



# MEMBER SERVICES

## UNIVERSITY

*MSU Course:*

### *Mano Y Mano With The Media*

A COURSE FOR YOU AND YOUR PRESS SECRETARY

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**PROFESSOR:** CONGRESSWOMAN MARSHA BLACKBURN (TN-07)

**MEMBER PREP:** To get a clear and concise message out, preparation is everything.

- **THE FOOTPRINT FORM:** 1 page, 13 font. Theme: the general message you want to bring every question back to. Footprint: the quote you want to make sure you get in / the sound bite that will get carried elsewhere. Points: no more than 3 bullets that support your case. (see attachment)
- **THE 4/3 STEP PROCESS:** Not every opportunity comes with enough time but you should have a prep process in place for those that do, as well as a process when you are our pushing your own agenda.
  - Step 1 (Communications Director): Check Conference / Committee messaging on an interview topic. You don't always have to tow the party line, but you should be aware of what others are saying and be ready when the reporter asks, "why do you disagree with the Speaker?"
  - Step 2 (Communications Director / Member): briefly talk through the interview, what points you want to make and what traps you should avoid.
  - Step 3 (Communications Director): Prep work / Footprint form.
  - Step 4 (Communications Director / Member / +1) with appropriate legislative staff or the Chief run through possible questions and answers to make sure eventualities have been anticipated.

#### **THINGS YOU SHOULD DO REGULARLY:**

- **DRIVE THROUGH THE DISTRICT** to meet with local radio hosts, weekly paper editors, etc. Communications Directors should do this at least twice a year.
- **SIT DOWN INFORMALLY WITH DC REPORTERS:** stringers, select reporters, etc. Communications Director and Member should do this quarterly.
- **GO TO NEW YORK:** at least twice a year the Member and Communications Director should go to New York to meet with specialty media, have media training sessions, cable shows in

studio, (Communications Director should make time to meet with bookers and producers) Editorial boards.

- EDITORIAL BOARDS: The Member should participate in an editorial board with each major daily in the District at least once a year.
- MAKE A 50 / 20 LIST: The Member, Communications Director, and policy staff should make a 50/20 list. This is a list of 50 opinion leaders, policy experts, or other Members that the Member can learn from or advance a policy objective through. The idea is to try to get through at least 20 people on the list in a given year.
- DEVELOP A QUICK CALL LIST: a handful of reporters, radio hosts, bloggers, bookers, etc. that you can reach quickly if you need to react quickly or want to get into a breaking story. The Member should know who these reporters are.
- DEVELOP AND REVIEW AN EMERGENCY PLAN: every Member has vulnerabilities, even if they are fabrications by an opponent. The Communications Director has to know what these are, the history of the issue, what the ground truth is, and the acceptable parameters of response.

### *THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO:*

- NEVER THROW EACH OTHER UNDER THE BUS: A member should never back off a quote or statement that the Communications Director has given in his name. A Communications Director should never tell a reporter "I'd talk to you but my boss won't let me."
- NEVER HAVE MORE THAN TWO VOICES FROM AN OFFICE: The only people who should be allowed on the record are the Member or the Communications Director. Only the Member should appear on Radio or TV. Allowing policy staff, district directors, or chiefs of staff to go on the record always leads to problems down the road. Likewise, it never works to have a campaign strategist or consultant second-guessing or undercutting the Communications Director - especially on federal issues.
- NEVER BE LATE FOR A TV OR RADIO INTERVIEW: this is the fastest way not to be asked back. No matter how good you are, if a booker can't rely on you to make your hit, they won't come back to you.
- NEVER BE DROPPED BEHIND ENEMY LINES WITH TOO MUCH INFORMATION: A Communications Director needs to be prepared to react rapidly to a known vulnerability. That does not mean the Communications Director needs to know everything. There are stories where the Communications Director needs to be able to honestly say "I haven't been involved in those conversations, let me get back to you." This is an effective backstop against the reporter who calls to say "My deadline is in 10 minutes and I am asking you on

the record for a yes or no answer.”

### *GENERAL RULES TO REMEMBER*

- MAKE TIME: You can only get good press if you make time to talk to reporters, be on TV, compose thoughtful columns, and call into radio shows. All this takes time – the one thing a Member doesn’t have. Be sure to leave holes in the schedule to get good press.
- BE TOUGH: The Communications Director has to be the Member’s toughest critic.
- GROUND RULES MATTER: You are always on the record unless the REPORTER AGREES OTHERWISE: Take the McChrystal lesson to heart. If you see a reporter in a social setting, you are still obligated to set the ground rules.
- “FIRST REPORTS ARE ALWAYS WRONG”: Jumping too fast on a breaking story could cost valuable time later as you walk back a statement. Example: Sec. Clinton’s statement that the U.S. Air Force was air lifting nuclear coolant to Japan. Nuclear plants are cooled with water.
- SPEED KILLS: if you deliberate too long, or wait too long to notify key people of a position, you could find yourself looking irrelevant or as though you are chasing a trend.
- YOU AREN’T CAMPAIGNING: Communications strategies that work for the relatively finite period of a campaign (especially a Member’s first campaign) don’t always work in the long haul of a Congressional career that depends on advancing issues over multiple terms.

### *RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:*

Building relationships is key. To make them productive, here are some things to keep in mind. Remember that Communications Directors and Members have a mutual relationship with the press.

### *DC PRESS*

- DAYTIME CABLE SHOWS: Retail is best for a TV pitch. Short e-mail with the topic, why it is a fit for the show, what the Member will say, and availability (when/ where). If the pitch can’t be read in one blackberry screen, it is too long! When you get an offer, don’t sit on it. If you can’t make it, tell the booker as soon as you can, that earns points. If it is an important hit, accept it immediately and worry about the Member’s schedule later.
- HILL REPORTERS: Relationships matter here especially for generalists. The better you know a particular reporter the better you will be able to pitch them.

- LOCAL STRINGERS: The most important relationship you will have. Touch base regularly. CDs should make a practice of having regular and extended off the record sessions with them.
- BLOGGERS AND ACTIVISTS: Bloggers and activists need to have the same access to a Member that a mainstream reporter does.
- NATIONAL RADIO: Rush, Hannity, and Levin rarely take guests, but there is no shortage of other national hosts who do. Radio Rows are an incredible way to build a grassroots national profile.

#### *DISTRICT PRESS*

- WEEKLY PAPERS: Their readership is declining and hyper-local. Many have even stopped running Member's weekly columns. Still for grant announcements, town hall meetings, and job creation events, these are the premier platform.
- LOCAL TV: Members should develop relationships with anchors and Communications Directors with the news directors. I keep a laminated card in my wallet with the phone number and e-mail of every district news desk.
- LOCAL RADIO HOSTS: There is no substitute for the occasional multi-segment in-studio hit. Communications Directors should also cultivate a reputation for passing hot material to local hosts regularly. The Member / CD should act as a conduit to make sure that local hosts are getting the kind of information they need, including guest bookings, from the leadership.
- ED BOARDS: Some Members love them, some members hate them, still; it is important to sit for them a few times a year. Even if the only achievement is greater ease in placing OpEds, they are important. Papers often claim that they maintain a barrier between the newsroom and the editorial pages. However true this may be, it is also true that the editorial board's opinion of a Member is certainly colored by the newsroom's coverage- after all, they invariably believe their newsroom coverage to be fair, balanced, and accurate. An editorial board is an invaluable opportunity to introduce a new perspective or tell your own side of the story.
- LOCAL PRINT REPORTERS: The DC stringer isn't going to cover your town hall meeting in the district. Local reporters are often less likely to be as jaded and cynical, especially when you make a local connection to a national issue. Good relations here help balance your relationship with the national reporters and vice versa.

## *REP. BLACKBURN MEDIA PREP. WEEK OF 3/28-4/1*

TOPIC: National Security / Afghanistan trip / Libya

BACKGROUND: National Security is a leading topic again this week, following your trip to Iraq and Afghanistan. Ten days after initiating military action, the President will address the nation about Libya. Use of military resources and stability in the wider Middle East are the links that unite what you saw in Afghanistan and what is happening in Libya. In Afghanistan several people expressed concern that additional assets needed for the spring offensive could be tied up in Libyan operations.

THEME: The progress I saw in Afghanistan is more fragile, certainly reversible, and earned at a high cost by the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. As they come home we must be sure their sacrifice is not in vain. I worry that assets our forces in Afghanistan will need to fight the spring offensive- particularly those systems like drones which are in short supply, may be diverted to Libya.

FOOTPRINT: "The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne returns to Tennessee this spring as heroes. The progress they achieved came with the sacrifice of more than a hundred American lives. I am determined that their sacrifice should not be in vain. Over and over Soldiers and Generals told me how heavily they rely on drones and other unmanned assets to defeat al Qaeda. Those resources are now in demand in Libya. I want to make sure that Americans in the Afghanistan fight are given priority by their commander in chief."

SUPPORT:

- Weapons systems like drones are highly effective in counter insurgency operations like Afghanistan. They are also useful in monitoring and deterring the Libyan army.
- Drones and other systems are in short supply across the Military. Other NATO forces do not have the same drone capacity. Unused drones that could be need during a period of intense combat in Afghanistan may be used in Libya instead.
- It is unclear who the Libyan opposition is. A significant portion of terrorist insurgents in Iraq were recruited from Libya.

