



Misconceptions of Advocacy

It is important to address those misconceptions early on so you can no longer make excuses throughout your journey.

1. Advocacy takes too much time! I don't have the time. It's just one more thing and I am way too busy to get involved in advocacy.

Advocacy takes as much or as little time as you give it. Be sure to pay attention to how to develop an advocacy plan for your community and how to educate your students, peers and others around you so they become advocates too. This will take that heavy burden off you and shift the responsibility to other citizens that are affected by the same issues.

2. I am not a politician. I don't "do" politics. I don't want to march on Washington.

You may not be a politician or "do" politics, but being an educated person is your civic duty. It is important that you uphold your responsibilities as a U.S. citizen and exercise your rights to freedom of speech and voting. You don't have to march anywhere! An e-mail or phone call can go a long way in getting your point across.

3. I don't have the personality to ask people for things. I'm shy.

The beauty of being a proactive advocate is that you don't necessarily have to ask for things. One of the most important aspects of advocacy is educating your policymakers. If you love what you do, then tell them about it. If your students or peers are doing something amazing around you, be sure to share that with your policymakers and others in your community. You don't have to be a salesman to get your point across. Sitting behind your computer typing up a press release to send to your local community newspaper doesn't require you to ask for anything or get out of your comfort zone.

4. It doesn't make a difference. I have heard that Congress deletes constituent emails, ignores phone calls and/or sends generic responses to letters.

This is a common misconception. However, many people forget that your votes and opinions are what gets your congressmen and women elected in the first place, and what keeps them in office. Your opinion does matter, and so do your e-mails and phone calls. Regardless if it is a generic response or if you hear from a congressional staff person, those messages are delivered to your legislator and they

hear them. They know if they don't listen to what you say, when it comes election time you have the right to vote them out of office and elect someone that will listen to you. That is the glory of democracy.

5. My member of Congress just doesn't seem to care about agricultural education. So why bother?

This is even more reason for you to communicate with them. These are some of the most important legislators to educate. If they do not know what agricultural education is, it is your responsibility to inform them. If you don't, then you're not doing your profession justice, because when it comes time to vote on Perkins funding for your state programs, they will have no clue about the importance of that funding to your local program.

6. I'm a Democrat and my member of Congress is a Republican. Or, I'm a Republican and my member of Congress is a Democrat.

Once again, your representative is representing you. Regardless of their political affiliation, your vote still gets them elected. Therefore, you shouldn't let party affiliation stop you from letting your opinion be heard. Your legislator may not share the same opinions with you about foreign policy, but they will listen to what is happening within their own community.

7. I've already sent my member of Congress an e-mail through the NAAE's action alert system about this issue once before. There's no need to do so again.

You may have contacted your member of Congress 15 times already, but it is important to maintain a quality relationship with that person. Communicating with them beyond action alerts is important, and encouraging their participation in your program or local community is essential to that relationship.