SurgeonsVoice Advocacy Guide:

Tools and Resources to Become an Effective Surgeon Advocate
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You are your best advocate

SurgeonsVoice: Cutting Edge Advocacy

**MISSION:** Empowering surgeon advocates with necessary tools and resources to establish and maintain relationships with legislators to help advance the College’s health policy priorities.

**PURPOSE:** Demonstrating strength in numbers to help elevate surgery’s voice at the federal and state levels.
ADVOCACY 101

Every day decisions are being made in Washington, DC, and around the country that have the potential to directly affect our practice environments and the patients we treat. Because surgeons believe responsibility to our patients extends beyond the operating room, advocacy and health policy continues to remain a top priority of the American College of Surgeons (ACS).

OVERVIEW

In 2001, the ACS Board of Governors voted unanimously to establish a 501c(6) affiliated corporation, the American College of Surgeons Professional Association (ACSPA), to offer a broader range of activities and services benefitting surgeons and patients, including an expanded legislative advocacy program featuring a political action committee (PAC). The formation of the 501c(6) ensures that the College can continue to maintain the standard-setting educational activities that remain at the core of its mission. Fellows hold a seamless membership to both the ACS and ACSPA.
ACS’ ROLE

ACS goals include improving surgical patient care and safeguarding standards of that care within an ethical practice environment for our profession. Even in the current challenging political climate, the College must continue to play a proactive role in meaningful health policy proposals for Congress and state legislatures to consider. It is up to surgeon advocates to become experts within this space and help advocate for meaningful, practical policies at the federal and state levels.

The ACS Division of Advocacy and Health Policy (DAHP) exists to help advance the College’s health policy agenda through Congress via lobbying activities, grassroots (Surgeons’Voice) efforts, and political affairs (Surgeons’PAC). To help develop and advocate for health care policy that is in the best interest of patients and physicians, the DAHP Washington office liaises with federal and government entities—including Congress, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and Health and Human Services (HHS)—on a variety of issues of importance to the surgical profession.

All surgeons should become more engaged in advocacy.

YOUR ROLE

Establishing yourself as a surgeon advocate is crucial to making your voice heard. More specifically, regularly engaging with members of Congress and their staff, and serving as a trusted resource on issues of importance to surgeons and the surgical patient, is essential. As a surgeon, your first-hand expertise and training provide a realistic perspective on health policy issues that members of Congress often only encounter via budget implications and reticent policy jargon. As a result, many lawmakers, particularly your elected officials, will look to you for guidance on complex issues.
INSIDE THE ACS

ADVOCACY STRUCTURE
Familiarizing yourself with the College’s advocacy structure is essential to understanding how ACS determines its advocacy priorities. Under the leadership of the Health Policy and Advocacy Group (HPAG), the Legislative Committee, General Surgery Coding and Reimbursement Committee (GSCRC), Health Policy Advisory Council (HPAC), and the ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC Board of Directors all play a unique and vital role to help identify what challenges surgeons are facing around the country.

STRUCTURAL OVERVIEW

HEALTH POLICY AND ADVOCACY GROUP (HPAG)
The Health Policy and Advocacy Group (HPAG) is the executive committee for the DAHP and is responsible for approving the recommendations made by its subcommittees. The HPAG sets the DAHP advocacy agenda and priorities, and aims to ensure that all advocacy related subcommittees are working in coordination with its policy agenda.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
The Legislative Committee’s primary responsibility is to analyze legislation and review and provide policy position recommendations to HPAG. Other committee duties include serving as a knowledgeable resource for their colleagues regarding legislative activities that impact surgeons and surgical patients.
GENERAL SURGERY CODING AND REIMBURSEMENT COMMITTEE (GSCRC)
The General Surgery Coding and Reimbursement Committee (GSCRC) represents and acts in the interests of general surgeons and their clinical practices regarding issues that impact coding, billing, and reimbursement for surgical care. The GSCRC focuses on activities of the American Medical Association/Specialty Society Relative Value Scale Update Committee (RUC) and the Current Procedural Terminology Editorial Panel (CPT), which are responsible for determining payment rates for health care services. In addition to RUC and CPT, the GSCRC also evaluates a variety of other payment policy issues, including those related to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, third party payor issues, accurate valuation of global codes, administrative burden reduction, and practice management.

HEALTH POLICY ADVISORY COUNCIL (HPAC)
The Health Policy Advisory Council (HPAC) is the grassroots advocacy committee for the College and is based on the theory that “all politics is local.” The goal of the College’s nationwide grassroots advocacy program is to communicate, educate, and provide the necessary tools and resources to build a strong network of surgeon advocates. HPAC members are a diverse group, consisting of Regents, Governors, young surgeons and residents, Health Policy Scholars, and other College members with expressed interest or expertise in health care policy. Special efforts are made to ensure that all specialties have representation within the HPAC.

ACSPA-SURGEONSPAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
The SurgeonsPAC Board of Directors is responsible for establishing the fundraising activities and disbursement strategies for the American College of Surgeons Professional Association Political Action Committee, ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC. In particular, PAC Board members are experts on the political process, play a role in determining policies and procedures to help educate and communicate the importance of a PAC contribution to the membership at-large, and determine which candidates and incumbents warrant SurgeonsPAC support.
ADVOCACY IN ACTION

FEDERAL EFFORTS

On a daily basis, both academic and practicing surgeons are affected by issues such as reducing administrative burdens and regulations, modifying and implementing Medicare physician payment reform, improving electronic health record and health information technology interoperability, increasing funding for trauma systems and enhancing cancer care, and more. The federal legislative team regularly monitors Congress’ agenda to help determine what issues have the potential to impact surgeons and surgical patients.

The federal legislative team works on your behalf to advocate, lobby, and promote important issues. In 2017, staff lobbied more than 250 congressional offices, advocated for more than 20 House and Senate health care-related bills, and attended upwards of 200 fundraisers, candidate meetings, and health care industry events.

Educating our membership about legislative initiatives and policy positions via ACS publications, press statements, and social media is critical to ensuring Fellows remain engaged and informed.

By participating in working groups, testifying before Congress, and coalescing with like-minded physician and patient groups, DAHP helps to ensure that the ACS is a leader and subject matter expert regarding important health policy matters.

Frank Opelka, MD, FACS, testifying at the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee Hearing on MACRA implementation

Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA-06) and John Daly, MD, FACS, Co-Chair, ACS Patient Education Committee
STATE ACTIVITIES

The College's State Affairs staff monitors the legislative activity of state legislatures around the country to prevent enactment of harmful policies as well as to identify trending issues and strategies that ACS Chapters can apply locally to maximize the impact of their efforts.

Utilizing state advocacy resources (facs.org/advocacy/state/resources) provides Fellows with the ability to track bills, review legislative toolkits, write their representatives, develop legislative strategic plans, and more.

Tracking state legislation and monitoring potential impacts to surgical practice at the local level is critical. A comprehensive list of bills that ACS staff is currently reviewing is available at facs.org/advocacy/state/legislation.

Established in October 2009, the Chapter Advocacy Lobby Day Grant Program supports local advocacy efforts through ACS Chapters in their respective states. Lobby days are a great way to establish and leverage relationships, even if not advocating for a specific bill or issue.

ACS partnerships with state specialty societies and other like-minded health organizations help establish strong allies on surgical issues.
REGULATORY EFFORTS

The ACS Regulatory Affairs team analyzes federal policies that affect surgeons and the care they provide to surgical patients. Much of the DAHP’s regulatory activity is focused on physician, hospital, and ambulatory surgical center reimbursement rules, as well as Medicare payment models and incentive programs, which are issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and its subdivisions.

Advocating for appropriate quality measurement and reimbursement policies is important to ensure that surgical patients receive high-quality care, as well as to secure proper payment rates for practicing surgeons.

Supporting clinical quality measures that accurately represent the care surgeons provide leads to meaningful quality improvement and fair public reporting.

Reviewing and submitting feedback on proposed regulations enables the College to be a leader in shaping and revising health care policies, and provides the ACS with an opportunity to highlight potential regulations that may negatively affect surgeons and their patients.

The College develops educational resources and practice management tools to help Fellows adjust to new clinical guidelines and regulatory compliance requirements whenever an important policy is enacted, changed, or eliminated.
Through *SurgeonsVoice*, the American College of Surgeons Professional Association’s (ACSPA) nationwide, interactive advocacy program, surgeon advocates have the ability to send messages to Congress to strengthen ACS’ impact in Washington.

In addition to learning more about grassroots tools and resources available to you via *SurgeonsVoice.org*, the following programs and activities can help you become a more engaged, effective surgeon advocate:

**Become a surgeon advocate.** Online resources available at *SurgeonsVoice.org* allow surgeons to engage and build valuable relationships with lawmakers, advance policy and legislation favorable to surgeons and surgical patients, and foster champions for such on Capitol Hill.

**Become an HPAC Councilor.** The Health Policy Advisory Council (HPAC) consists of key surgeon advocates who have developed expertise on legislative, political, and regulatory issues in order to facilitate two-way communication between Fellows and the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy. HPAC Councilors serve as grassroots ambassadors forming an extensive, nationwide grassroots advocacy network.

**Take action.** Taking action on issues of importance is vital to provide the surgical perspective in Washington. More specifically, regularly engaging with members of Congress and their staff, and serving as a trusted resource on issues of importance to surgeons and surgical patients is an essential part of establishing oneself as a surgeon advocate.

**Learn about your legislators.** Learning about your representatives or senators backgrounds, key committee assignments, voting history, and relevant leadership roles assists in establishing a level of respect within a congressional office. Regularly visiting members’ websites, signing up for e-newsletters or updates, and keeping up with issues they support are great ways to stay informed.
A CUT ABOVE THE REST: ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

Overview
The Division of Advocacy and Health Policy’s (DAHP’s) Advocate of the Year recognition program tracks how engaged surgeon advocates utilize tools and taking action on SurgeonsVoice.org. Top advocates establish and maintain relationships with legislators, helping to advance health policy priorities. The Advocate of the Year will be recognized during the annual Clinical Congress, featured in the Bulletin of the American College of Surgeons, and invited to participate in other advocacy related activities.

Principles of Participation
✓ Attend the annual Advocacy Summit
✓ Serve on an ACS Committee
✓ Attend in-district meetings
✓ Host a site visit/facility tour/training (Stop the Bleed*)
✓ Present on the value of ACS advocacy efforts
✓ Join state chapter lobby days
✓ Contribute to ACS publications
✓ Participate in press/op-ed opportunities
✓ Provide advocacy testimonials
✓ Recruit surgeon advocates
✓ Share advocacy-related content via social media
✓ Become an issue expert

ADVOCATE AT HOME
Meeting with your elected officials is a powerful way to raise the profile of issues and effect change. While members of Congress and their staff are well-versed on many issues, surgeons are the experts on surgical issues. Similarly, constituent relationships assist policymakers to gauge what is important to their constituents.

Senators and representatives return home to their states and districts during Congressional work periods. In-district meetings are a great opportunity to meet with policymakers nearby.

Through DAHP’s Advocate at Home program, staff can assist with planning, preparing for, and executing a successful meeting or event. The Surgeon Advocate Appendix within this handbook provides additional information on how to conduct an effective in-district meeting.
SurgeonsPAC facts
Established in 2002, the American College of Surgeons Professional Association political action committee (ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC) is governed by an appointed Board of Directors comprised of Fellow, Young Fellow, and Resident members from numerous specialties. SurgeonsPAC seeks to support an advocacy agenda for surgeons and their patients across specialty lines, and plays a critical role in ensuring that the College has the ability to establish and maintain relationships with legislators and advance the College’s health policy agenda.

SurgeonsPAC, in conjunction with the College’s federal legislative staff and surgeon advocates, work to establish relationships with surgical champions on Capitol Hill. Ranked among the top 20 health professional PACs in Washington, DC,* SurgeonsPAC provides nonpartisan financial support to federal office holders who share surgery’s perspective on health care policy issues, and those who are positioned to advocate for ACS’ legislative priorities. The PAC has strict criteria for contributing to candidates. It is very important to the ACSPA that contributions are distributed to friends of surgery in compliance with Federal Election Commission (FEC) regulations.

SurgeonsPAC donor levels and benefits
It is important to keep in mind that participation is more important than the amount contributed. For that reason, SurgeonsPAC offers several donor levels to its members, including unique benefits and incentives. Donor levels are merely suggested guidelines for SurgeonsPAC participation.

SurgeonsPAC activities
Visit SurgeonsPAC.org to learn more about fundraising and disbursement activities, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), and more.

Become a PAC champion by educating your peers and encouraging their involvement. PAC literature, personalized presentation templates, data, and other resources are available upon request.
Host an event or fundraiser for your member of Congress and invite your colleagues and local physician community. This is a great way to get to know candidates or members of Congress and help cultivate a lasting relationship.

SurgeonsPAC encourages members of the College to become actively engaged in the political process and welcomes requests to support federal candidates. The SurgeonsPAC Board evaluates requests based on the guidelines above. When the SurgeonsPAC Board and staff make the determination to support a candidate, surgeon advocates have the opportunity to participate in an in-district check delivery or attend an event in Washington, DC.

Note: Contributions to ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. Contributions are voluntary, and all members of ACSPA have the right to refuse to contribute without reprisal. Federal law prohibits ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC from accepting contributions from foreign nations. By law, if your contributions are made using a personal check or credit card, ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC may use your contribution only to support candidates in federal elections. All corporate contributions to ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC will be used for educational and administrative fees of ACSPA and other activities permissible under federal law. Federal law requires ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC to use its best efforts to collect and report the name, mailing address, occupation, and the name of the employer of individuals whose contributions exceed $200 in a calendar year. ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC is a program of the ACSPA, which is exempt from federal income tax under section 501c(6) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Advocacy in Action

Surgeons PAC Reception

Gary L. Timmerman, MD, FACS; Mark Malangoni, MD, FACS; and James Gigantelli, MD, FACS

John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS, and Rep. Neal Dunn, MD, FACS (R-FL-02)

Scott Kurtzman, MD, FACS; Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT); and Brendan Campbell, MD, FACS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

What is grassroots advocacy?
Grassroots advocacy comes in many forms including (but not limited to) letter writing campaigns, providing education on issues, testifying before governing bodies, working with local, state, and federal agencies, and more. The purpose of grassroots advocacy is to demonstrate to policymakers that a particular issue has strong support in their home districts among their constituents.

Does grassroots advocacy really make a difference?
Yes! But, strength in numbers and recognizing that it can take a long time to see the value or impact is key to the program’s success.

How do I know if ACS is working on issues that affect me?
The College’s advocacy activities at the federal and state levels were established to represent interests of the practicing surgeon and surgical patients. Be sure to regularly review our issue one-pagers, position statements, and more at facs.org/advocacy. If there is a local issue affecting your surgical practice and you would like more information on how to make an impact, contact DAHP staff.

Who are grassroots advocates?
A grassroots advocate is someone who cares enough about an issue to make their voice heard. Grassroots advocates help raise the level of awareness regarding specific issues at the local, state, or federal levels.

Who are grasstops advocates?
Grasstops advocates are seasoned grassroots experts who mentor peers and colleagues to encourage participation. They have preexisting relationships with their lawmakers, staff, and local organizations, and serve as trusted advisors.

Who are my elected officials?
Learning more about your members of Congress is easy. Visit SurgeonVoice.org and view “My Legislators,” or go to house/senate.gov to look up your legislators by your ZIP code or state.

How do I know where my lawmaker stands on a specific issue?
Becoming educated about your member of Congress’ background, committee assignments, voting history, and relevant leadership roles can help provide a better understanding of issues of importance to them.
**How can I learn more about becoming a surgeon advocate?**

Establishing yourself as a surgeon advocate is crucial to making your voice heard. More specifically, regularly engaging with policymakers and their staff, and serving as a trusted resource on issues of importance to surgeons and surgical patients is essential. Become a surgeon advocate today to help advocate for meaningful, practical health policy proposals at the federal and state level.

- Attend the annual ACS Leadership and Advocacy Summit
- Become educated about ACS health policy priorities
- Visit SurgeonsVoice.org and participation in grassroots “Calls to Action”
- Utilize social media and online tools and resources available to surgeon advocates
- Learn about your legislators
- Become an HPAC Councilor within your state
- Host a facility tour or conduct a site visit
- Help DAHP staff help you!

**How do I set up a meeting with a Congressional office?**

Reference the Surgeon Advocate Appendix, participate in the At Home program, and review the Grassroots Guide accessible to you at facs.org/advocacy/participate/surgeonsvoice/guide. DAHP staff are also available to assist with scheduling requests.

**What is a “Call to Action”?**

When lawmakers need to hear from their constituents to elevate a legislative priority, DAHP staff will issue a “Call to Action” to engage FACS and encourage them to contact their members of Congress.

**Does my participation truly have an impact?**

Yes! You are your best advocate. Your unique expertise will lead to many lawmakers, particularly your elected officials, looking to you for guidance on complex issues.

**Where can I find additional information regarding ACS advocacy and health policy priorities?**

Please visit online resources via SurgeonsVoice.org and facs.org or contact the ACS Division of Advocacy and Health Policy by e-mail ahp@facs.org or phone 202-337-2701.
Introduction: A Member (or members) of Congress introduces a bill, which is then read and referred to the committee(s) of jurisdiction.

Committee: The committee reviews the bill, holds hearings with subject matter experts, amends the bill, and votes it out of committee for consideration on the House/Senate floor.

Consideration: A bill voted out of a committee of jurisdiction moves to the full House/Senate chamber for additional debate, amendments, and final passage.

Final passage: Both chambers must pass identical legislation before a bill can go to the President’s desk to be signed into law.

ACS’ role: When a DAHP federal legislative priority rises to the level of a legislative “fix,” DAHP staff drafts, or works with Congressional staff to draft, legislation and helps identify bill sponsors.

ACS’ role: When lawmakers need to hear from their constituents to elevate a legislative priority, DAHP staff will deploy a “Call to Action” to engage FACS and encourage them to contact their members of Congress.

ACS’ role: Many bills never make it through the committee process let alone become law. When the College has a legislative victory at any level staff might issue a press statement, include a write-up in an ACS publication, or thank the bill sponsor via e-mail, mail, or social media.

Your role: Contact DAHP staff about ideas for legislative fixes.

Your role: Take action and urge your peers to do the same.
**LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

**ACS’ role:** The federal legislative team meets with lawmakers and staff to discuss positive or negative implications of a bill, particularly how it has the potential to impact surgeons and patients, and assists with targeting cosponsors should ACS decide to support the bill.

**Your role:** Participate in the annual ACS Leadership & Advocacy Summit and meet with your elected officials in Washington and at home.

**ACS’ role:** The federal lobbying team continues to monitor the bill’s progress, evaluates the need for additional cosponsors, enlists coalition support, brings in surgeon advocates to testify, and more.

**Your role:** Strength in numbers is critical in this final stage. Call, e-mail, write, and Tweet your elected officials, share your personal story, and establish your position on the issue.

**Your role:** Educate your peers about the College’s legislative priorities and victories, utilize social media to thank your representative and senators, and invite these champions to visit you at your workplace.

**Committee:** The committee reviews the bill, holds hearings with subject matter experts, amends the bill, and votes it out of committee for consideration on the House/Senate floor.

**Consideration:** A bill voted out of a committee of jurisdiction moves to the full House/Senate chamber for additional debate, amendments, and final passage.

**Final passage:** Both chambers must pass identical legislation before a bill can go to the President’s desk to be signed into law.
Here you will find supplemental information to make your advocacy efforts in Washington and at home more successful.

UNITED STATES CONGRESS: PLAYERS AND PROCESS

Composition of Congress
Made up of two houses—the Senate and the House of Representatives—Congress’ primary job is to legislate or establish laws. There are a total of 435 U.S. Representatives and 100 U.S. Senators in Congress. While every state has two senators, the number of representatives in each state depends on its population.

Legislative Process
ACS advocates on behalf of surgeons and surgical patients by monitoring and lobbying for (or against) federal legislation that has the potential to impact surgical care and the environment in which it is provided.
ACS KEY COMMITTEES

House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Comprised of 55 members, the Energy and Commerce Committee is one of the oldest standing committees in the House of Representatives and has responsibility over issues ranging from telecommunications, to consumer protection, to energy policy. It is also only one of two committees in the House with significant jurisdiction over matters pertaining to health care. The College is most actively involved with the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A number of the College’s legislative priorities pass through the Energy and Commerce Committee, including topics related to physician payment, cancer and trauma care, Health Information Technology (HIT), opioids, drug pricing, and medical liability reform.

House Committee on Ways and Means
The Committee on Ways and Means is the oldest committee of the U.S. Congress, and is the chief tax-writing committee in the House. The committee oversees revenue-related aspects of the Social Security system, Medicare, and social services programs. Because the Constitution requires that all revenue-raising provisions originate in the House, the Committee on Ways and Means is considered influential. Comprised of 40 members, the committee has jurisdiction over several of the College’s legislative priorities, including physician payment under the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Stark law, rural health care, and reducing physician practice burdens.

Senate Committee on Finance
Considered to be one of the most influential committees in Congress, the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance is responsible for taxation and other revenue measures in addition to overseeing issues pertaining to health programs under the Social Security Act, including Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and other health and human services programs. Comprised of 27 members, there are a total of six subcommittees within the full committee. The College is actively involved with both the full committee and the Subcommittee on Health Care. Nearly every legislative priority that would require a legislative fix or offset to Medicare or physician payment reform falls under this committee’s oversight.

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) has jurisdiction over nearly all agencies, institutes, and programs within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Administration on Aging, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. In turn, this Committee has the ability to impact initiatives critical to the College such as opioids, HIT/interoperability, and more. Comprised of 23 members, there are a total of three subcommittees within the full committee, including a subcommittee on health. The College predominately engages with the full committee as this is where a majority of health care-specific issues are deliberated. Given the scope of this committee’s work, ACS works closely with its members and staff to help identify potential new policy priorities.
GRASSROOTS GUIDE

Why meet in-district?
To be an effective surgeon advocate, nothing is more important than establishing a personal relationship with members of Congress. Conversely, to a member of Congress, there is nothing more valuable than input and support from constituents (voters!). Meeting with policymakers and/or their staff is extremely valuable to help advance the College’s surgical advocacy agenda and provide you with the opportunity to develop key contacts with your legislators. Scheduling in-district meetings is easier than you think! Get started through participating in our At Home program.

In-district meetings
Scheduling your meeting:

Do your research. Every office is different, so be sure you get to know your member of Congress prior to your meeting.

Contact staff. Notify them that you are a constituent, surgeon, and Fellow of the College, and what issue(s) you plan to discuss.

Follow-up and confirm. Be brief but specific. For example, “My name is Dr. John Smith. I am a constituent of Rep./Sen. Washington, and I am following up on a meeting request sent on May 22, 2018, to discuss physician payment issues.” Once scheduled, confirming your meeting details and time is equally as important.

Be flexible. Members of Congress maintain extremely busy schedules, especially at home/in-district. Meeting details, locations, times, and durations will vary.

Utilize resources and support. The ACS Division of Advocacy and Health Policy staff is available to help coordinate a personal meeting, organize a site visit or facility tour, provide talking points, and more.

Tips for successful meetings
Utilizing the following tips can help lay the groundwork to develop a mutually beneficial relationship between you and your elected officials:

Get to know your members of Congress. Understanding background, committee assignments, voting history, and relevant leadership roles your member of Congress participates in will help you establish a level of respect within an office. Regularly visiting their website, signing up for e-newsletters or updates, and staying informed about key policy priorities are great ways to remain educated.
“Friend” or “follow” your elected officials. In today’s social media driven domain, politicians rely on Facebook, Twitter and other vehicles as easy, effective platforms to get their message across to constituents and vice versa. Because social media is set up to engage an audience, you too can educate, praise, or respond to your elected official.

Know before you go. Similar to getting to know your congressperson, knowing your issue(s) and recognizing their position(s) on said matters is critical to framing your ask. Honing in on one or two key issues per visit and framing them in the context of your legislator’s viewpoint (examples of how x initiative will help or hurt you, your patients, or constituents) will help ensure your request is clear. Regularly browse ACS publications like NewsScope and the Bulletin, and visit SurgeonsVoice and SurgeonsPAC websites, to learn more about advocacy and health policy issues that have the potential to affect surgeons and surgical patients across the country.

Make the ask. Help policymakers help you! Being attentive and respectful while confidently reinforcing your ask goes a long way in helping hold an office accountable. Your ask should be clear and may include the following: sponsoring or cosponsoring a bill, extending a follow-up meeting, encouraging your contact to stay in touch and consider you a resource when it comes to health care-specific issues, and so on.

Provide feedback. Your feedback and questions are important to us. In addition to completing a meeting evaluation form, the DAHP wants to know the following:

- Was the office responsive?
- Did the member of Congress agree to take action?
- Did staff request any additional information?
- Do you plan to schedule a follow-up meeting?
- Anything else you care to share.

You are your best advocate. Do not believe someone else is your advocate. We need all College members engaged in advocacy and political efforts.