

Pointers for Testifying before Legislative Committees (Thomas Chapmond)

- Craft your message, hone it and practice it. This allows you to answer the question YOU want to answer. You can turn a question into an opportunity to reiterate the point you want to emphasize.
- It is THEIR club. When testifying, play by their rules. You are always respectful, never talk while they are talking, never interrupt, and quit talking if they start talking while you are talking. If a legislator is mean to you, they can get by with it, but if you stay cool, you may get some support from someone else on the committee.
- It is seldom that minds are changed in hearings, but you can't ignore them. Lack of participation provides excuse for ignoring (not funding) your issue
- Get your legislator out to your program before the session starts, don't wait until the last minute to engage them, because it is likely that everyone else has waited until the last minute.
- Get to know your legislator's staff – Austin and home
- Call their office, they keep tally sheets of calls on issues
- If you are going to testify before a committee that your legislator sits on, visit ahead of time – at least call. They love to show off their programs. Also, ask them if they would like some questions that they could ask you
- The real work is done in offices – not hearing rooms
- Your (and TNOYS') credibility is critical, always know your facts – be consistent and DON'T GUESS (or make stuff up). If you don't know, tell them you don't know but that you will get back with them
- Practice your testimony – DON'T READ IT
- Always introduce yourself
- Provide a written document (a bulleted document may be read more than text)
- Don't trash your cash cow. If you trash the agency through which your funding comes, why would the legislators want to give them money?
- Don't correct (or embarrass) a legislator. If they have said something that is really off the mark, catch them after the hearing
- Be aware of the political environment – You may get pulled into a battle you don't want in
- There is nothing wrong with saying "I don't know, but I will get back with you". But then under promise and over deliver. Say you will get it by the end of the week and deliver it that same day.
- Never, Never, Never, Never write anyone off – it is not personal. If the founders of the STAR program had written off Representative Jack Vowell, we wouldn't have a STAR program today.
- If they ask "Are you through?" the answer is "yes".

THEIR FUTURE IS OUR BUSINESS.
