

2017 March Storm Legislative Blitz

Paul Corda, Angelica Gould, Amador Salinas, Michael Weinhoffer
Applied Aviation Sciences Department

Abstract

This project examines legislative advocacy tactics and advocate training procedures during a weeklong legislative blitz on Capitol Hill. Through applied research in the planning, execution, and results of citizen advocacy, the impact of a legislative campaign will be examined. Upon the resolution of the blitz, organizers will follow up with congressional staff to monitor the results of the specific asks made. The entire process will be analyzed and a critique offered. This research, which will be included in the overall group presentation by the students who are going to March Storm, involves the efforts of the branches of the Federal Government in producing space legislation that will then be placed into the United States Code and the Code of Federal Regulations. Research will include how the statutes affect the policy of the United States for operating in space and the direction it gives to its federal agencies to do so.

Daily Activities

Our day started at Rayburn House office building cafeteria every morning. From there we would receive our assignments and gather with our group members to tackle the day. Teams were assigned either the House side or the Senate side for the day so that running back and forth between office buildings was minimal. Even though we were kept on one side of the Capitol each member of the group walked close to 6 or 7 miles a day between buildings! Teams averaged about 4 members per team and got to meet with 6 or 7 offices a day. When we arrived at an office we would meet with a staffer and brief them on the legislation we were lobbying for. Most meetings only lasted 20-25 minutes. Some meetings only lasted 5 minutes and were conducted out in the hallway when the staffer was short on time! In the end, we collectively felt like we made an impact and really got our nation's governments thinking about space!

Summary

The main goal of the blitz was to promote the 2017 "Citizen's Space Agenda," which was drafted by the Alliance for Space Development, to congressional staffers. All four objectives included a specific request to the staffer, and while most were unsurprisingly noncommittal (as they cannot speak for the member), we did get great feedback. The first item was promoting the introduction of the ULCATS Act into the House of Representatives. ULCATS (Ultra-Low-Cost Access to Space) encourages the continued development of reusable launch vehicles, and the development of fully reusable vehicles with rapid-turnaround capabilities. The goal is to create airline-like operations for rocket launches, whereby rockets can be used repeatedly and require little maintenance in between launches. The second item was a letter that we wanted Congress members to sign. The letter asks NASA to include additional items in its report to Congress on a post-ISS strategy, since the ISS is losing funding in 2024 and no transition plan exists. The third item was the Cis-lunar Commercialization Act of 2017, which promotes the private commercialization of the area in between the Earth and the Moon and on the Moon. The final request was asking Congress members to support the Space Settlement and Development Act of 2017. The bill is currently sponsored by Representative Rohrabacher, and makes development and settlement of outer space an official part of NASA's mission.



March Storm Participants in front of the United States Capitol building



Amador Salinas with a March Storm Veteran



Paul Corda and Angelica Gould meeting with the House Space Subcommittee Majority Staff

Observations

The main objective of March Storm aside from space advocacy is political intelligence gathering. The specific policy requests were frequently answered ambiguously or outright rejected. In either case, participants were trained to follow up with questions that would assess under what circumstances a MoC would agree or be more likely to agree to a request. This typically involved which members lead would an office follow to concentrate on that member, or offering to follow up in the future. Offices were more receptive to messages that were tailored to their primary issues/fields, constituent demographics, and committee positions. Congressional Staffers usually expressed interest discussing matters of space policy. Our underlying agenda of space development and settlement was captivating for many. It was said by one staffer that "[we] definitely had one of the sexier presentations going around the hill right now"

Research

The legislative branch (Congress) of the federal government is responsible for writing and presenting space policy and law for the nation. Laws that are enacted by the Congress and signed by the President becomes public law. When public law changes the statutory code, the law is then codified into statutes that are placed into the United States Code and the Code of Federal Regulations. These outline the public laws that are currently enforced. March Storm participants visited the offices of the House of Representatives and the Senate to propose draft legislation for space policy that the Alliance for Space Development believes would benefit the United States space policies and law, which could improve the capabilities of its space industry. Petitions signed by constituents in a congressman's district or a senator's state helped promote a meeting with their staffers to discuss these issues related to the draft legislation being lobbied by the participants.

March Storm participants took particular interest in having meetings with representatives who were part of the House Appropriations Committee and the Committee on Science, Space and Technology. These committees affect what space policy is developed, and how much is allocated towards these programs in relation to space on the House side of the Congress. For the Senate, participants took particular interest in meeting with senators who are on the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, and the Committee on the Budget. These committees also influence what space policy is developed, and drafting budget plans for Congress and for monitoring, and enforcing rules regarding the federal budget. These representative and senators, who are in these committees, can have a greater impact on having the draft legislation that the March Storm participants are lobbying to be sponsored or co-sponsored and put through these committees to become law.

Conclusion

Margaret Mead once said to "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." It is this principle which has carried us through March Storm. As students who care very much about the future of space development, March Storm was an excellent opportunity to be an advocate and exercise our constitutional rights to petition the government. It also provided us with a deeper understanding of the inner workings of the U.S. Congress and federal government.

Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our gratitude to Dr. Howard and the Office of Undergraduate Research for sponsoring this trip