C O N G R E S S I O N A L  O U T R E A C H  T O O L K I T
Meet with Your Member of Congress During the Congressional Recess


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.

W H Y  T H E  C O N G R E S S I O N A L  R E C E S S ?

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.

G E T T I N G  S T A R T E D

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 is currently over $22 trillion. Debt held by the public stands at over $16 trillion, or about 79 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 2019 is projected to be $960 billion. Trillion dollar deficits are set to return permanently by 2020.

- **National debt will skyrocket.** National debt held by the public will reach nearly the size of the U.S. economy by 2029 (95 percent of GDP).

- **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 of 106 percent of the economy 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 double in dollar terms 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.

- **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 (CBO) 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 CBO 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.”
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>Holidays &amp; Special Events</th>
<th>House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 18 – February 22</td>
<td>February 18: President’s Day</td>
<td>February 18 – February 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td></td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18 – March 22</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 18 – March 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td></td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 15 – April 26</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 15 – April 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td></td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 27 – May 31</td>
<td>May 27: Memorial Day</td>
<td>May 27 – May 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td></td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1 – July 5</td>
<td>July 4: Independence Day</td>
<td>July 1 – July 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td></td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 5 – September 6</td>
<td>September 2: Labor Day</td>
<td>July 29 – September 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td>September 29: Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown</td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 30 – October 14</td>
<td>October 1: FY 2020 begins</td>
<td>September 30 – October 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td>October 8: Yom Kippur begins at sundown</td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>October 14: Columbus Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31</td>
<td>October 14: Halloween</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 25 – November 29</td>
<td>November 11: Veteran’s Day</td>
<td>November 4 – November 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td>November 28: Thanksgiving Day</td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 25 – November 29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 16 – December 31</td>
<td>December 22</td>
<td>December 16 – December 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Recess</td>
<td>Hanukkah begins at sundown</td>
<td>House Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Year’s Eve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senate Recess is also called a “State work period”

House Recess is also called a “District work period”