



**CALIFORNIA TOBACCO
ENDGAME CENTER FOR
ORGANIZING AND ENGAGEMENT**
A project of the American Heart Association®

CAPITOL INFORMATION & EDUCATION DAYS



Answers to Tough Questions and Situations During a Legislative Meeting

Situation 1: A legislator or staffer starts talking about a bill they or a colleague is authoring and wants your support to help pass it.

Response: You'll want to acknowledge the request and then pivot back to our talking points. "Thank you for sharing this with us but we're not able to address specific legislation or engage in any lobbying activity."

If the subject of the bill is related to tobacco, health, the environment, or youth protections, you could use that as a bridge back to our messages. "It sounds like you're really committed to protecting the environment, and that's exactly why we're here today speaking about the costly toll that commercial tobacco takes on the environment, more than \$41 million a year in clean-up costs"

Situation 2: A legislator or staffer seems unsupportive of tobacco prevention, makes comments about personal freedom, that we've passed enough laws against tobacco, or that people already know smoking is unhealthy.

Response: Focus them back to the problem – "We see every day the costly toll commercial tobacco takes on the health and productivity of our communities. The costs of smoking in California of more than \$18 billion a year not only hurts the economy but causes untold pain and suffering to the families who lose loved ones too early to tobacco-related illnesses.

Situation 3: The legislator or staffer is not engaging with the group, seems distracted or uninterested.

Response: This can happen, especially at this time of the year when the Legislature is very busy. Try asking them a question: "What do you hear from your constituents about tobacco or teen vaping?" or "Do you see tobacco product waste in parks and other public areas when you are home in the district?" This is also a great opportunity to respond with local data.

Situation 4: You don't know the answer to a question they asked.

Response: It's ok to say you don't have an answer right now but will follow up with them. Then note their question on your Feedback Form to us at the Center.

Situation 5: The legislator/staffer is running late, maybe we should re-schedule?

Response: Let them know that you understand, but you'd like to wait (if that will not make you late for another scheduled meeting). If they persist, ask if you can schedule for another time today since you are only in Sacramento today.

Situation 6: The ASK. A staffer or legislator asks, "What do you want me to do? A letter to whom, and what do you want me to support?"

Response: Be prepared ahead of time for this. If you know of a policy campaign at a city or county in their district, let them know which jurisdiction and what problem is being addressed. We cannot advocate that they support a specific policy because that would be lobbying. But we CAN talk about the issue and its impact on the community. For example, "volunteers conducted a clean-up day at local playgrounds and found X amount of cigarette butts and e-cigarette waste." Offer to provide them with the sample letter and make sure to do so when you send a follow-up, thank you email.

If the legislator or staffer pushes for details on an upcoming policy, you can offer to have a volunteer coalition member follow up with them in the district.

If there are no current campaigns or policy issues in the legislator's district, ask them to post on social media their concern for how costly commercial tobacco is to the communities in their district.