



## **Legislator Coffees, Constituent Meetings and Forums**

In order to advance environmental issues in Iowa, the legislators need to become aware that environmental issues are important. You can play a role in that! Here are some tips for ensuring that legislators know that environmental issues are important.

Iowa's state senators and representatives regularly hold meetings in their districts. Sometimes they are called coffees. Sometimes they are called forums. Sometimes they are called constituent meetings.

We encourage you to attend and to ask a question about an environmental issue at these meetings.

### **What happens at a constituent meeting or a forum?**

The format of a constituent meeting, forum or coffee can vary, but the following tips will give you an idea of what to expect. Some of the forums are quite formal, where the legislators are part of a panel, with a moderator. Other constituent events follow a question and answer format and are quite informal.

- If it is the first time you have attended a coffee or forum, arrive early. You can ask others who are present what the format will be, so you are prepared.
- If there is a sign-in sheet, be sure to sign in. You may be put on a constituent mailing list so that you will be notified of future constituent meetings. You may also be placed on a legislator's mailing list, so you will be informed of legislation your representative or senator is following or sponsoring.
- You may be asked to submit your question on a slip of paper.
- Or you may be asked to sign your name on a sheet of paper if you want to ask a question.
- If you are called on to ask your question, be polite while you are asking your question. Be brief and do not give a long speech related to your question. It is a good idea to stick to one topic, bill, or issue when you ask your question.

Also, if there is a time before the event or afterwards where people are greeting each other, introduce yourself to the legislator and let him or her know you are a member of the Sierra Club.

When a legislator is shaking hands, you can use that time to give a short summary of your issue and tell the legislator that you would like to see him or her support the issue. As an example, you could say to the legislator, “I hope you will work to expand the Bottle Deposit Law to include water bottles and fruit juices.”



Legislators participating in a forum. Photo by Pam Mackey-Taylor

### **Locate a coffee, constituent meeting, or forum**

Check your local papers for dates, times, and locations of these meetings. Also check the legislator’s webpage or social media for dates and locations of forums.

### **Don’t hesitate to follow-up on an issue with an Email or hard-copy letter**

You can send an e-mail or letter to the legislator after the forum.

You can thank them for taking your questions. You can also thank them for supporting a particular issue.

If you feel like the legislator did not understand the issue or had no opinion on the item, feel free to explain the issue and why it is important for them to support your position.

At the bottom of the e-mail or letter, include your name, address, and phone number.

Email is a good way to communicate with your legislator. However, you can also send a letter via the US Mail. You can send letters to your legislator to: 1007 East Grand Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50319.

E-mail addresses for the state senators are found at [www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/senate](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/senate)

E-mail addresses for the state representatives are found at [www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/house](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/house)