglands Research Laboratory, El Reno, OK | “The carbon Bank beneath Our Feet: Storing Carbon in Rangeland Soil”

Elizabeth Stulberg
Science Policy Manager
estulberg@sciencesocieties.org