



CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH TOOLKIT

Meet with Your Member of Congress During the Congressional Recess

WE NEED CITIZEN LOBBYISTS, LIKE YOU

The Campaign to Fix the Debt is a non-partisan movement to mobilize the American public around the common belief that the nation's growing federal debt threatens our future and that we must address it now—not down the road.

The success of **Fix the Debt** relies upon constituents from a variety of social, economic and political perspectives to come together as citizen lobbyists and compel members of Congress to step up to solve our nation's fiscal challenges. As a citizen lobbyist, you will directly influence the discussion around the federal debt and help establish a critical mass of supporters and advocates that cannot be ignored.

WHY THE CONGRESSIONAL RECESS?

Did you know members of Congress spend the month of August, as well as several more weeks per year, in the district offices where you live? This is why the recess is an exceptional opportunity for citizen lobbyists, like you, to cultivate a relationship with their representatives. One of the easiest ways is to simply schedule a meeting to share why a bipartisan plan to **Fix the Debt** is important to you and your district.

GETTING STARTED

Find Your Representative

Visit the House of Representatives website at <http://www.house.gov> and enter your zip code to find your congressional representative.

The Senate website lists senators by state at <http://www.senate.gov>.

Your representative's website is a great resource for district office contact information and protocol, and will often include the member's schedule.

Call to Schedule a Meeting

While some representatives may provide a meeting request form on their website, it's recommended that you first phone the district office scheduler. You may be asked to provide a

written request, as well. Due to a myriad of security issues, email requests are more expedient than those by mail, so feel free to ask for this option. **Fix the Debt** has provided a **Sample Email Meeting Request** below.

The Recess is a busy time for members; don't hesitate to accept a meeting with a staff person instead. Most congressional staffers are helpful, well informed, and play an important role in shaping policy.

Be Persistent

Politely follow-up with the scheduler until an actual meeting is confirmed. It's okay to be persistent—you're a constituent.

If you are unable to secure an appointment with your representative in person, [send a letter](#) to express your concern about our nation's growing federal debt.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Assemble and Prepare Your Team

The excitement of a 15-20 minute meeting with a member of Congress can be overwhelming, but it's important to stay focused on your goals.

- **Assemble a small coalition of diverse supporters to bring along.** An organized team approach will keep your discussion concise and persuasive.
- **Conduct some basic research** before your meeting.

Nearly all members of Congress claim to be against the debt. However, some key actions can help you better understand your member's position on budget reform. Such as, has the member supported a comprehensive approach that deals with all parts of the budget?

Check their official website to see what they say about the federal budget and national debt. A general Google search is also helpful. Websites of local print and broadcast media outlets can also provide more district specific information.

- **Draft a brief agenda** to ensure your important points are addressed first.
- **Identify a primary speaker to facilitate the meeting,** as well as a note taker.

- **Practice your message.** Your goal is to express your support for taking steps to **Fix the Debt**. Understand how and why by reviewing ***Facts About the Debt*** (below). And practice delivering these points in a way that feels authentic to you.
- **What’s your “ask?”** Another goal as a citizen lobbyist is to ask the member if they support addressing the rising debt sooner rather than later. Keep in mind that tackling the debt will require members to make difficult choices about programs that they and many of their constituents hold dear. One of your goals is to find out what it would take for the member to support including such a “sacred cow” in fixing the debt.
- **Memorialize the visit.** Ask the member if you can take a photo together. Share the photo on social media (including the hashtag #fixthedebt in your post).

With some basic preparation and simple practice, you can stay on point—and on time.

DURING THE MEETING

Start on the Right Foot

Begin your meeting by thanking your representative for his or her time. It’s also nice to acknowledge what’s going “right” in the district. Take a minute for brief introductions. Identify the organization and the purpose of your meeting. Again, keep it simple.

Introduce the Issue

Numbers help policymakers quantify impact, so it’s helpful to bring along data and information like the resources below.

Deliver Your Key Message About Fix the Debt

The primary goal of meeting the member is to deliver your message clearly and concisely.

As a citizen lobbyist, you need to deliver one key message:

We support a strong, bipartisan fiscal plan that’s sizable enough to bring the debt under control and addresses all parts of the budget.

And don’t forget why you became involved in this issue. Make the message relevant to your personal story and it will be easier to deliver!

Make Your Ask

Again, another important goal of your meeting is to measure the member’s support for an approach to **Fix the Debt**.

1. **Do you support a comprehensive debt reduction plan?**
2. **Will you oppose any spending or tax legislation that is not offset and adds to the debt?**

Don't become too frustrated if after your research and preparation, you don't hear the answers you wanted. Remember, simply meeting with your representative is a big win for **Fix the Debt!**

AFTER THE MEETING

Review Your Notes

Immediately review your notes. Good note taking will not only help you remember what was accomplished, but will remind you to follow-up on questions you were unable to answer.

Follow-up

Always send a note of thanks, along with any other relevant materials. Include a copy of the photo you took during the visit. Continue to keep your representative informed on the progress of the campaign, and invite he or she to sponsor a **Fix the Debt** event.

Share Your Experience

It's important to share your success as a citizen lobbyist! Please post your experience and photos on our [Facebook](#) page or send us an email at info@fixthedebt.org. And please follow [@FixTheDebt](#) on Twitter and send a tweet to share your visit experience. Ask if your member is on Twitter and use the handle in your tweet. Example: Had a great #FixtheDebt meeting with @sendavidperdue.

RESOURCES

- ***Facts About the Debt***
- **Sample Email Request for a Meeting**
- **Calendar of Congressional Recesses**

Overview of U.S. Fiscal Challenges

- **National debt is historically high.** Gross debt surpassed the \$20 trillion mark for the first time ever in 2017 and is currently over \$22 trillion. Debt held by the public stands at over \$16 trillion, or about 78 percent of the U.S. economy, which is the highest it has been since just following World War II.
- **\$1 trillion deficits are just around the corner.** The federal budget deficit in fiscal year 2018 was \$779 billion. Trillion dollar deficits are set to return permanently by 2022.
- **National debt will skyrocket.** National debt held by the public will exceed the all-time record as a share of the economy by 2037.
- **The outlook will be even worse if tax and spending policies are extended.** If tax cuts and spending increases currently set to expire are continued, national debt will hit a new record by 2030.
- **We will spend more on interest payments on the debt.** Net interest payments are the fastest-growing part of the budget and are projected to nearly triple from \$325 billion in 2018 to \$921 billion in ten years. More of the budget dedicated to interest means less available for investments in areas such as education, infrastructure, or defense.
- **Autopilot spending will drive debt upwards.** An aging population and rising health care costs per person will increase spending on Social Security and federal health care programs like Medicare. Along with interest, this spending is essentially on autopilot since no annual approval by Congress is required. Spending on Social Security, health care, and debt interest will exceed all federal revenue by 2041 under current law.
- **Rising debt will be a drag on economic growth and standard of living.** Failing to address the debt will result in higher interest rates, slower economic growth, greater burdens on future generations, and an increased chance of a fiscal crisis. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that annual average income in 30 years will be \$5,500 lower than if debt were put on a downward path.
- **Waiting to fix the debt will likely hurt future generations.** As the report states, “In all likelihood, if policymakers postponed fiscal tightening and debt as a share of GDP continued to rise, the changes necessary to stabilize debt would place an even greater burden on future generations.”

SAMPLE EMAIL MEETING REQUEST

Subject Line: Fix the Debt – In-District Meeting Request

Body:

Dear [Scheduler or Staff person],

As a constituent of [Senator/Representative Jones], I would like to request a meeting with [him/her] at [his/her] district office in the next week to discuss the need to address the rising national debt. Constituents [Jane Doe] and [John Doe] will also be in attendance, if scheduling permits.

I am a supporter of the **Campaign to Fix the Debt**, a non-partisan initiative founded by a coalition of members from different parties and perspectives, who believe our country's growing federal debt will adversely impact Americans for generations to come.

I am one of many **Fix the Debt** supporters who want our leaders to solve our nation's fiscal crisis now – not down the road.

We have joined over 370,000 other Americans in this effort – many are currently meeting with other members of Congress during the recess to secure support of a bipartisan approach that includes:

- **Cutting wasteful and low priority expenditures in domestic and defense spending;**
- **Slowing the growth of health care costs and reforming Social Security to make it financially sound;**
- **Enacting pro-growth and deficit reducing tax reform.**

The **Campaign to Fix the Debt** now seeks [Senator/Representative Jones]'s support and feedback to intelligently bring our debt under control.

Please let me know of anything else you need to schedule the meeting. I appreciate your assistance and look forward to your reply. In the meantime, the Member and [his/her] staff can find more information at www.fixthedebt.org.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your email]

[Your phone number]

www.fixthedebt.org

2019 LEGISLATIVE RECESS CALENDARS

SENATE	HOLIDAYS & SPECIAL EVENTS	HOUSE
February 18 – February 22 Senate Recess	February 18 President’s Day	February 18 – February 23 House Recess
March 18 – March 22 Senate Recess		March 18 – March 22 House Recess
April 15 – April 26 Senate Recess		April 15 – April 26 House Recess
May 27 – May 31 Senate Recess	May 27 Memorial Day	May 27 – May 31 House Recess
July 1 – July 5 Senate Recess	July 4 Independence Day	July 1 – July 5 House Recess
August 5 – September 6 Senate Recess	September 2 Labor Day September 29 Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown	July 29 – September 6 House Recess
September 30 – October 14 Senate Recess	October 1 FY 2020 begins October 8 Yom Kippur begins at sundown October 14 Columbus Day October 31 Halloween	September 30 – October 14 House Recess
November 25 – November 29 Senate Recess	November 11 Veteran’s Day November 28 Thanksgiving Day	November 4 – November 11 House Recess November 25 – November 29 House Recess

December 16 – December 31
Senate Recess

Senate Recess is also called a
"State work period"

December 22
Hanukkah begins at sundown

December 25
Christmas Day

December 31
New Year's Eve

December 16 – December 31
House Recess

House Recess is also called a
"District work period"