



The Vote Hemp Guide to Hemp Activism

A Concise Guide to Citizen Lobbying on the Hemp Issue

This guide may be used as a tool by anyone who wants to help change America's ridiculous and unfair domestic policy that effectively bans hemp farming. It will help empower you to become more involved and show you how to influence your representatives in Congress and/or your state government to once again allow American farmers to grow industrial hemp. If you would like to understand more about why this issue is both essential and urgent, read the Vote Hemp Treatise [*A Renewal of Common Sense: The Case for Hemp in 21st Century America.*](#)

This guide will take you from the easiest ways to get involved to the more influential ways, including setting up a meeting with a Congressional staffer or even with a member of Congress. It can be empowering, exciting and meaningful to become part of the democratic process.

Timing can sometimes mean success. For example, times when your legislators are in their home district are a perfect opportunity to exercise your power by arranging a meeting or visiting a public town hall meeting. Also, during elections, bring a question to ask during a public debate.

Citizen Lobbying: The Key Ingredient for Change

While there are many things that can influence political behavior, there is but *one* factor that is always necessary and can trump all others. This factor is *grassroots constituent support*. No matter the issue or politician, constituent support is a key factor in influencing Congress and state legislatures. Members of Congress and Senators turn to *you* in order to learn about which issues are important, so *speak up* and know your stuff! For any change in domestic hemp policy to occur, there needs to be more visible and vocal constituent support.

Build Support: Take Action

There are many ways to [take action](#) in order to build support for a cause. Following are some of the better-known ways to influence Congress with your own voice. They are generally ranked from less effective to more effective.

- *Online Petitions* – These petitions are very easy to create and distribute and they can be an effective tool, but you need a substantial amount of signatures to make a real impact. Online petitions are also a good way to get the word out and engage online communities supportive of your cause.
- *Signed Paper Petitions* – Same as online petitions, many signatures are needed. But again, this is a great way to get the word out and introduce new people to the issue, particularly at a community gathering or an open public event. Some people may genuinely take interest and will be willing to do more.
- *Pre-written Emails* – Online tools make it easy to write to your representatives in government. With Vote Hemp’s tool powered by CapWiz, you can go to our web site or [just click here, type in your zip code](#) and send a message to your members of Congress right now. Your electronic message is individually received and noted, and it will likely prompt a written response from the congressional office (which we collect at [Constituent Reply Letters](#) on our site). However, because it is pre-written and less personal, we encourage you to consider making phone calls as well (see below).
- *Handwritten Letters* – This technique is time-tested and has been effective long before emails or fax machines even existed. A handwritten letter has a personal feel, and you can copy text from our [action alerts](#) as well as add your own local or personal angle. These are well worth the little bit of extra time it may take. They will be delayed if you send them to the Washington, DC office, so consider sending them to the district office.
- *Phone Calls* – Calls to your representatives’ Congressional offices are a very effective way to literally make your voice heard. If you’re really lucky, you’ll even get a chance to talk with a legislative staffer. And if you know your hemp facts, and can be polite, this can be fun and satisfying. Even just leaving a message has an impact. It helps to know who the staffer is you wish to talk to. Please [click here](#) to look up your Congressional representatives, click on the Staff tab once you have found them and look for the name of the Agriculture LA. When you call, ask if they are still the Agriculture LA, then ask to speak with them.
- *Letters to the Editor* – These are a great way to be heard in your community, and a great exercise as well. Even if your letter is not published in your local paper you can easily send it to numerous other outlets, such as members of Congress, online publications, blogs, your family and friends, etc. Just search for the word “editor” in our [Hemp News](#) section for helpful

examples. Once you have composed your letter you may submit it for publication through our [CapWiz Media Guide](#).

- *Meetings with a Staffer* – Now we’re starting to get into some real direct citizen lobbying. Your federal representatives have an office in Washington, DC, as well as multiple district offices, and they are there to work for you. It is typically not too difficult to set up a meeting with a staffer. See “Citizen Lobbying 101” below for more information on how to do direct citizen lobbying.
- *Public Addresses* – There are several congressional recesses each year, most notably during the month of August. During this time, members of Congress make several public appearances, including at town hall meetings, community festivals, fundraisers, etc. This is an invitation to approach your representative and to personally put this issue on their radar.
- *Meetings with a Representative* – A personal meeting with your representative is the most impactful thing you can do to raise awareness about the industrial hemp issue. During recess, you can try to schedule a meeting with your representative in their district office, or try to schedule one in Washington, DC when Congress is in session, if you can make the trip. In order to increase your chances, consider working with other local businesses, community leaders, farmers or anyone else knowledgeable and articulate about hemp. You will likely only have a few minutes, but the primary goal is to make a good impression, so that when the word or issue comes up, your representative will think of you and how important this issue is to you. If you do get a meeting with your representative, please contact Vote Hemp for tips and assistance (email Ben Droz at ben@votehemp.com). Again, see “Citizen Lobbying 101” below for more information on how to do direct citizen lobbying.

Citizen Lobbying 101

If you’re ready to do some real, direct citizen lobbying the information below will help you navigate the system and get some face time with your representatives. It may seem daunting, but it’s really pretty easy. Remember that politics is all about relationships, so your goal is to build an active and productive one with your legislators. Time and effort invested here will very likely pay large dividends.

Making a Call

First, we suggest you go to the lobbying tool on our web site (<http://capwiz.com/votehemp/dbq/officials/>) and enter your Zip Code. This will bring up a list of your lawmakers and allow you to get familiar with their backgrounds, interests and any committees they may serve on. Getting to know your representatives and communicating with them is an integral, but often overlooked, part of democracy. Select the “Contact” tab to get the phone numbers for their DC and district offices.

Now you’re ready to start making some phone calls. Be sure to keep your calls short and to-the-point.

Sample Call Script

Call your representative's office and say the following ...

"Hello, my name is [your name] and I am calling from [your city and state]. As a constituent, I would like to express the importance to me of a specific issue. Is there an agriculture or judiciary staff member with whom I could speak? Thank you very much."

If you get a staffer on the phone, then introduce yourself again and say ...

"I would like to express my strong support for H. R. 1866, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act. Industrial hemp is an agricultural crop that is grown throughout the world for a variety of uses from textiles and nutritious foods, to biodegradable plastics, low-carbon building materials and much more. Due to confusion with marijuana under federal law, American farmers are not currently able to grow hemp. This is detrimental to our own American farmers, businesses, and the economy. Here in [your city], there is a lot of support for a change in these laws. Even the National Farmers Union supports hemp farming. I would really appreciate the opportunity to provide some further information to [your rep's name]."

It's best if you come up with your own talking points ahead of time and know the supporting material very well, without resorting to hyperbole or outright lies. If you do not get a staffer, then simply make the same statement to the receptionist and continue per below.

At this point, you've made an initial impression and registered the issue on their radar. Be sure to next ask for a written response. You will need to provide your postal address or email address, but this is important because we collect and publish these responses [here](#). You can say ...

"I would also appreciate a written response from [your rep's name] on this issue."

If they have offered to accept more information (which they certainly should), you should get the name and contact information of the appropriate staffer and contact Vote Hemp for help in following up with them. You can say ...

"I would like to follow up with an appropriate staffer. Can I have his or her contact information, please?"

Finally, if you did not get a staffer on the phone, you can also ask to leave them a voicemail, and perhaps the staffer will actually follow up with you. You can say ...

"If the staffer is not available right now, may I please leave a voicemail?"

See below for suggestions on leaving a voice mail, and be sure to provide a way for them to contact you.

Feel free to also visit our [FAQ page](#) for more things to say or substitute in the above statement and script.

Leaving a Voicemail

If possible, you should leave a voicemail for the appropriate staffer. As always, be sure to keep it short and to the point. You must know what you are talking about on any issue. You can say ...

“Hello, my name is [your name] and I am a constituent from [your city and state]. I would like to talk with you about H.R. 1866, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act.”

Find out if your state has passed any hemp legislation (see <http://www.votehemp.com/state.html>). If so, mention it briefly. For example, if you live in Oregon or Virginia ...

“There is already clear support in our state for the hemp issue. In 2009, the Oregon legislature passed SB 676, which allows farmers to be licensed by the State Department of Agriculture to grow hemp.”

“There is already clear support in our state for the hemp issue. In 1999 and 2001, the Virginia legislature passed resolutions calling for a revised federal hemp policy.”

If your state has no hemp legislative history, you should then make just one talking point, such as one of these ...

“Sales for hemp products have surged, but jobs and profits are unfairly outsourced, as American farmers cannot legally grow the crop here.”

“Forcing American businesses to import hemp raw materials denies our farmers a profitable crop and weakens our foreign trade balance.”

“Hemp is a great rotational crop, which is why the National Farmers Union supports industrial hemp farming.”

“Hemp farming in the United States has a long history: our founding fathers grew hemp, and the USDA even promoted it in the early 1940’s.”

“Hemp production helps reverse the effects of climate change: a house built with Hempcrete can sequester hundreds of tons of carbon dioxide.”

Finish your voicemail message as follows ...

“I would like to briefly bring you up to speed on this important issue. My phone number is [your phone number]. Thank you very much, and I look forward to hearing back from you soon.”

Remember to keep your voicemail short. It should be no longer than one minute.

After leaving your voicemail, we recommend that you send a short email as well. Their email address will most likely be in the following format: FirstName.LastName@mail.house.gov. Something like the following should suffice ...

“Hello, my name is *[your name]* and I am a constituent from *[your city and state]*. I would like to talk with you about H.R. 1866, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act. I just left a voicemail for you and would love to arrange a time to talk briefly about the industrial hemp issue and why I think it is important for our country. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.”

Setting up a Meeting

If you have done most of the above, you are well on your way towards a face-to-face meeting with your representative or their staff. When setting up a meeting, be sure to contact the district office if you are meeting locally, or contact the DC office if you are going to be visiting the Capitol.

If you have already been directly in touch with a staffer, you should follow up with them personally. You can say ...

“Thank you so much for your interest. I would like to find a time when we can sit down and talk briefly about the hemp issue, so that I can better articulate why this issue is so important to me and my community in *[your city]*. Can you please help me set up a meeting?”

If you have not been in touch directly with a staffer yet, below are several ways to successfully get some face time.

Call the district office and say ...

“My name is *[your name]*, and I am a constituent from *[your city and state]*. I know that the Summer District period is going on/coming up, and I would like to have a chance to meet my Representative/Senator. May I please speak with the scheduler?”

Once you have the scheduler on the line, you can ask ...

“Is there a time when I could come in for just a minute? I would love to meet with *[your rep’s name]* and take a picture.”

If the scheduler asks specifically what you would like to talk about, you should respond ...

“I’d like to talk about sustainable farming issues” or “I have an idea for generating jobs that I really want to share with him/her.”

Try to avoid using the word “hemp” at this point, as the term or subject itself can sometimes be a turnoff for them. Use it only if you must.

You can also ask ...

“Are there any local events where I could have the opportunity to meet him/her? Will there be a town hall meeting, fundraiser or other event that he/she will be attending?”

Public events sometimes present an easier way to get in front of your representatives. Have them email you more information and/or an invitation, if possible. Then attend the event, scope it out and find an opportune time to approach them. Remember to bring some “take-aways” with you, such as a Vote Hemp brochure, the CRS hemp report, a printed copy of H.R. 1866 and/or a sample hemp product.

Be sure to schedule the meeting when you have some flexibility. You don’t want to be late, and the meeting may not go any longer than a few minutes, so there’s no time to waste. If they ask how much time you are requesting, you can state that at least ten minutes would suffice if you’re to meet with a staffer, although more would be helpful and appreciated. If you are working to get face time with your Representative, you will likely only have a few minutes.

Finally, always be sure to thank them for their time and attention and request a follow-up. Also, follow up with them – send an email to anyone you’ve spoken with, as well as anyone you would like to speak with.

Good luck arranging your meeting(s)! If you are successful, please contact us and let us know. We can help you prepare your talking points and maximize the value of your lucky few seconds or minutes with your representative.

Preparing for a Meeting

Once you’ve scheduled your meeting, now it’s time to prepare. Please call Ben Droz, our Legislative Assistant, at 412-805-0087 for help. Or you can follow these guidelines:

- *“Meet” your Representative online first.* Check the Wikipedia article about them, and check their campaign Web site or their House Web site. Click on “issues,” “about me” or “biography,” or read any recent news articles. Take note of their committees and what issues are important to them. If you don’t know who your Representative is, just [click here](#) to find out.
 - This will help to frame your talking points. For example, if your representative serves in the Committee on Agriculture, talk about the benefits to farmers. If they are actively environmental, push environmental benefits. If they are Republican, maybe you should stress States Rights. If your Representative is from an urban area, talk about retail sales, processing and the benefits to small businesses.
- *Bring sample hemp products.* Bringing real hemp products with you can be a key part of the meeting. (Yes, it’s a lot like “show-and-tell” from school.) Bring a shirt that they can feel, a granola bar that they can taste, or lotion they can try. Print a document on hemp paper, and bring a sample lip balm or protein powder. Bringing a product (you can leave it with them, but you certainly don’t have to) will make the meeting more memorable, and it will also give them a tangible example of how hemp is used. Feel free to contact us for a Vote Hemp bar from Ruth’s Hemp Foods.

- *Bring relevant documents.* It is important to bring supporting documents. These are not only things that you will leave for them, but they can help as talking points for the meeting. You will show them a document and talk about why it is important, hand it to them, and then bring out another document. You can simply print them out and put them in a folder. Please see “Additional Links & Resources” at the end of this document for some good resources.
 - a. Local News Articles – a great way to show local support and educate about the issue.
 - b. State Legislation – this is very important if your state has passed any hemp-related legislation. You can find it on our Web site; just click on your state on the map at: <http://www.votehemp.com/legislation>.
 - c. National News – articles from reputable national publications, such as *The New York Times* “Sober North Dakotans,” “Hanes Strikes Deal,” “Low Carbon Building Materials,” or any similar recent article.
 - d. H.R. 1866, The Industrial Hemp Farming Act – this is important to bring and talk about.
 - e. CRS Report – to many staffers, this is all they will trust. To conserve paper, you can simply print the first two pages, which includes the title and the abstract/summary. They can look up the rest online.
 - f. NFU Statement – short and easy to talk about.
 - g. Hemp: An Overview – this fact sheet can lend talking points if you need them.
 - h. Nutrition Facts – this shows, in a standard nutrition panel, why hemp is so healthy.

Conducting a Meeting

OK, now that you are fully prepared for your meeting, and the excitement is building. Here are some suggestions on how to best conduct your meeting in order to get the most out of your time.

- *Show up 10 minutes early.* This will help assure that your meeting will start on time. Remember, if you are visiting a House or Senate office building in DC there will be airport-like security checks, so bring only what you will need for your meeting with you
- *Dress nicely.* It is very important that you do not show up looking like you just left a Phish concert. Wear a suit or a nice dress if you can, but nice pants and a collared shirt will also work fine. Please show up clean and presentable. You are asking them to do something for you, so look the part.
- *Be articulate.* This is an important presentation and you need to be clear and simple.

- *“Bring it home.”* Make sure to stress the local angle. Tell a personal story or relate the benefits or history of hemp to your hometown.
- *Be concise.* Short and sweet can be strong. Only use a few talking points. Do not give them a long-winded rant about the hemp plant.
- *Read your audience.* If the person you are talking with seems like they are losing interest, use another talking point. If they continue to lose interest, try to wrap up the meeting in a professional manner. If they seem intrigued, pause to answer a question. If they are friendly, make a joke. Listen as much as you talk. This is a relationship that you can continue to cultivate.

Following Up

Everything so far is just the beginning of your relationship with your representatives. You now need to build on the foundation that you have created. Following up and continuing to provide relevant and timely information to your legislators and their staff is key to their education and ultimately their positive action on the issue.

- Make sure to email the staffer every time you talk with them. If you talk on the phone, send a quick email, if only to thank them (you can also give a brief recap of what you talked about)
- Follow up with them a couple weeks later. “Have you thought any more about hemp farming?”
- Sample emails:

- Subject: [Hemp Farming in Minnesota](#)
- To: FirstName.LastName@mail.house.gov
- CC: ben@votehemp.com

- Dear *[First Name]*,

It was great talking with you on the phone today about hemp farming in Minnesota. It’s an issue that is very timely and I really appreciate your interest.

Could we set up a time to talk more about this? I am available *[day/time]*.

Thank you again, and have a great week!

[Your Name]

- Dear *[First Name]*,

I just wanted to check in with you. Yesterday, the *Minnesota Times* published an article about hemp foods and their growing availability [add hyperlink]. Please take a look at this; it's a great article!

Thanks,

[Your Name]

▪ Dear [First Name],

How are you doing today? I just was thinking more about what we discussed last month, and the importance of industrial hemp farming. I wanted to send you this quick video I just found showing a new type of hemp car [add hyperlink].

Please let me know what you think.

Thanks,

[Your Name]

- Keep your emails short, so they can be read on a Blackberry or similar mobile device.
- Once there is a relationship, you can email them with articles or just to touch base. Keep the emails short, but provide a “thank you” and another reminder of why hemp is still important.
- Email relevant links, articles, research and documentation.

Tips

Here are some general tips to keep in mind:

- Being a constituent makes all the difference. Make sure to say this directly, and makes sure to stress why hemp is important to where you live.
- Keep your emails, letters and calls short and sweet. These people are generally very busy and are not necessarily curious about the amazing history of hemp. Don't spill the beans all at once; you need to leave other things to tell them when you follow up.
- Be kind and polite- even if the person you talk with seems like they don't care at all about hemp, or if they say specifically that their office will not cosponsor the bill, do NOT get angry. Address their questions and comments in a polite manner. Do not leave a bad taste in their mouth.
- Follow up on a semi-regular basis. This will let them know that you're not going anywhere.
- Wear a suit to the meeting- this will raise the professionalism.
- Make sure to follow up with Vote Hemp to let us know how it went!

ADDITIONAL LINKS & RESOURCES

Vote Hemp's Action Alert Database & Lobbying Tools

<http://votehemp.capwiz.com>

Collected Replies from Members of Congress

<http://www.votehemp.com/lobbying>

A Renewal of Common Sense: The Case for Hemp in 21st Century America

<http://www.votehemp.com/renewal.html>

The Industrial Hemp Farming Act (H.R. 1866) from the Library of Congress

<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d111:h.r.01866>

Industrial Hemp Resolutions

<http://www.votehemp.com/resolution.html>

State Industrial Hemp Legislation

<http://www.votehemp.com/legislation>

Vote Hemp Download Center

<http://www.votehemp.com/download>

Vote Hemp Site Map

<http://www.votehemp.com/sitemap.html>